

The strategic military revamps combined with the structural modernization of the weapons of mass destruction, has enabled North Korea to secure the world's fourth-largest military force. North Korea's nuclear advancements have multiplied the concerns of the global [non-proliferation](#) regime and put forth a series of substantial security challenges for the United States and its Northeast Asian allies. Despite the attempts on part of the U.S to serve as an interlocutor and resolve the conflict in the Korean Peninsula by combining both poise and pressure, North Korea's blatant disregard for the fundamental principles of international security regimes remains unaffected. North Korea is of strategic importance to both the leading superpowers, U.S and China. As a result, the Chinese attempts at keeping the Northern Peninsula out of the US's reach has deepened the crisis. The inadequacies of the recent diplomatic exchanges of North Korea with the United States and South Korea has facilitated the possible [reproachment](#) between Kim Jong Un and Xi Jinping, who continues to condemn the international sanctions on North Korea. The evident reluctance on part of North Korea to denuclearize its regime points towards the growing risk of military escalation, thereby posing a significant challenge to the international community. This calls for effective collective action to prevent the crisis from escalating any further.

Though the tensions between the United States and North Korea were heightened by the Trump administration's pronouncement of retaliating the North Korean threats with "[fire and fury](#)", no other U.S president had earlier attempted to attend a summit meeting with Kim Jong Un, this move indeed resulted in several changes to the U.S Policy on North Korea. From Obama's approach of "strategic patience" to Trump's method of "[massive pressure and engagement](#)", and now Biden's "step by step" strategy, each one of these policies aimed at denuclearising the Northern Peninsula by strengthening the bilateral and multilateral ties to prevent North Korea from threatening and challenging the U.S. But with the development of ICBM by Kim's regime, there is a multifold increase in the nuclear threat to the U.S. North Korea intends to undermine the US's policy of deterrence and subsequently aims to restrain the presence of the U.S military in the Korean Peninsula. At this stage, a Korean War can prove extremely detrimental to the interest of the US as, Gary Luck, the former U.S military commander in the Republic of Korea (ROK) [warned](#), that it will end up costing a million lives, hundreds of billions of dollars and industrial damage amounting to a trillion dollars. North Korea's proliferation sheet has a [long list](#) of countries, including missile and nuclear trade with Pakistan, missile sales to Egypt, Libya, Yemen, and others, chemical weapons aid to Syria and assistance to Iran's ballistic missile programs. It becomes important to highlight the cybersecurity threats posed by North Korea with recent UN Security reports indicating an amount of \$670 million stolen in the form of foreign currency and cryptocurrency by [state-sponsored hackers](#). The development and dispensation of these weapons of mass destruction along with enhanced cyberattack

capabilities can result in catastrophic consequences for the entire global community.



Image source: CFR

The relationship between China and North Korea has often been characterized as an ideological relic. But Beijing has [significant economic and political leverage](#) over Pyongyang, as it continued its ties with the Northern Peninsula, despite the collapse of the Six-Party Talks, followed by North Korea's nuclear testing and provocative military action against South Korea, to list a few. China's support of North Korea also stems from its [concerns](#) of the inflow of refugees from the region, the contamination from the use of hazardous weapons, the uncertainty around South Korea's stance and the growing competition with the U.S. China's close relations with North Korea also helps it manage the relations with the U.S by serving as a key component in brokering the denuclearization deal. Despite several fallouts, the recent events suggest the rekindling of friendship between the two nations with exchanges and visits beyond diplomatic talks and China's promise to fund the completion of the New Yalu River bridge. China played a crucial role in the construction of the 50-megawatt reactor at Yongbyon in the 1980s and [evidence](#) suggests that the North Korean uranium enrichment and nuclear design plans were originally obtained from China.

This makes the inclusion of China quintessential for the execution of a strategic plan towards denuclearization followed by the enforcement of a peaceful regime.

As both U.S and China grapple with the issue of North Korea, there is a visible divergence in the interest of both the state actors. While China is more inclined towards achieving stability than proliferation in the Northern Peninsula, the United States has the opposite ranking. Despite several diplomatic engagements, Kim's unwillingness to relinquish the nuclear arsenals serves as a testament to the need for considerable changes in the policies to deal with the ongoing crisis. The process of denuclearization has to be executed in different phases of diplomatic dialogue. Rather than pushing for denuclearisation at the early stages of negotiation, the [focus](#) should be shifted to stopping the further production of fissile material and testing nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles. The international community should respond by imposing heavy export controls to increase the cost of WMD-related material and technology and this, in turn, will slow down the North Peninsula's acquisition of nuclear armament. The act of overestimating the threat can be as deleterious as the act of underestimating it, therefore gaining a proper estimate of North Korea's defence capabilities becomes imperative and hence continued vigilance is required. China serves as North Korea's only ally, therefore China's cooperation to realize the verifiable, and irreversible dismantlement of North Korea's nuclear program is [essential](#). Offering a [package deal](#) to North Korea, where the nuclear weapons and the ruling ideology is traded off for security guarantees, market-oriented economic reform and opening, a blueprint for economic modernization, and an international development fund to help the country retrieve from the crisis appears to be a viable solution. Therefore, the deficiencies of the past policy decisions need to be done away with in favour of renewed diplomatic strategy. The coming together of two superpowers to attain the common objective can eventually lead to the creation of a more peaceful and secure world.



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