



The U.N. and North Korean-Iranian Weapons Proliferation

The Iranian-North Korean challenge: Through their cooperation to avoid treaty commitments and acquire weapons of mass destruction, North Korea and Iran test the limits of the United Nations and its ability to respond. North Korea and Iran are suspected of sharing technology for ballistic missiles, nuclear weapons material, and may even be cooperating on nuclear bomb designs.

Both countries challenge the global nuclear non-proliferation system. North Korea has tested nuclear weapons twice, on 9 October 2006 and 25 May 2009. Iran claims its program is entirely civilian and has not tested a nuclear weapon. In September 2009 Iran admitted to having a second, previously secret nuclear plant that can be used to develop fissile material, the most essential ingredient for nuclear weapons, something that the outside world suspected for a long time. Both countries have tested medium range ballistic missiles and space launch vehicles. Iran successfully launched its first satellite into orbit on 3 February 2009, and North Korea has tried unsuccessfully, most recently with a failed launched attempt on 5 April 2009. Meanwhile, ships carrying rocket and nuclear technology are suspected to be shuttling between the two countries.

Caught in the middle: The United Nations is under stress on how to further address the situation of shipping nuclear weapons, ballistic missiles and other dangerous weapons. North Korea and Iran escalate matters further by threatening the international community and then back down for international aid but have persisted in their gathering of nuclear technology and weapons. Ships have been suspected of shipping radioactive material and other dangerous weapons that could possibly contaminate other goods onboard the ships. Iran and North Korea have been suspected of selling technology and possibly weapons on the black market.

How does the U.N. stop nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles from reaching the wrong hands? What actions can the U.N. take to make peace with Iran and North Korea to assure that possible weapons are kept safe? Can the U.N. take actions on the ships suspected of carrying dangerous weapons or is it crossing national sovereignty? Rising nuclear capabilities expose weakness in the UN system, which is best to establish principles for all nations rather than specific action against a few.

Serious issues like this often paralyze the international community. American opposition to the new nuclear programs is well known, but this is not enough for Israel, which has repeatedly demanded military action, not sophisticated enough for European who insist on enhanced inspections through the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), and too confrontational for China and Russia, both of whom need cooperation from Iran and would suffer from the collapse of the North Korean government. Only leadership and compromise can assure the UN an effective role in the resolution of such controversies.

Nobody's pal, and proud of it: North Korea allowed IAEA inspectors to some nuclear sites in the 1990s but not to sites suspected of nuclear production. In 1994, North Korea offered to halt its military nuclear program in return for \$5 billion of fuel and two civilian power generating nuclear reactors. In 2002, president George Bush Jr. included North Korea as part of the infamous "axis of evil". Later that year, North Korea threw out UN inspectors after the shipment



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of fuel oil was suspended. North Korea responded by restarting its reactor near the village of YongByon. The *Six Power Talks* between the China, Japan, North and South Korea, Russia and the United States were intended to resolve the dispute, but they faltered. Instead, North Korea tested its first nuclear device—a small test described by experts as a fizzle—on 9 October 2006 and declared it had enough plutonium to use in a nuclear bomb, but also offered to give up its capability in return for aid and security guarantees. A breakthrough in early 2007 promised quick resolution of the issue, but neither Washington or North Korea moved quickly and momentum toward progress was lost. North Korean missile tests—two of which crossed over Japan—further undermined the prospects for compromise.

North Korea's second nuclear test—a much more powerful detonation in May 2009—was condemned by most countries and led to *U.N. Security Council resolution 1874*. With much greater unity than ever before, the U.N. unanimously imposed tougher sanctions including halting all weapons trade with North Korea, excluding small arms. This is especially important since arms exports are essentially North Korea's only source of foreign currency income. There have been several ships that have been halted or followed because of suspected cargo, ranging from radioactive material to ballistic missiles. North Korea helped Pakistan establish its ballistic missile industry and continues to work with Iran. The Shahab-3, currently Iran's largest ballistic missile—also used for its April 2009 space launch—appears identical to North Korea's NoDong rockets. The countries also appear to cooperate on nuclear technology, but this cannot be confirmed.

Iran is a large country in a crucial geographic location. From an American perspective, Iran is the geographic key to both Afghanistan and Iraq. Iran is a signatory of the 1968 Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (North Korea withdrew from the treaty in 1993), and continues to allow required inspections of its nuclear facilities by the Vienna-based IAEA. As shown by revelation of the Qom enrichment plant in September, though, it also conceals key facilities. Iran has an elected president, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, but the ruler with the most power is religious leader Ayatollah Khomeini. Iran has another very influential body called the Guardian Council which can veto election results which might have been influential in this year's presidential election. Iran is very nationalist and often resists all foreign pressure. It carries bitter memories of rule by Britain in the early 20th Century, and nearly being occupied by the Soviet Union (Russia) in the 1940s. Its first democratically elected government was toppled by the United States in 1953, a fact every Iranian knows well. Immediately after the evolution of 1979 that toppled the Shah and brought religious leaders to power, it fought a bitter eight-year war with Iraq. Today it is a major oil and natural gas exporter, but with a rapidly growing population (some 70 million today) it fears running out and sees nuclear power as essential to its future.

Israel is within range of Iranian Shahab-3 missiles. Larger Iranian missiles may be used to target Eastern Europe. The United States has helped Israel build Arrow missile defenses, designed to counter this threat. In 2007, President Bush announced a highly controversial missile defense system to protect against possible Iranian Intercontinental Ballistic Missiles (ICBMs).



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Based in the Czech Republic and Poland, this was angrily denounced by Moscow as a response to a non-existent threat that could only be aimed at Russia. President Obama has shelved this plan—no Iranian ICBM threat is in sight—and replaced it with sea-based interceptors operated by the U.S. Navy.

No friends, no brokers? Traditionally, North Korea and Iran both relied on support in the U.N. from the Non-Aligned Movement, the bloc of countries that became independent in the 1950s and '60s and oppose cooperation with their former colonial rulers. Iranian and North Korean excess have tested that support. Arab countries are frightened of the rise of Iran, an alien culture dominated by Shiite Islam, heretical to Arab Sunni Muslims. Russia treats Iran gently, concerned about instability on its southern border regions. Russia has also agreed to sell S-300 missile systems to Iran to strengthen its air defenses. China relies on Iran for much of its oil, and hesitates to criticize it. Countries of the European Union are more critical, but unwilling to consider outright war. Venezuela recently has emerged as Iran's most outspoken ally against the West.

How does the U.N. negotiate a peaceful ending to the situation? Should the U.N. stress universal principles for all countries, or should it focus on particular countries that it believes are acting dangerously? Can its 192 sovereign states agree?

Get started: YOUR country's approach to crisis diplomacy

Country background at BBC News Country Profiles (facts, leaders, perspectives and links on all countries) http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/country_profiles/default.stm

Country background at CIA World Factbook (history, people and governments for all countries) <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/>

UN Security Council Resolution 1874, Condemns North Korea's Nuclear Test and WMD trade <http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2009/sc9679.doc.htm>

North Korean nuclear and missile programs: http://www.nti.org/e_research/profiles/NK/index_110.html

Iranian nuclear and missile programs: http://www.nti.org/e_research/profiles/Iran/index.html

More on the North Korean-Iranian WMD trade (following page):



The U.N. and North Korean-Iranian Weapons Proliferation

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