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Research Report

Topic 3: The escalating situation in North Korea



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The escalating situation in The DPRK

Introduction:

The political chief of the United Nations has stated that the current most dangerous security issue the world is facing lies on the Korean peninsula¹. The focus is on a small country; the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, a self-described independent socialist state. Governed by the supreme leader Kim Jong-un, it has taken the world spotlight by conducting a series of missile and nuclear tests that acts as a testament to their power. Combined with their aggressive agenda, this poses a threat to the surrounding countries and the overall stability of the world.

This paper will explain the background behind the situation and will provide an insight into the challenges facing the Security Council in finding a solution that optimally has a peaceful end.

Definition of Key Terms:

- **DMZ:** refers to the demilitarized strip of land that separates the countries of the DPRK and South Korea. Established in 1953, it is the de facto international border. Inside the DMZ there is a Joint Security Area that serves as meeting point for representatives of the DPRK to meet with international diplomats and it is where all negotiations have taken place.
- **DPRK:** is the acronym used for the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, commonly known as the DPRK. The country is in East Asia as part of the Korean Peninsula. The capital is Pyongyang.
- **ICBM:** is the acronym for the Intercontinental Ballistic Missile. An ICBM is a guided ballistic missile with a maximum range of 5,500 kilometers. Used mainly for delivering thermonuclear warheads.
- **THAAD:** is a defense system designed to detect and destroy intermediate and medium range ballistic missiles (this does not include intercontinental ballistic missiles). It stands for Terminal High Altitude Area Defense.

¹ <http://www.foxnews.com/world/2017/12/09/officials-from-un-north-korea-agree-situation-is-dangerous.html>

Background information:

The current situation traces its origin to the cold war. Using proxy war tactics, both the USA and the USSR sought to spread their influence throughout Europe, Asia and America. And as such, in June 25th, 1950, together with Chinese and Soviet backing, The DPRK invaded South Korea who were backed by the USA.² Ultimately having made no progress in terms of seizing land, both parties decided to halt the war in July 27th, 1953. It ended by establishing the DMZ on the 38th parallel and creating the border between North and South Korea. Officially the war was never settled with a peace treaty but rather with an armistice and as such has never actually ended.³ It's also worth noting that on the side of South Korea was the UN which authorized the formation and dispatch of UN forces to Korea.

The result of the war became an everlasting tension between the two Koreas. Following the collapse of the USSR in 1991 and the change in Chinese government, the DPRK is beginning to find itself without allies. Though they might call themselves a democratic state, this statement can easily be argued against. The country has been ruled by a three-generation lineage dynasty descendant from the first leader, Kim Il-sung, in 1948. Dictatorial nations have often been considered a threat by big players such as the USA, France and the UK (among others, as well). For many reasons including this one, some of these countries, when the opportunity presents itself, have been involved in overthrowing totalitarian governments and replacing their ruling systems with more pro-western semi-democratic states. Fearing this, the DPRK has concentrated a substantial portion of its GDP into the research and armament of their nuclear and military capabilities as means to deter any foreign intentions.⁴

Dynamic levels of tension have been displayed over recent decades in yearly military exercises carried out by both North and South Korea. In addition, the DPRK is infamous for having test fired the occasional missile launch into the ocean as well as several underground nuclear tests. However, after the American orchestrated Shayrat missile strike in Syria in response to the Shaykhun

² Millett, Allan R. "Korean War." Encyclopædia Britannica. September 27, 2017. Accessed January 11, 2018. <https://www.britannica.com/event/Korean-War>.

³ Korea. Accessed January 11, 2018.

<https://web.archive.org/web/20110427205513/http://www.fas.org/news/dprk/1995/950313-dprk-usia.htm>.

⁴ Kelly, Robert E., Benjamin Dythe DPRK, Barry Dythe DPRK, Arie Kruglanski, and Ted Galen Carpenter. "The Surprisingly Simple Reason The DPRK Has Nuclear Weapons." The National Interest. Accessed January 11, 2018. <http://nationalinterest.org/feature/north-korean-nukes-are-almost-certainly-defense-21671>.

chemical attack in 2017, the DPRK saw further reason in escalating their nuclear arms program. On April 5th, the DPRK test fired a medium-range ballistic missile from its eastern port of Sinpo into the Sea of Japan. In response, U.S. president Donald Trump stated that the U.S. was prepared to act alone to deal with the nuclear threat from the DPRK.⁵ Following this incident, on April 8th, by means of miscommunication an American navy strike group was presented as moving towards the Korean Peninsula.⁶ This helped to incite even stronger feelings of tension. Claiming the area to be the world's biggest hotspot, the DPRK declared their readiness to declare war on the United States if they were to be attacked. On April 24, in celebration of the 85th anniversary of the Korean People's army the DPRK hosted their largest military drill in their history. The day after, the U.S. placed THAAD missile defense systems in South Korea.⁷

On July 4th, 2017, the DPRK announced their achievement of becoming "a full-fledged nuclear power that has been possessed of the most powerful inter-continental ballistic rocket capable of hitting any part of the world"⁸. The statement was a follow up to their first publicly announced launch of the ICBM, Hwasong-14. The flight range was recorded at 933km and crashed into the Sea of Japan.

On August 8th, a rhetorical response was made to the DPRK by U.S. president Donald Trump in a statement in which he declared the possibility that "[the DPRK] be met with fire, fury and power, the likes of which the world has never seen before"⁹. This declaration was met with the DPRK threatening to strike the American territory of Guam with ICBMs.

⁵ "Trump ready to 'solve' The DPRK problem without China." BBC News. April 03, 2017. Accessed January 11, 2018. <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-39475178>.

⁶ "The DPRK missiles: US warships deployed to Korean peninsula." BBC News. April 09, 2017. Accessed January 11, 2018. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-39542990>.

⁷ Sang-hun, Choe, and Gerry Mullany. "Missile Defense System Takes Shape in South Korea as North Holds Drills." The New York Times. April 25, 2017. Accessed January 11, 2018. https://www.nytimes.com/2017/04/25/world/asia/north-korea-military-anniversary-artillery-drills.html?_r=0.

⁸ "The DPRK missile: US confirms long-range test." BBC News. July 05, 2017. Accessed January 11, 2018. <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-40502361>.

⁹ Warrick, Joby, Ellen Nakashima, and Anna Fifield. "The DPRK now making missile-ready nuclear weapons, U.S. analysts say." The Washington Post. August 08, 2017. Accessed January 11, 2018. https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/north-korea-now-making-missile-ready-nuclear-weapons-us-analysts-say/2017/08/08/e14b882a-7b6b-11e7-9d08-b79f191668ed_story.html?utm_term=.bee3aec44bce.

On the 14th, in an article written by the *New York Times* statements by their Chairman of the National Security and Defense council of Ukraine denying any possible involvement of a Ukrainian factory having sold missile technology to the DPRK.¹⁰

August 29th, the DPRK launches an ICBM over Japan triggering the J-Alert warning system advising people to seek shelter. It reaches a range of 2,700 km before crashing into the Pacific. An emergency UN Security Council meeting is called that day to discuss the incident. U.S.A. makes further rhetorical threats.

The DPRK carries out its 6th nuclear test on September 3rd. The DPRK declares it to be a hydrogen bomb capable of being mounted on an ICBM. The independent seismic monitoring agency NORSAR estimated that the blast had a yield of around 120 kilotons.¹¹ The U.S.A. warned on the same day that it would carry out “a massive military response” if a threat was made against the U.S.A and any of its allies. Jens Stoltenberg, Secretary General of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, declares that the situation also merits NATO's attention, however, only speculation was made on whether Article 5 would trigger in case Guam was attacked.

On September 11th, the United States manages to pass a resolution that will reduce 30% of oil provided to the DPRK by cutting off over 55% of refined petroleum products going to the country.¹² It is met uneagerly by Russian president Vladimir Putin and by China. Both these countries propose a joint freeze of U.S. and North and South Korean missile tests and military exercises, hoping that it would trigger peace talks. However, China later agrees with the U.S. to continue adding pressure on the DPRK “through vigorous enforcement” of UN Security Council resolutions. U.S. president Donald Trump refers to Kim Jong-un as “Rocket Man” at the UN GA on September 19th¹³ and the U.S. further increases their sanctions against the DPRK by giving the U.S. Treasury authority to target firms and financial institutions conducting business with the DPRK.

¹⁰ Zinets, Natalia, and Alessandra Prentice;. "Ukraine denies selling missile technology to The DPRK." Reuters. August 14, 2017. Accessed January 11, 2018. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-northkorea-missiles-ukraine/ukraine-denies-selling-missile-technology-to-north-korea-idUSKCN1AU1C9>.

¹¹ "SAR Image of Punggye-ri." Arms Control Wothe DPRK. Accessed January 11, 2018. <https://www.armscontrolwothe DPRK.com/archive/1203852/sar-image-of-punggye-ri/>.

¹² https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia_pacific/us-calls-for-monday-vote-on-new-north-korea-sanctions/2017/09/11/4b9959f0-96a6-11e7-af6a-6555caaeb8dc_story.html?utm_term=.fc64396f1cca

¹³ "Remarks by President Trump to the 72nd Session of the United Nations General Assembly." The White House. Accessed January 11, 2018. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-president-trump-72nd-session-united-nations-general-assembly/>.

Though further threats were continued to be issued by both countries, Rex Tillerson (U.S. Secretary of State) stated on September 30th, that the U.S. and the DPRK were in “direct contact” and that he ‘New York Channel’ had been opened making communications between Washington and Pyongyang more facilitated.¹⁴ This sparked hope for the possibility of peaceful negotiations, however the message and the overall sentiment was blurred when Trump made a series of posts on Twitter which seemed to undermine the efforts made by Tillerson.¹⁵

Major Countries and Organizations Involved

The DPRK

The situation revolves around the small country of 25 million people. Ruled by their Supreme Leader, Kim Jong-un, their focus is on obtaining the high-ground of negotiations and maintaining military capabilities that equalize them to their rivals to defend their vulnerable position.

Russia

An old ally to the DPRK and a permanent member of the Security Council, Russia seeks to maintain peace in the region. Their relationship with the DPRK has been quite dynamic over the years. They have followed through with sanctions imposed on the DPRK such as not assisting with technical support in the development of ballistic missiles.¹⁶ However, in 2014 president Vladimir Putin wrote off 90% of an \$11 billion-dollar debt that the DPRK owed to the Russian Federation. In addition, both nations have made several trade deals with each other and have even cooperated in several projects in Russia’s far east.¹⁷

China

Another key player in the stability of the region. China is also an old ally of the DPRK, however, they too have seen their friendship with the small country diminish. It is now that their trade-based

¹⁴ "The DPRK and US 'in direct contact', says Tillerson." BBC News. September 30, 2017. Accessed January 11, 2018. <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-41454007>.

¹⁵ CBSNewsOnline. YouTube. October 01, 2017. Accessed January 11, 2018. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=plMgfOvIoMg>.

¹⁶ Ntv.ru. // .Ru. December 02, 2013. Accessed January 11, 2018. <http://www.ntv.ru/novosti/750076/>.

¹⁷ Yonho, Kim. "Russia, The DPRK Boost Economic Ties." VOA. March 22, 2015. Accessed January 11, 2018. <https://www.voanews.com/a/russia-north-korea-boost-economic-ties/2690186.html>.

relationship with the DPRK is put at test. As of 2017, president Xi Jinping of China has not made a state visit to the DPRK and remains the only Chinese president not to meet with the leader of THE DPRK.¹⁸ China is a permanent member of the Security Council.

U.S.A.

Though previously only a guardian to its danger-close allies, the U.S.A. now sees itself in the crosshair. The DPRK's ICBMs now have the capability of reaching the mainland and this has prompted their increased presence in the area. The U.S.A. has vowed to defend both South Korea and Japan from any attacks made on them from THE DPRK. This is a permanent member of the Security Council.

Japan

Japan does not maintain a good relationship with the DPRK, and as such is the target of many unarmful missile tests. They are also used as a bargaining chip by the DPRK to protect their sovereignty.

South Korea

South Korea shares a similar situation with Japan. However, the effects are more direct and up-close. If peace were ever to be brokered or if any of the two nations disbanded, the Koreans would most likely look to rejoin each other and the families. Many Koreans share the view that they are one people and would opt for a peaceful solution to the situation.

NATO

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization is a background chip that must be considered in the debate for peace as failure to find a solution could potentially lead to war. U.S.A., Japan and South Korea are all members of NATO and if any of these were to be attacked, article 5 would trigger causing all members of NATO to retaliate in conjunction.

¹⁸ Carpenter, Ted Galen. "Why China's Xi is reluctant to bring The DPRK's Kim Jong Un to his knees | Opinion." Newsweek. April 10, 2017. Accessed January 11, 2018. <http://www.newsweek.com/why-chinas-xi-reluctant-bring-kim-jong-un-his-knees-579016>.

Relevant UN Resolutions

SC Resolution 83: adopted on June 27th, 1950, this resolution recommended UN member states to provide assistance to South Korea in the Korean War to repel the Attack by The DPRK.¹⁹

SC Resolution 1887: addressing the non-proliferation treaty, the SC called upon the withdrawal of the use of weapons of mass destruction in the world. This was done to promote international stability and was also a deliberate denunciation of the DPRK nuclear weapons program.²⁰

SC Resolution 2375: adopted unanimously, it strengthened sanctions on the regime limiting their oil imports by 30% and bans overseas sales of the DPRK's textiles and further restricts the country's exports of its workers. This resolution was proposed by the United States on September 11th, 2017 in response to the 6th the DPRK's nuclear test.²¹

Previous Attempts to Solve the Issue

Views range as to what constitutes a solution. However, it is universally agreed upon that a peaceful ending should be a priority. It is unknown what the future holds for the Korean Peninsula and all states involved, though there have been numerous attempts at finding solutions. These will be explored below.

In 2003, a six-party talk among South Korea, Russia, China, the U.S., Japan and the DPRK was launched with the purpose of finding a diplomatic solution to halt THE DPRK's nuclear program.

¹⁹ Stueck, William (2008), "The United Nations, the Security Council, and the Korean War", in Lowe, Vaughan; Roberts, Adam; Welsh, Jennifer; Zaum, Dominik, *The United Nations Security Council and War: The Evolution of Thought and Practice since 1945*, Oxford University Press, p. 266, ISBN 978-0-19-953343-5

²⁰ "Figure 2f from: Irimia R, Gottschling M (2016) Taxonomic revision of *Rochefortia* Sw. (Ehretiaceae, Boraginales). *Biodiversity Data Journal* 4: e7720. <https://doi.org/10.3897/BDJ.4.e7720>." doi:10.3897/bdj.4.e7720.figure2f.

²¹ 11th, 2017 Hamish Macdonald September. "United Nations Security Council approves new The DPRK sanctions." *THE DPRK News - The DPRK News*. September 14, 2017. Accessed January 11, 2018. <https://www.theDPRKnews.org/2017/09/united-nations-security-council-approves-new-north-korea-resolution/>.

Not much progress was made by these talks. Mainly because military exercises at the 38th parallel and the occasional threat helped keep the tension at the same level. In 2009, these talks came to an end and have not been relaunched since.

Countless sanctions have been made on the DPRK that limit and restrict their ability to trade with other nations. Economic penalties on the DPRK have been imposed by both independent countries and the UN with the hopes that this will deter them from continuing their nuclear weapons program. However, these sanctions have not steered the nation away from continuing their program. When they can't sell coal to China they reroute their trade to Vietnam or Malaysia, and in fact, life in the DPRK, in economic terms, has improved. In addition, the DPRK does not function like a regular country. Commonly, when economic strains are too great, nations will switch course in order not to damage their people's living standard and the countries overall economic power. And this is not the case for the DPRK. As president Vladimir Putin put it "They'd rather eat grass than give up their nuclear program".²²

Propaganda and persuasion tactics have been used by South Korean NGO's to incite movements within the regime.²³ Movements that they hope will drive the DPRK to possible democratization. However, the results are hard to quantify. There have been numerous cases of defectors from the DPRK that allude their escape to these NGO's. This has not been taken well by their Korean counterparts, as it has helped increase tension between the two nations.

Possible Solutions

The ranging views of what merits as a solution varies from country to country. Though peace is commonly agreed to be of the greatest importance it is also important to consider what exactly this means. It is worth noting that the DPRK is a known human's rights violator and is home to the likes of concentration camps containing almost 100,000 of their own people.²⁴

²² Taylor, Adam. "Analysis | Why haven't sanctions on The DPRK worked? Two very different theories." The Washington Post. September 12, 2017. Accessed January 11, 2018. https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2017/09/11/why-havent-sanctions-on-north-korea-worked-two-very-different-theories/?utm_term=.1c95d8a5ea49.

²³ Bardsley, Daniel. "South Korea softens stance towards north." The National. November 19, 2011. Accessed January 11, 2018. <https://www.thenational.ae/world/asia/south-korea-softens-stance-towards-north-1.413981>.

²⁴ <https://web.archive.org/web/20131001154636/http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/asset/ASA24/001/2011/en/2671e54f-1cd1-46c1-96f1-6a463efa6f65/asa240012011en.pdf>

Firstly, diplomatic measures can be considered as no country desires war. This option can be done by relaunching the six-party talks. Again, the agenda of each country must be considered when launching such an endeavor. The NATO side of the talks have reiterated their desire for the DPRK to stop their nuclear arms program and believe that if this is not done the regime will always constitute as a world danger. While the Chinese believe this to be a reasonable position, they are more inclined to continue trade with the DPRK and have made lesser efforts to stop the nuclear program. In line with the Chinese are the Russians. They too have expressed concerns over the nuclear program, but are less keen than the U.S.A. to undermine the DPRK's weapons program. As for the DPRK, Nuclear weapons are their defense system and as such will never stop the program. However, understanding that sovereignty is their goal can give a clue as to how to approach the Situation.

Secondly, the use of economic sanctions can be utilized to deter the nuclear program. To further strain the DPRK's economy, stricter and more sanctions can be imposed on the regime. For results to be made, China and Russia could be convinced to completely halt any trade and deals made with the DPRK. In addition, it can be sought to stop other nations from taking China and Russia's position as trade partners if these two countries are to cooperate. The result of diminishing the DPRK's economic power could lead to convincing Kim Jong-un to stop their nuclear program. However, The DPRK is not a stranger to famines, if the economy of the country plummets too hard it could lead to millions of people dying of starvation. Though, this can also be a motivation for the people of the DPRK to oppose their leader and perhaps even incite an opposition movement from within.

Finally, to do nothing is also an option. Many believe that the hermit kingdom looks for nothing but to be left alone and such should not constitute a danger to the world. American presence in the area is considered as a threat by the DPRK and have created a defense system using nuclear weapons. Shifting attention to the American party to removed them from the area can also be considered as a viable strategy to ensure world peace. But it goes without saying, that this would mean to leave alone a dictatorial nation with nuclear capabilities. Their soundness and stability should be considered.

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