



Country Profile: North Korea

North Korea: The Basics

Size (square miles)	46,541- Slightly smaller than Mississippi
Population	23,479,089 - Roughly equal to the population Texas
Major Ethnic Groups	Racially homogeneous; there is a small Chinese community and a few ethnic Japanese
Major Religious Groups	Numbers Unknown; Communist regime does not allow religion
GDP Growth Rate 2007	-1.1%

Government Overview

North Korea – officially known as the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK) – is a Stalinist dictatorship whose highest executive office is the chair of the National Defense Commission. The legislature, which in theory is the supreme government organ, is the unicameral Supreme People’s Assembly. The judicial system of North Korea consists of the central court, the provincial court, and the people’s courts. The constitution provides for freedom of speech and the press, but in practice these rights are nonexistent. All media outlets are run by the state. Televisions and radios are permanently fixed to state channels, and all publications are subject to strict supervision and censorship. Internet access is restricted to a few thousand people with state approval, and foreign websites are blocked. Foreign policy is based on the principal of self-reliance. North Korea has little economy, and a significant amount of its hard foreign currency is obtained through smuggling operations and counterfeiting U.S. currency. After decades of economic mismanagement and resource misallocation, the DPRK has relied heavily on international aid to feed its population since the mid-1990s, while continuing to expend resources to maintain an army of approximately 1 million.

North Korea’s history of regional military provocations, arms proliferation, and long-range missile development – in addition to its nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons programs and massive conventional armed forces – are of major concern to the international community.

Freedom House Political Rights Score: Not Free

Key Players



Kim Jong-Il: is the leader of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. He is the Chairman of the National Defense Commission, Supreme Commander of the Korean People's Army, and General Secretary of the Workers' Party of Korea (the ruling party since 1948). In 1998, his Defense Commission position was declared to be "the highest post of the state." Since Kim is not the president, he is not constitutionally required to hold elections to confirm his legitimacy and has not done so. Kim Jong-Il is the son of **Kim Il-Sung**, who founded North Korea in 1948.

Christopher R. Hill: an American diplomat who currently serves as the Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs. In February 2005, Hill was named as the Head of the U.S. delegation to the Six-Party talks aimed at resolving the North Korean nuclear crisis. In 2008, a tentative deal was reached with North Korea concerning a range of nuclear activities and the lifting of sanctions against North Korea. The agreement requires North Korea to disable its main nuclear facility and offer a complete accounting of its plutonium production.



North Korea's Nuclear Program



In 1965, North Korea established a nuclear research reactor with the help of the USSR to begin studying the nuclear fuel cycle. In 1977, North Korea signed an agreement with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) to inspect the research reactor. However, in the 1980s, North Korea began a nuclear weapons development program. In 1985, under international pressure, North Korea acceded to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, however, it continued to develop its nuclear program. In 1992, it signed a required nuclear safeguards treaty with the IAEA. However, in January 1993, it refused to allow international inspections of two facilities believed to hold nuclear waste. Faced with international pressure, North Korea gave 90-day advance notice that it would withdraw from the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.

The potential that a paranoid regime could develop nuclear weapons led to the first round of U.S.-North Korea nuclear diplomacy under the Clinton Administration. During negotiations, the Clinton Administration undertook a U.S. military build-up near North Korea, and created plans to bomb the active Yongbyon nuclear reactor.

The Agreed Framework:

Diplomatic success instead resulted in “The Agreed Framework,” which was signed on October 21, 1994 by the United States and North Korea. The provisions of the agreement were:

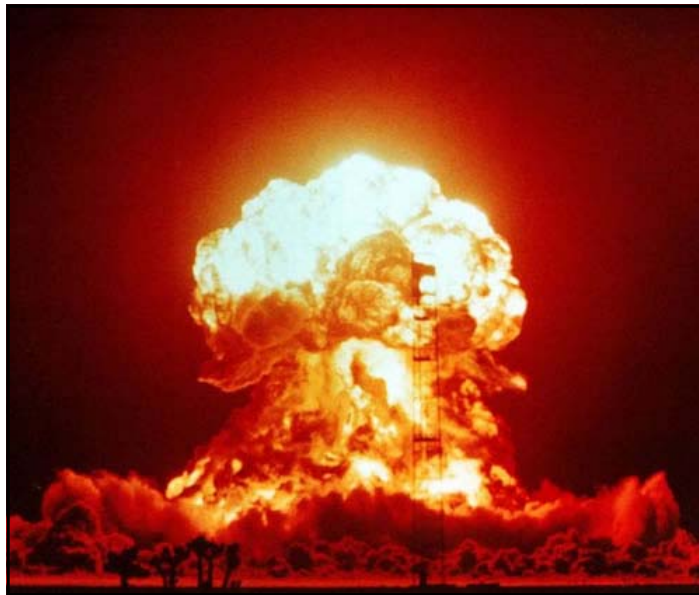
- DPRK’s graphite-moderated nuclear power plants, which could easily produce weapons grade plutonium, would be replaced with light water reactor (LWR) power plants by a target date of 2003.
- Oil for heating and electricity production would be provided while DPRK’s reactors were shut down, until completion of the first LWR power unit.
- Both sides would work toward normalization of political and economic relations.
- The U.S. provided assurances that it would abstain from threat or use of nuclear weapons against the DPRK.
- The DPRK would take steps to implement the 1992 Joint Declaration on the Denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula.
- The DPRK would remain a party to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.
- The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) would conduct ad hoc and routine inspections for facilities not subject to the freeze.
- Existing spent nuclear fuel stocks would be stored and ultimately disposed of without reprocessing in the DPRK.
- Before delivery of key LWR nuclear components, the DPRK would come into full compliance with its safeguard agreement with the IAEA.

Trouble Implementing the Agreed Framework:

- The 104th Congress shifted power to Republicans, who took office under the banner of Newt Gingrich’s Contract with America. This ideologically-charged Congress initially refused to fund the Agreed Framework, forcing the Clinton administration to use U.S. Department of Defense emergency funds and international funding. Congress began providing funds in 1996, but not always in sufficient amounts, leading to the late delivery of some of the agreed transitional oil supplies.
- Due to congressional opposition, the Clinton administration was unable to phase out the economic sanctions that the U.S. had imposed on North Korea after the Korean War.
- With sanctions ongoing and diplomatic relations yet to be restored in 1999, North Korea threatened to resume nuclear research unless the U.S. kept up its end of the bargain. The U.S. repeatedly stated that further implementation would be stalled as long as suspicions regarding a covert weapons program could not be discounted.
- Construction of the first LWR reactor began in August 2002. Construction of both reactors was well behind schedule. The initial plan was for both reactors to be operational by 2003, but the construction had been halted indefinitely in late 2002.

The Agreed Framework Breaks Down

In October 2002 the United States confronted North Korea with a bold accusation: that it was secretly developing a program to enrich uranium to weapons grade, in violation of the 1994 agreement. Since North Korea had cheated, the Bush Administration declared, the United States was no longer bound by its side of the deal. Accordingly, the United States and its allies suspended the oil shipments they had been providing North Korea under the 1994 agreement. Pyongyang retaliated by expelling international inspectors, resuming the reprocessing of plutonium, and declared it was developing a nuclear deterrent.



North Korea Obtains Nuclear Weapons

Beginning in August 2003, North Korea, China, Japan, Russia, South Korea, and the U.S. have participated in the Six-Party Talks aimed at resolving the stalemate over the DPRK's nuclear programs. However, the Bush Administration's public rhetoric emphasized regime change, not nuclear non-proliferation. After initial rounds achieved little progress, North Korea pulled out of the talks in November 2005.

In July 2006, North Korea test-fired ballistic missiles, and conducted a nuclear test in October 2006. While intelligence officials believed that North Korea had obtained nuclear weapons during the years since the breakdown of the Agreed Framework, this was the first public proof that North Korea was now a nuclear power.

“Regime Change” Policy Allows North Korea to Obtain Nukes

Between the Bush administration abrogating the Agreed Framework in 2002, and its restarting of serious diplomatic talks at the end of 2006, North Korea acquired approximately 37 kilograms of plutonium. The Nagasaki bomb used in World War II used about 6 kilograms of plutonium, giving North Korea the capacity to produce about a half-dozen nuclear bombs. Although North Korea did not follow the 1994 agreement to the letter of the law, the Agreed Framework did succeed at preventing North Korea from producing weapons-grade material from 1994 to 2002. The hard-line “regime change” philosophy that animated the Bush administration from 2002 to 2006 not only failed to change North Korea’s behavior, but allowed it to obtain nuclear weapons.

The Six-Party Talks Resume, and Diplomacy Reaches a New Agreement

After North Korea’s nuclear test in 2006, the Bush administration reversed its previous position, opting for serious negotiations over its initial attempts to isolate North Korea and prompt regime change.

North Korea returned to the Six-Party Talks in December 2006 and subsequently signed two agreements on denuclearization. Thanks to the diplomatic overture, North Korea and the United States have reached an agreement whereby:

- North Korea turned in a long overdue report on its nuclear facilities to the Six-Party conference in Beijing.
- The United States rescinded North Korea’s designation as a state sponsor of terrorism and lifted the application of the “Trading with the Enemy Act” in regard to North Korea.
- North Korea destroyed the cooling tower for its nuclear reactor at Yongbyon.

The Initial Actions Agreement shut down North Korea’s nuclear facilities at Yongbyon in July 2007. In the October 2007 Second Phase Actions Agreement, Pyongyang pledged to disable those facilities and provide a correct and complete declaration of its nuclear programs. Under the supervision of U.S. nuclear experts, North Korean personnel completed a number of agreed-upon disablement actions at the three core facilities at the Yongbyon nuclear complex by the end of 2007. North Korea also began the discharge of spent fuel rods in December 2007, but it did not provide a declaration of its nuclear programs by the end of the year.

Looking Ahead

Although the recent agreement between Washington and Pyongyang represents a major step toward denuclearizing North Korea – or at the very least halting North Korea’s weapons program – a number of challenges remain:

- Accounting for the uranium enrichment program
- Accounting for North Korean proliferation activity
- Disabling other nuclear facilities
- Removing North Korea’s plutonium and nuclear weapons



These are time-consuming tasks and it will be up to the next president to either continue or change course if North Korea refuses to cooperate. While there is reason to believe an agreement can stop most of North Korea’s nuclear and proliferation activities, we should not expect a major change in North Korean behavior. The North Korean strategy has been very consistent for almost two decades. They are prepared to sell bits and pieces of their nuclear program in exchange for concrete economic and political benefits, but they are not willing to give the program away completely. They want access to the outside world to the extent that it brings them food, fertilizer, heavy fuel oil, and cash, but are afraid of a full embrace with the outside world, which in their view would undercut the survival of the regime.

North Korea: Additional Historical Background

Following World War II, the Korean peninsula was split between the northern half, which came under Soviet-sponsored Communist domination, and the U.S.-supported southern half. After failing to strengthen their cause in the free elections held in South Korea in May 1950, and the refusal of South Korea to hold new elections per North Korean demands, the North Korean Army assaulted the South on June 25, 1950. The United Nations Security Council was convened in a few hours and passed the United Nations Security Council Resolution 82 condemning the North Korean aggression unanimously (the Soviet Union was boycotting the UN at the time, and could not veto the resolution).

Within days, South Korean forces – outnumbered, outgunned, and often of dubious loyalty to the Southern regime – were in full retreat or defecting en masse to the North. North Korean forces occupied Seoul, the South Korean capital, on the afternoon of June 28, 1950. With United Nations approval, the United States led an international military mission that succeeded at pushing the North Korean Army back across the 38th parallel, the current border between North and South Korea, eventually capturing Pyongyang, the North Korean capital.

As American and South Korean forces drew nearer the Chinese border, the Chinese military intervened in a surprise attack in November 1951. A military stalemate ensued from 1951-1953, entrenching each side around the proximity of the 38th parallel. A cease-fire was signed in June 1953 and a demilitarized zone (DMZ) was established around the parallel, with North Korean forces to the north and United Nations, United States and South Korean forces to the south. Because South Korea refused to sign the armistice, the Korean War technically remains a “hot war” today. The U.S. maintains a large military presence in the DMZ, including more than 26,000 American troops.

After failing to conquer the U.S.-backed Republic of Korea (ROK), North Korea, under its founder President Kim Il-Sung, adopted a policy of ostensible diplomatic and economic “self-reliance” as a check against excessive Soviet or Communist Chinese influence. The DPRK demonized the U.S. as the ultimate threat to its social system through state-funded propaganda. They molded political, economic, and military policies around the core ideological objective of eventual unification of Korea under Pyongyang’s control. The regime created a hostile, even paranoid foreign policy centered around the cult of personality attached to its Supreme Leader. The United States has no presence or Embassy in North Korea.

Kim’s son, the current ruler Kim Jong Il, was officially designated as his father’s successor in 1980, assuming a growing political and managerial role until the elder Kim’s death in 1994.

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