

# Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK)

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The Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) has been conducting nuclear test explosions since 2006 and is expected to have a current arsenal of around 35 assembled nuclear warheads.<sup>2</sup> The DPRK has asserted that its nuclear weapon and missile programmes are a "deterrent" against the United States, due to the lack of formal conclusion to the Korean War between the two countries and what the DPRK describes as the US government's "hostile policy".<sup>3</sup>

The DPRK has at various times participated in negotiations with the United States and other relevant parties. The 1994 Agreed Framework between the United States and the DPRK, and the September 2005 Six Party Talks joint statement from the United States, the DPRK, the Republic of Korea (ROK), China, Russia, and Japan, both made some progress to halt the DPRK's nuclear and missile programme. However, the efforts of the action-for-action approach of the Six Party Talks toward denuclearisation and the development of a peace regime failed under the lack of political will. In the years following the failure of the talks, the DPRK stepped up its nuclear and long-range ballistic missiles tests, to which the US has responded with policies of "strategic patience" and "maximum pressure".

The DPRK's six nuclear tests and intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) test-launching led to the UN Security Council's resolutions imposing sanctions on the DPRK. The last three years, from 2017 to 2019, are a microcosm of the 70 year-old story of the Korean peninsula under the state of war: the war of words and escalating tensions, leading to the brink of war;<sup>4</sup> inter-Korean rapprochement; suspension of a military drill; moratoria on nuclear and ICBM tests; a first-ever US-DPRK summit; and then an impasse under ongoing sanctions, military drills, and advancements of the nuclear and missile programmes. Yet, while there have been continuous voices in favour of maximum pressure for DPRK's denuclearisation, the voices calling for a formal end to the Korean War with a peace agreement and phased diplomatic approach are increasing.

## Current status

While the DPRK has rarely disclosed information about its nuclear programme, there is a growing body of data provided externally by experts and intelligence agencies based on official DPRK statements, information provided during negotiations, and satellite imagery. Occasionally, the DPRK has invited foreign scientists and inspectors to visit its nuclear facilities to demonstrate its capabilities. The DPRK has also announced the results of successfully conducted nuclear and missile tests.

The DPRK, which joined the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) in 1985 and concluded a comprehensive safeguards agreement in 1992, has been subject to International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) inspections in the past. Due to lack of political engagement; the resumption of US-ROK combined military exercises; and conflicts between the IAEA and the DPRK, the DPRK announced in 1993 its intent to withdraw from the NPT. It then reversed its decision and "suspended the effectuation" of its withdrawal.<sup>5</sup> The US-DPRK 1994 Agreed Framework allowed the IAEA to monitor the freeze of the DPRK's graphite-moderated reactors and related facilities until 2002. The facilities subject to the freeze were the 5MW(e) reactor, the Radiochemical Laboratory (reprocessing), the fuel fabrication plant, and the partially built 50 and 200MW(e) nuclear power plants. Following a change in government in the US in 2001, the US-DPRK 1994 Agreed Framework was abandoned. Another attempt to freeze the DPRK nuclear programme was undertaken in 2007, when the DPRK allowed IAEA inspections to confirm the shutdown of five nuclear facilities in Yongbyon under the September 2005 Six Party Talk joint statement.<sup>6</sup> There have been no further formal talks among the Six Party countries since December 2008.

The conflict between the countries was never formally ended, such as through a peace agreement. While it is not an 'active' conflict today, it remains unresolved and contributes to unique dynamics and tensions. For example, the DPRK has made the IAEA's scope of activities in its country a subject of its negotiations with the United States. The lack of verifiable information and

the politicisation of the issue have led to varying and even conflicting assessments of the DPRK's capabilities.

Based on internal and external assessments, the current status of the DPRK's nuclear programme is outlined below.

## Nuclear tests

The DPRK has tested a nuclear explosive device six times between 2006 to 2017. Kristensen and Norris assessed that "after the six nuclear tests—including two

with moderate yields and one with a high yield—there is no longer any doubt that the DPRK can build powerful nuclear explosive devices designed for different yields."<sup>7</sup>

On 3 September 2017, the DPRK announced that it had tested a hydrogen bomb (or two-stage thermonuclear device), which it said was successful,<sup>8</sup> and said that it is developing an intercontinental ballistic missile for delivery.<sup>9</sup>

According to US and international estimates, each test produced underground blasts that were progressively higher in magnitude and estimated yield.

**Table 1: DPRK's nuclear tests**

NUCLEAR TEST	1ST	2ND	3RD	4TH	5TH	6TH
<b>Date</b>	Oct 9, 2006 (Mon) 10:36	May 25, 2009 (Mon) 09:54	Feb 12, 2013 (Tue) 11:57	Jan 6, 2016 (Wed) 10:30	Sep 9, 2016 (Fri) 09:30	Sep 3, 2017 (Sun) 12:29
<b>Magnitude (mb) ROK MND</b>	3.6	4.5	4.9	4.8	5.0	5.7
<b>Magnitude (mb) Kristensen and Norris</b>	4.1	4.5	5	4.8	5.1	6.1
<b>Yield (kt) ROK MND</b>	Approx. 0.8	Approx. 3-4	Approx. 6-7	Approx. 6	Approx. 10	Approx. 50
<b>Yield (kt) Kristensen and Norris</b>	0.5	1-3	10	5	10-15	140-250
<b>Yield (kt) Hecker</b>	Close to 1 Likely Pu	~ 2 to 7 Likely Pu	~ 7 to 14 Either Pu or HEU	~ 7 to 14 Claim of H bomb not likely. Possible proof of principle H-bomb?	~ 15 to 25 Likely made progress in miniaturisation	Over 100, possibly 250 Two-stage thermonuclear possible

### Sources:

2018 Defense White Paper, Ministry of National Defense of the Republic of Korea, January 2019.

Hans M. Kristensen and Robert S. Norris, "North Korean nuclear capabilities, 2018," *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* 74:1, 2018, pp. 41–51.

Siegfried S. Hercker, "DPRK nuclear arsenal: How advanced and do we know?" DMZ Seminar 2019, 20 September 2019.

In April 2018, the DPRK announced that it would "discontinue nuclear and inter-continental ballistic missile tests from April 21, Juche 107 (2018)", and "The northern nuclear test ground of the DPRK will be dismantled to transparently guarantee the discontinuance of the nuclear test."<sup>10</sup> On 24 May 2018, the DPRK destroyed test tunnels and buildings of the Punggye Ri nuclear test site, allowing 30 international journalists from the ROK, the US, China, the UK, and Russia to observe.<sup>11</sup> The US State Department stated that Chairman Kim Jong Un had "invited inspectors to visit the Punggye Ri nuclear test site to confirm that it has been irreversibly dismantled" at a meeting with Secretary Pompeo in Pyongyang on 7 October 2018. Such an inspection has not yet occurred, as the second US-DPRK summit ended without agreement.<sup>12</sup> The DPRK explained

that these measures were taken voluntarily as a first step towards confidence-building and the removal of bilateral hostile relations with the United States.

Since the US-DPRK Hanoi Summit of 28 February 2019, there has been little progress made between the two countries. In response to the United States' decision to resume US-ROK combined military drills and maintain sanctions against the DPRK, DPRK leader Kim Jong Un declared on 1 January 2020, "The DPRK has found no grounds to be unilaterally bound any longer by the commitment with no other party to honour, and this has put a damper on its efforts for disarmament and the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons across the world."<sup>13</sup>

## Delivery systems

The DPRK has a large and diverse arsenal of land-based ballistic missiles and has tested submarine-launched ballistic missiles. In Kristensen and Norris' assessment, the parts of this arsenal that are confirmed to be operational are close-range ballistic missiles, short-range ballistic missiles, and two of its three medium-range ballistic missiles. One of two intermediate range ballistic missiles (IRBMs) may be close to operational status, and one intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) may have a limited operational capability, while as many as four are in development. Additionally, only one of DPRK's ballistic missiles is thought to have a probable operational nuclear capability: the Rodong, a medium-range ballistic missile.

The operational capability of the DPRK's nuclear warhead delivery technology is unclear.<sup>14</sup>

Kristensen and Norris state, "There is no credible public information to demonstrate that the DPRK has developed nuclear warheads for delivery systems other than ballistic missiles, even though warheads for ballistic missiles are more difficult to develop than gravity bombs because of the extreme environment of their launch and trajectory." They added, "All other nuclear-armed states first developed nuclear bombs for aircraft and then proceeded to field warheads for missiles."<sup>15</sup>

**Table 2: DPRK's missiles and their specifications**

CLASSIFICATION	RANGE (KM)	WARHEAD WEIGHT (KG)	REMARKS
Scud-B/C	300-500	1,000	Deployed
19-1 SRBM	Approx. 600	Unknown	Test-launched
19-4 SRBM	Less than 600	Unkown	Test-launched
19-5 SRBM	Approx. 400	Unkown	Test-launched
Scud-ER	Approx. 1,000	500	Deployed
Nodong	1,300	700	Deployed
Musudan	At least 3,000	650	Deployed
Taepodong-2	At least 10,000	500-1,000	Launched
Pukguksong/ Pukguksong-2	At least 10,000	650	Test-launched
Pukguksong-3	Approx. 2,000	Unkown	Test-launched
Hwasong-12	5,000	650	Test-launched
Hwasong-14	At least 10,000	Unkown	Test-launched
Hwasong-15	At least 10,000	1,000	Test-launched

Sources: 2020 Defense White Paper, Ministry of National Defense of the Republic of Korea, June 2021.

## Progress of the DPRK's missile development in 2017<sup>16</sup>

12 February 2017: Launched Pukguksong-2 in Gusong, North Pyongan Province

16 April 2017: Launched Hwasong-12 in Shinpo, South Hamgyong Province (failed)

29 April 2017: Launched Hwasong-12 in Pukchang Airfield, South Pyongan Province (failed)

6 March 2017: Launched Scud-ER in Dongchang-ri, North Pyongan Province

14 May 2017: Launched Hwasong-12 in Gusong, North Pyongan Province

22 March 2017: Launched Musudan in Wonsan, Kangwon Province (failed)

21 May 2017: Launched Pukguksong-2 in Pukchang, South Pyongan Province

5 April 2017: Launched Hwasong-12 in Shinpo, South Hamgyong Province (failed)

29 May 2017: Launched Scud-series missile in Wonsan, Kangwon Province

4 July 2017: Launched Hwasong-14 in Banghyon, North Pyongan Province

28 July 2017: Launched Hwasong-14 in Mupyong, Chagang Province

26 August 2017: Launched a short-range ballistic missile in Gitdaeryong, Kangwon Province

29 August 2017: Launched Hwasong-12 in Sunan Airfield, Pyongyang

15 September 2017: Launched Hwasong-12 in Sunan Airfield, Pyongyang

29 November 2017: Launched Hwasong-15 in Pyongsong, South Pyongan Province

The DPRK performed test-launching of a Hwasong-12 IRBM, and the Hwasong-14 and Hwasong-15 missiles, which are assessed to be ICBMs, respectively in 2017. When inter-Korean dialogues and exchanges resumed in early 2017, the DPRK announced a moratorium on nuclear tests and ICBM test-launching from 21 April 2018.<sup>17</sup> The moratorium has been implemented up to now and the DPRK launched no missiles in 2018.<sup>18</sup> In 2019 when the US-DPRK dialogues was standoff, the DPRK conducted tests of short-range projectiles 12 times and a Pukguksong-3 Submarine-Launched Ballistic Missile (SLBM).<sup>19</sup> At the military parade marking the 75th anniversary of establishment of its ruling party in October 2020, the DPRK unveiled a total of nine types of ballistic missiles including a new intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) and a new SLBM marked "Pukguksong-4."<sup>20</sup> In 2021 the DPRK several various missiles eight times including Short-Range Ballistic Missiles (SRBMs), a mini SLBM, cruise missiles and a new hypersonic missile called Hwasong-8.<sup>21</sup>

Siegfried S. Hecker, Robert L. Carlin, and Elliot A. Serbin assessed that "the abrupt end to missile testing at a time of rapid progress on several new missile systems, including ICBMs, SLBMs, and solid-fueled ballistic missiles, set back the DPRK's missile programme significantly when the DPRK announced they would discontinue nuclear and ICBM testing in April 2018." The authors concluded that "the DPRK cannot deliver a nuclear warhead with any measure of confidence to the U.S. mainland, and that much more flight-testing of the intercontinental-range missiles is required." They also noted that "even once missiles have been adequately flight-tested, as has the U.S. Minuteman III, they still need to be test-launched to ensure effectiveness, readiness, and accuracy." As an example, they note that the United States "conducted four unarmed test launches of the Minuteman III from Vandenberg Air Force Base in

California toward Kwajalein Island in the Pacific in 2017 and three in 2018..."

Meanwhile, according to the Korean Central News Agency (KCNA), the DPRK's Academy of National Defense Science carried out a "very important test" at its Sohae Satellite Launching Station on 7 December 2019, saying, "the results of the recent important test will have an important effect on changing the strategic position of the DPRK once again in the near future." While the DPRK had not released any more details of these tests, experts analysed that the second test was probably a second-stage engine test for rockets which technically could be used for both purpose of an ICBM and a satellite.<sup>22</sup>

## Fissile materials

Hans M. Kristensen, director of the Nuclear Information Project with the Federation of American Scientists, and Matt Korda, a research associate with the project, cautiously estimate that the DPRK might have produced sufficient fissile material to build 40 to 50 nuclear weapons and that it might possibly have assembled 10 to 20 warheads for delivery by medium-range ballistic missiles.<sup>23</sup>

Siegfried S. Hecker, a senior fellow emeritus at the Freeman Spogli Institute for International Studies at Stanford University and a renowned expert on North Korea's nuclear program, who last visited the Yongbyon nuclear complex in 2010, said that the DPRK might have 20 to 60 nuclear weapons with the most likely number being 45 in an interview in April 2021. He said that "it may have enough fissile material for 45 nuclear weapons, but that does not necessarily mean it has produced that many at this time."<sup>24</sup>

According to the the ROK MND, it is assessed that the DPRK possesses around 50kg of weapon-grade plutonium obtained by reprocessing spent fuel rods, and it is believed to possess a substantial amount of highly enriched uranium (HEU) through its uranium enrichment program. The ROK MND assessed that the DPRK's ability "to miniaturize nuclear weapons has reached a significant level."<sup>25</sup>

The US Defense Intelligence Agency reportedly estimated in August 2017 that the DPRK had produced sufficient fissile material for up to 60 nuclear weapons and developed a miniaturised nuclear warhead that could fit inside its missiles.<sup>26</sup> However, the US Congressional Research Service reported that there is no public US intelligence community consensus of the DPRK's fissile material stockpiles.<sup>27</sup>

## Economics

There is little data on the cost of the DPRK's nuclear and missile programmes. In December 2012, an official from the ROK Ministry of National Defense told reporters that it estimated the DPRK spent US \$1.74 billion on missile development and US \$1.1–1.5 billion on nuclear development for a total of US \$2.8–3.2 billion.<sup>28</sup> Other unconfirmed media reports put South Korean estimates of the DPRK's nuclear programme at US \$1–3 billion, with the higher number combining nuclear and missile development. One such media report compared the cost of the DPRK's entire nuclear and missile programme with that of one nuclear-powered Virginia class attack submarine, which costs US \$2.5 billion USD, or the USS Gerald Ford, the United States' newest aircraft carrier with an US \$8 billion USD price tag, not counting development costs.<sup>29</sup>

In June 2011, Global Zero estimated the core and full cost of the DPRK nuclear programme to be between 500 and 700 million USD respectively. It said, "The former represents about 6 per cent of the DPRK's military spending (US \$8.8 billion in 2009, the last available reliable estimate of total military spending, which represents about 33 per cent of the country's national income spent on the military)." <sup>30</sup> According to Global Zero, "Core costs refer to researching, developing, procuring, testing, operating, maintaining, and upgrading the nuclear arsenal (weapons and their delivery vehicles) and its key nuclear command-control-communications and early warning infrastructure; full costs add unpaid/deferred environmental and health costs, missile defenses assigned to defend against nuclear weapons, nuclear threat reduction and incident management."

The DPRK reported that its gross domestic product (GDP) in 2019 was US \$33,504 million, an increase of 1.2x from 2015, as compared to what it included in its first Voluntary National Review report submitted to the High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) in June 2021.<sup>31</sup>

The Bank of Korea in the ROK estimated that the DPRK's nominal gross national income (GNI) was 35.9 trillion Korean won (KRW) (approximately US \$32.2 billion) in 2018 and 35.6 trillion KRW (approximately US \$30.8 billion) in 2019. It estimated the per capita GNI of the DPRK was 14 million KRW those years, or 3.8 per cent of the ROK's per capita GNI. For context, the ROK's defence budget was 43.2 trillion KRW in 2018 and 46.7 trillion KRW in 2019.<sup>32</sup> The ROK's estimate of the DPRK's GNI looks less than its defence budget.

Critics have denounced the DPRK government for investing in a nuclear and missile programme at the

expense of the national economy and public welfare. They contend that the DPRK should instead divert its resources toward feeding its people and providing clean water and medical supplies. While some maintain that economic sanctions should remain in place until the complete, verifiable, and irreversible dismantlement of the DPRK's nuclear programme,<sup>33</sup> some humanitarian and civil society groups argue that the United States and the DPRK should formally end the Korean War with a peace agreement to help facilitate a shift in the government's investments.<sup>34</sup>

## International law and doctrine

According to the UN Office for Disarmament Affairs (UNODA), the DPRK is categorised as a state party to disarmament treaties of 1925 Geneva Protocol (1988), Antarctic Treaty (1987), Biological Weapons Convention (1987), Convention on Environmental Modification Techniques (1894), Outer Space Treaty (2009), and the NPT (1985)—though the DPRK says it withdrew from the NPT in 2003 (see below).<sup>35</sup> The DPRK is not a party to the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT). It is also not party to the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW), though it voted in favour of the resolution in October 2016 to convene negotiations in 2017 on a "legally binding instrument to prohibit nuclear weapons, leading towards their total elimination".<sup>36</sup>

The DPRK presents itself as a country that is in principle in favour of global denuclearisation, but legally entitled and practically "forced" to develop nuclear weapons for self-defence due to the ongoing state of war with a nuclear-armed state, the United States. It does not consider itself to be party to any binding agreement generally limiting its nuclear programme. It notably considers that it lawfully withdrew from the NPT in 2003, although according to UNODA, "States parties to the Treaty continue to express divergent views regarding the status of the DPRK under the NPT."<sup>37</sup>

The DPRK acceded to the NPT on 12 December 1985, as the Soviet Union required the DPRK's membership for a planned purchase of four Soviet light water-reactors.<sup>38</sup> The DPRK never received the reactors due to Soviet Union's disintegration, but it built in Yongbyon a 5 MW(e) experimental reactor in 1986 and started the construction of two gas-graphite reactors and a radiochemical laboratory around 1987.<sup>39</sup>

The DPRK signed a Safeguards Agreement with the IAEA on 30 January 1992 after signing the Joint Declaration on the Denuclearisation of the Korean Peninsula with the ROK on 20 January 1992, in the context of goodwill gestures by the United States. These efforts included

a declaration by the US Deputy Assistant Secretary of State on 17 January 1991 that the United States “will not pose a nuclear threat on the DPRK,” a US announcement of the withdrawal of nuclear weapons from the ROK on 27 September 1991, and a suspension of Team Spirits, the US-ROK combined military exercises on 7 January 1992.

When the safeguards agreement entered into force in April 1992, the IAEA began its inspection of the DPRK’s initial report. The IAEA found inconsistencies and requested access to two suspected nuclear waste sites at Yongbyon.<sup>40</sup> However, the DPRK refused access, claiming that they were non-nuclear military sites and raising its sovereignty and national dignity concerns.<sup>41</sup> Given the arguments from both sides were not resolved, the DPRK announced its decision to withdraw from the NPT on 12 March 1993 since the US-ROK combined military exercise Team Spirits resumed.<sup>42</sup> But the DPRK suspended its withdrawal in June 1993 under negotiation with the United States.<sup>43</sup>

The negotiation did not succeed, which resulted in the DPRK’s withdrawal from the IAEA on 12 June 1994. In the IAEA’s view, the withdrawal did not affect the DPRK obligations under its Safeguards Agreement, but the DPRK took the position that it was no longer obliged to allow inspectors to carry out their work under the Safeguards Agreement.<sup>44</sup>

During an interview with journalist Selig Harrison in June 1994, President Kim Il Sung, in explaining why the DPRK had been pursuing light-water reactors, said, “We need energy and we recognise that type of nuclear facilities we are now developing are not the best.” When former President Jimmy Carter visited Pyongyang in June 1994, Premier Kim told him, “If the U.S. had helped the DPRK to acquire a light water reactor, even from a third country, the current problem could have been avoided.” He went on to say, “if a commitment is made to furnish us with a light water reactor, then we will immediately freeze all our nuclear activities.”<sup>45</sup>

After the first nuclear crisis in June 1994, during which the United States considered a range of military options against the DPRK, the US and the DPRK signed the Agreed Framework in October 1994. Despite numerous obstacles following the signing of the Agreed Framework, the Clinton administration prioritised diplomacy with the DPRK. Initially, the DPRK honoured its commitments, however a lack of political will and support from the US Congress under the Clinton administration impeded progress on the full implementation of the Agreed Framework.

The succeeding Bush administration’s policy on the DPRK shifted from engagement to a hardline approach based on US intelligence reports of a covert uranium enrichment

programme in the DPRK. Unable to resolve the issue through direct talks, the DPRK announced an end to its suspension of the withdrawal from the NPT.

In the years since, there have been several bilateral agreements between the US and the DPRK, and multilateral agreements through the Six Party Talks. None of the denuclearisation agreements concluded between the United States and the DPRK appear to have been considered legally binding by either side and each collapsed one after another. The DPRK is subject to several UN Security Council (UNSC) resolutions banning it from developing nuclear weapons independently of its NPT status, based on Chapter VII of the UN Charter, though the DPRK dismisses these resolutions as unlawful infringements upon its sovereignty.<sup>46</sup>

The DPRK conducted its first nuclear test on 9 October 2006, stating on 11 October that it “was entirely attributable to the U.S. nuclear threat, sanctions and pressure.” The DPRK insisted that it remained committed to implementing the Joint Statement and “unchanged in its will to denuclearise the peninsula through dialogue and negotiations.”

The UNSC thereupon adopted Resolution 1718 on 14 October 2006, acting under Chapter VII of the UN Charter, condemning the nuclear test, demanding the return of the DPRK to the NPT and IAEA Safeguards Agreement, and deciding that the DPRK should abandon all nuclear weapons, all other existing weapons of mass destruction, and all ballistic missile programmes in a complete, verifiable and irreversible manner, and imposing sanctions.<sup>47</sup>

The DPRK tested a space launch vehicle on 5 April 2009, and a presidential statement of the UNSC condemned it as a violation of UNSC resolution 1718 by treating it as a ballistic missile launch.<sup>48</sup> The DPRK denounced this interpretation on 14 April 2009 as a violation of the freedom of exploration contained in the Outer Space Treaty, declared that “it would permanently pull out of nuclear disarmament talks and restart its nuclear programme,” and expelled UN inspectors from the country.<sup>49</sup> On 25 May 2009, it conducted its second nuclear test, which was met by an expansion of sanctions under UNSC resolution 1874 on 12 June 2009. Since a space-launch vehicle sent on 12 December 2012 led the DPRK getting sanctioned under UNSC resolution 2087, there have been a series of DPRK nuclear, space-launch vehicle, or long-range missile tests that were met with progressively stronger sanctions.

While the so-called smart sanctions based on resolutions 1718 (2006), 1874 (2009), 2087 (2013), 2094 (2013), and 2270 (2016) targeted the military and the elite,



the sanctions based on resolutions 2321 (2016), 2371 (2017), 2375 (2017), and 2397 (2017) targeted entire sectors of the DPRK's economy, regardless of whether there was a proven direct link to the nuclear programme. The UNSC has increasingly cut off the DPRK from access to international capital and has limited its access to the international banking system. Beyond the funding problems this has caused for the DPRK in general, these financial sanctions have negatively affected the work of humanitarian entities—including UN agencies—by interfering with the administration of funding, adding red tape, and discouraging banks from handling any transactions involving the DPRK under a phenomenon of “de-risking” or “over-compliance.”<sup>50</sup>

The DPRK has at the UN General Assembly attacked these sanctions as “illegal and double-standard” for denying it the freedom to explore outer space, for infringing on its national sovereignty, and for preventing it from exercising its right to self-defence. It points out that other satellite-launching countries and nuclear-armed countries are not being sanctioned. It draws the conclusion that the actual reason for these resolutions is “that the permanent members of the Security Council, all nuclear powers, have common interest in maintaining their monopolistic nuclear status.”<sup>51</sup>

## Doctrine

The DPRK has maintained that it will not use nuclear weapons nor transfer them or related technology unless there is a nuclear threat or provocation against it. In April 2018, at the Third Plenary Meeting of the Seventh Central Committee of the Workers' Party of Korea, the DPRK adopted a resolution stating that “the DPRK will never use nuclear weapons nor transfer nuclear weapons or nuclear technology under any circumstances unless there are nuclear threat and nuclear provocation against the DPRK.”<sup>52</sup> Some civil society nuclear disarmament organisations categorise the DPRK as a country of that does not have a no first use policy.<sup>53</sup>

The DPRK has asserted that its denuclearisation is contingent upon ending hostile relations with the United States. According to the report of the Fifth Plenary Meeting of the 7th Central Committee of the Workers Party of Korea at the end of 2019, Chairman Kim Jong Un declared, “If the United States persists in its policy hostile towards the DPRK, there will never be the denuclearisation of the Korean peninsula.” He also stated that the DPRK “will steadily develop indispensable and prerequisite strategic weapons for national security until the United States rolls back its hostile policy and a lasting and durable peace mechanism is in place.”<sup>54</sup>

The DPRK has long preferred an action-for-action approach to advance denuclearisation and the establishment of a peace regime. A phased approach was adopted during the Agreed Framework negotiation, which resulted in a nearly 10-year freeze of the DPRK's nuclear activities. It was also adopted following the Joint Statement of the Six Party Talks on 19 September 2005, which stipulated that “the Six Parties agreed to take coordinated steps to implement the afore-mentioned consensus in a phased manner in line with the principle of commitment for commitment, action for action.”<sup>55</sup>

The DPRK has pursued a similar approach in its negotiations with the Trump administration and to advance the goals outlined in the US-DPRK declaration signed at the Singapore Summit in June 2018. The DPRK has demanded the United States take appropriate reciprocal action toward its voluntary halt on nuclear and ICBM testing and the destruction of tunnels at its Punggye-ri nuclear test site. The US-DPRK summit in Hanoi in February failed to make progress however, following the Singapore Summit, as the United States reportedly brought the so-called “Libya model” to the table, which the DPRK has firmly opposed.<sup>56</sup>

Ahead of the inauguration of the new US administration under President Biden in January 2021, Kim Jong Un, President of the State Affairs of the DPRK, in his report at the 8th Congress of WPK in January 2021, stated that the key to establishing a new DPRK-US relationship lies in the US' withdrawal of its “hostile policy” toward the DPRK. He expressed the principled stand that we would approach the US on the principle of power for power and goodwill for goodwill in the future, too.<sup>57</sup>

## Public discourse

To people in the Korean peninsula and the region, public discourse on the DPRK's nuclear weapons has been focused on how to achieve denuclearisation along with a peace regime on the peninsula. There have been various and diverse public discourses from different perspectives for over 75 years as the armistice regime has been maintained without political settlement to replace it into a peace agreement. This section of the report will focus on recent public discourse.

It was widely welcomed when the ROK and the DPRK agreed on participation from the DPRK in the Winter Olympic in Pyeongchang in 2018. It was also surprising to hear that the US agreed to suspend the annual US-ROK combined military exercise for the successful Winter Olympics. On top of that, the DPRK announced it would discontinue nuclear and ICBM tests, dismantle the nuclear test site, and affirm not to transfer

nuclear weapons and nuclear technology under any circumstances. The highlight was the announcement of the first-ever US-DPRK summit.

According to the Asan Report in July 2018, 71.8 per cent of South Koreans rated the US-DPRK summit as positive. As perceptions on the prospect for the denuclearisation of the DRPK improved, 62.6 per cent of South Koreans were optimistic about DPRK's implementation of the agreement. The Moon Jae-in administration's policy toward the DPRK received overwhelming support (72.3 per cent) following the April–May inter-Korean talks, the April 27 Panmunjom Declaration, and the closing of the North's nuclear test site in May 2018. The percentage of South Koreans who viewed future inter-Korean relations and US-DPRK relations as positive also reached 83.2 per cent and 76.7 per cent, respectively.<sup>58</sup>

In October 2018, there was a joint event to celebrate the anniversary of a 2007 inter-Korean summit in Pyongyang with government officials, politicians, civic, religious, and cultural figures from the ROK and the DPRK. The participants called for faithful implementation of the recent summit agreements by the two leaders in a joint letter they adopted. They also urged efforts to make the Korean Peninsula free of nuclear weapons and nuclear threats, while working together in expanding cross-border exchanges and cooperation.<sup>59</sup>

Meanwhile, at the joint event of non-governmental groups in Mount Kumgang in February 2019, groups from the DRPK didn't agree to include denuclearisation in the joint statement with groups from the ROK. They reportedly said the issue was something to be dealt with by the leaders of the two countries at the meeting of a joint new year's event.<sup>60</sup>

In the United States, the public discourse on DPRK's nuclear weapons is dominated by those who advocate resuming large-scale military exercises and maintaining sanctions as leverage to denuclearise the DPRK. Increasingly however, experts and civil society groups are challenging this conventional view, as outlined below.

At a Senate Foreign Relations subcommittee hearing on the DPRK on 25 February 2020, Republican Senator Cory Gardner, chairman of the East Asia, the Pacific and International Cybersecurity Policy subcommittee of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, called for a return to "the successful policy of maximum pressure that was adopted early in the Trump administration, but since abandoned in earnest effort of diplomatic engagement with Pyongyang." He added, "We must immediately enforce sanctions against Pyongyang and its enablers."<sup>61</sup> He and Democratic Senator Ed Markey, ranking member of the subcommittee, introduced the Leverage to Enhance

Effective Diplomacy (LEED) Act, expanding US sanctions against the DPRK and its enablers, including those engaged in illegal oil transfers to the DPRK.<sup>62</sup>

However, in June 2019 Democrat Congressman Ro Khanna introduced House Resolution 152, which calls for a formal end to the Korean War.<sup>63</sup> In May 2021, Democrat Congressman Brad Sherman introduced H.R.3446, the "Peace on the Korean Peninsula Act" which calls for serious, urgent diplomacy in pursuit of a binding peace agreement to formally end the Korean War. It further urges the Secretary of State to seek to enter negotiations with the DPRK to establish liaison offices in each country's capital, and requires the Secretary of State to conduct a full review of the travel restrictions to the DPRK.<sup>64</sup>

US public opinion on the threat posed by DPRK's nuclear weapons is also shifting. According to a poll conducted in January 2020 by the Chicago Council on Foreign Affairs, only 13 per cent of US citizens believe that the DPRK presents the world's "greatest threat" to the United States, a significant drop from 59 per cent in 2017.<sup>65</sup> And according to a 2019 poll conducted by Data for Progress and YouGov, 67 per cent of US citizens across political affiliations support negotiating a peace agreement with the DPRK.<sup>66</sup>

However, since the 2019 Hanoi summit ended without an agreement, there has been no progress made between the US and the DPRK, and this has impacted the inter-Korean dialogues and cooperation. Even though there was a surprising trilateral meeting between leaders of the United States, the DPRK, and the ROK in Panmunjom in June 2019, working-level nuclear talks in Sweden in October failed. The DPRK's representative announced, "The negotiations have not fulfilled our expectation and finally broke off."<sup>67</sup>

While the United States keeps saying it maintains a flexible approach, it has nevertheless refused to ease sanctions or durably suspend the US-ROK combined military exercises,<sup>68</sup> which the DPRK had demanded as confidence-building measures. When China and Russia drafted a resolution that reportedly proposed the UNSC relieve sanctions on DPRK exports of seafood and textiles in December 2019, a US State Department official said that it was not the time for the Security Council to consider lifting sanctions on the DPRK as the country was "threatening to conduct an escalated provocation, refusing to meet to discuss denuclearisation, and continuing to maintain and advance its prohibited weapons of mass destruction and ballistic missile programmes."<sup>69</sup>

After the first-ever inter-Korean summit in June 2000, Professor Hamm Taik-young, a well-known expert at



comparative study of the ROK and the DPRK, said that the most challenging task ahead was to institutionalise the peace process, including through a peace agreement, cross-recognition of the two Koreas by the four major powers, regional cooperation, and arms control and disarmament. He stressed, "The security policy of the two Koreas should be oriented toward arms control and disarmament, since an arms race beyond 'reasonable sufficiency' is not desirable." He also argued, "Due to the asymmetric balance between ROK (U.S.) superiority in war-fighting capabilities and the DPRK's deterrents,

an arms buildup by the ROK will be matched by an asymmetric buildup by the DPRK." <sup>70</sup>

These has indeed come to pass. While sanctions and military build-up have continued, the development of the DPRK's nuclear and missile program has also advanced. But voices on both sides have called on the relevant parties to go beyond the formulas that have failed to resolve this problem for the past 25 years, including US Special Representative for the DPRK Stephen Biegun noted.<sup>71</sup>

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