

PROSPECTS OF RESUMPTION OF US-NORTH KOREA NUCLEAR TALKS

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North Korea is building up its military capabilities. It has conducted a series of missile tests in 2022 that have caught international attention and are a source of concern for the US and Japan. While on the other hand, continued economic sanctions on North Korea are further deepening the economic crisis in the country. Earlier, North Korea and the US failed to undergo negotiations after the failure of the Hanoi summit, which was held between Trump and Kim Jong-un in February 2019. Unfortunately, the Biden administration's approach to engaging North Korea is also not working out. There are concerns that if the US fails to restart denuclearisation talks with North Korea, there would be serious consequences for regional and international security.

North Korea conducted 10 tests in 2022. It also conducted its third hypersonic missile test. This type of weapon is less vulnerable to interception because it manoeuvres close to the surface of the earth and traverses laterally. In addition, it can also achieve more than five times the speed of sound, which is about 6,200 km/h.¹

North Korea has been testing its longest-range ballistic missile since 2017, the Hwasong-12, which reached an altitude of 2,000 km and travelled 800 km. It fired two short-range ballistic missiles into

¹ "North Korea says Kim Jong-un Oversaw Third Hypersonic Missile Test," *BBC*, January 12, 2022, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-59958664>.

the sea and allegedly flight-tested a pair of long-range cruise missiles.² Another test was a ballistic missile test that had flown around 270 km at a top altitude of 560 km.³ On March 4 2022, it fired a ballistic missile that flew at a maximum altitude of 550 km and North Korea claimed it as a component of a reconnaissance satellite.⁴ On March 24, it tested its 'monster missile' Hwasong-17, which is an intercontinental ballistic missile. It flew for 1,090 km to a maximum altitude of 6,248.5 kms. Therefore, it continues to bolster its defence capabilities despite harsh sanctions.



Source: "January 2022: Missile Tests of the DPRK," One Earth Future, February 01, 2022, <https://oneearthfuture.org/research-analysis/january-2022-missile-tests-dprk>

² "North Korea Tests Longest-range Missile since 2017," NPR, January 29, 2022, <https://www.npr.org/2022/01/29/1076751251/north-korea-missile-launch>

³ "North Korea Conducts its Ninth Missile test of 2022," *The Japan Times*, March 05, 2022, <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2022/03/05/asia-pacific/north-korea-ninth-missile-launch/>

⁴ "North Korea Fires Ballistic Missile ahead of S Korea Election," *Al-Jazeera*, March 05, 2022, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/3/5/north-korea-fires-ballistic-missile-ahead-of-s-korea-election>.

⁵ North Korea says tested new ICBM, prepared for long confrontation with U.S.," Reuters, March 26, 2022, <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/nkorea-fired-unidentified-projectile-off-east-coast-skorea-military-2022-03-24/>

<u>NORTH KOREA MISSILE TESTING 2022</u>			
DATE	MISSILE TESTED	MISSILE TYPE	NUMBER OF MISSILES TESTED
January 30, 2022	Hwasong-12 (KN-17)	Intermediate Range Ballistic Missile	1
January 27, 2022	KN-23	Short range ballistic missile	2
January 25, 2022	Unnamed Cruise Missile	Land attack cruise missile	2
January 17, 2022	KN-24	Short range ballistic missile	1
January 14, 2022	KN-23	Short range ballistic missile	2
January 11, 2022	Hypersonic Missile Test	MaRV	1
January 05, 2022	Hypersonic Glide Vehicle	MaRV	1

Sources: “North Korea’s Missile Testing Reaches Monthly Apogee,” IISS, February 17, 2022, <https://www.iiss.org/blogs/military-balance/2022/02/analysis-north-koreas-missile-testing-reaches-monthly-apogee> and “January 2022: Missile Tests of the DPRK,” One Earth Future, February 01, 2022, <https://oneearthfuture.org/research-analysis/january-2022-missile-tests-dprk>

In 2021, Pyongyang launched a Submarine-launched Ballistic Missile (SLBM), which was the first test since 2019. The *Korean Central News Agency (KCNA)* stated the new missile has advanced control guidance technology including flank mobility and gliding skip mobility.⁶ It also launched a hypersonic missile, a train-based long-range ballistic missile and a long-range cruise missile.⁷ In addition, North Korea launched a series of short-range ballistic missiles in 2020, which could fly for less than 500 km.⁸ The ICBM Hwasong-16 was unveiled in 2020, which is larger than the Hwasong-15.⁹ Similarly, it tested short-range ballistic missiles in 2019, which are believed to be KN-23 and according to South Korea’s Joint Chief of Staff, Pyongyang tested a 600m rocket launcher system (MLRS). After no beneficial result was produced after the summit of 2018, North Korea ambitiously tested its missiles and stated that discontinuation of nuclear and ICBM test fire depends upon the US attitude.¹⁰

During the Trump era, Kim Jong-un and Trump met each other for two summits known as the Singapore summit of 2018 and the Hanoi summit of 2019. The summits emphasised denuclearising

⁶ “N Korea Confirms Test of ‘New Type’ Submarine-launched Missile,” *Al-Jazeera*, October 20, 2021, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/10/20/n-korea-confirms-test-of-new-type-submarine-launched-missile>

⁷ “North Korea: What we know about its Missile and Nuclear Programme,” *BBC*, January 28, 2022, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-41174689>

⁸ “Does Size Matter? North Korea’s Newest ICBM,” *38 North*, October 21, 2020, <https://www.38north.org/2020/10/melleman102120/>

⁹ “North Korea Tests First Missiles of 2020,” *Arms Control Association*, April 2022, <https://www.armscontrol.org/act/2020-04/news/north-korea-tests-first-missiles-2020>

¹⁰ “Chronology of US-North Korean Nuclear and Missile Diplomacy,” *Arms Control Association*, July 2020, <https://www.armscontrol.org/factsheets/dprkchron>

the Korean Peninsula, re-establishing relations and releasing the prisoners of war who went missing in action in North Korea. Trump pledged that he would cease all the military exercises with South Korea. Moreover, Trump also stated that the DPRK has promised to destroy a facility for testing its ballistic missile engines. Unfortunately, the two meetings lacked substance and failed to produce any advantage. According to Trump, they came to a halt because Pyongyang wanted sanctions to be lifted completely but the US could not accept the demand.¹¹

North Korea has conducted six underground nuclear tests in 2006. It detonated a nuclear device in 2017 equal to 250 kilotons of TNT creating an explosion 16 times the size of the bomb that exploded in Hiroshima.¹² Along with nuclear tests, it made major advancements by developing its ICBMs known as Hwasong-14 and Hwasong-15. Hwasong-14 has a range of 10,400 km which can place most of the continental US within range.¹³ One of the most powerful ICBM North Korea owns is Hwasong-15, which ranges between 8,500-13,000 km. Hwasong-12, was also launched in 2017 and it was one of the three high-profile ballistic missiles, it is an intermediate-range ballistic missile covering a range of 4,500 km.¹⁴

The US and North Korea have failed to restart nuclear negotiations. Pyongyang considers the US policy to be hostile due to the economic and military pressure it has exerted on the denuclearisation of the Korean Peninsula. Furthermore, it perceives the joint military exercises between the US and South Korea as a major threat that are being performed annually to defend against a North Korean invasion. It demands the termination of these exercises to resume negotiations. Lastly, it had an objection to the UN's reaction to its pursuit of military capabilities while remaining silent about South Korea's missile developments.¹⁵ Pyongyang claims that its missile programme is defensive.

North Korea is in desperate need of sanction relief. The Biden administration has been busy dealing with Afghanistan and Ukraine and negotiations to revive the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action regarding Iran's nuclear programme. Kim expects the US to respond quickly in such a way that would prove beneficial for both countries.¹⁶ Back in 2021, Joe Biden described his North Korea policy as a

¹¹ "Failure of the Hanoi Summit: What Lies Ahead?" Observer Research Foundation, March 13, 2019, <https://www.orfonline.org/expert-speak/the-failure-of-the-hanoi-summit-and-what-lies-ahead-48949/>

¹² "2017 North Korean nuclear test 10 times larger than previous tests, new study finds," Eurek Alert, June 03, 2019, <https://www.eurekalert.org/news-releases/844988>.

¹³ "Hwasong-14 (KN-20)," Missile Threat CSIS Organisation, July 31, 2021, <https://missilethreat.csis.org/missile/hwasong-14/>.

¹⁴ "A Primer on North Korea's Hwasong-12 'Guam Killer' Ballistic Missile," The Diplomat, February 01, 2022, <https://thediplomat.com/2022/02/a-primer-on-north-koreas-hwasong-12-guam-killer-ballistic-missile/>.

¹⁵ "North Korea's Signaling on Nuclear Weapons and Negotiations," 38 North, December 21, 2021, <https://www.38north.org/2021/12/north-koreas-signaling-on-nuclear-weapons-and-negotiations/>

¹⁶ "Can Biden Avert a Crisis with North Korea?" *The New York Times*, January 27, 2022, <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/01/27/us/politics/north-korea-biden-missile-tests.html>

combination of “diplomacy and stern deterrence” and Press Secretary, Jen Psaki, stated that the US would not step back from its goal of complete denuclearisation of the Korean Peninsula.¹⁷ Special attention and flexibility must be shown to North Korea otherwise it would continue to build strategic weapons. North Korea perceives Tokyo, Seoul and Washington as major threats to its sovereignty. Its ultimate goal is to intimidate Seoul and Tokyo while struggling to reduce Washington’s regional influence by supporting the withdrawal of the US troops from the region.¹⁸

The US must deal with North Korea very carefully because it remains undeterred from building strategic weapons. The US should bring North Korea back to the negotiation table to avoid any further escalation of tensions in the region. In addition, there must be a diplomatic solution to this problem. North Korea is an impoverished state, the US should remove obstacles from the path of humanitarian assistance since there is a huge possibility of food shortage and this step might prove to be significant in bringing both the states closer to negotiation. Both states should opt for a phased approach to denuclearisation and move gradually to build trust. Both the states should negotiate as soon as possible to avoid a catastrophic situation in the future.

¹⁷ “Biden’s Policy Review Leaves North Korea Challenge in Limbo,” Council Foreign Relations, May 19, 2021, <https://www.cfr.org/blog/bidens-policy-review-leaves-north-korea-challenge-limbo>

¹⁸ For the U.S., South Korea, and Japan, It’s the North Korean Regime, Not Kim Jong Un Per Se, That Is the Threat,” RAND Corporation, June 8, 2020, <https://www.rand.org/blog/2020/06/for-the-us-south-korea-and-japan-its-the-north-korean.html>