

## **North Korea Nuclear VII**

### **Background:**

Starting in July 2017 and continuing into 2018, the U.S., South Korea and Japan faced North Korea in a crisis related to North Korea's nuclear and missile programs.

The sixth international crisis related to North Korea's nuclear-weapons program (Crisis #477) ended in the last months of 2016. The crisis actors briefly entered a period of uncertain peace. However, tensions began to rise again just weeks later in the lead up to the U.S. administration change. As president-elect, Donald Trump was predicted by many to be a brash leader with a more confrontational stance on North Korea than the previous Obama administration. For example, on 3 January 2017, Trump declared via Twitter that he would not tolerate North Korea's development of missiles with the capacity to strike parts of the U.S. Despite Trump's warnings, Pyongyang remained undeterred in maintaining and enhancing its nuclear program. On 20 January 2017, U.S. President Donald Trump took office.

Precrisis: Three weeks after Trump assumed the presidency, North Korea tested a new medium-range ballistic missile system on 12 February 2017. North Korean media called the test a success and indicated that the missile flew approximately 500 km at a lofted trajectory. On 6 March, North Korea launched four more ballistic missiles near the Chinese border. The missiles landed 1000 km away, at sea in the Japanese exclusive economic zone, 300 km off the coast of Japan. Pyongyang conducted additional missile tests on 5 and 16 April. On 6 April, Chinese and U.S. leaders met and agreed to apply greater pressure on North Korea to denuclearize. The Trump administration, including Secretary of State Rex Tillerson, Secretary of Defense James Mattis, Director of National Intelligence Dan Coats, and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Marine General Joseph Dunford, briefed the U.S. Senate on 26 April on its new strategy towards increasing pressure on North Korea to denuclearize. North Korea denounced the American actions. Trump warned the following day that major military action against North Korea was not off the table.

On 2 May, the U.S. THAAD missile defense system, deployed in Seongju, South Korea, became operational. The system was intended to detect and intercept North Korean missiles launched at South Korea. Moon Jae-in was elected president of South Korea days later, on 9 May, and he advocated for diplomatic talks with North Korea provided it halt its nuclear activity.

North Korea conducted another missile test of Hwasong-12 missiles on 14 May. The intermediate-range ballistic missiles could reportedly travel up to 4,800 km. In reaction, the UNSC expanded sanctions on North Korea on 1 June, targeting four entities and fourteen officials. South Korean and U.S. leaders met at a summit in Washington on 29-30 June to discuss next steps in their approach to North Korea.

### **Crisis:**

On 3 July 2017, North Korea performed a test of a new type of intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM). Based on the demonstrated capabilities of the missile, some analysts believed it could reach Alaska but was not capable of reaching Hawaii. This ICBM test launch triggered the crisis for the United States, Japan, and South Korea.

The U.S.'s initial response comprised two main actions on 4 July. First, the U.S. and South Korean forces performed joint military exercises, which included test firings of their own ballistic missiles along the

coast of the Korean Peninsula. These joint exercises also constituted South Korea's main response to the crisis trigger. Second, the UN Security Council convened an emergency meeting, acting on a request from the U.S. Japan responded on 4 July with harsh criticism of North Korea, stating that the test was in clear violation of the restrictions placed upon North Korea by the UNSC. It lodged a complaint against North Korea and called for action from the UNSC.

Further escalation of the crisis occurred on 28 July. North Korea tested a second ICBM with the potential capabilities to reach the west coast of the U.S. according to some experts, though there was uncertainty regarding the missile's exact capabilities. Once again, the U.S. and South Korea responded with joint military exercises and launching of their own ballistic missiles. This second test also prompted South Korea's new president, Moon Jae-in, to reverse his decision to halt deployment of the controversial THAAD missile defense system, telling the South Korean military to deploy the system.

Due to the repeated tests of the ICBMs, the UNSC imposed new sanctions on North Korea on 5 August. These sanctions had the potential to effect a one-third reduction in North Korean export revenue and triggered a crisis for North Korea. North Korea responded on 7 August, stating that the country would seek to retaliate against the United States "thousands of times" over and promised to never give up its nuclear arsenal.

Further escalation for North Korea came just one day after North Korea's remarks. On 8 August, U.S. President Trump threatened "fire and fury like the world has never seen" should North Korea make any more threats against the U.S. North Korea responded by stating it was considering a strike against Guam, which houses an important US Air Force base.

The main crisis management technique for each of the crisis actors remained non-violent military activity throughout the early part of the crisis. Each side participated in some form of joint military exercises, tests of missile capabilities, or test of missile defense systems. These crisis management techniques would change towards the end of 2017, shifting towards negotiation.

Several additional, important events occurred during the later-half of 2017 which caused the crisis to continue into 2018. North Korea launched a missile directly over northern Japan on 28 August. Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe stated that the launch was an "unprecedented, serious and grave threat," which caused several train lines to be halted and set off alert systems throughout the country. Tensions continued to rise when North Korea conducted a test of a hydrogen bomb on 3 September. The test spurred further live-fire exercises by the United States and South Korea, wide-spread condemnations, and prompted additional sanctions by the UNSC on 12 September.

On 2 January 2018, South Korea and North Korea decided to hold talks for the first time in two years. The two states also agreed to reestablish a hotline between them that it had disconnected after the closing of the Kaesong industrial complex. The talks were held on 9 January along the demilitarized zone in Panmunjom. Around the same time, the U.S. and South Korea agreed to postpone their annual joint military exercise until after the 2018 Winter Olympics in South Korea.

Over Easter weekend, on 31 March 31 and 1 April, CIA Director Mike Pompeo and North Korean leader Kim Jong-un held a secret meeting in North Korea to lay the groundwork for a summit between Kim and Trump in early June 2018 to discuss North Korea's nuclear status. Trump announced that the meeting went smoothly and that the two adversaries established a good relationship. However, despite the more

conciliatory rhetoric from both sides following the meeting, uncertainty remained as to whether the meeting would take place.

On 27 April Kim Jong-un and South Korean President Moon Jae-in met again in Panmunjom at an Inter-Korean Summit and signed the Panmunjom Declaration for Peace, Prosperity and Unification of the Korean Peninsula, which called for the complete denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula. The summit terminated the crisis for South Korea and Japan.

In mid-May 2018, tensions rose between the U.S. and North Korea once again, when Trump cancelled the U.S.-North Korea meeting over what he referred to as North Korean hostilities. He also signaled his willingness to use whatever means possible to end the North Korea nuclear threat. North Korea also stated they were ready to respond to any U.S. action.

Despite Trump's statement, the two countries did meet on 12 June and signed a joint declaration calling for regional peace and eventual complete denuclearization on the peninsula. The signing of the joint declaration signaled the end of the crisis for North Korea and the U.S.

Regarding UN activity, in addition to the sanctions imposed by the UNSC, the UN Secretary-General, Antonio Guterres, criticized North Korea, stating that the first ICBM test constituted a “dangerous escalation of the situation.”

In the early part of the crisis, Russia and China both reacted to the events. Russia performed several shows of force, including flying a nuclear bomber near the Korean peninsula during U.S.-South Korean exercises on 24 August 2017. China's main role during the crisis came in criticizing South Korea's decision to deploy the THAAD system, which China had vehemently opposed since 2016. Additionally, China and Russia held joint anti-ballistic missile defense exercises starting in mid-December 2017.

The main regional organization to respond to the crisis was the EU. In addition to condemning the crisis, the EU added their own sanctions on top of the UNSC sanctions of 5 August 2017. These sanctions consisted of travel bans and asset freezes in 2017 and 2018 against individuals involved in North Korea's nuclear program. It also adopted the sanctions against the individuals and entities listed in the UNSC resolutions against North Korea.

NATO and the IAEA played a minor role in the conflict. The 3 July 2017 missile test and 3 September nuclear test each received statements of condemnation from NATO and the IAEA respectively. While they both verbally condemned North Korea's nuclear tests, they did not take any further action.

#### **Sources:**

Baker, Peter and Choe Sang-Hun. “Trump Threats ‘Fire and Fury’ Against North Korea if It Endangers U.S.” *The New York Times*, August 08, 2017. <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/08/08/world/asia/north-korea-un-sanctions-nuclear-missile-united-nations.html>.

BBC News. “North Korea slapped with UN sanctions after nuclear test.” *British Broadcasting Corporation*, September 12, 2017. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-41235157>.

Berlinger, Joshua and Taehoon Lee. "Nuclear test conducted by North Korea, country claims; South Korea responds with drills." *CNN*, September 04, 2017. <https://www.cnn.com/2017/09/03/asia/north-korea-nuclear-test/index.html>.

CBS News. "Defiant Kim says N. Korea nukes not up for negotiation." *CBS Inc.*, July 05, 2017. <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/north-korea-kim-jong-un-nuclear-missile-no-negotiation-icbm-test/>.

Council of the European Union. "EU restrictive measures against North Korea." *European Council*. <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/sanctions/history-north-korea/>.

Council of the European Union. "North Korea: Council reinforces EU sanctions in line with UN Security Council resolution 2371 of 5 August 2017." *European Council*, September 14, 2017. <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2017/09/14/north-korea-eu-sanctions-reinforcement/>.

Davenport, Kelsey. "Chronology of U.S.-North Korean Nuclear and Missile Diplomacy." *Arms Control Association*. <https://www.armscontrol.org/factsheets/dprkchron#2016>.

Gady, Franz-Stefan. "China, Russia Kick Off Anti-Ballistic Missile Defense Exercise." *The Diplomat*, December 12, 2017. <https://thediplomat.com/2017/12/china-russia-kick-off-anti-ballistic-missile-defense-exercise/>.

Gladstone, Rick. "U.N. Security Council Imposes Punishing New Sanctions on North Korea." *The New York Times*, August 05, 2017. <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/08/05/world/asia/north-korea-sanctions-united-nations.html>.

Harris, Shane, Carol D. Leonnig, Greg Jaffe, and David Nakamura. "CIA Director Pompeo met with North Korean leader Kim Jong Un over Easter weekend." *The Washington Post*, April 18, 2018. [https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/us-china-trade-dispute-looms-over-trump-summit-with-japans-abe/2018/04/17/2c94cb02-424f-11e8-bba2-0976a82b05a2\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/us-china-trade-dispute-looms-over-trump-summit-with-japans-abe/2018/04/17/2c94cb02-424f-11e8-bba2-0976a82b05a2_story.html).

IAEA. "Statement by IAEA Director General Yukia Amano on DPRK." *International Atomic Energy Agency*, September 03, 2017. <https://www.iaea.org/newscenter/statements/statement-by-iaea-director-general-yukiya-amano-on-dprk>.

McCurry, Justin. "North Korea agrees to first talks with South in two years." *The Guardian*, January 04, 2018. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/jan/05/north-korea-talks-south-olympics>.

Mullany, Gerry. "Trump Warns That 'Major, Major Conflict' With North Korea Is Possible." *The New York Times*, April 27, 2017. <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/04/27/world/asia/trump-north-korea-kim-jong-un.html?module=inline>.

North Atlantic Council. "Statement by the North Atlantic Council on the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK)." *North Atlantic Treaty Organization*, July 12, 2017. [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official\\_texts\\_146213.htm?selectedLocale=en](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_146213.htm?selectedLocale=en).

Osborn, Andrew. "Russian nuclear bombers fly near North Korea in rare show of force." *Reuters*, August 24, 2017. [https://www.reuters.com/article/us-russia-southkorea-bombers-idUSKCN1B40MP?mkt\\_tok=eyJpIjoiWmpNek9UaG1Oek15Tm1VNSIsInQiOiJEXC9Rb1ZcL09WcDRwSjluVWdodFhiUXNZYjM2RGFDYnFoWGJWYlBaTXhmK1RncG1HYnY0R24yQlhGbnNPdGIPK0paTjFIOHJpQjJ2ZlN0VnNDS09GMk5PNGpZOXZFk5djNpUmxxK3hXRGZzdGFYZG9HR1dTd0treDNiZlIkRIUxIn0%3D](https://www.reuters.com/article/us-russia-southkorea-bombers-idUSKCN1B40MP?mkt_tok=eyJpIjoiWmpNek9UaG1Oek15Tm1VNSIsInQiOiJEXC9Rb1ZcL09WcDRwSjluVWdodFhiUXNZYjM2RGFDYnFoWGJWYlBaTXhmK1RncG1HYnY0R24yQlhGbnNPdGIPK0paTjFIOHJpQjJ2ZlN0VnNDS09GMk5PNGpZOXZFk5djNpUmxxK3hXRGZzdGFYZG9HR1dTd0treDNiZlIkRIUxIn0%3D).

Perlez, Jane and Rick Gladstone. "North Korea Rails Against New Sanctions. Whether They Will Work Is Unclear." *The New York Times*, August 07, 2017. <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/08/07/world/asia/north-korea-responds-sanctions-united-states.html>.

Pollack, Jonathan. "The Trump administration contemplates its North Korea strategy-Following Obama's lead?" *Brookings*, January 13, 2017. <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2017/01/13/the-trump-administration-contemplates-its-north-korea-strategy-following-obamas-lead/>.

Reuters. "Liberal Moon Jae-in wins South Korea's presidential election." *South China Morning Post*, May 10, 2017. <https://www.scmp.com/news/asia/east-asia/article/2093679/liberal-moon-jae-wins-south-koreas-presidential-election-end>.

Reuters. "Trump administration to brief full U.S. Congress on North Korea policy." *CNBC News*, April 26, 2017. <https://www.cnn.com/2017/04/26/trump-administration-to-brief-full-us-congress-on-north-korea-policy.html>.

Sang-Hun, Choe. "North Korea Fires Another Missile Amid Rising Tensions with U.S." *The New York Times*, July 03, 2017. <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/07/03/world/asia/north-korea-missile.html>.

Sang-Hun, Choe. "North Korea Says it Might Fire Missiles Into Waters Near Guam." *The New York Times*, August 09, 2017. <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/08/09/world/asia/north-korea-missiles-guam.html>.

Sang-Hun, Choe. "U.S. Confirms North Korea Fired Intercontinental Ballistic Missile." *The New York Times*, July 04, 2017. <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/07/04/world/asia/north-korea-missile-test-icbm.html>.

Sang-Hun, Choe and David E. Sanger. "North Korea Fires Missile Over Japan." *The New York Times*, August 28, 2017. <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/08/28/world/asia/north-korea-missile.html>.

Sang-Hun, Choe. "U.S. Antimissile System Goes Live in South Korea." *The New York Times*, May 02, 2017. <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/05/02/world/asia/thaad-north-korea-missile-defense-us.html>.

Sanger, David, Choe Sang-Hun, and William J. Broad. "North Korea Tests a Ballistic Missile That Experts Say Could Hit California." *The New York Times*, July 28, 2017. <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/07/28/world/asia/north-korea-ballistic-missile.html>.

Shaffer, Leslie. "North Korea launches missile it claims is ICBM, likely hitting Japanese waters." *CNBC*, July 04, 2017. <https://www.cnn.com/2017/07/03/north-korea-launches-missile-nearing-japan-reports.html>.

Sputnik News. "Chinese Military Urges U.S. to Remove THAAD from S Korea Over Security Concerns." *Sputnik International*, October 13, 2017. <https://sputniknews.com/asia/201710131058191719-china-urges-usa-remove-thaad/>.

Yonhap. "Full text of joint declaration issued at inter-Korean summit." *Yonhap News Agency*, April 27, 2018. <https://en.yna.co.kr/view/AEN20180427013900315>.