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Policy Brief:
Nuclear Proliferation in North Korea

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Executive Summary

Since the creation of nuclear weapons, they have posed a serious security threat to the international community and have bred mistrust and tensions among nations. North Korea's military nuclear weapons program has been a major concern for the international community for several decades. Since the 1970s, North Korea has been pursuing its nuclear weapons program in earnest. Though the regime has joined multiple international agreements aimed at the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons, it has continued to develop its nuclear arsenal and has made significant advancements in both its nuclear weapons and the missiles designed to deliver them in the past few decades. The United States and the international community have tried to manage and confront this threat through sanctions programs and attempts at diplomacy, but the security problem persists and North Korea's nuclear weapons remain a threat to international security.

To address this threat, the United States should take a phased approach to multilateral diplomacy with its allies and North Korea while offering incentives such as incremental sanctions relief in return for concrete steps towards denuclearization from North Korea. The United States should also focus on China, a state that has impeded non-proliferation by continuing to trade with North Korea. By changing the economic incentives, the United States can convince China that it is in its best interest to cooperate fully with sanctions placed on North Korea so that the international community has leverage in negotiations.

Introduction

In recent decades, North Korea's nuclear arsenal has become more extensive and powerful than ever, and the threat of a nuclear attack looms over the heads of the international community. North Korea's more recent construction of intercontinental ballistic missiles makes

the threat even greater, as the weapons now have the ability to reach countries thousands of miles away. To avoid the horrifying danger of nuclear war, the international community has focused on the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons, yet North Korea's nuclear program continues to progress at a concerning pace. North Korea's nuclear weapons pose a security threat to the international community and must be addressed. What should the United States policy be toward nuclear proliferation in North Korea?

This brief argues that the best policy to address nuclear proliferation in North Korea is for the U.S. to engage in multilateral diplomacy with North Korea to persuade the regime to denuclearize. The U.S. needs to address the issue of China continuing to finance North Korea by implementing sanctions on institutions that continue to trade with the regime, which will give the current sanctions more power against North Korea and thus give the U.S. more leverage in negotiations. From there, the U.S. can offer sanctions relief in exchange for North Korea's denuclearization using a phased approach.

This brief begins by providing background about North Korea's nuclear weapons program and showing the context that makes it necessary for the United States to take action. Next, the paper discusses three potential policy options to address the security threat: changing economic incentives, managing the problem through deterrence, and multilateral diplomacy. Finally, the brief outlines the preferred policy option and explains the logic behind the decision.

Background

As an unpredictable totalitarian state, North Korea's nuclear arsenal poses a serious threat to the international community and should not be ignored. North Korean leader Kim Il Sung saw the immense power of nuclear weapons during World War II and began pursuing nuclear research programs in the 1950s. North Korea agreed to peaceful development programs with the

Soviet Union, which helped them to build a nuclear reactor and establish it at Yongbyon.

However, when the Soviet Union withdrew its missiles from Cuba after the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis, North Korea began to worry that it would be abandoned by the USSR, and nuclear development was becoming increasingly seen as an important way to guarantee the security of the regime (Columbia Law School). Motivated by envy at South Korea's economic development and a need to secure the North Korean nuclear program from China and the USSR, Kim Il Sung began pursuing nuclear development more rapidly and seriously.

North Korea viewed the international nuclear non-proliferation movement as a way to obtain its nuclear deterrent (Wakefield, 2010). In 1974, North Korea joined the International Atomic Energy Agency and had a scientist stationed at the agency's headquarters in Geneva until 1979 to collect information. Though the regime had successfully expanded its Soviet research reactor at Yongbyon, the North Koreans became interested in the development of light water reactor technology. They needed assistance from the Soviet Union, who agreed under the condition that North Korea ratify the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons. This treaty, which originally became effective in 1970, was signed by the United States, the Soviet Union, and 60 other states (Freedman, 2023), and is aimed at limiting the spread of nuclear weapons through disarmament, non-proliferation, and peaceful use of nuclear energy. North Korea ratified the treaty in July 1985.

In 1985, however, using satellite images, the United States found that new construction was happening at Yongbyon's nuclear complex, which led the U.S. to suspect that North Korea was developing a new nuclear weapon. The Non-Proliferation Treaty requires states to allow inspections of its facilities, but North Korea had not yet allowed International Atomic Energy Agency inspectors to do so (Columbia Law School). North Korea finally signed an accord

allowing inspections in 1992, permitting inspectors to look into seven sites at Yongbyon. The U.S. and the IAEA suspected that North Korea was using the site to turn spent fuel into weapons-grade plutonium, and the theory that North Korea was hiding secret operations was supported by the fact that throughout 1992 and 1993, the regime blocked inspectors from two of its suspected nuclear waste sites. In 1994, the matter was turned over to the United Nations Security Council, where the United States was proposing imposing sanctions on North Korea. Tensions continued to escalate as the U.S. dispatched reinforcements to South Korea, but in the end, high-level diplomatic intercession led to the U.S. and North Korea signing the Agreed Framework in October 1994 (Sigal, 1997). This agreement called upon North Korea to freeze operations and construction of nuclear reactors in exchange for proliferation-resistant nuclear power reactors.

Despite the Agreed Framework, suspicions of North Korea's covert nuclear activities persisted. Throughout the next decade, North Korea conducted missile tests and stalled on its obligations to declare plutonium sites. U.S. intelligence sources revealed that North Korea's centrifuge program was pursuing technology for a uranium enrichment program, which would produce material for nuclear weapons (Columbia Law School). As a result, in 2003, the Korean Peninsula Energy Development Organization, which was formed to implement the Agreed Framework, announced that it would suspend construction of the two light-water nuclear reactors in North Korea for one year. As the Agreed Framework broke down, North Korea announced that it would withdraw from the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, stating that its decision was influenced by the US's hostile policy towards the regime and that North Korea had been singled out as a target of a pre-emptive nuclear attack (Kirgis, 2003).

Following its withdrawal from the nonproliferation treaty, North Korea conducted its first underground missile test in 2006, confirming that it had continued to develop nuclear weapons and had violated the international agreements it was formerly a part of. This prompted the United States, China, Russia, Japan, South Korea, and North Korea to resume the six-party talks, which were initially launched in 2003 and saw North Korea agreeing to abandon its nuclear program in 2005 (Bajoria and Xu, 2013). In June 2008, after negotiations, the U.S. released \$25 million in frozen North Korean funds, gave the country almost 1 million tons of oil, and removed it from the list of state sponsors of terrorism. In return, North Korea committed to disclosing all nuclear programs, disabling its facilities, and ending the export of nuclear technology and material. However, in December of the same year, the six-party talks reached a stalemate because North Korea refused to allow a verification system that would confirm the end of its nuclear activity (Columbia Law School). Throughout the 2000s and 2010s, North Korea continued to conduct nuclear weapon and missile tests, despite diplomatic efforts and sanctions imposed by the United Nations Security Council. An amendment to North Korea's constitution in 2012 even referenced the regime as a nuclear state, and the country increased its tensions with South Korea by declaring the 1953 Korean War armistice nullified as a response to U.S. and South Korea joint military exercises and the deployment of U.S. troops. No concrete denuclearization agreements have been reached, and North Korea's nuclear arsenal remains an international security threat to this day.

Currently, North Korea reportedly continues to produce fissile material for weapons and has produced enough for anywhere from 20 to 60 warheads. A recent U.S. Defense Intelligence Agency report claims that North Korea has achieved its goal of lightening and standardizing nuclear weapons to fit on weapons ranging from short-range ballistic missiles to intercontinental

ballistic missiles, which are an area of concern for the international community as intercontinental ballistic missiles are designed to carry nuclear weapons to targets thousands of miles away. North Korea conducted an unprecedented 63 ballistic missile test launches in 2022 and is advancing its technology to make the missiles more mobile, reliable, potent, and precise (Federation of American Scientists, 2023). Throughout decades of attempted negotiations and other measures aimed at denuclearization, it is clear that North Korea has continued to advance its nuclear weapons program, and the U.S. needs to consider a new approach to address this security threat to the international community.

Policy Alternatives

The United States must create an effective policy with the goal of getting North Korea to denuclearize. Denuclearization does not necessarily mean forcing the regime to give up all of its nuclear weapons altogether, which seems like an unfeasible goal; instead, it would involve reducing its nuclear arsenal and discontinuing the progress and development of its nuclear program, including the development of intercontinental ballistic missiles. One potential policy option is to persuade North Korea to denuclearize by changing the economic incentives. The goal of this policy is to convince North Korea that the cost of its nuclear weapons is too high and that it is in its best interest to denuclearize for economic security and the survival of the regime. However, sanctions against North Korea have been imposed in the past as a way to convince the government to comply with non-proliferation agreements, and they have not always been successful. Various countries and international organizations, including the United Nations, have implemented sanctions targeting North Korean banks, businesses, and individuals to limit their access to the global financial system and prevent the government from accessing the proceeds of its illegal activities, but North Korea has proved capable of evading them.

The United Nations has imposed sanctions on North Korea since 2006, just after the country's first underground nuclear test was conducted. PBS's *How North Korea Uses Front Companies to Help Evade Sanctions* explains that North Korea's "ability to finance itself, despite growing international sanctions, can be credited to a broad range of illicit activity that spans the world" (Einbinder, 2017). United Nations and Congressional reports indicate that these illicit activities include currency and cigarette counterfeiting, insurance fraud, illegal drug production and trafficking, weapon sales, and wildlife and human trafficking. Additionally, North Korea is able to evade sanctions because of its ties to Chinese institutions: "a complex web of illicit networks set up largely within China that allow it to maintain access to international markets" (Einbinder, 2017). The proceeds from these networks are believed to help North Korea obtain goods from abroad, maintain a stable economy, and finance nuclear weapons and missiles. North Korea establishes business relationships with Chinese companies, who then act as middlemen and cover North Korea's illicit activities under more legitimate trade. China is North Korea's most important trading partner, and though China has backed United Nations resolutions to condemn North Korea's nuclear proliferation, China continues to have economic ties to the regime. Even as trade between the two countries dropped dramatically in 2018 in the face of tougher sanctions, informal trade has been established along the border between China and North Korea in items like fuel, seafood, and cellphones. Additionally, the physical links between the countries have expanded in the past decade; for example, a bulk-cargo shipping route was established to boost the export of North Korean coal to China. While China, like much of the international community, does not want North Korea to have or use nuclear weapons, its priority is the stability of the North Korean regime (Albert, 2019).

The sanctions program against North Korea has largely been headed by the United Nations Security Council. The Council on Foreign Relations' *What to Know About Sanctions on North Korea* provides a timeline of UN sanctions, beginning with Resolution 1718 in 2006, which condemns North Korea's first underground nuclear test and imposes sanctions on the supply of heavy weaponry, missile technology and material, and luxury goods. Resolutions passed by the Security Council in 2009 and 2013 strengthened the imposed sanctions in response to more nuclear testing, and in 2016 the export of minerals, helicopters, and various other items was banned. In response to North Korea's intercontinental ballistic missile tests in 2017, Resolution 2371 was passed completely banning previously restricted items such as coal, iron, and seafood. In 2022, the Security Council tried to issue a US-drafted resolution imposing more sanctions on tobacco and oil imports to North Korea, but it was vetoed by China and Russia. Currently, the UN sanctions regime against North Korea bans the trade of arms and military equipment, vehicles, industrial machinery, and metals, freezes the assets of individuals involved in the nuclear program, bans the import of oil, natural gas imports, and luxury goods as well as the export of electrical equipment, coal, minerals, seafood, and agricultural products, restricts fishing rights and caps North Korean labor exports, and restricts scientific cooperation with the regime. It does, however, allow for humanitarian aid.

The Council on Foreign Relations also outlines sanctions imposed specifically by the United States, which target a larger amount of economic activities than UN sanctions. According to the United States Department of Treasury, the current sanctions regime against North Korea began in 2008 when President Bush issued Executive Order 13466, which declared a national emergency to deal with the national security threat of nuclear weapons material on the Korean Peninsula. Since then, many subsequent executive orders have been issued expanding on the

national emergency declared in Order 13466. The U.S. has partially lifted sanctions on North Korea several times in exchange for North Korea's pledge to freeze its nuclear program, but the regime has consistently gone back on its promises. As part of his administration's "maximum pressure" campaign, President Trump passed the Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act, which prohibits certain types of U.S. assistance to foreign governments that aid North Korea. Later that year, he authorized the Treasury Department to block from the U.S. financial system any foreign business or individual that facilitates trade with North Korea (Council on Foreign Relations). Trump also restored North Korea's designation as a state sponsor of terrorism, imposing another layer of sanctions.

The current sanctions program against North Korea is extensive but has not convinced North Korea to denuclearize. Part of this issue can be attributed to the fact that North Korea is still able to fund its regime, especially through its financial ties to China. To address this issue, the U.S. could increase pressure on Chinese banks and financial institutions to stop doing business with North Korean entities rather than continuing to increase sanctions on North Korea itself. This could include threatening to impose more comprehensive sanctions on Chinese banks that violate UN sanctions on North Korea. Creating a united front with U.S. allies to enforce economic sanctions makes it more difficult for China to evade them. If increasing sanctions on China does not persuade them to uphold international sanctions, the U.S. could instead provide incentives for China to stop helping North Korea as much, like preferential trade treatment or security guarantees. The U.S. could also work with other countries to develop alternate trade routes for North Korean goods, which could make it more difficult for North Korea to evade sanctions and ultimately make its nuclear weapons program more costly. Creating trust with China is a difficult goal for the United States, but the objective is to emphasize to China that the

international community is not trying to destabilize the region or cause the North Korean regime to collapse. Whether the U.S. uses punitive measures to sanction Chinese institutions that deal with North Korea or provides incentives to get China to uphold sanctions against the regime, the goal is to make the cost of continuing the nuclear weapons program too costly for North Korea.

However, the policy option of convincing North Korea to denuclearize by changing the economic incentives through sanctions on North Korea and China comes with costs and risks. As mentioned previously, North Korea has successfully evaded sanctions in the past, and they are difficult to enforce. In 2020, a report by the Institute for Science and National Security found that at least 62 countries violated sanctions imposed by the United Nations, and North Korea does this more often and more successfully than most (Albright, Burkhand, and Faragasso, 2020). National authorities often have insufficient resources to inspect shipments at ports of entry, carry out complex investigations, and perform other enforcement activities. Additionally, the U.S. has already attempted to punish countries that finance North Korea by restricting the aid they receive from the US, and while the policy option would involve targeting specific Chinese institutions with sanctions, there is no guarantee that these sanctions would convince China to stop dealing with North Korea. In this case, North Korea could continue to finance itself through illicit economic activity with its bordering nation. Increasing sanctions on China may also put further strain on the US's relationship with the nation, which could undermine cooperation on other issues such as terrorism and climate change and make it more difficult for the U.S. to engage in diplomacy with China at all.

In regards to North Korea, tougher sanctions could have the opposite of the intended effect and spur the regime to pursue nuclear advancement with more urgency. Kim Jong-Un has already conducted more missile and nuclear tests since he took power in 2012 than his father and

grandfather combined (Pak, 2018), and could interpret additional sanctions as a threat to his regime's survival and take more extreme action. From North Korea's perspective, "the continual ratcheting up of conditions to meet for even limited sanctions relief has led its officials to draw a stark conclusion – that the United States and the international community seek not just the elimination of the North Korean nuclear program, but also the collapse of the country itself" (Daniels, 2023). Since North Korea sees its nuclear program as a way to ensure the security of its regime, threatening the country could push it to take its nuclear program even more seriously. Sanctions also have a human cost and are often felt by ordinary citizens more than the targeted elites: "The North Korean government has easily passed the cost of sanctions onto its citizens while decision-makers live large" (Daniels, 2023). For example, industries dependent on exports such as textiles, fishing, and coal, will be affected by export restrictions, which disproportionately affect North Korean civilians who depend on these economies. The United States must decide if these costs are worth imposing more aggressive sanctions on North Korea in hopes that the country will denuclearize.

A second policy option would be to manage the current issue through deterrence. To deter North Korea from acting on its nuclear threat, the U.S. needs to convince North Korea that the cost of using its weapons would outweigh the benefits. One way to do this is to maintain the U.S. military presence in the region to show North Korea that the United States and its allies are prepared to defend themselves in the event of an attack. According to the Global Conflict Tracker, the United States has nearly 29,000 troops deployed in the Korean peninsula committed to defending South Korea under a mutual defense treaty. In addition to U.S. troops, many South Korean and North Korean troops are stationed near the Demilitarized Zone at the border. One of the main concerns of the United States and the international community is North Korea's ability

to manufacture intercontinental ballistic missiles, which put nearly the whole world within reach of North Korea's nuclear weapons. The United States has stationed an anti-missile system in South Korea, called the Terminal High Altitude Area Defense, but the U.S. could work towards developing a stronger missile defense system. This could involve increasing funding for research and development of new missile defense technologies, which would allow the United States to develop new interceptors, sensors, and command and control systems that are capable of defeating emerging threats. The U.S. Government Accountability Office explains that the U.S. Department of Defense's Missile Defense Agency shares responsibility for operating and maintaining missile defense systems with the military services, but this shared responsibility becomes difficult if the two have different priorities for different parts of the system. The Department of Defense "lacks comprehensive guidance for sustaining Missile Defense System elements, such as missile interceptors, sensors, and communications" and "does not have an approach for prioritizing efforts to address sustainment challenges for MDS" (U.S. Government Accountability Office, 2023). By strengthening its missile defense system, the U.S. provides greater assurance of security for itself and the international community and hopefully deters North Korea from launching these missiles if it knows that the world is protected against them.

Additionally, to manage the threat of North Korea's nuclear arsenal, the United States should work with Japan and South Korea to develop this missile defense network, which could involve pooling resources, sharing information and intelligence, standardizing missile defense systems, and conducting joint missile defense exercises. This would make sure that the U.S. and its allies are prepared to coordinate their responses to missile attacks. This multilateral approach to deterrence is important because it places more pressure on North Korea and discourages attacks, especially since these countries are physically closer to North Korea.

The policy option of managing the North Korean nuclear threat through deterrence presents various challenges and costs as well. While deterrence manages the issue, it does not address the root cause of North Korea's nuclear proliferation involving the regime's perception of insecurity and need for self-preservation. Even while the security threat is being deterred by preparing for the worst outcome in which North Korea uses its missile and nuclear weapons, North Korea can hold nations hostage and use the threat of its nuclear weapons to gain an advantage in negotiations and force other states to act how the regime wants. North Korea has accused the U.S. of plotting to invade it, which was its reasoning for withdrawing from the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, and the regime believes that it needs nuclear weapons to secure itself: "North Korea's stated reasons for withdrawing from the NPT were that the United States was threatening its security by its hostile policy toward North Korea. According to North Korea, the United States had singled it out as a target of a pre-emptive nuclear attack and had threatened it with a blockade and military punishment" (Kirgis, 2003). Since the United States' threat of military punishment previously convinced North Korea to withdraw from an international nonproliferation treaty, it is fair to assume that the regime may not respond well to more military deployments from the US, even if they are just a method of deterrence and ensuring international security. Deterrence relies on the credible threat of retaliation, so there is always a risk that North Korea might perceive defensive measures as offensive, leading to an escalation of tensions and potential conflict. Moreover, the deployment of stronger missile defense systems, specifically in Japan and South Korea, could strain relations with other countries such as China and Russia who may view such actions as destabilizing. International cooperation is crucial to this policy option, and standardizing priorities with other nations could become challenging.

Deterrence through the deployment of troops and the strengthening of missile defense technology also involves the allocation of economic resources towards research and development of new defense technologies, which will require a significant financial commitment and could lead to public backlash. Domestic resistance to allocating resources for defense initiatives instead of domestic priorities and concerns about the potential for military conflict could sway public opinion, especially since there is no guarantee that technological advancements will be able to keep pace with North Korea's capabilities. The long-term sustainability of this policy option is a concern, as it requires a consistent commitment to military presence, technology development, and international cooperation. Deterrence is important to manage the current problem, but as North Korea continues to advance its nuclear weapons program, the international threat will persist.

A third policy alternative is multilateral diplomacy aimed at persuading North Korea to denuclearize and stop developing its nuclear arsenal. To improve its diplomatic efforts, the United States would need to be more creative in its diplomacy. As mentioned previously, many diplomatic efforts have been made in the past to get North Korea to denuclearize, but the regime rarely follows through with its side of the agreements that are reached. The six-party talks, for example, involving the United States, China, Russia, Japan, South Korea, and North Korea, began in 2003 and have been relaunched many times, but are continuously hindered by North Korea's missile tests and provocations. Under the Trump administration, the United States engaged in multilateral negotiations with North Korea, specifically through personal interactions that have not led to a resolution. Though there have been multilateral efforts in the past that have not been successful, North Korea is still more likely to be responsive to diplomacy that involves other countries, such as China, South Korea, and Japan, and combined with a different

diplomatic approach, these efforts could be more successful. The United States has historically insisted on North Korea completely dismantling its nuclear program before any sanctions would be lifted, but North Korea has proven that even in the face of tough sanctions the regime is willing to continue its nuclear weapons program. The U.S. can instead consider a phased approach to denuclearization. This is another time when economic sanctions can come into play: North Korea taking concrete steps to dismantle its nuclear program in exchange for incremental sanctions relief. This approach is more likely to be successful because it would provide North Korea with some immediate benefits for taking steps toward denuclearization. Stanford's Center for International Security and Cooperation suggests that it is "unimaginable that Kim Jong-un will accept immediate, complete denuclearization, which some in Washington have suggested to include shipping his weapons out of the country - that is simply too dangerous. The phased approach may be acceptable to Kim Jong Un and allow the United States to reduce the greatest risks first and address the manageable risks over time" (Carlin, Hecker, and Serbin, 2019). Pyongyang is likely to want to keep its rights to a civilian nuclear program, such as the production of electricity and medical isotopes, and the United States may need to prepare to concede some of these things to reach a larger goal. In regards to verification of denuclearization, Carlin, Hecker, and Serbin suggest that the United States explore cooperative efforts with South Korea, North Korea, and the International Atomic Energy Association to demilitarize the nuclear and missile programs, as verification measures will be very difficult in a confrontational environment.

During negotiations, a carrots and sticks approach to diplomacy could be implemented, meaning that the United States can offer a combination of incentives and deterrents to achieve the goal of North Korea's denuclearization. The incentives could include economic assistance,

security guarantees, diplomatic recognition, and the phased lifting of sanctions as North Korea takes concrete steps to denuclearize and allows inspections of its facilities. On the other hand, if North Korea does not hold up its side of agreements, the United States can take away those incentives. Though it is unrealistic to threaten military action as the United States does not want to enter into a conflict with North Korea and destabilization is not the goal, the U.S. can threaten a harsher sanctions regime and emphasize the importance of the incentives North Korea would receive should the regime cooperate. The United States should also be willing to build trust with North Korea by taking steps to improve relations between the two countries, such as resuming high-level dialogue and opening diplomatic missions in each other's capitals, though the U.S. should not focus solely on personal talks and bilateral diplomacy. Through new approaches to diplomacy, the U.S. will hopefully lead North Korea on the path to denuclearization by convincing the regime that the potential rewards or punitive measures are more important than advancing its nuclear program.

Still, like the other policy alternatives, multilateral diplomacy aimed at persuading North Korea to denuclearize has its drawbacks. The more extensive North Korea's nuclear programs become, the more leverage it gains in future negotiations. After the Hanoi Summit in 2019, when no agreement was reached, Kim Jong-Un has expressed on multiple occasions his declining belief that the nature of the relationship between the United States and North Korea can fundamentally change (Town, 2021). Even if the U.S. can revive negotiations with North Korea, pursuing diplomatic engagement with the regime raises ethical concerns, particularly regarding the regime's human rights abuses. Granting diplomatic recognition or providing economic assistance may be viewed as legitimizing the regime endorsing a government with a poor human rights record. The United States needs domestic support to create a feasible option, and providing

North Korea with incentives to denuclearize while the regime is actively abusing its citizens may not garner support. Additionally, multilateral diplomacy requires cooperation between participating nations, and aligning the interests and priorities of different countries may be difficult, specifically because offering security guarantees to North Korea as part of diplomatic negotiations could raise concerns among regional allies, such as South Korea and Japan. North Korea is also an unpredictable regime, and changes in leadership or internal dynamics could impact the success of diplomacy. Though diplomacy is not unfeasible, the United States will need to recognize the failures of past negotiations as well as the limits of its influence on North Korea in order to create an effective diplomatic policy.

Preferred Policy Recommendation

Based on the above policy options, the United States should combine elements of multilateral diplomacy and changing economic incentives to persuade North Korea to denuclearize. Though deterrence is important and the United States should continue its current program of missile defense to protect itself and show North Korea that it will not be defenseless against a potential attack, deterrence does not address the root of the problem and does not actively work towards denuclearization. Multilateral diplomacy is more comprehensive than deterrence or changing economic incentives and can incorporate the sanctions from the first policy option. The United States should focus on leveraging China to persuade North Korea to denuclearize; In past deals, the U.S. and its allies have compensated Pyongyang with heavy fuel oil and energy substitutes in exchange for a freeze on North Korea's missile testing, while China maintained normal bilateral economic relations with Pyongyang, absolving it of any direct stake in the denuclearization project. China has largely ignored the international counter-proliferation financing regime, which is designed to sanction North Korean entities, allowing North Korea to

evade sanctions and access the international economy. North Korea has proved that it does not need to be a part of the international community and can continue its nuclear program while facing sanctions. However, by leveraging China's economic role in North Korea, the survival of the regime could be at stake. North Korea will need to be willing to cooperate in negotiations to avoid punitive measures that could threaten the regime's security. The United States, with its allies, should use a phased approach to denuclearization, offering incentives such as incrementally lifting sanctions as North Korea takes steps to denuclearize. The U.S. should define upfront the terms for lifting sanctions and promote dialogues to accelerate these measures (Daniels, 2023). Kim Jong-Un has stated that though the U.S. says that it is not hostile towards North Korea, the country has not taken actions to prove that and instead continues to create tensions (Bandow, 2022). Since the Trump administration's "maximum pressure" campaign against North Korea still did not yield the desired results, a focus on China's role in financing North Korea combined with multilateral diplomacy with the option of reducing sanctions in exchange for denuclearization efforts is a viable policy.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the security threat of nuclear proliferation in North Korea has been an international concern for decades, but so far, nothing has succeeded in persuading North Korea to denuclearize. This brief outlined three potential policies for the United States to pursue. The first policy, persuading North Korea to denuclearize by changing economic incentives, involves imposing more sanctions on the regime and punishing China if the country does not cooperate. The second option involves managing the threat through deterrence by taking measures such as a strengthened missile defense system and a more extensive joint military presence from the United States and its allies on the Korean peninsula. Finally, the third option was to persuade

North Korea to denuclearize through multilateral diplomacy using sanctions and incentives. The recommended policy option is to combine the third option, multilateral diplomacy, with elements from the first policy option. This would mean leveraging China's role in North Korea's economy by sanctioning Chinese entities that deal with North Korea to get China to cooperate in the non-proliferation regime. This then allows the United States and the international community to have more leverage in negotiations and persuade North Korea to denuclearize through incremental relief of punitive measures. By using a new approach to multilateral diplomacy and working to ensure cooperation from other states, the United States will make progress toward its goal of denuclearizing North Korea and lessening the threat it poses to international security.

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