



Negotiating North Korea's Nukes

BACKGROUND - *latest update:* 15 March 2019



Summary

- Nearly three decades of stop-start negotiations have failed to achieve North Korea's denuclearization or the signing of a peace treaty to formally end the Korean War.
- The UN Security Council has adopted nine major resolutions imposing sanctions on North Korea for its nuclear and missile programs.
- North Korea accelerated its nuclear development under Kim Jong Un. The last nuclear test took place in September 2017, leading to a peaking of tensions and prompting fears of military conflict.
- Parties have since returned to the negotiation table, amidst a flurry of unprecedented bilateral summit diplomacy, committing to complete denuclearization and the building of a peace regime on the Korean Peninsula.
- However, exacerbated by a lack of trust, progress has been slow, with the United States and North Korea demanding more than the other is willing to give.

A Brief History

North Korea first established, with Soviet support, a nuclear research center in 1962, and had managed to produce a small amount of plutonium by 1975. Despite Kim Il Sung's appeals to the Soviet Union and China for assistance in developing nuclear weapons, both countries refused. In 1985, North Korea joined the nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT), pledging not to develop nuclear weapons and allowing inspections of its nuclear facilities.¹

In spite of this, U.S. spy satellites in the late 1980s picked up images of activity at a nuclear reactor in Yongbyon, a town 60 miles north of Pyongyang, raising suspicions that North Korea was pursuing a covert nuclear weapons program. Suspicions were heightened when North Korea missed deadlines for international inspections and threatened to withdraw from the NPT in February 1990.²

The end of the Cold War saw the U.S. remove tactical nuclear weapons from South Korea and an agreement on denuclearization between the two Koreas in early 1992. However, failing to satisfy inspectors from the International Atomic Energy Association (IAEA) on verification of its denuclearization, North Korea announced its

The North-South Joint Declaration

Signed between North and South Korea on February 19, 1992, the North-South Joint Declaration specified that both parties would “not test, manufacture, produce, receive, possess, store, deploy or use nuclear weapons.” A South-North Joint Nuclear Control Commission was established to this end.³ A key provision was a freezing of North Korea’s nuclear programs in return for cancellation of Team Spirit military exercises between the U.S. and DPRK.

intention to withdraw from the NPT in March 1993. The IAEA subsequently referred North Korea to the UN Security Council the following month, prompting the first nuclear crisis.⁴

Seeking a resolution to this crisis, the Agreed Framework was signed between the Clinton administration and North Korea in October 1994. While the success of the agreement is disputed, it is claimed to have largely served to limit North Korea’s production of plutonium for the next eight years.⁵ Negotiations ultimately broke down after the incoming Bush administration conducted a policy review that concluded North Korea was developing a uranium enrichment program for nuclear weapons.

In April 2002, President Bush declared that North Korea was not complying with the Agreed Framework. This came after his State of Union address in January in which, along with Iran and Iraq, North Korea was branded as being part of an “axis of evil.”⁶

North Korea expelled IAEA inspectors from the country at the end of 2002, and, in January 2003, announced its withdrawal from the NPT.⁷ This prompted what is termed the second nuclear crisis. North Korea went on to conduct its first nuclear test in October 2006.⁸ The UN Security Council subsequently passed what would be the first of nine significant sanctions resolutions against North Korea’s nuclear and missile programs to date.¹⁰ Despite periods of crisis and stalemate, negotiations with North Korea were resumed. Chaired by Chi-

The Agreed Framework

Signed on October 21, 1994, the Agreed Framework between the U.S. and DPRK concluded month-long talks in Geneva. It stipulated the DPRK’s freezing of its nuclear reactors and related facilities, under IAEA monitoring, in return for the provision of light-weight reactor (LWR) power plants, as well as 500,000 tons of heavy fuel oil annually to offset the shortfall of energy.

The LWR was stipulated to be completed by 2003 by which point the DPRK was to fully dismantle its graphite-moderated reactors. Other elements of the framework covered steps towards normalizing U.S.-DPRK political and economic relations, the U.S. providing formal assurances that it would not threaten or use nuclear weapons against the DPRK while the latter would take steps to implement the North-South Joint Declaration on the Denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula. The final dimension covered the DPRK’s abidance by the NPT and compliance to the safeguards agreement with the IAEA.⁹

Reaffirming the principles in the Agreed Framework, the 2000 DPRK-U.S. Joint Communiqué stated: “the U.S. and the D.P.R.K. strongly affirmed its importance to achieving peace and security on a nuclear weapons free Korean Peninsula.” The DPRK agreed it would not launch long-range missiles of any kind while both sides agreed to respect each other’s sovereignty and non-interference.¹¹

na between 2003 and 2009, the Six-Party Talks were the most sustained multilateral effort towards a comprehensive settlement of the nuclear issue and addressing North Korea’s security concerns.

The talks involved special representatives from the two Koreas, China, U.S., Japan, and Russia. Several rounds of talks led to North Korea taking significant steps to disable its Yongbyon nuclear facility in 2007, in exchange for aid and lifting of an asset freeze.¹² While progress continued in

North Korea Missile Launches

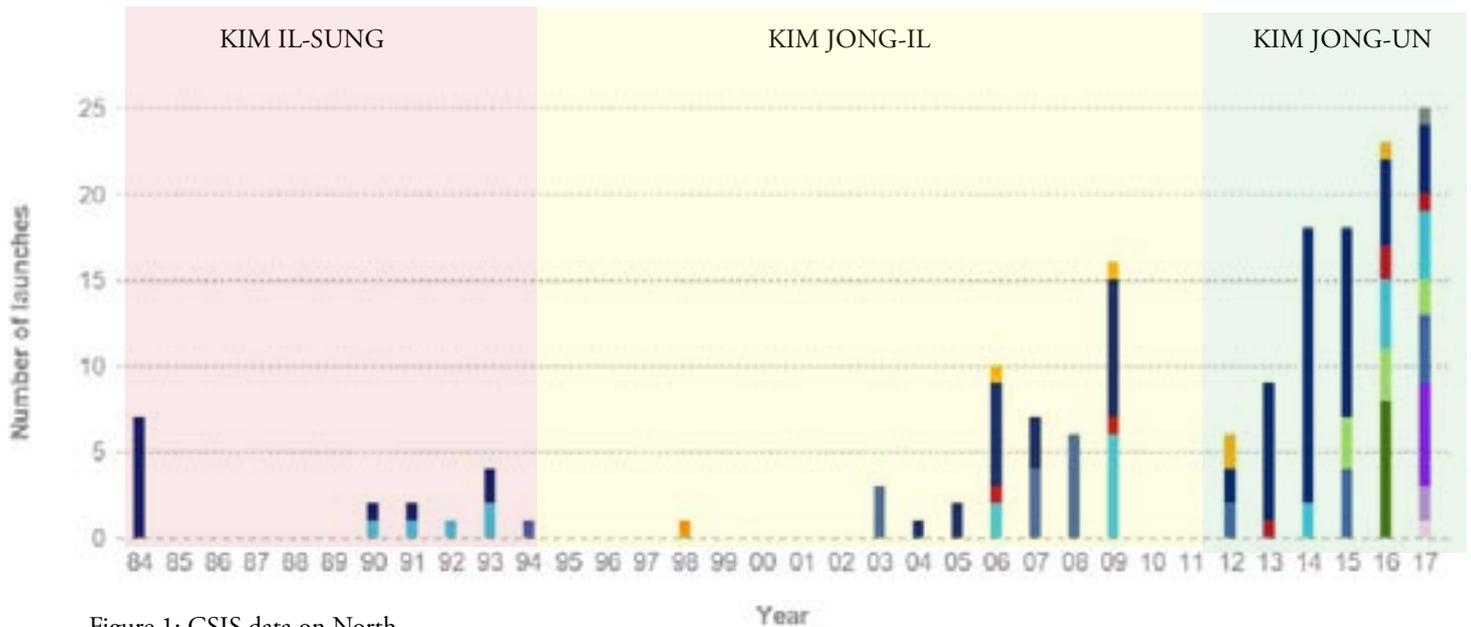


Figure 1: CSIS data on North Korea Missile Launches

Key

- Hwasong-15 (13,000 km)
- Cruise Missile (KH-25, KN-01, 150-250 km)
- SRBM - Short range ballistic missile (Scud variants, KN-02, 150-1,000 km)
- Hwasong-14 (10,000 km+)
- KN-11 SLBM / KN-15 (900-2000 km)
- Taepodong-1 (2,000-5,000 km)
- Hwasong-12 (4,500 km)
- MRBM - Medium range ballistic missile (Scud-ER, No Dong, 1,000-1,500 km)
- Taepodong-1/Unha-3 (4,000-15,000 km)
- BM-25 Musudan (2,500-4000 km)
- Nuclear test
- Unknown

This data accounts for full flight tests only. It does not include partial tests of missile subsystems such as static engine firings or cold-launch ejection tests, tests of air defence systems, or short-range rockets and artillery firings.

Data taken from the CSIS Missile Defense Project - September 20, 2017



The September 19, 2005 Joint Statement

The September 19, 2005 Joint Statement was signed upon the fourth round of Six-Party Talks. All sides reaffirmed the goal of the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula. This involved the DPRK “abandoning all nuclear weapons and existing nuclear programs” other than for peaceful purposes. The U.S. in turn affirmed it had no nuclear weapons on the Peninsula and had no intention to attack or invade the DPRK. All parties also stated willingness to provide energy assistance to the DPRK.¹³ Five working groups were also established to deal separately with different issues, including denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula, normalization of U.S.-DPRK relations, normalization of Japan-DPRK relations, economy and energy cooperation, and a peace and security mechanism for Northeast Asia.¹⁴

Subsequent rounds of talks detailed actions regarding the implementation of the Joint Statement. These resulted in the February 13, 2007 agreement with a 7-point action plan,¹⁵ as well as the October 3, 2007 Joint Statement which further reaffirmed commitment to the Joint Statement and the February 13 agreement. Accordingly, the DPRK agreed to complete disablement of its Yongbyon reactor and associated facilities by December 31, 2007, as well as give a “complete and correct” account of its nuclear programs by the same date. Energy aid and steps towards the normalization of relations were again pledged by the other parties.¹⁶

2008, with the Bush administration alleviating sanctions and removing North Korea from the State Sponsors of Terrorism list, negotiations broke down due to discrepancies over verification procedures, with North Korea ceasing cooperation with the IAEA in April 2009 and conducting its second nuclear test the following month.¹⁷

Succeeding his father after his death in 2011, North Korea sped up its nuclear and missile programs under Kim Jong Un. Despite a short-lived agreement known as the “Leap Day deal” with the U.S. in February 2012, in May of the same year North Korea revised its constitution, crediting former leader Kim Jong Il with having developed the country into a “nuclear state and an unchallengeable military power.”¹⁸

In February 2013 it conducted its third nuclear test and, on March 31, 2013, it was announced at a session of the Party Central Committee that the country pursued a “Byungjin” line of simultaneously pursuing economic and nuclear development.¹⁹

In 2016, North Korea conducted two more nuclear tests. It also significantly accelerated the frequency of its missile tests, from 2 in 2012, to 24 and 20 in 2016 and 2017 respectively.²⁰ With the failure of the 2012 deal, the Obama administration pursued a policy known as “strategic patience,” which essentially waited for North Korea to change while maintaining diplomatic and economic pressure.²¹



Figure 2: North Korean Unha-3 rocket at launch pad

The Leap Day Deal

Known as the Leap Day deal, the February 29, 2012 Agreement was a result of high-level bilateral talks between the United States and DPRK. However, unlike the other agreements, there was no published mutually agreed-on document. The key element of the agreement was that the U.S. would provide 240,000 tons of nutritional assistance in return for the DPRK suspending nuclear and long-range missile activities.²⁴

Following the DPRK's announcement that it would launch a satellite in April, the U.S. suspended food aid plans on March 28, arguing that the launch using ballistic missile technology was in breach of the agreement.²⁵ Though the DPRK's launch in April failed, another launch in December succeeded.²⁶

No high-level talks between the U.S. and North Korea would take place for the next five years.²² Relations between South Korea and North Korea also deteriorated as the conservative administrations of Lee Myung-bak and Park Geun-hye insisted on North Korea's denuclearization as a precondition for engagement.²³

With the incoming Trump administration, 2017 was a dramatic year on the Korean Peninsula which prompted the third nuclear crisis and saw tensions escalate to their highest levels in decades.

In August, the U.S. and South Korea staged large-scale joint military exercises.²⁷ This was followed by North Korea's sixth and most powerful nuclear test on September 3 of what it claimed to be hydrogen bomb.²⁸

Adopted on September 11, 2017, the UNSC passed resolution 2375 condemning North Korea's nuclear test and imposing the toughest sanctions yet, including capping oil exports to North Korea, issuing no new work permits for North Korean workers abroad, and banning its textile and seafood exports,

among other measures.²⁹ North Korea criticized the UNSC resolutions as "illegal" and "unjust," with foreign minister Ri Yong Ho justifying North Korea's withdrawal from the NPT on the grounds of the United States' "hostile policy" towards it.³⁰

On September 19, President Trump in his speech to the UN General Assembly threatened to "totally destroy North Korea" if forced to do so.³¹ At a joint summit with Japan on November 6, Trump declared the era of "strategic patience" to be over and that it was time to apply "maximum pressure" on North Korea.³² Capping an eventful year, North Korea conducted an ICBM test of its Hwasong-15 missile on November 28, which it claimed could deliver a nuclear warhead to the mainland United States.³³ Tensions dramatically receded in 2018, however, leading to a flurry of bilateral summit diplomacy and new declarations pledging complete denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula and a new future for U.S.-North Korea and inter-Korean relations. It remains to be seen if this is genuinely a new era or not. Looking back over nearly three decades, there have been patterns of conflict escalation followed by de-escalation and resumption of negotiations. But while these have served to slow or delay North Korea's nuclear development, they have not entirely stopped it.



Figure 3: Donald Trump speaks at the UN General Assembly in September 2017



Timeline of Events

- **1962** - North Korea establishes its first nuclear research center, with Soviet support
- **1985** – North Korea joins the NPT
- **1993** – North Korea announces its intention to withdraw from the NPT and the IAEA refers North Korea to the UNSC
- **1994** - the Agreed Framework is signed by the Clinton administration and North Korea
- **2002** - President Bush declares that North Korea is not complying with the Agreed Framework and brands the country as part of the "Axis of Evil"
- **2003** - North Korea announces its withdrawal from the NPT
- **2003** - The Six Party Talks begin constituting the most sustained multilateral effort to resolve the nuclear crisis
- **2006** - North Korea conducts its first nuclear test
- **2009** - the Six Party Talks break down due to discrepancies over verification procedures and North Korea conducts its second nuclear test shortly after
- **2011** - Kim Jong Un succeeds his father as the leader of North Korea
- **2012** - "The Leap Day deal" is signed – a short-lived agreement between the U.S. and North Korea
- **2013** - Following the failure of the Leap Day deal, the Obama administration pursues a policy of "strategic patience". North Korea launches its third nuclear test and announces the "Byungjin" line of simultaneously pursuing economic and nuclear development
- **2016** - North Korea completes two nuclear tests, in January and September respectively
- **2017** - the Trump administration enters the White House and tensions escalate to their highest levels in decades as North Korea conducts its sixth and most powerful nuclear test to date. Trump states that the era of "strategic patience" is over
- **2018** - Tensions recede and Trump and Kim Jong Un meet in Singapore, which leads to declarations pledging complete denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula and a new future for U.S.-North Korea relations.
- **2019** - Talks between the U.S. and DPRK hit a stumbling block as the second summit between President Trump and Chairman Kim ends without a deal.

North Korea's Nuclear and Missile Capability

North Korea has provided no independently verifiable information about its nuclear capabilities. It conducted six progressively stronger underground nuclear tests at its Punggye-ri testing site between 2006-2017. It claimed that its last test, on September 3, 2017, was of a more powerful hydrogen bomb.

The Yongbyon nuclear facility has been important for the production of fissile material for bombs, namely plutonium and highly enriched uranium. It is also suspected that there are other secret nuclear and missile facilities.³⁴ According to the SIPRI 2018 Year Book, it is conservatively estimated that North Korea may have produced at least 10-20 nuclear weapons.³⁵ Other sources, such as a U.S. Defense Intelligence Agency report from July 2017 speculate that this number could be as high as 60.³⁶

Its missile program is also an important component for delivering a nuclear warhead. The 2019 U.S. Missile Defense Review argues that “over the past decade, [North Korea] has invested considerable resources in its nuclear and ballistic missile programs ... and has the capability to strike U.S. territories, including Guam, U.S. forces abroad, and allies in the Pacific Ocean.”³⁷ On November 28, 2017, North Korea test-launched the Hwasong-15 missile, an intercontinental ballistic missile, with a potential range of 13,000 km. There is inconclusive evidence, however, if it can yet miniaturize a nuclear warhead and mount it on a missile that can credibly reach the U.S. mainland. In addition, North Korea is also developing other delivery systems such by submarine and mobile launchers.³⁸ Experts are divided to what extent North Korea has acquired foreign technologies in its nuclear and missile programs, with some pointing to a high level of indigenization.³⁹ Pakistani nuclear scientist Abdul Qadeer Khan is known to have assisted North Korea, though the significance of his role is disputed.⁴⁰

Satellite imagery has been used to monitor activity at the Yongbyon nuclear facility as well as determine other suspected missile and nuclear-related sites. While indicative, they do not provide conclusive evidence as IAEA inspectors have been unable to visit North Korea since April 2009. In response to speculation concerning continued nuclear fissile production at Yongbyon, on November 22, 2018, IAEA Director General Yukiya Amano stated that it could not confirm the nature or purpose of these activities.⁴¹

Why Did Previous Agreements Fail?

The reasons for the past failure of agreements is subject to dispute between the parties as well as differing opinions by experts.

A North Korean view is that while “the Clinton Administration agreed to choose peaceful co-existence with the DPRK ... announc[ing] the October 2000 Joint Communiqué,” the Bush administration’s designation of North Korea as part of the “axis of evil” and its listing as a target for a pre-emptive nuclear strike “forced the DPRK to develop nuclear weapons.” It is further charged that no serious talks were convened on a key provision of the Septem-

ber 19, 2005 Joint Statement, namely establishing a peace mechanism on the Korean Peninsula that would assuage North Korea’s security concerns.⁴²

The U.S. is thus blamed for failing to conclude a peace treaty to replace the 1953 Armistice Agreement while consistently maintaining a “hostile policy,” including conducting annual joint U.S.-ROK military exercises. The fates of the regimes in Libya, Afghanistan, and Iraq have often been invoked by North Korean officials to justify its quest for nuclear weapons.⁴³

Others contest North Korea acted in bad faith during negotiations and likely never intended to completely denuclearize, instead buying time to continue its nuclear program and ex-



tracting concessions. Cheong Seong Whun, formerly president of the Korea Institute for National Unification, attributes the failure of previous deals and policies to North Korea's "chronic habit of noncompliance."⁴⁴ Former U.S. Assistant Secretary of State Susan Thornton on September 28, 2017, also cited the "DPRK's track record of violating the spirit and the letter of negotiated agreements and commitments."⁴⁵

Some analysts point the blame at both Pyongyang and Washington for failing to abide by commitments. In regard to the Agreed Framework and September 19 Joint Statement in particular, U.S. Korea scholar Leon Sigal writes: "Washington did little to implement its commitment to improve relations and Pyongyang reneged on denuclearization."⁴⁶ Among other factors, others have pointed to the vague language used in agreements and the lack of mutually agreed definitions of commitments specified.⁴⁷ Regardless of the reasons, the past history of failure – and the consequent lack of trust, especially between the U.S. and North Korea – looms large on the current negotiation process.



Figure 4: Leaders Chairman Kim Jong Un and President Moon Jae-in outside the Cheongwadae - Blue House during the historic inter-Korean summit.

Back to the Negotiation Table

A new diplomatic rapprochement was initiated in early 2018 amidst the backdrop of the Pyeongchang Winter Olympics held in South Korea to which North Korea sent high-level delegations.⁴⁸ While the Trump administration credited its policy of "maximum pressure" of sanctions as well as political and military leverage for forcing North Korea to return to the negotiation table, others point to the role of South Korean President Moon in seeking to improve inter-Korean relations and his efforts at mediation between Washington and Pyongyang.⁴⁹ Another perspective is that North Korea's declared completion of its nuclear program at the end of 2017, and willingness to improve relations, marked a juncture for it to return to negotiations in a stronger position as a nuclear power.⁵⁰

The two Korean leaders held an unprecedented three summits in 2018 in which many different areas of inter-Korean relations and cooperation were discussed. The first summit on April 27 led to the Panmunjom Declaration in which both sides confirmed the "common goal of realizing, through complete denuclearization, a nuclear-free Korean peninsula."⁵¹

This was followed on June 12 by a summit between Trump and Kim Jong Un – the first between serving leaders – in Singapore, at which they signed a four-point joint statement. Both sides pledged to establish new U.S.-DPRK relations, build a peace regime on the Korean Peninsula, and to recover remains of U.S soldiers from the Korean War. The third point committed North Korea to "work toward complete denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula."⁵² While hailed as a historic and symbolic meeting, the document was largely a vague vision statement with details on its implementation left to subsequent working-level negotiations.

Nonetheless, North Korea has suspended nucle-

ar and long-range missile tests and in May announced that it had demolished its main nuclear testing site at Punggye-ri in front of selected observers as well as taken steps to dismantle its Dongchang-ri (Sohae) missile test site.⁵³ While not detailed in the U.S.-DPRK Joint Statement, Trump agreed to indefinitely suspend large-scale military exercises with South Korea.

Reiterating previous commitments, the third inter-Korean summit on September 19 led to the Pyongyang Declaration in which North Korea “expressed its willingness to take additional measures, such as the permanent dismantlement of the nuclear facilities in Yongbyon, as the United States takes corresponding measures in accordance with the spirit of the June 12 US-DPRK Joint Statement.” Additionally, North Korea also committed to permanently dismantling its Dongchang-ri missile engine test site.⁵⁴

However, despite U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo’s visits to Pyongyang, little progress was made for the rest of the year as both sides reached a stalemate, failing to reconcile positions on how to sequence the implementation of their respective commitments. Early 2019 saw renewed momentum, however, with Kim Jong Un paying his fourth visit to Beijing, followed by senior official Kim Jong Chol’s second visit to Washington during which he hand-delivered a personal letter from the North Korean leader to Trump.⁵⁵ The U.S. president subsequently announced that a second summit would place on February 27-28 in Vietnam.⁵⁶ Contrary to expectations, the Hanoi Summit came to a close with no signing ceremony and no deal.⁵⁷ While the rapport between the two leaders seemed cordial, negotiations broke down on the second day. It was reported that impasses over North Korea’s demand for the complete lifting of sanctions and the U.S. demand for more facilities than just the Yongbyon nuclear reactor to be dismantled were the main points of contention.⁵⁸

Commenting on the outcome, South Korean President Moon stated that while it was “regrettable they were unable to reach an agreement,” he was supportive of continuing dialogue to prevent the Korean peace process from stalling.⁵⁹ Both the U.S. and North Korea appear to be recalibrating their respective approaches behind the scenes, and a freeze in negotiations may ensue for the time being.

Much speculation and debate surrounds the sincerity of North Korea’s commitment to denuclearization (and from North Korea’s perspective the U.S. commitment to normalize relations). Seen as partially contradicting President Trump’s assertion that “tremendous progress” has been made and that “there was a decent chance of denuclearization,”⁶⁰

Defining Denuclearization

While the U.S. has traditionally advocated the more robust definition Complete, Verifiable, Irreversible Denuclearization (CVID) that entails North Korea’s thorough nuclear dismantlement, it has since favored the term Final, Fully Verified Denuclearization (FFVD).⁶¹ While some have speculated that this change constitutes a watering down of U.S. demands, it is unclear whether there is any difference between the two terms.

In a speech on January 31, 2019, U.S. nuclear envoy Stephen Biegun clarified that FFVD “means the elimination of all weapons of mass destruction, their means of delivery, and the means to produce them.”⁶² While committing to complete denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula, it would appear that North Korea does not ascribe to the FFVD definition.

Further question marks exist over whether North Korea includes U.S. extended deterrence (“nuclear umbrella”) to South Korea as part of denuclearization and whether consensus can be found on the scale and scope of any inspection regime to verify North Korea’s denuclearization. In short, the devil remains in the detail.



a recent U.S. intelligence assessment stated that North Korea was unlikely to completely give up its nuclear stockpile as it sees it as key to its survival.⁶³

Others have argued that it will be a long-term process and that North Korea would consider doing so only if its demands are met. Complicating talks, as analysts have pointed out, is a lack of rigorous working-level negotiations to flesh out details as well as perception gaps on key concepts.⁶⁴ In a speech at Stanford University, Stephen Biegun admitted that the U.S. and North Korea did not share a common or specific definition of denuclearization.⁶⁵

Positions of Parties

In his 2019 New Year Address, Kim Jong-un clarified that “we would neither make and test nuclear weapons any longer nor use and proliferate them.” Arguing that North Korea has already taken practical measures for denuclearization, he argued that it was incumbent on the U.S. to respond to these prior efforts with “corresponding practical actions.”⁶⁶ Accordingly, **North Korea** is pursuing a phased action-for-action approach in which it trades elements of its nuclear and missile programs in return for concessions from the U.S. Its core demands include the lifting of sanctions, the establishment of a peace mechanism to replace the Armistice Agreement, as well as the complete suspension of U.S.-ROK military exercises and introduction of strategic assets.⁶⁷

The **U.S.** position is that North Korea should first undertake Final, Fully Verified Denuclearization before the lifting of sanctions or the signing of a peace agreement. A core initial demand is that North Korea provide a complete and correct list of its nuclear and missile facilities, which has been rejected by North Korea. In the lead up to the second Hanoi summit the U.S. position had appeared to slightly soften, with nuclear envoy Stephen Biegun arguing it was not the case that the U.S. “would not do anything” until North Korea “did everything.” However, in the after-

math of the summit, Biegun stated at the 2019 Carnegie International Nuclear Policy Conference in March that the U.S. was “not doing denuclearization incrementally.”⁶⁸ Instead, the U.S. seems to have reverted to a “big deal” strategy pursued in the past that puts the onus on North Korea to commit to larger denuclearization steps.

The **South Korean** government states its policy on the Korean Peninsula to be the “resolution of the North Korean nuclear issue and establishment of permanent peace” along with sustainable inter-Korean relations and realizing a new economic community.⁶⁹ Seoul advocates a step-by-step approach that involves North Korea moving from first freezing its nuclear weapons program to dismantlement in exchange for a peace regime. It acknowledges complete denuclearization to be an end goal for negotiations and not a precondition.⁷⁰ While officially in favor of upholding sanctions as a pressure tool, Seoul would appear to advocate an easing of sanctions to facilitate inter-Korean economic cooperation and to incentivize Pyongyang to undertake denuclearization measures.⁷¹ This has created tensions with the U.S. and led to the establishment of a joint working group to better coordinate policy approaches.⁷²

China officially supports the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula and is opposed to North Korea’s nuclear and missile programs. It proposes a “dual track approach” which refers to a parallel process of denuclearizing the Korean Peninsula at the same time as establishing a peace mechanism.⁷³ Many analysts argue, however, that a core objective of China is to also reduce the U.S. strategic presence in Northeast Asia.⁷⁴ While North Korea’s largest trading partner, China has also criticized assumptions that it bears primary responsibility for pressuring Pyongyang to give up nuclear weapons. It instead sees North Korea and the United States as the key parties to resolve the denuclearization issue.⁷⁵ Underscoring Beijing’s role and improvement in China-DPRK relations is that President Xi Jinping has met Kim Jong Un on four

occasions (most recently in January 2019). In September 2018, China together with Russia asserted that the UNSC should reward North Korea for the “positive developments” and ease sanctions.⁷⁶

Russia condemned North Korea’s nuclear test on September 2 as disregarding UNSC resolutions and undermining peace and stability on the Korean Peninsula.⁷⁷ While President Putin signed a decree to enact sanctions on October 16, he had previously stated that sanctions were “useless” and that diplomacy was the only option.⁷⁸ Moscow has adopted a similar stance to Beijing and has been critical of U.S. attempts to tighten sanctions. It has welcomed North Korea’s denuclearization steps and Putin has invited Kim Jong Un to visit Moscow in the near future.⁷⁹

Japan has not featured in negotiations so far and Prime Minister Abe Shinzo has yet to meet Kim Jong Un despite indicating a willingness to normalize relations.⁸⁰ In addition to North Korea’s nuclear program, Japan is also concerned about North Korea’s short- and medium-range missiles and the unresolved abduction issue, referring to Japanese citizens abducted by North Korea in the 1970s and 80s.⁸¹

While the **European Union** is not a major actor, it pursues a policy of critical engagement defined as “combin[ing] pressure with sanctions and other measures while keeping communication, and dialogue channels open.”⁸² It defines a key goal of its policy as being reducing tensions on the Korean Peninsula by ensuring that North Korea irreversibly relinquishes its nuclear, missile and WMD programs.⁸³ Concerned with upholding the NPT regime, the EU is largely opposed to lifting sanctions until North Korea denuclearizes.⁸⁴ Sweden has played an important role in facilitating dialogue. In January 2019, it hosted trilateral talks between high-level representatives from North Korea, South Korea, and the U.S.⁸⁵

Technicalities of Denuclearization

The complete denuclearization of North Korea would require addressing its entire nuclear complex, including nuclear arsenal, scientific personnel, reactors and facilities, missile testing sites, and delivery systems. This would in turn require an intrusive and stringent verification process that North Korea has strongly resisted in the past. Prominent nuclear scientist Siegfried Hecker has advocated a longer-term roadmap process of up to ten years that moves from freezing, disabling to dismantlement and North Korea’s return to international treaties, namely the NPT.⁸⁶

Other experts such as Robert Kelley have argued for a quicker process to first “remove the teeth of the tiger” that would involve extracting fissile material from the weapons and disassembling them.⁸⁷ While a technical process, the path to denuclearization will be determined by political considerations.



Endnotes

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