**What's happening with North Korea?**

We are receiving strange messages on the web about the situation in North Korea and we ask why people are suggesting that the North Koreans are going to test missiles and nuclear warheads. As we have previously reported, in September, 2017, during their 6th nuclear test in North Korea, there was a bad accident that destroyed their entire test site and multiple sources reported many deaths at the site. Since it was a nuclear test site, presumably the personnel at the test site were people involved with the test. If true, there would have been nuclear scientists include among the dead. It is not easy to replace nuclear scientists in a small nation like North Korea, so we can assume that this was likely a major setback to her nuclear program. I could be wrong, but we need some intelligence to support any other logical conclusion.

Ever since that September 2017 accident, there has been no further nuclear testing, but to distract outsiders, they have launched several missiles covering only a range of a few hundred miles. I am reminded that unless an enemy missile lands on your head, a missile without a warhead is not a serious threat, and a missile without a nuclear warhead is just a big bluff.

One reporter claims that Kim Jong-um has ordered his military to ensure missiles are combat read.

Another report has suggested that the North Koreans were planning to have 200 nuclear warheads by 2027. According to the Bulletin of Atomic Scientists, the North has around 40 nuclear warheads.

An NBC News reporter claims (without sourcing) that the North now has more nuclear weapons than ever, plus ballistic missiles that intelligence officials say could deliver a warhead to the U.S. If true, we are going to have to quickly take action to prevent any North Korean missile launch.

In the absence of supporting evidence that the North is planning to start a nuclear war, which she cannot win, Kim Jung-un is not stupid. The South Korean military, alone, can defeat the North Koreans 2 weeks. With our offensive American military support, the defeat of the North would not take more than one week, just using conventional weapons. The North, reportedly, has access to our war preparation plans with the South and is fully aware of the consequences if they initiate an attack.

One conjecture that is logical is that some people realized that with the cost to recuperate from the pandemic and the huge stimulus money distributed, our entire budget, including our defense budget is likely to take a hit. Defense contractors and defense planners would like to minimize any decrement in our defense spending, and by raising the North Korea threat now could prevent any major decrement in our defense budget. But I could be wrong, or not ...

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**Kim Jong-un wants North Korea's nuclear missiles to be 'combat ready'**

<https://www.mirror.co.uk/news/world-news/kim-jong-un-wants-north-23929597>

*North Korea dictator Kim Jong-un has told military officials to be ready to execute orders "at any time" as one expert suggests the United States is not ready*

By: Nathan Hyde for the ***UK Mirror*** //  11:02, 17 APR 2021 // UPDATED01:19, 17 APR 2021

**The UN Security Council has banned North Korea from testing these powerful weapons.**

**Kim Jong-un is reportedly ramping up**[**North Korea's**](https://www.mirror.co.uk/all-about/north-korea)**nuclear programme and he has ordered the military to ensure his missiles are combat ready**. Military officials have been told they should be ready to execute his orders "at any time", according to a high-ranking source. The order was issued this week and troops were put on alert, before the secretive communist state celebrated the birthday of its founder Kim Il-Sung, at an event known as the Sun Festival.

One source close to the regime claims it is unusual for such an order to be issued during the week of the festival, [reports The Sun](https://www.thesun.co.uk/news/14671175/north-korea-missiles-ready-combat/). **Reports suggest another short-range ballistic missiles test could be carried out in the coming weeks**, after a satellite image, published by 38 North, revealed a recently modified missile test barge had returned to a shipyard in a major military hub this week. **Short-range misses were fired into the Sea of Japan and the Yellow Sea during weapons test in March**, for the first time after US President [Joe Biden](https://www.mirror.co.uk/all-about/joe-biden) took office.

The UN Security Council has banned North Korea from testing these powerful weapons, but it has ignored that order on numerous occasions. There are growing concerns about advances in North Korea's military technology and **experts believe the country is ramping up its nuclear programme.** A worrying report published by a **Korean think tank, called the Asan Institute for Policy Studies, states North Korea could have 200 nuclear weapons and several dozen intercontinental ballistic missiles by 2027**.

 There are growing concerns about North Korean leader Kim Jon-un's missile tests. The report states the United States and South Korea are "not prepared" to deal with the "developing North Korean nuclear weapon threat". It also states their attempts to stop the rogue state from expanding its nuclear arsenal, through a series of negotiations, has "failed". It says **Mr Kim "appears to be building a nuclear weapon force capable of enabling peninsula dominance**" and the US and South Korea need to develop "enhanced" defences to "sustain deterrence now".

In January, country revealed it had a new submarine launched ballistic missile, which the state media described as "the world’s most powerful weapon". The missile was unveiled at a parade, that was overseen by Mr Kim, weeks after he described the USA as his country's “biggest enemy”. According to the state-run Korean Central News Agency, he said: “Our foreign political activities should be focused and redirected on subduing the US.”

After the missile tests in March, President Biden said "there will be responses” if North Korea choose to “escalate" he will engage in diplomatic negotiations they are "conditioned upon the end result of denuclearisation". However, the White House claims North Korea has not engaged in talks since Biden took office.

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**Why North Korea Would Start a Nuclear War**

[***https://www.19fortyfive.com/2021/04/why-north-korea-would-start-a-nuclear-war/***](https://www.19fortyfive.com/2021/04/why-north-korea-would-start-a-nuclear-war/)

By: [Eli Fuhrman](https://www.19fortyfive.com/author/eli-fuhrman/) for ***19FortyFive*** // Published; April 6, 2021

 The Korean Peninsula remains one of the world’s most dangerous hotspots, with the potential for the outbreak of a [truly calamitous](https://www.vox.com/world/2018/2/7/16974772/north-korea-war-trump-kim-nuclear-weapon) conflict.

Much of the danger stems from military concerns among the potential combatants that leave each side with strong incentives to launch a preemptive attack, potentially lowering the threshold for the start of hostilities. This is particularly true for North Korea, whose conventional military inferiority in comparison to both South Korea and the United States strongly encourages such an opening maneuver.

**Conventional Comparisons**

The Korean People’s Army (KPA) enjoys a substantial quantitative advantage over the militaries of both South Korea and the United States. Indeed, the KPA remains one of the world’s largest standing militaries, [numbering close to 1.3 million](https://carnegieendowment.org/2020/03/18/state-of-north-korean-military-pub-81232) total active-duty personnel with more than 6 million potential reserves. The KPA’s numerical advantage extends to certain categories of military hardware as well, with the KPA fielding an estimated 1.5 times as many main battle tanks as the South Korean military and more than twenty times as many multiple launch rocket systems (MLRS).

However, despite its large quantitative advantage, the KPA suffers from significant qualitative deficiencies when compared to the U.S. and South Korean armed forces. **Much of North Korea’s military capabilities are** [**based on outdated Soviet or Chinese platforms**](https://fas.org/irp/world/dprk/dod-2017.pdf) **acquired during the Cold War**. **North Korea’s large armored force, for example, is** [**comprised**](https://nationalinterest.org/blog/buzz/fact-north-korea-has-thousands-tanks-can-they-fight-78851) **primarily of Soviet and Chinese tanks that the DPRK received during the 1970s, while its domestically produced tanks are heavily based on equally outdated Soviet designs.**

The **Korean People’s Air and Air-Defense Force (KPAF)** [**operates similarly aging equipment**](https://www.iiss.org/blogs/military-balance/2020/02/north-korea-air-force)**, with the majority of its over 400 tactical fighter aircraft consisting of Soviet and Chinese designs from the 1950s and 1960s**.  North Korea has attempted to offset its relative conventional deficiencies through the pursuit of asymmetric military capabilities. The **DPRK’s approach to military modernization has** [**long been guided**](https://www.19fortyfive.com/2021/02/history-explains-why-north-korea-wants-nuclear-weapons/) **by a desire to pursue select capabilities that provide the largest strategic benefit for the lowest possible costs** in recognition of its resource constraints.

This has resulted in not only the country’s nuclear weapons program but also its development of a large and increasingly capable [ballistic missile arsenal](https://missilethreat.csis.org/country/dprk/), its [stockpiling of chemical weapons](https://www.rand.org/pubs/testimonies/CT486.html), and its employment of a [large special operations force](https://www.csis.org/analysis/korean-special-asymmetric-and-paramilitary-forces) as well as its [growing cyber capabilities](https://www.fdd.org/analysis/2018/10/03/kim-jong-uns-all-purpose-sword/).

**In Search of a Quick Victory**

 In the event of the outbreak of large-scale conflict on the Korean Peninsula, North Korea is likely to pursue a [quick and decisive](https://fas.org/irp/doddir/army/atp7-100-2.pdf) end to the conflict. This is reflective of not only **the relative weakness of the country’s conventional military** – which would likely struggle in the face of sustained combat with the armed forces of South Korea and the United States – but also of **North Korea’s inability to sustain a conflict long term, which is limited by a stockpile of food, oil, and ammunition** that the South Korean Ministry of National Defense [has estimated](https://www.mnd.go.kr/mnd_book/DefenseWhitePaper/2018/final(eng)/index.html#p=36) would last only between one and three months.

The need for a quick victory would likely see North Korea act quickly in the opening stages of a conflict. [Roughly 70 percent](https://fas.org/irp/world/dprk/dod-2017.pdf) of North Korea’s military forces are forward deployed to within  60 miles of the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ), giving it the ability to launch an invasion of the South quickly as well as to overcome at least some of the supply and logistical challenges associated with such an endeavor. **North Korea would also likely look to** [**rapidly escalate**](https://thediplomat.com/2017/10/military-stalemate-how-north-korea-could-win-a-war-with-the-us/) **the conflict utilizing its full array of asymmetric military capabilities in an attempt to secure an initial advantage.**

An important facet of North Korea’s wartime strategy will also no doubt involve preventing or at least delaying the introduction of additional U.S. forces to the Korean Peninsula, and as such North Korea will [look to target](https://www.38north.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/NKNF-Jackson-Alliance-09151.pdf) military bases and ports in both South Korea and Japan used for such a purpose.  There is also reason to believe that North Korea will turn towards the early use of nuclear weapons in the event of a major war with South Korea and the United States.

In addition to their obvious value in offsetting North Korea’s conventional inferiority as part of a [nuclear warfighting strategy](https://www.38north.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/NKNF_Evolving-Nuclear-Strategy_Smith.pdf), the need for a quick end to a conflict in order to avoid a conventional defeat is likely to result in a “[use it or lose it](https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/north-korea/2013-04-01/next-korean-war)” mentality among the North Korean leadership. Such concerns may be reinforced by a [South Korean military strategy](https://nationalinterest.org/blog/korea-watch/kill-chain-and-massive-punishment-and-retaliation-south-korea’s-plan-war-north) centered around the targeting of the North Korean leadership in the event of a North Korean attack on the South.

North Korea no doubt recognizes that its ability to prevail in a conflict with South Korea and the United States is predicated on its ability to cause enough casualties and achieve relevant military objectives before the U.S. and ROK are able to effectively bring to bear their superior conventional military capabilities. As such, **North Korea will be heavily incentivized to launch a preemptive attack if it believes that a war with South Korea and the United States is on the horizon.** This will likely lower the threshold for North Korean recourse to the use of force, which has significant ramifications for crisis and conflict escalation on the Korean Peninsula.

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**North Korea has more nuclear weapons than ever. What should Biden do?**

**By: Ken Dilanian and Carol E. Lee and Dan De Luce for *NBC News* // April 17,2021**

**WASHINGTON** — Ever since North Korea began building nuclear weapons in the 1990s, the policy of the United States has been clear: Give up those bombs or face international isolation.

After three decades of sanctions, threats of force and diplomacy — including President Trump's innovative summits with North Korean leader Kim Jong Un **— North Korea now has more nuclear weapons than ever, plus ballistic missiles that intelligence officials say could deliver a warhead to the U.S. And because of the global pandemic**, the hermit kingdom has shuttered its borders, halting imports of food and medicine in a way [more punishing](https://www.nbcnews.com/news/world/kim-jong-un-compares-north-korea-s-economic-woes-1990s-n1263594) than international sanctions could ever be.

That dangerous security threat is now in President Joe Biden's lap, and his administration is expected to announce the results of a policy review on [North Korea](https://www.nbcnews.com/news/world/north-korea-makes-splash-biden-ballistic-missile-salvo-n1262130)soon. Experts and people briefed on it say they expect that while Biden will not formally abandon the goal of "total denuclearization," he will attempt to achieve the more limited aim of diminishing North Korea's nuclear threat, while at the same time seeking to lower the visibility of a thorny foreign policy problem that has no neat solution.

"Realistically speaking, the administration's North Korea strategy will probably be open to (an) approach in which North Korea's capabilities are capped or limited," Eric Brewer, who worked on North Korea policy at the National Security Council in the Obama administration, told NBC News. "Even if denuclearization remains a component of the strategy, I find it hard to believe they wouldn't be open to more interim solutions that reduce the threat."The administration also plans to seek to reinvigorate the so-called trilateral relationship between the U.S., South Korea and Japan, according to a former Trump administration official who has been consulted.

**Whether there are direct talks with the North Koreans depends on the North's behavior, that person said.** While denuclearization would remain a long-term goal, **the U.S. could try to persuade North Korea to agree to restrictions on its delivery systems for nuclear weapons in return for substantial relief from economic sanctions, Brewer said.**

If unchecked, those delivery systems, including solid-fuel missiles, ICBM warheads and multiple re-entry vehicles, could allow North Korea to launch attacks faster and potentially evade U.S. countermeasures. Brewer recently co-authored an article in Foreign Affairs with Sue Mi-Terry, who worked on the National Intelligence Council under President Obama and served as a CIA analyst, arguing for a "realistic bargain" with North Korea.

The two, who are both now senior fellows at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, wrote that the fallout from the Covid-19 pandemic has exacerbated the regime's economic woes, and could mean North Korean leader Kim Jong Un would be open to cutting a deal. "Kim has not been easily swayed by economic pressure in the past," they wrote, but it is possible he is desperate enough for sanctions relief — and confident enough in his existing nuclear and missile capabilities — that he would trade some limits on his weapons programs for a significant reduction in sanctions."

In an interview, Terry told NBC News, **"Right now, we are looking to re-engage with North Korea in some form."** Victor Cha, who oversaw Korea policy in the George W. Bush administration, agreed. He noted that **North Korea has shut down its borders completely in an effort to tamp down the spread of Covid-19, including imports of food and medicine from**[**China**](https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/national-security/china-other-countries-now-top-u-s-intel-s-global-n1263950). In so doing, it has imposed a blockade on itself more draconian than sanctions, which don't usually cover humanitarian aid.

"This is about as maximum as the sanctions can be and it's all self-imposed," said Cha, who said Biden may want to offer pandemic-related aid as a gesture of goodwill. Even with a less ambitious objective, arms control negotiations with North Korea would be "really, really hard," Brewer said, particularly because Pyongyang has tended to fiercely resist any inspection or verification mechanisms. And any restrictions on the North's weapons systems would have to be verified on the ground, he said, not just via U.S. intelligence surveillance.

**Intelligence officials say North Korea has no intention of giving up its nuclear weapons, leaving the Biden administration faced with a series of unpalatable options.** They range from attempting to restart talks that have a history of failure to a military strike that could have disastrous repercussions. "North Korea will be a WMD threat for the foreseeable future, because [Kim Jong Un] remains strongly committed to the country's nuclear weapons, the country is actively engaged in ballistic missile research and development, and Pyongyang's (chemical and biological) efforts persist," says an unclassified intelligence assessment released Tuesday by the Office of the Director of National Intelligence.

After two failed presidential summits with Trump, **North Korea has greeted the incoming Biden team with a series of provocations, including harsh rhetoric and a short-range missile test.** **But so far, the regime has not taken the far more provocative steps of testing a long-range missile or a nuclear weapon**, both of which it has done previously. There is always a chance, however, that Biden's bid for negotiations fails, and North Korea falls back on its pattern of aggressive and attention-seeking behavior, including threatening its neighbors and testing dangerous weapons.

If that happens, the only real option short of war — covert CIA operations aside — is more economic sanctions, experts say. Critics point out that years of sanctions of various kinds have failed to convince the North to denuclearize. But in fact, observers say, the **U.S. has never mounted the sort of sustained and biting sanctions campaign against North Korea that the Obama administration used to push Iran to bargain**, resulting in a 2015 nuclear agreement from which Trump withdrew, but which Biden is seeking to restore.

**"It took three years of really hard sanctions for Iran to come to the negotiating table," Terry said. Those sanctions included penalties against European and other banks accused of violating the law by doing business with Iran**. So far, no administration has been willing to levy similar "secondary sanctions" against Chinese banks that keep North Korea afloat. "The U.S. imposed $8 billion to $9 billion in fines on U.K. and French banks for money laundering for Iran, but $0 in fines on Chinese banks for money laundering for North Korea," said Bruce Klingner, a former CIA analyst and Korea expert at the Heritage Foundation.

Klingner and other North Korea experts cite a single telling exception to that rule: An action against an obscure bank in Macau that they say could be a blueprint for putting the squeeze on North Korea. The Treasury Department imposed sanctions on Banco Delta Asia in 2005, accusing it of laundering money for the North Korean regime. Soon, more than two dozen financial institutions had pulled back from doing business with North Korea, imperiling its finances. Even many top U.S. officials were surprised at how hard the sanctions had bitten.

"You Americans finally have found a way to hurt us," Cha, then the point person on Korea policy, recalls an inebriated North Korean diplomat mumbling during a round of toasts at a negotiation. But two years after the sanctions on the bank were imposed — including the freezing of $25 million in North Korean assets — the U.S. gave the money back, paving the way for North Korea to re-enter the international banking system. It was part of a deal that was supposed to result in the unwinding of North Korea's nuclear weapons program.

That didn't happen, of course, yet no similar sanctions have been levied since. Joshua Stanton, who runs the blog [OneFreeKorea](http://freekorea.us/" \l "sthash.oOwNyq3S.dpbs" \t "_blank) and is one of the foremost experts on North Korea sanctions, argues that United Nations reports on sanctions compliance [regularly provide evidence](https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/s_2020_840.pdf) that could be used to penalize companies, but the U.S. has rarely acted on that material. "Why are we more tolerant of Chinese banks violating North Korea sanctions than Barack Obama was of European banks that violated Iran sanctions?" asked Stanton.

One reason, Cha and others say, is because the U.S. has long sought China's help in pressuring North Korea. "We've always been careful about going after Chinese," Cha said. "It's a balancing act — there's a desire to have Chinese cooperation in the negotiations." In order for diplomacy to work, it must be backed by a credible threat of force, the former Trump administration official and other experts say.

"The only way to get the North to agree to anything is sanctions plus a military threat, and diplomatic pressure," the former official said.

In response to questions from NBC News, a spokesperson for the National Security Council said, "**The North Korea review is in its final stages and we're not going to get ahead of that."**