

# **United Nations Security Council**

## **Addressing the North Korean Nuclear Threat**



### **Headwaters Model United Nations Background Guide**



**Security Council**  

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**United Nations**

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## Background of Council

The United Nations Security Council is responsible for maintaining peace and addressing global issues that threaten international security, including arms control, terrorism, civil wars, and natural disasters. The council consists of five permanent members known as the P5:

United States, Russia, China, France, and United Kingdom. These members have veto power over any resolution. It also has ten elected members with no veto power. They serve two-year, non-consecutive terms. The elected members are chosen via a two-thirds majority vote of the UN General Assembly. The council's presidency changes every month. This allows the ten nonpermanent members to have some influence over the agenda.

Russia has exercised the most number of vetoes, including when it was the Soviet Union. The United States has exercised the second highest number of vetoes, the last of which was a 2018 veto rejecting a resolution condemning Israel for Palestinian deaths in Gaza. China's number of vetoes has risen in the last few years, while France and the UK have not used their veto power since 1989. These last two have advocated for exercising the veto power sparingly.

The Security Council tries to resolve international conflicts according to Chapter VI of the UN Charter, which enables the council to encourage parties to find solutions through negotiation, arbitration, and other peaceful processes. When a peaceful resolution fails, Chapter VII authorizes the Security Council to use more forceful tactics, such as imposing sanctions or authorizing the use of force to ensure that peace and



security are maintained or restored. Peacekeeping missions are one of the most noticeable conflict management approaches employed by the council. In mid-2020 alone, the council was managing thirteen missions across three continents, involving about 100,000 people.

From its inception to the end of the Cold War (roughly four-and-a-half decades), the council only authorized seventeen peacekeeping missions in total. This lack of activity was primarily due to poor American-Soviet relations. Since that time, it has authorized 54 peacekeeping missions to deal with crises such as collapsing states, civil wars, and challenging humanitarian emergencies, including deploying personnel to conflict-ridden regions. Some of its operations have included military intervention to provide civilian and refugee protection. The majority of the personnel for the missions have come from developing nations.

Post-Cold War, sanctions have become one of the Security Council's most common tactics. As of 2020, there are fourteen Security Council sanctions regimes. These focus on political conflict resolution, nuclear non-proliferation, and counter-terrorism. Each regime is managed by a sanctions committee chaired by a non-permanent member of the Security Council. The Council recognizes the rights of those being targeted by the sanctions, and as such, attempts to ensure that there are fair and clear procedures for imposing and lifting the sanctions measures. Sanctions are now more focused and less comprehensive, such as arms embargoes, travel bans, asset freezes, and import/export bans on individual goods.

Under the UN charter, members are allowed to use force only when acting in self-defense or when they have been authorized by the council. However, members and blocs of countries have often used military force outside of these parameters. There is ongoing debate on whether these military actions are legitimate. Several U.S. administrations have insisted that humanitarian intervention (coupled with military



action) can be legitimate if backed by regional organizations (such as NATO) or other coalitions. But Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon argued against this stance in 2008, stating that “The responsibility to protect does not alter, indeed it reinforces, the legal obligations of Member States to refrain from the use of force except in conformity with the Charter.”



## The Issue at Hand

### History of the Issue

Following the Korean War which ended in 1953 and left the North and South regions of the peninsula on hostile terms that continue to this day, North Korea began conducting nuclear research for peaceful purposes with help from the Soviet Union. However, once the Soviets withdrew their missiles from Cuba at the end of the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis, North Korea began to recognize that it could lose the protection from its superpower allies (the Soviet and China) and that it needed to guarantee its security by building up its own nuclear weapons capabilities.

During the 1970s, with continued help from the Soviets, North Korea's Kim Il Sung expanded the country's nuclear program more vigorously in an attempt to become less dependent on Beijing and Moscow. In 1974, North Korea joined the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and between 1975 and 1979, it installed a nuclear scientist at the IAEA's central branch in Geneva for the purpose of gaining the knowledge to design a nuclear reactor. In 1980, North Korea built a reactor capable of producing weapons-grade plutonium. Due to pressure from the Soviets, in 1985 it signed the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), a multilateral agreement to halt the proliferation of nuclear weapons and to promote peaceful nuclear energy use. However, it refused to allow IAEA observers into the country until the 1990's. When in 1993 the IAEA discovered that North Korea's nuclear program was more substantial than what the regime had revealed, North Korea announced its plan to leave the NPT. But under pressure from the UN Security Council, North Korea reversed its intended withdrawal and allowed the first inspection to occur in March 1994. These actions culminated in the October 1994 Agreed Framework accord between the United States and North Korea that called upon Pyongyang to halt construction and operation of certain nuclear



reactors deemed to be potential nuclear weapons facilities, in exchange for aid and non-proliferation reactors.

But the Agreed Framework fell apart in 2002, and North Korea withdrew from the NPT in 2004, confirming in the process that it possessed a covert uranium-enrichment program for building nuclear weapons. This program directly violated the Agreed Framework, the NPT, and agreements between North and South Korea. A new diplomatic effort, named the Six-Party Talks, began in August 2003. The countries involved in the talks included China, Japan, North Korea, Russia, South Korea, and the United States. The talks took place over a number of years, pausing intermittently due to periods of standstill or crisis. In what appeared to be a breakthrough in 2005, North Korea agreed to relinquish its nuclear programs and weapons and rejoin the NPT. However, in 2006, North Korea tested short, medium, and long range ballistic missiles and conducted an underground nuclear test. This resulted in unanimous condemnation by the UN Security Council, with accompanying trade sanctions. Diplomatic efforts resumed in 2007, and the Six-Party Talks countries reached an agreement on the steps to administer the 2005 agreement.

The talks again collapsed in 2009 due to the parties being unable to reach consensus on verification and because of North Korea's rocket launch. Since then, North Korea has insisted it would not resume talks and that it is no longer restricted by the agreements. The other five countries have reaffirmed their commitment to the talks and have demanded that North Korea honor its 2005 denuclearization promise. Until 2018, tensions in the region increased as North Korea continued conducting many nuclear and ballistic missile tests. In April 2018, North Korean leader Kim Jong-un announced plans to stop nuclear testing and attended a summit meeting with the South Korea president. In June 2018, Kim met with US President Trump, the first face-to-face meeting between the countries, and promised to resume denuclearization efforts. But this promise was



questioned in July 2020 when a previously unidentified facility thought to be associated with nuclear weapons was discovered.

Concerning the UN Security Council, nine major resolutions have been unanimously approved since 2006 to address North Korea's nuclear and ballistic missile operations. The resolutions condemn the activities and demand that North Korea halt them. The resolutions impose sanctions and give UN member states permission to seize and inspect North Korean cargo within their country's boundaries. They also demand that North Korea rejoin the NPT and resume Six-Party Talks. Furthermore, the other Security Council members besides China believe that China has considerable leverage with North Korea due to its economic support of the country since the end of the Cold War. Therefore, they have urged China to impose sanctions on North Korea to force it to resume diplomatic talks. This resulted in China imposing penalties on Pyongyang in the form of a coal imports ban and a petroleum product exports ban.

## Current Situation

Fear of a nuclear war is always prevalent in the world today, with the number of countries developing nuclear weapons having grown to nine in recent years, including the United States, Russia, France, China, the United Kingdom, Pakistan, India, Israel, and North Korea. The number of nuclear weapons in total has also increased to an estimated 13-15,000 nuclear weapons among these countries. These increased numbers mean there is always some risk of a nuclear attack, but fear of nuclear conflict has been heightened in recent months by stalled talks between the U.S. and North Korea on the subject of nuclear weaponry. More specifically, the conversations between the two were reported to be about the largely undisclosed details of North Korea's nuclear arsenal. Since these conversations, a new Intercontinental Ballistic Missile (ICBM) was unveiled during a North Korean military parade. While it is difficult to confirm exact





measurements, this newest nuclear weapon appeared to be larger than the Hwasong-15, which was previously North Korea's largest missile. While it is currently untested, the increased size indicates that this missile may be able to fly farther, and with a more powerful nuclear warhead. It can be assumed that this unveiling during a parade indicates that this missile was meant to be a message to other countries, and it is currently unclear whether this weapon is fully operational, or if it was simply mocked up for show during its unveiling.

With the historical context previously presented, there is much fearful speculation on the possibility of nuclear conflict in the very near future. This is why the UNSC has deemed this meeting prudent.

## Possible Solutions

In the past, the UN has approached nuclear disarmament with a heavy influence towards upholding and emphasizing the NPT. For instance, in a five-point proposal published by the UN Secretary General, one of the points was to simply make sure that the treaty, and any obligations within that treaty, was being upheld by any and all parties involved. There has been a heavy emphasis on communication and transparency between all parties, which has been a struggle in the past. In terms of solutions to the issue, the UN has been supportive of eliminating other types of Weapons of Mass Destruction, as well as limits and/or bans on weapons trading. More drastic measures not put forth by the UN are concepts such as a No First Use Policy, which is essentially a commitment by countries who adopt such a policy that they will not be the first country to use a nuclear weapon in a conflict. It is more than possible for this committee to expand beyond these ideas, but these solutions, and concepts similar to these, are currently being pushed to the forefront.



## Further Reading

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