



Security Council Topic Background Guide

Topic 1: The Situation in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea¹

October 15, 2009

According to Chapter VI of the UN Charter, the Security Council “may investigate any dispute, or any situation which may lead to international friction or give rise to dispute, in order to determine if either the continuance of the dispute or situation is likely to endanger the maintenance of international peace and security.”²

In the last several decades the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK), known also as North Korea, has received considerable attention from the Security Council, due to its acquisition of nuclear weapons and swings between international confrontation and conciliation.³ In 2009 alone, the DPRK has launched a number of missiles, conducted a nuclear test, and threatened to stop participating in international talks.

In recent resolutions, the Security Council has demanded the DPRK dismantle its nuclear weapons and halt its missile launches, and the Council has imposed sanctions on the DPRK until it does so. According to the DPRK, it will continue to carry out such activities until sanctions are lifted and economic aid is forthcoming. This creates a challenge for the Security Council.

History and Current Events

To understand the contemporary situation in the DPRK, it is important to understand the history of the country. From 918 to 1905, the Korean peninsula was ruled by a single, independent government. In 1905, Japan occupied Korea and ran it as a colony, extracting land, labor, and natural resources. Japanese rule lasted until the end of World War II in 1945, when the Soviet Union (USSR) invaded from the north and the US invaded from the south, pushing Japan out of the area.

The agreement between the US and the USSR was that each would occupy part of the peninsula until elections for a unified Korean government could be held. In 1948, this agreement broke down. The south held elections and, with US approval, declared an independent state, the Republic of Korea (ROK). In return, the north proclaimed its independence as the DPRK.⁴

During the Cold War, the US supported the ROK and the USSR supported the DPRK. The effects of US-Soviet rivalry were so profound that neither North Korea nor South Korea joined the UN until 1991, when the end of the Cold War assured that neither the US nor Russia would veto their ascension. Since the end of the Cold War, the DPRK has become very isolated. Today it is often described as the “last Stalinist state on earth.”⁵

¹ This document was written by Kedra Hildebrand, Teaching Assistant, and Karen Adams, Faculty Advisor.

² “Charter of the United Nations,” Chapter VI, Article 34, available at <http://www.un.org/aboutun/charter/>

³ Moon Ihlwan, “Humanitarian Talks Mark North Korea's Shift in Game,” Business Week.com, August 26, 2008, available at http://www.businessweek.com/globalbiz/blog/eyeonasia/archives/2009/08/humanitarian_ta.html?chan=globalbiz_asia+index+page_top+stories

⁴ Walter LaFeber, *America, Russia and the Cold War 1945-2006*, 10th ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2006).

⁵ “North Korea: Overview,” *New York Times*, June 16, 2009, available at <http://topics.nytimes.com/top/news/international/countriesandterritories/northkorea/index.html?scp=1-spot&sq=North%20Korea&st=cse>

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The first leader of the DPRK was Kim Il-Sung, who fought the Japanese in Korea and Manchuria. He was installed by the Soviets in 1946 and became the prime minister when Soviet troops withdrew in 1948.⁶ The first leader of the ROK was Syngman Rhee, who had studied in the US and was an anti-Japanese activist during the occupation period. He was appointed head of the provisional government by the US and was elected president in 1948.⁷

In 1950, the DPRK invaded the south to reunify the peninsula, and the Korean War began. During the war, the North Koreans were supported by the USSR and People's Republic of China (PRC). South Korea was supported by the US, UK, Canada, the Philippines, and several other states. Support for the ROK was authorized by Security Council Resolution 82, which passed without Soviet veto because the USSR was boycotting the Council. The Soviets were boycotting because the US refused to transfer China's UN membership from the nationalist Chinese government which controlled only Taiwan to the communist government that took over the mainland in 1949.⁸

The fighting ended in 1953 under an armistice agreement signed by the UN, the DPRK and China. South Korea refused to sign the armistice, citing frustration that Korea was to remain divided by North and South. But it did agree to abide by the terms. Under the armistice, both sides withdrew two kilometers from the border on the 38th parallel, creating what is today known as the Demilitarized Zone.⁹ No peace treaty has ever been signed. Today, there are about a million DPRK forces on the north of the DMZ and about 500,000 South Korean and 25,000 US forces in the south.

Kim Il-Sung's political philosophy was "Juche," or self-reliance. It articulated a desire for the DPRK to be completely independent from other states in the international system. In implementing this philosophy, the DPRK has become "one of the world's most secretive societies,"¹⁰ which has made it difficult for other states and organizations such as the UN to know what is happening within its borders. This is true in all dimensions of life – political, economic, social, and military.

Nuclear Program

The DPRK's military secrecy has been of special concern because for many years it was unclear whether the country was trying to develop nuclear reactors for energy purposes or for both energy and nuclear weapons.

In 1979, North Korea started to build a 5-megawatt nuclear reactor at Yongbyon with Soviet nuclear help. In December 1985, North Korea declared the existence of the Yongbyon facility to the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), the oversight body for the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), and joined the NPT.¹¹

According to the NPT, the only legal nuclear weapons states are those that had declared nuclear programs when the Treaty was written in 1968, namely the United States (which developed nuclear weapons in 1945), Russia (1949), United Kingdom (1953), France (1964), and China (1964). All other state parties to the Treaty agreed to pursue nuclear programs only for energy, not for weapons. In exchange, the five existing nuclear states promised to

⁶ "North Korea Timeline: Chronology of Key Events 1945-2006," *International Debates*, 4:8, November 2006, p. 2.

⁷ LaFeber, *America, Russia and the Cold War*.

⁸ LaFeber, *America, Russia and the Cold War*.

⁹ "North Korea Timeline: Chronology of Key Events 1945-2006."

¹⁰ "Country Profile: North Korea," BBC News, June 10, 2009, available at http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/country_profiles/1131421.stm

¹¹ "Timeline: North Korea Nuclear Threats, Climb-downs, Tests," *Reuters*, 21:19, May 24, 2009.

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“pursue negotiations in good faith on effective measures relating to . . . nuclear disarmament, and on a treaty on general and complete disarmament under strict and effective international control.”¹²

In 1992, North Korea agreed to allow inspections by the IAEA, but refused to allow access to certain sites that were suspected of nuclear weapons production.¹³

In 1994, Kim Il-Sung died and Kim Jong-Il, his son, succeeded him as North Korea’s leader. Soon after, North Korea and the US signed an agreement in which the DPRK pledged to halt and eventually dismantle its nuclear weapons program in exchange for, among other things, international aid to build two nuclear power plants.¹⁴ The agreement is known as the “Agreed Framework.”¹⁵ In 1998, in violation of the Agreed Framework, North Korea launched a rocket that flew over Japan before landing in the Pacific Ocean. In 2001, the DPRK threatened to restart its nuclear weapons program if the US did not keep its promises under the Agreed Framework.

In 2002, US President George W. Bush warned that the US would use military force to destroy any effort to obtain nuclear weapons, and he called North Korea part of the “Axis of Evil,” along with Iraq and Iran.¹⁶ North Korea reacted by saying that the U.S. was “little short of declaring war” and disclosing that it was working on and would not halt a uranium enrichment program.¹⁷ When the U.S., Japan, and South Korea retaliated by halting fuel oil shipments, North Korea sent IAEA inspectors home, withdrew from the NPT, and announced it was restarting the plutonium reactor at Yongbyon.¹⁸

These events led to the first of a series of Six-Party Talks including North Korea, the US, Russia, China, Japan and South Korea. These talks were held in Beijing as a sign of China’s increased concern over the DPRK’s growing nuclear ambitions. The aim of the Six-Party Talks was to “obtain a full declaration of nuclear materials from Pyongyang (including highly enriched uranium, plutonium, and nuclear devices) and the disablement of all North Korea nuclear facilities and activities.”¹⁹

When the talks stalled in February 2005, the DPRK Foreign Ministry declared that North Korea had manufactured nuclear weapons. In March, the DPRK declared that it was a nuclear weapons state.²⁰

¹² “Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Weapons,” UN Department for Disarmament Affairs, 2002, Articles II, IV, VI, available at <http://www.un.org/Depts/dda/WMD/treaty/>

¹³ “North Korea Timeline: Chronology of Key Events 1945-2006.”

¹⁴ Robert Gallucci, “The Agreed Framework: Advancing U.S. Interests with North Korea,” *U.S. Department of State Dispatch* 5:50, December 12, 1994: 820-823.

¹⁵ “Agreed Framework Between the United States of America and the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea,” The Korean Peninsula Energy Development Organization (KEDO) official website, October 21, 1994, available at <http://www.kedo.org/pdfs/AgreedFramework.pdf>

¹⁶ George W. Bush, “State of the Union Address,,” January 29, 2002, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2002/01/20020129-11.html>

¹⁷ North Korea’s official state newspaper as quoted in PBS Frontline’s chronology for “Kim’s Nuclear Gamble,” <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/kim/etc/cron.html>

¹⁸ For the full text of the DPRK explanation for withdrawal, see “KCNA ‘Detailed Report’ Explains NPT Withdrawal,” January 22, 2003, FBIS Translated Text, Federation of American Scientists website, available at <http://www.fas.org/nuke/guide/dprk/nuke/dprk012203.html>

¹⁹ Victor Cha, “Winning Asia,” *Foreign Affairs* 86:6, November/December 2007: 98-113.

²⁰ “Timeline: North Korea’s Nuclear Test,” *New York Times*, November 27, 2006, <http://topics.nytimes.com/top/news/international/countriesandterritories/northkorea/index.html?8qa>

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In September 2005, in response to a “balanced package” devised in the Six-Party talks, the DPRK agreed to abandon its nuclear weapons program and rejoin the NPT. This package addressed the “security needs of North Korea as well as the concerns of the international community about North Korea’s nuclear activities.”²¹

Despite this agreement, in October 2006, North Korea demonstrated its nuclear weapons capability by conducting a test.²² In 2006, the Natural Resources Defense Council estimated that North Korea had ten nuclear weapons and the capability to manufacture one per year.²³

Today, there is no question that the DPRK has nuclear weapons. Now, questions center on whether the DPRK plans to use them against other states or sell them to other states or terrorist groups such as al-Qaeda.

Economy and Human Rights

North Korea’s continued adherence to a strict communist economic system, its closure to trade, and a series of natural disasters have led to widespread economic privation. According to international aid agencies, two million people have died since the mid-1990s due to food shortages. Enforced political closure has also led to human rights abuses. The DPRK has been accused of holding approximately 200,000 political prisoners. Prisoners and other citizens are reportedly subject to torture, public execution, slave labor, forced abortion, and infanticide.²⁴

The secretive and closed nature of the DPRK makes it hard to verify such accusations. In 1995, at the World Summit for Social Development, DPRK Vice-President Mr. Kim Pyong Sik painted a picture of peace and prosperity. Sik contended that the benevolent policies implemented by General Kim Il-Sung and furthered by his son Kim Jong-Il ensured that the its people were provided for and were part of a “great harmonious family.” According to Sik, the DPRK government provides food, housing, universal free education, medical services, and support for the disabled, the elderly, and war veterans. In the DPRK, he said, there are “no unemployed, no homeless people, no vagrant beggars, no drug addicts, and no prostitutes.”²⁵

Relationship between Military and Economic Goals

There is a strong and clear connection between the DPRK’s economic problems and its pursuit of nuclear weapons. Before 2005, Kim Jong-Il repeatedly tied his promises to stop nuclear development to requests for economic aid and assistance constructing nuclear energy facilities. Since 2005, he has tied promised to disarm to similar economic requests.²⁶

²¹ “UN Nuclear Watchdog Hopes to Send Inspectors Back to the DPR of Korea Soon,” UN News Center, September 19, 2005, available at <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=15881&Cr=dpr&Cr1=korea>

²² “North Korea Timeline: Chronology of Key Events 1945-2006.”

²³ Natural Resources Defense Council, “Nuclear Notebook: Global nuclear stockpiles, 1945-2006,” *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* 62:4 (July/August 2006), pp. 64-67, <http://thebulletin.metapress.com/content/c4120650912x74k7/fulltext.pdf>

²⁴ “Country Profile: North Korea.”

²⁵ “Statement by H.E. Mr. Kim Pyong Sik At the World Summit for Social Development,” World Summit for Social Development at the United Nations, March 11-12, 1995, available at <http://www.un.org/documents/ga/conf166/gov/950311140848.htm>

²⁶ James Laney and Jason Shaplen, “How to deal with North Korea,” *Foreign Affairs* 82:2, March/April 2003: 17-19. Available through Infotrac High School Reference.

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But economics are clearly not the only motivation for the DPRK's nuclear weapons program. The 38th parallel continues to be one of the most heavily armed areas of the world, and no peace treaty ending the Korean War has ever been signed. According to the government, the DPRK built nuclear weapons for "self-defense" against the US, Japan, and South Korea, which seek regime change in the country.²⁷ Another goal may be to assert greater independence from China.²⁸

Previous Committee Work on This Topic

The situation in the DPRK troubles the Security Council for several reasons. First, under the NPT, only states that had nuclear weapons in 1968 are allowed to be nuclear powers. North Korea's withdrawal from the NPT in 2003 is a precedent that the permanent five members of the Council (all of which have nuclear weapons) worry that others will emulate. The DPRK is not the only country to have violated the terms of the NPT. Since 1970, a number of states -- including Israel, India, and Pakistan -- have developed or otherwise obtained nuclear weapons.²⁹ India has been especially vocal about the legitimacy of its nuclear arsenal, referring to the fact that the US, Russia, and other authorized nuclear weapons states have never fulfilled their promise to disarm.³⁰

Second, Security Council members are concerned that the DPRK will not just inspire other states to develop nuclear weapons but also transfer nuclear weapons, plans, or materials to others. Of particular concern is the spread of nuclear weapons to terrorist groups such as Al Qaeda. This concern is especially acute given the DPRK's economic problems, which might induce it to sell nuclear technology or weapons.³¹

In response to these concerns, the Security Council has passed a series of resolutions to address nuclear non-proliferation, in general, and the situation in the DPRK, in particular. These include:

-- S/RES/1540 (April 2004), which affirmed that the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) is a threat to international peace; that the international community must take action against that threat; and that all member states have a responsibility to stop the spread of weapons of mass destruction by creating and enforcing laws and measures to prevent the manufacture, acquisition, possession, development, transportation, and transfer of WMD and their delivery systems.³²

-- S/RES/1695 (July 2006) was adopted after North Korea test-fired long-range and medium-range missiles over the Sea of Japan. This resolution condemned the missile launches and called for a suspension of all activities related to the ballistic missile program. The resolution also called for vigilance by member states

²⁷ Michael Duffy, "What Does North Korea Want?" *Time*, February 13, 2005, available at <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1027498,00.html>

²⁸ Larry Nicksch, "North Korea's Nuclear Weapons Program," CRS Report for Congress: Foreign Affairs, Defense and Trade Division (RL33590), October 5, 2006: 1; available at [http://pards.org/crs_country/CRSReportNorthKorea'sNuclearWeaponsProgram\(October5,2006\)Update.pdf](http://pards.org/crs_country/CRSReportNorthKorea'sNuclearWeaponsProgram(October5,2006)Update.pdf)

²⁹ Natural Resources Defense Council, "Nuclear Notebook."

³⁰ Jaswant Singh, "Against Nuclear Apartheid." *Foreign Affairs* 77:5 (September/October 1998), pp. 41-52, available on through Infotrac High School Reference and on the Embassy of India Washington D.C. website, [http://www.indianembassy.org/pic/js/js\(foreignaffairs\).html](http://www.indianembassy.org/pic/js/js(foreignaffairs).html)

³¹ United Nations Security Council, "Security Council Decides All States Shall Act to Prevent Proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction Weapons," Security Council Press Release (SC/8076), April 28, 2004, available at <http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2004/sc8076.doc.htm>

³² United Nations Security Council Resolution 1540, April 28, 2005, available at <http://daccessdds.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N04/328/43/PDF/N0432843.pdf?OpenElement>

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regarding North Korea's pursuit of nuclear weapons and urged the DPRK to return to the Six-Party Talks without any preconditions.³³

-- S/RES/1718 (October 2006) was adopted after the DPRK's first nuclear test, which demonstrated that it had nuclear weapons. This resolution noted that the "proliferation of nuclear, chemical and biological weapons, as well as their means of delivery, constitute a threat to international peace and security." It decided that the DPRK should "abandon all nuclear weapons and existing nuclear programmes in a complete, verifiable and irreversible manner." Furthermore, the resolution imposed sanctions against the country and individuals supporting its military program. Finally, the Council demanded that North Korea retract its withdrawal from the NPT and accept supervision of its nuclear plants by the IAEA. This resolution passed unanimously.³⁴ The imposition of sanctions was especially significant because it signaled that the P-5 members were in agreement about the need for enforcement. But the Council was able to agree to impose sanctions on just a few items.³⁵

In 2007, in response to economic aid offered by members of the Six-Party talks, North Korea agreed to shut down the Yongbyon nuclear reactor and allow UN nuclear inspectors back into the country. But in 2008, the government threatened to stop disabling the facility unless the US took the DPRK off its terrorist watch list. It had been on the list since 1988, when DPRK agents were involved in the bombing of a South Korean airliner. The US agreed to drop the DPRK from the list.³⁶

In early 2009, North Korea launched a multistage rocket, said it would quit nuclear talks, and threatened to conduct a nuclear test and intercontinental ballistic missile test. In May 2009, it conducted a nuclear test and tested both long range and mid-range missiles over Japan. The DPRK promised to continue such acts until the Security Council lifts all sanctions.³⁷

In response to these actions, in June 2009, the Security Council unanimously adopted S/RES/1874, which condemned the nuclear test and imposed tougher sanctions on the DPRK. According to the resolution, the nuclear test was in "violation and flagrant disregard" of relevant Council resolutions, particularly S/RES/1695 (2006) and S/RES/1718 (2006). The Security Council demanded that the DPRK "not conduct any further nuclear tests or launch any ballistic missile technology" and restated its determination for the DPRK to abandon its nuclear weapons program.³⁸

Conclusion

It is clear that Security Council members want the DPRK to dismantle its nuclear weapons. Yet Security Council sanctions have apparently increased DPRK resolve and belligerence, leading to the recent missile launches and tests. The Security Council is in a tight spot. Should it continue to amp up the sanctions, knowing that this

³³ United Nations Security Council Resolution 1695, July 15, 2006, available at <http://daccessdds.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N06/431/64/PDF/N0643164.pdf?OpenElement>

³⁴ United Nations Security Council Resolution 1718, October 14, 2006, available at http://www.iaea.org/NewsCenter/Focus/IaeaDprk/unscres_14102006.pdf

³⁵ "Security Council Imposes Sanctions on DPR Korea After its Claimed Nuclear Test," UN News Center, October 14, 2006, available at <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=20261&Cr=DPRK&Cr1=>

³⁶ "North Korea Timeline: Chronology of Key Events 1945-2006." Peter Finn, "U.S. to Weigh Returning North Korea to Terror List," Washington Post, June 8, 2009, available at <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/06/07/AR2009060700717.html>

³⁷ "Timeline: North Korea Nuclear Threats, Climb-downs, Tests."

³⁸ "Tougher UN Sanctions on DPR Korea Send 'Clear and Strong' Message-Ban," UN News Center, June 12, 2009, available at <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=31133&Cr=dprk&Cr1=>

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could lead to conflict among the states in Northeast Asia or weaken the North Korean economy so much that the government could collapse, creating refugee and other security problems? Are there alternative or additional measures the Council could take that would better serve the prospects for international peace and security?

In developing your country's position on this issue, consider the following questions:

- Does your country have nuclear energy and/or nuclear weapons? Has it signed the NPT? Is it in compliance with the IAEA?
- What relationship does your country have with the DPRK and permanent-five members of the Security Council? Consider diplomatic, economic, and military relations.
- How has your country participated in or reacted to the situation in North Korea? Has it been affected by the Security Council sanctions? How would it be affected by military strikes by or against North Korea, or by the collapse of the North Korean state?
- What can and should the Security Council do to ensure the DPRK's compliance on the nuclear issue?

Recommended Reading

Federation of American Scientists. "Weapons of Mass Destruction Resources." Website. Available at <http://www.fas.org/nuke/>

The FAS is a well-respected source of information on nuclear weapons issues, both technical and political.

Niksch, Larry. (October 5, 2006). "North Korea's Nuclear Weapons Program." CRS Report for Congress: Foreign Affairs, Defense and Trade Division (RL33590). Available at [http://pards.org/crs_country/CRSReportNorthKorea'sNuclearWeaponsProgram\(October5,2006\)Update.pdf](http://pards.org/crs_country/CRSReportNorthKorea'sNuclearWeaponsProgram(October5,2006)Update.pdf)

This article provides an explanation of North Korea's motivation for seeking nuclear weapons as well as an overview of the importance of the Six-Party Talks.

"North Korea: Overview." *New York Times*. Website. Available at <http://topics.nytimes.com/top/news/international/countriesandterritories/northkorea/index.html?scp=1-spot&sq=North%20Korea&st=cse>

This *New York Times* country profile provides up-to-date information about the DPRK, with links both to new stories and to reports from international organizations.

"Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Weapons." (2002). UN Department for Disarmament Affairs. Available at <http://www.un.org/Depts/dda/WMD/treaty/>

This site provides the text of the Non-Proliferation Treaty, as well as a list of states that have ratified it. It also provides information on the nuclear activities of most countries in the world and UN efforts to oversee nuclear energy and control nuclear weapons.

UN Security Council. "1540 Committee." Available at <http://www.un.org/sc/1540/>

Security Council Resolution 1540 (April 28, 2005) is the basis for Security Council action against states that pursue WMD technology. The 1540 Committee was established to collect information about state compliance with the resolution. This is an excellent site to understand what the Council has done thus far and which states have and have not complied with the Council resolutions.