



North Korea's Nuclear Doctrine under Kim Jong Un

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Summary

Unlike his father and grandfather, Kim Jong Un began his reign with an unambiguous and tested first generation nuclear weapons capability, yet he has accelerated nuclear and missile testing to an unprecedented rate. More than his father's focus on an existential nuclear deterrent to ward off foreign invasion on the Iraq model, Kim Jong Un has articulated additional goals, including raising North Korea's stature and safeguarding its freedom of action. He has ordered the simultaneous development of a range of land- and sea-based ballistic missiles, thermonuclear weapons, more precise ballistic missiles better suited to military targeting, and a deployed nuclear force on alert that he called useable in a contingency. Why and how the younger Kim ordered the development of his nuclear arsenal provide insights into his nuclear doctrine. The paper concludes with specific meaning for military planners, diplomats, and political leaders.

Background: The Three Kims and North Korea's Nuclear Development

1. The North Korean nuclear program has deep roots in the Kim family.¹ Kim Il Sung first

sought Soviet nuclear assistance in the 1950s, obtained an IRT-2000 research reactor from the Soviets that began operations in 1965, sought to diversify nuclear suppliers with requests for Chinese and Eastern European assistance in the 1960s and 1970s, and rebuffed Moscow's pressure to join the 1968 Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) pledging to forego nuclear weapons until 1985. Western and communist states alike were suspicious of Kim Il Sung's nuclear motives, but declassified documents show that even the US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) articulated until the late 1980s North Korea's nuclear program as primarily a civilian energy program that left the door open to future weaponization.² How-

Affairs, "Nuclear-Free Korean Peninsula: Strategies And Action Programs For the Moon Jae-In Administration," 11-12 December 2017, Seoul. It is being published simultaneously in a longer version as a NAPSNet Special Report: <https://nautilus.org/uncategorized/reading-kim-jong-un-slips-what-is-his-playbook-and-intention-with-nuclear-weapons/>. The views expressed here are the author's alone and do not necessarily represent those of the US Department of State. For constructive comments, the author would like to thank Peter Hayes, Guy Arrigoni, Sig Hecker, Elliot Serbin, Narushige Michishita, Bob Carlin, John Merrill, Han Xiandong, Lee Sigal, Georgy Toloraya, Alexandre Mansourov, Haksoon Paik, and Alexander Zhebin. All remaining judgements are the responsibility of the author, who can be reached at Patrick.McEachern@wilsoncenter.org.

² CIA Directorate of Intelligence, "North Korea: Potential for Nuclear Weapon Development," September 1986, Declassification date unknown, http://www.foia.cia.gov/sites/default/files/document_versions/89801/DOC_0000835124.pdf, p. 1, 12-13. Also available as US Declassified Documents Online GALE Document Number KAETJM546819996. Director of Central

¹ The Open Society Foundation and the Ploughshares Fund funded the preparation of this paper and it was presented by the author at the 2017 IFANS Conference On Global

ever, in 1989 overhead imagery intelligence of the Yongbyon facility raised concerns about nuclear weapons capabilities, triggered a series of diplomatic meetings, and contributed to increasing pressure on the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) to allow inspections by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).³ Until the last few years of his life, Kim Il Sung's nuclear program was marked by basic uncertainty about its intention and its technical ability to detonate a first generation nuclear device.

2. By the time of the first nuclear crisis in 1992–94, Kim Jong Il was effectively running the government. The IAEA found discrepancies in North Korea's report to the UN nuclear watchdog in 1992 and demanded a special inspection in February 1993. North Korea refused full compliance with the agency's inspection demand and announced in March 1993 its intention to withdraw from the NPT. It removed in 1994 from its 5MW reactor at Yongbyon spent fuel rods that could be reprocessed for nuclear weapons.⁴ Kim Jong Il showed an unambiguous intention to weaponize the nuclear program although his technical ability to create a functioning nuclear weapon remained uncertain.

3. Given an uncertain nuclear weapon capability, credible threat of war and energy and economic incentives, Kim Jong Il accepted limits on his pursuit of nuclear weapons. Although the Agreed Framework faced difficulties in implementation, it verifiably froze North Korea's only established route to nuclear weapons for eight years. Kim Jong Il showed his nuclear quest could be moderated. As diplomatic ef-

forts floundered, Kim Jong Il advanced his nuclear weapons program to reduce uncertainty about his country's technical ability to make a nuclear weapon.⁵ His first nuclear test in 2006 did not demonstrate a clear ability to detonate a functioning nuclear device, but the higher yield second nuclear test in 2009 did.⁶ Kim Jong Il bequeathed to his son a functioning nuclear device.

4. Kim Jong Un inherited a first generation nuclear device without basic uncertainty about its purpose and technical capability and accelerated testing. Starting in 2013, Kim Jong Un conducted four nuclear tests (2013, January 2016, September 2016, 2017) and over 90 ballistic missile launches.⁷ He has not engaged in sustained diplomatic efforts that would test his willingness to freeze or dismantle this program. His regime has continued to produce fissile material for the quantitative expansion of the country's nuclear arsenal, tested higher-yield nuclear weapons that the regime claims are thermonuclear and made progress towards longer-range and more precise missiles.

5. Kim Jong Un did not have the same decision calculus as his father or grandfather to moderate his development of nuclear weapons. Kim Jong Un's nuclear weapons capability was not an aspirational capability, rather it was a tested one. Kim Jong Un appeared uninterested in trading away his tested nuclear program at the price offered during the Six Party Talks when North Korea's nuclear program had not yet demonstrated the same level of functionality. Without an active diplomatic process to freeze or reverse his nuclear program, Kim Jong Un moved forward with developing a more sophisticated nuclear program.

Intelligence, US National Intelligence Estimate, "The Korean Military Balance and Prospects for Hostilities on the Peninsula," NIE 42/14.2-87, March 1987, Declassified 12 June 2010, p. 14. CIA, "Intelligence Assessment of North Korea's Nuclear Efforts," 28 April 1987, US Declassified Documents Online GALE document number: GXONLA309315833. CIA, "Intelligence Special Analysis on Concerns Over North Korea's Expansion of its Nuclear Program, 22 March 1989, US Declassified Documents Online GALE document number: WOBATD108526282.

³ Don Oberdorfer and Robert Carlin, *The Two Koreas: A Contemporary History*, revised and updated third edition (New York: Basic Books, 2014), pp. 198–200.

⁴ Joel Wit, Daniel Poneman and Robert Gallucci, *Going Critical: The First North Korean Nuclear Crisis* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2005).

⁵ Charles Kartman, Robert Carlin and Joel Wit, *A History of KEDO: 1994–2006* (Stanford, CA: Center for International Security and Cooperation, 2012). CIA, unnamed unclassified report to Congress, November 2002,

<http://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB87/nk22.pdf>. Choe Sang-hun, "North Korea Started Uranium Program in 1990s, South Says," *New York Times*, 6 January 2010.

⁶ BBC, "North Korea Nuclear Tests: What Did They Achieve?" 3 September 2017, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-17823706>.

⁷ Claire Phipps, "North Korea Missile Launch: What We Know," *Guardian*, 15 September 2017.

Kim Jong Un's Nuclear Weapons: Goals and Methods

6. Kim Jong Un inherited a tested nuclear device. In theory, he could reverse, sustain, or advance the program. *Reversing* North Korea's nuclear program in a "grand bargain" could generate substantial economic benefits and alternative security arrangements at the expense of a technical means to provide for the country's security. *Sustaining* the program with a capped number of nuclear weapons might entice foreign partners to offer more modest security or economic rewards – or forego additional punishments – without completely abandoning a basic nuclear deterrent. *Advancing* the nuclear program would double down on the world's most powerful weapons for regime security. Kim Jong Un to date has chosen the third option to advance his regime's nuclear weapons capability.

Table 1: North Korea's Nuclear Weapons Intentions and Capabilities by Leader

Leader	Nuclear Weapons Intentions	Nuclear Weapons Capabilities
Kim Il Sung	Opaque. Nuclear Energy With Futures Weapons Applications	Untested
Kim Jong Il	Clear. Weapons Pursuit	Untested
Kim Jong Un	Clear. Weapons Pursuit	Tested

7. The advancement of North Korea's nuclear weapons capability raises a number of questions. Why has the regime gone beyond a basic ability to impose unacceptable costs on its adversaries with a first generation nuclear device and singular means of delivery to provide a nuclear deterrent to pursuing thermonuclear devices and an array of missiles? Does the Kim Jong Un regime have additional goals beyond existential deterrence, such as providing an insurance policy against retaliation for a more aggressive military approach to peninsular or regional objectives? What can we say about North Korea's budding nuclear weapons doctrine?

8. Close consideration of what North Korea does *and* what it says in tandem is important. Critical analysis always requires taking foreign leaders' comments with a grain of salt, deciphering motives and varying audiences, and drawing conclusions. A systematic review of North Korean public comments and instructions to North Korean policy practitioners, read critically and in context, can narrow our uncertainty about Kim Jong Un's intentions, goals and tactics. Kim Jong Un's strategic speeches and on-the-spot guidance is binding and guides North Korean practitioners engaged on the country's nuclear and missile programs. It is in effect a government decree and consistently repeated decrees from the top leader should be understood as policy. Especially when there is a strong correlation between the regime's stated strategy and observed actions, we can take reasonable confidence that this is Kim Jong Un's approach.

Kim Jong Un's Pre-Doctrinal Nuclear Advances

9. In the first four years of his reign, Kim Jong Un voiced and demonstrated a commitment to nuclear weapons development without a publicly articulated doctrine. With a vague goal of advancing nuclear weapons development combined with the established technical means to do so, Kim Jong Un pursued more and bigger weapons without broadly communicating their purpose beyond generally addressing North Korea's perception of an American threat.

10. Kim's first major test would come within three months of his assumption of power. On 29 February 2012, the Foreign Ministry Spokesman announced that the DPRK had reached a deal with the United States that reaffirmed the commitments in the 19 September 2005 Joint Statement of the Six Party Talks and recognized the armistice. This was diplomatic code for committing to reactivate the denuclearization process and refrain from provocations against South Korea in exchange for specific concessions. The DPRK "agreed to a moratorium on nuclear tests, long-range missile launches, and uranium enrichment activity at Yongbyon and [to] allow the IAEA to monitor

the moratorium on uranium enrichment while productive dialogues continue.”⁸

11. Yet the Leap Day Deal would not show Kim Jong Un committed to reversing his country’s nuclear program. Despite warnings that any launch would violate the deal, the DPRK Foreign Ministry noted its interpretation that the deal applied only to missile launches and not rockets configured as satellites.⁹ The deal fell apart in record time.¹⁰ The DPRK attempted to launch the rocket on 13 April and the UN Security Council condemned it. The DPRK inscribed in its constitution its self-proclaimed status as a nuclear state.¹¹

12. In December 2012, the DPRK launched another rocket and conducted a third nuclear test in February 2013. The DPRK sought to justify its move as within the international norm and criticized the United States for leading an international effort to portray the nuclear test as dangerous. The younger Kim had continued nuclear and missile advances, but he had not yet articulated his own vision for why and how he would develop and posture them.

Pre-doctrinal Mixed Nuclear Messages

13. In a 31 March 2013 speech, Kim Jong Un re-introduced the concept of *byungjin*, defining it as “a new strategic line on carrying out economic construction and building nuclear armed forces simultaneously... [expanding upon the] original [*byungjin*] line of simultaneously developing economy and national defense.” Kim noted *byungjin* is permanent and not intended as a political bargaining chip. The “nuclear shield” is for self-defence, and “the nuclear armed forces should be expanded and beefed up qualitatively and quantitatively until the denuclearization of the world is realized.”

He instructed the military to integrate nuclear weapons into its “war strategy” and “combat posture.”¹² Two days later, a spokesman for the DPRK’s General Department of Atomic Energy, citing Kim’s speech, announced that it would restart both the uranium enrichment and 5MW reactor at Yongbyon.¹³ The regime inscribed the guidance in the 2013 Nuclear Weapons State Law.¹⁴

14. Within three months of declaring nuclear development was non-negotiable, North Korea offered denuclearization talks, contributing to mixed messages on Kim’s nuclear intent. North Korea’s National Defense Commission (NDC) urged “senior level talks” between the DPRK and the United States and noted: “The denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula was behests of President Kim Il Sung and leader Kim Jong Il.”¹⁵ The NDC repeated the offer in October.¹⁶ The DPRK relaxed its super-inflated rhetoric on the United States, but unclassified satellite data in September showed that amid the offers to negotiate that the DPRK had restarted its 5MW reactor at Yongbyon, which had been disabled for six years.¹⁷ Ultimately, these offers did not materialize into sustained negotiations that could test Kim Jong Un’s seriousness about denuclearization.

15. The DPRK did not conduct additional nuclear tests in 2014 and moderated some of its rhetoric. The DPRK settled into a more comfortable rhythm of expanding its fissile material production and advancing its nuclear and ballistic missile technology through less explicitly provocative means such as shorter-range missile launches. The US Director of National Intelligence visited Pyongyang to secure the release of two American citizens in November 2014, and North Korean officials later noted

⁸ KCNA, 29 February 2012.

⁹ KCNA, 27 March 2012.

¹⁰ Peter Crail, “N. Korean Launch Plan Puts Deal at Risk,” *Arms Control Today* 42:3 (April 2012), pp. 36–37.

¹¹ Peter Hayes, “The DPRK’s Nuclear Constitution,” NAP-SNet Policy Forum, 13 June 2012, <https://nautilus.org/napsnet/napsnet-policy-forum/the-dprks-nuclear-constitution/>. “N. Korea Puts Nuclear Arms in Constitution,” *Choson Ilbo*, 31 May 2012, http://english.chosun.com/site/data/html_dir/2012/05/31/2012053100646.html.

¹² KCNA, 31 March 2013.

¹³ KCBS, 2 April 2013.

¹⁴ Sung Chull Kim, “North Korea’s Nuclear Doctrine and Revisionist Strategy,” in Sung Chull Kim and Michael Cohen, eds., *North Korea and Nuclear Weapons: Entering the New Era of Deterrence* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2017), pp. 31–54.

¹⁵ KCNA, 16 June 2013.

¹⁶ KCNA, 12 October 2013.

¹⁷ 38North, “North Korea Restarting Its 5 MW Reactor,” 11 September 2013, <http://38north.org/2013/09/yongbyon091113/>.

their disappointment that this did not provide a diplomatic opening.¹⁸

16. In January 2015, the DPRK offered a moratorium on nuclear tests for a discontinuation of joint military exercises.¹⁹ The United States rejected the offer.²⁰ Kim Jong Un injected new uncertainty on whether he was simply unwilling to negotiate on limiting his nuclear weapons program or the two sides simply had far different expectations about the nature of a possible deal.

17. By September 2015, the DPRK appeared poised to revert to more explicitly public and provocative behaviour. North Korean announced the restart of its plutonium and uranium enrichment facilities at Yongbyon and cited the merits of sovereign outer space activities.²¹ The pronouncements raised the near-term spectre of more visible DPRK nuclear and missile flight tests. North Korea conducted its fourth nuclear test on 7 January 2016.²² In mid-January, the DPRK reiterated the country's double freeze offer as the UN Security Council deliberated sanctions.²³ The proposal did not gain traction. The DPRK moved towards its next long-range missile test in February, which again prompted sanctions.

North Korea's Nuclear Doctrine and the Seventh Party Congress

18. The Korean Workers Party held its Seventh Congress in May 2016 – the first in 36 years. Kim Jong Un's comments provided the best single sketch available for the regime's nuclear doctrine. North Korean leaders, including Kim, would continually reference his Party Congress speech following significant missile and nuclear tests in subsequent years as implementing actions for that vision. Summarizing the work

of the Party Central Committee at the Congress, Kim Jong Un said:

As long as nuclear threats and the tyranny of imperialism continue, we will permanently adhere to the strategic line of simultaneously pushing forward economic construction and the building of nuclear armed forces. As long as the aggressive hostile forces do not infringe upon our sovereignty with nuclear [weapons], our Republic, as a responsible nuclear state, will not use a nuclear weapon first, as already elucidated; will faithfully carry out the obligation, assumed before the international community, to prevent nuclear proliferation; and make effort to achieve the denuclearization of the world.²⁴

19. Kim Jong Un seemed to adopt a “no first use” doctrine of sorts, which would be later refined and clarified. He articulated a nuclear doctrine that included securing an existential nuclear deterrent and engaging in global nuclear arms control efforts as a nuclear weapons state. Results of the Party Congress provided additional detail on the goals and methods of North Korea's nuclear pursuit. The Congress stressed the regime's nuclear weapons were intended to safeguard the country's sovereignty, independence from imperialism and removal of foreign bases from other countries.²⁵ The Party decided not to specify “imperialist” threats to the DPRK alone or the removal of US troops from South Korea, but couched its ambitions in much more grandiose and global terms.

20. More specifically, the Party concluded: “Let us turn our country into a matchless nuclear power by bolstering up the Juche-based nuclear force in quality and quantity to mercilessly stamp out the enemies challenging us, whether they are in the sky or underground or on the sea.”²⁶ The DPRK would pursue a variety of land- and sea-based missile programs simultaneously as well as advance efforts to develop higher yield nuclear weapons and consistently cite these actions as working towards the nuclear doctrine articulated at the Party Congress.

¹⁸ Evan Osnos, “The Risk of Nuclear War with North Korea,” *New Yorker*, 18 September 2017.

¹⁹ Choe Sang-hun, “North Korea Offers U.S. Deal to Halt Nuclear Test,” *New York Times*, 11 January 2015, p. A7.

²⁰ KCNA, 20 May 2015.

²¹ KCNA, 15 September 2015. Will Ripley and Tim Schwarz, “North Korea's Space Race: Satellite Launch Imminent, Officials Say,” *CNN.com*, 23 September 2015. Uriminjokkkiri, 27 September 2015.

²² *Rodong Shinmun*, 7 January 2016.

²³ KCBS, 15 January 2016.

²⁴ *Rodong Shinmun*, 8 May 2016. KCNA, 8 May 2016.

²⁵ KCNA, 8 May 2016.

²⁶ KCNA, 9 May 2016.

21. At North Korea's National Defense University a month after the Congress, Kim Jong Un provided on-the-spot guidance that reiterated his goals for North Korea's nuclear program. He went beyond existential deterrence as the singular purpose of the North's nuclear program, indicating the nuclear program was also tied to the regime's power and prestige as a regional power. "Kim Jong Un said that the basic duty of the National Defense University is to more excellently train greater numbers of future leaders who further consolidate and glorify the status of military-first [North] Korea as a great nuclear power and the most powerful military state of the East."²⁷

22. Kim made the call to create the most powerful military in the region a theme. Celebrating the launch of a ballistic missile and giving binding on-the-spot guidance to the regime's rocket scientists, Kim urged continued diversification in the regime's nuclear and missile forces without a clear end in sight. "Kim Jong Un said that the preemptive nuclear strike capabilities should be constantly expanded and augmented, and a variety of strategic attack weapons should be continuously researched and developed [to create] a militarily powerful country that is equipped with the most powerful nuclear deterrent and is the most invincible under heaven."²⁸

23. The DPRK noting nuclear "pre-emption" as part of its doctrine appeared to contradict Kim's promise not to use nuclear weapons first. Kim had previously stated this no first use pledge would apply *if* the United States did not infringe on North Korea's sovereignty with nuclear weapons. He could broadly interpret (or ignore) the required condition of a violation of its sovereignty for the no-first use pledge, limiting the meaning of the statement. Indeed, Kim noted that he ordered a ballistic missile drill to practice pre-emptive attacks: "The drill was conducted by limiting the firing range under the simulated conditions of making pre-emptive strikes at ports and airfields in the operational theatre in south Korea where the U.S. imperialists nuclear war hardware is to be

hurled" and praised "developing diverse type ballistic rockets."²⁹

24. Kim Jong Un also lauded the importance of nuclear technology to the DPRK's position on the global stage. Following the test launch of a submarine-launched ballistic missile (SLBM), he noted operational specifics and wider implications: "we have joined in a dignified manner the ranks of the military powers that perfectly possess nuclear attack capabilities... no matter how hard the United States may deny it, the US mainland and the Pacific operational theatre are now definitely in our hands.... [which will] uphold in practice our party's plan for the construction of a powerful country of rockets."³⁰ Kim Jong Un expressed a sense that joining the ranks of the nuclear weapons states would establish his country as a global power better able to influence a range of security matters. The DPRK conducted its fifth nuclear test days later.³¹

25. Referencing the Seventh Party Congress, North Korean Foreign Minister Ri Yong Ho noted North Korea needed "to take measures to strengthen its national nuclear armed forces in both quantity and quality" to deal with US nuclear threats.³² By the end of 2016, Kim Jong Un still hit the same theme, telling a conference of party committee chairs that the regime's nuclear and missile efforts were "remarkably increasing the strategic position of the DPRK... the DPRK bolstered up its nuclear force both in quality and quantity by succeeding in developing Korean-style latest strategic weapons."³³

26. Kim personally ordered and observed the test launch of a surface-to-surface ballistic missile in February 2017, claiming the North's "nuclear attack means" now extended "to most accurately and most rapidly perform its strate-

²⁷ *Rodong Shinmun*, 13 June 2016.

²⁸ *Rodong Shinmun*, 23 June 2016.

²⁹ KCNA, 19 July 2016.

³⁰ *Rodong Shinmun*, 25 August 2016.

³¹ Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty Organization, "9 September 2016 North Korea Announced Nuclear Test," 9 September 2016, <https://www.ctbto.org/the-treaty/developments-after-1996/2016-sept-dprk-announced-nuclear-test/>.

³² Ri Yong Ho, "Statement by H.E. Ri Yong Ho, Minister for Foreign Affairs of The Democratic People's Republic of Korea at the General Debate of the 71st Session of The United Nations General Assembly," 23 September 2016.

³³ KCNA, 23 December 2016.

gic mission at any place – underwater or on the land.” He couched the technical development in terms of nationalism, highlighting the indigenous nature of the developments and its role in preserving the DPRK’s freedom of movement in foreign affairs.³⁴ Given North Korea’s revolutionary ambitions and demonstrated willingness to use force especially against South Korea, a self-perception of greater freedom of action in conventional military affairs afforded by its nuclear program is concerning.

27. Kim Jong Un observed military drills to utilize nuclear weapons against US bases in Japan while repeatedly referring to the DPRK’s “retaliatory strike” capability, again suggesting a second-strike war-fighting role for North Korea’s nuclear arsenal. He provided on-the-spot guidance to “Hwasong artillery units of the KPA Strategic Force tasked to strike the bases of the U.S. imperialist aggressor forces in Japan in a contingency.”³⁵ He later celebrated the regime’s “nuclear deterrence” to counter American nuclear blackmail and military intimidation efforts.³⁶ The party daily the following day further noted that the North would rely on its nuclear arsenal to end confrontation with the United States but not start it.³⁷

28. Diversifying North Korean missile capabilities would be useful in combat and enhance deterrence, Kim argued. Claiming to put US military assets in Alaska and Hawaii in range and aiming for deployable nuclear weapons, the party daily described the latest ballistic missile test as the “final validation” of the missile’s “adaptability in different combat environments, and deploy the missiles to military units for actual warfare” in line with Kim’s guidance.³⁸ Kim Jong Un would similarly instruct the development of precision ballistic missiles with quick launch for use in warfare³⁹ and development of forces for use in a contingency, not a first strike.⁴⁰ The binding nature of this guidance provided directly to missile and

security practitioners suggests it reflects the regime’s nuclear doctrine.

29. Contrary to early test flights developing a capability to target US forces in the region, Kim said the intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) launch on 4 July 2017 targeted the US mainland with nuclear-tipped missiles. He claimed his country had achieved a nuclear deterrent, would not negotiate it away and would further bolster its nuclear force unless the US changed its “hostile policy.” The DPRK would “neither put its nukes and ballistic rockets on the table of negotiations in any case nor flinch even an inch from the road of bolstering the nuclear force chosen by itself unless the US hostile policy and nuclear threat to the DPRK are definitely terminated.”⁴¹ The ICBM launch had “fundamentally changed the strategic position of our Republic and the structure of global politics” and advanced the guiding nuclear goals set forth at the Seventh Party Congress.⁴² In a congratulatory banquet for the North’s rocket scientists, Kim again ordered the continued qualitative and quantitative “bolstering” of its strategic weapons systems.⁴³

30. The war of words between the United States and North Korea escalated. In August 2017, the US President warned North Korea that continued threats would be met with “fire and fury” and a North Korean military spokesman responded by threatening that Kim could review options of “encircling fire around Guam.”⁴⁴ On 2 September 2017, *Rodong Shinmun* explained that thermonuclear weapons would give the DPRK a capability for high-altitude electro-magnetic pulse (EMP) attacks. It appealed to nationalism, stressing the indigenous development of these weapons, but did not clearly articulate the purpose of an EMP capability.⁴⁵ Citing the Seventh Congress goal of “completing the state nuclear force,” Kim Jong Un the following day signed an order to con-

³⁴ *Rodong Shinmun*, 13 February 2017.

³⁵ KCNA, 6 March 2017.

³⁶ KCNA, 14 May 2017.

³⁷ *Rodong Shinmun*, 15 May 2017.

³⁸ *Rodong Shinmun*, 22 May 2017.

³⁹ *Rodong Shinmun*, 30 May 2017.

⁴⁰ *Rodong Shinmun* 30 August 2017.

⁴¹ KCNA, 4 July 2017. *Rodong Shinmun*, 5 July 2017.

⁴² *Rodong Shinmun*, 13 July 2017.

⁴³ KCNA, 20 July 2017.

⁴⁴ John Wagner and Jenna Johnson, “Trump Vows North Korea will be met with ‘Fire and Fury’ if Threats Continue,” *Washington Post*, 8 August 2017. KCBS, 8 August 2017.

⁴⁵ KCNA, September 2, 2017. *Rodong Shinmun*, 3 September 2017.

duct a hydrogen bomb test.⁴⁶ Pursuit of EMP and hydrogen bombs were part of the Seventh Party Congress goal of diversifying the regime's nuclear forces. The UN Security Council imposed more sanctions.⁴⁷

31. North Korea fired a missile over Japan, noting its strategic aim focused on the United States. In on-the-spot guidance, Kim again called for deployed nuclear weapons that can be used in war: "all drills should become meaningful and practical ones for increasing combat power of the nuclear force like the current drill in the future, and the order to deal with nuclear warheads should be strictly established suited to their deployment for actual war." In his view, a nuclear war-fighting capability makes the DPRK a nuclear peer of the United States and aids deterrence: "our final goal is to establish the equilibrium of real force with the U.S. and make the U.S. rulers dare not talk about military option for the DPRK."⁴⁸

32. The US and North Korean leaders traded personal barbs in late September and the North Korean Foreign Minister raised the possibility of an atmospheric nuclear test over the Pacific Ocean.⁴⁹ In mid-November, three American aircraft carrier strike groups, augmented by South Korean and Japanese forces, conducted the first drill of its kind in a decade,⁵⁰ and the United States re-designated North Korea a state sponsor of terrorism and promised new sanctions.⁵¹ North Korea launched an ICBM on 28 November that it said could strike anywhere in the United States and presented it as an effort to defend the peace. The statement

also noted the launch advanced Kim Jong Un's "line on the simultaneous development of the two fronts," referring to the *byungjin* policy of economic and nuclear development.⁵²

Conclusions

33. Unlike his father and grandfather, Kim Jong Un began his reign as the top leader in North Korea with an unambiguous and tested first generation nuclear device. He doubled down on the nuclear program as fundamental to national security. Though Kim Jong Un's North Korea oscillated between boisterous nuclear threats and relatively quiet nuclear development that included offers for diplomatic engagement, the nuclear program has continued to progress. This is not simply a quantitative growth of North Korea's nuclear arsenal, rather has come to reflect a more sophisticated nuclear doctrine.

34. Kim Jong Un's speech at the Seventh Party Congress and subsequent clarifications provide the most important contemporary outlines of the regime's nuclear doctrine. North Korea does not seek a simple nuclear deterrent with a first-generation nuclear weapon and single means of delivery that raises the risks to a foreign invader. Rather, Kim has sought the simultaneous development of road-mobile-, sea-based, and quick-launch ballistic missiles that are difficult to find and pre-empt. Kim has also continued to note the North's nuclear weapons are motivated by and targeted at the United States, including its military bases in the region and in Alaska and Hawaii.

35. While the regime maintains rhetoric of threatening populations centres such as Seoul and Washington, the move towards more precise ballistic missiles and more powerful nuclear weapons, including a thermonuclear capability that can compensate for imprecise missiles, is consistent with efforts to disrupt military targets that are more hardened and smaller targets than population centres. This is consistent with an effort to develop a second-strike capability for nuclear deterrence.

⁴⁶ KCNA, 3 September 2017.

⁴⁷ Marcus Noland, Stephan Haggard, and Kent Boydston, "UN Security Council Resolution 2375," *North Korea: Witness to Transformation Blog*, 12 September 2017, <https://piie.com/blogs/north-korea-witness-transformation/un-security-council-resolution-2375>.

⁴⁸ KCNA, 15 September 2017.

⁴⁹ David Sanger and William Broad, "Prospect of Atmospheric Test by North Korea Raises Specter of Danger," *New York Times*, 22 September 2017.

⁵⁰ Lisa Ferdinando, "Three Carrier Strike Force Conducts Exercises in Western Pacific," *DOD News*, 13 November 2017, <https://www.defense.gov/News/Article/Article/1370807/three-carrier-strike-force-conducts-exercise-in-western-pacific/>.

⁵¹ Adam Taylor, "North Korea's On-Again-Off-Again Status as a State Sponsor of Terrorism," *Washington Post*, 20 November 2017.

⁵² KCNA, 29 November 2017.

36. In addition to deterrence, the regime has articulated a lofty goal of utilizing the nuclear program to raise its stature as a peer of the nuclear weapons states. According to Kim, the nuclear program helps preserve North Korea's sovereignty and independence. Kim notes that the nuclear force should not only deter US invasion but also safeguard the regime's freedom of action in the theatre. Seoul would have the most to lose in this scenario if Pyongyang believes Washington less willing to respond to North Korean aggression with military retaliation, and it demonstrates the dangers of accepting the DPRK as a nuclear weapons state.

37. As difficult as the question of US military pre-emption was during the Kim Jong Il period, it has grown considerably more difficult today. When Kim Jong Il prepared to flight test its Taepo Dong-2 long-range rocket for the first time in 2006, former and future secretaries of defence advocated striking the missile on the launch pad. The advocacy was controversial over the question of North Korea's response rather than confidence in destroying the missile before launch.⁵³ The challenge for military planners seeking to target North Korea's capabilities has grown considerably as those weapons have become more survivable, and the prospects for successful preventative strikes on North Korea have grown even dimmer.

38. Nuclear deterrence is robust, and Kim Jong Un's nuclear advances have not changed his ability to be deterred. However, the Korean Peninsula houses two adversarial and heavily armed sides with a history of lethal encounters. Unwanted escalatory spirals are possible and North Korean propaganda heralding the merits of nuclear use, even though fanciful, further raises this risk.⁵⁴ Military planners have an obligation to plan for unlikely, high impact events and get ahead of the threat curve. This study shows that Kim's nuclear doctrinal statements have forecasted his regime's nuclear advances reasonably well and can provide some insight for military planners looking over the horizon seeking to contain those threats.

⁵³ Ashton Carter and William Perry, "The Case for a Preemptive Strike on North Korea's Missiles," *Time*, 8 July 2006.

⁵⁴ Peter Hayes and Roger Cavazos, "Propaganda, Fire-Thrashing, and the Risk of North Korean First-Use of Nuclear Weapons in Korea", NAPSNet Special Reports, 10 April 2013, <https://nautilus.org/napsnet/napsnet-special-reports/propaganda-fire-thrashing-and-the-risk-of-north-korean-first-use-of-nuclear-weapons-in-korea/>.

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