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**North Korea makes nuclear policy ‘irreversible’ with new law**

Legislation allows it to carry out a nuclear first strike, amid concern country is on verge of resuming nuclear tests.

North Korea has passed a law allowing it to carry out a preventive nuclear strike and declaring its status as a nuclear-armed state “irreversible”, according to state media.

The announcement comes amid stalled talks on denuclearisation and concern Pyongyang may soon resume nuclear testing for the first time since 2017, following the failure of a series of high-level summits with then-United States President Donald Trump over sanctions relief.

The country has conducted an [unprecedented number of weapons tests this year](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/8/17/north-korea-fires-two-cruise-missiles-in-first-tests-in-weeks) — launching more than 30 ballistic weapons, including the [first intercontinental ballistic missile in five years](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/5/25/north-korea-fires-three-missiles-as-biden-ends-asia-visit).

The new law, passed at the Supreme People’s Assembly on Thursday, will allow North Korea to carry out a preventive nuclear strike “automatically” and “immediately to destroy hostile forces,” when another country poses an imminent threat to Pyongyang, the official Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) said.

With the law, “the status of our country as a nuclear weapons state has become irreversible,” KCNA quoted leader Kim Jong Un as saying.

The law also bans any sharing of nuclear arms or technology with other countries, KCNA reported.

“The utmost significance of legislating nuclear weapons policy is to draw an irretrievable line so that there can be no bargaining over our nuclear weapons,” Kim said in a speech to the assembly.

Leif-Eric Easley, associate professor of international studies at Ewha Womans University in Seoul, said that Kim’s comments did not appear to be made from a position of confidence.

“Despite boasting of his nuclear weapons capabilities, he is apparently fearful of regime decapitation in a conflict and even of a U.S. or South Korean preemptive strike against North Korea’s strategic assets,” Easley said in an email. “These concerns would be best addressed through diplomacy and reducing self-isolation, but instead Pyongyang is advertising an irresponsibly risky and aggressive nuclear doctrine. Such pariah state behavior is likely to deepen arms race dynamics in Asia as other countries act to counter North Korean threats to stability.”

The United States has [offered to hold talks with Kim at any time or place](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/5/1/us-says-no-grand-bargain-as-biden-changes-approach-to-n-korea), while South Korea’s President Yoon Suk-yeol, who was elected in May, has said his country would provide [massive amounts of economic aid](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/8/15/s-koreas-yoon-urges-better-ties-with-japan-offers-n-korea-aid) if Pyongyang began to give up its arsenal.