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Historical Security Council Issue #2:
The question of the North Korean nuclear crisis.

30th of March, 1994

The North Korean nuclear crisis was a situation surrounding the nation's nuclear program. The catalyst for the crisis was the threat that North Korea would withdraw from the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) in 1993. Pyongyang rejected inspections by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and announced its intent to leave the NPT[1].

The background of the crisis began decades earlier. The North Korean nuclear program started in the 1950s but only began in earnest in 1989 with the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union, the main economic ally of North Korea which had provided its support for 45 years. In 1956, the Soviet Union began training North Korean scientists and engineers, allowing the DPRK to acquire the "basic knowledge" to initiate a nuclear program[2]. Three years later, North Korea and the USSR signed a nuclear cooperation agreement. Over the next 30 years Moscow continued to provide the DPRK with nuclear training and technology. In the 60's the NPT was drafted, according to the UN , the "objective [of the treaty] is to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons and weapons technology, to promote cooperation in the peaceful uses of nuclear energy and to further the goal of achieving nuclear disarmament and general and complete disarmament"[3]. In 1962, North Korea signaled that their nuclear program was well underway, with the Foreign Minister Pak Song Chol writing a critique of the treaty to the USSR Ambassador, "who can impose such a [non proliferation] treaty on countries that do not have nuclear weapons, but

[1] Council on Foreign Relations, "North Korean Nuclear Negotiations: A Brief History," Council on Foreign Relations, 2024, https://www.cfr.org/timeline/north-korean-nuclear-negotiations.
[2] Derek Bolton, "Ref 0072 North Korea's Nuclear Program," 2012, https://www.americansecurityproject.org/ASP%20Reports/Ref%200072%20-%20North%20Korea%E2%80%99s%20Nuclear%20Program%20.pdf.
[3] (United Nations, "Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) – UNODA," United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs (United Nations), accessed July 2, 2025, https://disarmament.unoda.org/wmd/nuclear/npt/.

are perhaps successfully working in that direction."[4]. The treaty first opened for signature in 1968, later entering into force in 1970, at this time, the DPRK did not ratify the agreement. Throughout the 1970's North Korea found itself in a series of disagreements surrounding their nuclear program. Leader Kim Il-Sung's requests for nuclear weapons assistance were denied by both China and the USSR. Addiotionally, South Korea refused the North's offer to forge a joint, covert, nuclear program.

By the mid-80's North Korea reached a "dangerous level of nuclear capacity", the progress clearly related, though not entirely due, to the Soviet renewed decision to provide significant nuclear assistance to the country. However, the Soviets also imposed the condition that the DPRK join the NPT[5], which it honoured in 1985 when they ratified the treaty.

In the late 1980s, Soviet relations with the DPRK were strained due to increased contact with South Korea. Gorbachev chose to pursue a policy of trade and investment with South Korea, including a meeting with South Korean President Roh Tae-Woo in San Francisco in June 1990, followed by the Soviet recognition of South Korea. This caused a grave deterioration in Moscow's relations with Pyongyang, who considered this a Soviet betrayal[6]. South Korea's GDP became 15-20 times greater than the North's, this power imbalance was noted as one of the systemic factors driving North Korea's nuclear program.

In an effort to reconcile, the USSR and the USA signed the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START) in 1991 and the United States announced it would withdraw roughly one hundred nuclear weapons from South Korea. The situation seemed to be improving in the following

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[4] Ibid.
[5]Jacques E. C. Hymans, "Assessing North Korean Nuclear Intentions and Capacities: A New Approach," *Journal of East Asian Studies* 8, no. 2 (August 2008): 259–92, https://doi.org/10.1017/s1598240800005324.
[6]Sergey Radchenko, "Russia's Policy in the Run-up to the First North Korean Nuclear Crisis, 1991-1993 | Wilson Center," www.wilsoncenter.org, 2015, https://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/russias-policy-the-run-to-the-first-north-korean-nuclear-crisis-1991-1993.

year with the the governments of North and South Korea agreeing to “not test, manufacture, produce, receive, possess, store, deploy, or use nuclear weapons,” as well as ban nuclear reprocessing and uranium enrichment facilities[7].

As part of the NPT agreements, the DPRK was subject to International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) inspections. Although the IAEA inspections got off to a good start in mid-1992, the North Koreans were reluctant to open up some facilities, citing military secrets and fuelling suspicions that Pyongyang was hiding weapons-grade plutonium[8]. The 1993 Team Spirit exercises, a joint military training of the United States and South Korean Military, exacerbated the tension as they were interpreted by Pyongyang as a direct security threat. The frustration with South Korea and the United States, and that their agreement to inspections led only to recriminations, pushed the North Koreans to announce on 12 March 1993 that the country would withdraw from the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty[9].

As of March 30th, 1994, the starting date for debate, the crisis over the North's nuclear weapons program, and confrontations over inspections of North Korea's nuclear facilities deepened. One document records a clear warning from North Korean military officials during a meeting at Panmunjom: "this will not be a situation like the Iraq war. We will not give you time to collect troops around Korea to attack us. We will not attack the South first, but if it is clear you are going to attack, then we will attack."[10].

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[7]Council on Foreign Relations, “North Korean Nuclear Negotiations: A Brief History,” Council on Foreign Relations, 2024, https://www.cfr.org/timeline/north-korean-nuclear-negotiations.
[8] Ibid.
[9]Sergey Radchenko, “Russia’s Policy in the Run-up to the First North Korean Nuclear Crisis, 1991-1993 | Wilson Center,” www.wilsoncenter.org, 2015, https://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/russias-policy-the-run-to-the-first-north-korean-nuclear-crisis-1991-1993.
[10]Robert A. Wampler, “Reading the North Korean Tea Leaves: The Perpetual Struggle to Fathom Pyongyang’s Motives and Goals,” Gwu.edu, 2011, https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB421/.

Focus of Debate:

Debate should focus on reaching an agreement surrounding nuclear power held by non-P5 states. Additionally, the issue of nuclear weapons in general is central to the discussion. Delegates should consider other major world events of the time such as the fall of the Soviet Union and the Gulf War. The aim is to reach a solution that respects the agreements made in the NPT. It is vital that delegates represent attitudes and information available to their nations as of the 30th of March, 1994, and consider their nation's views on nuclear weapons.

Relevant Resolutions and Documents:

https://treaties.unoda.org/t/npt

- The Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), opened for signature on the 1st of July 1968, and entered into force on the 5th of March 1970.

http://unscr.com/en/resolutions/825

- UNSC resolution urging North Korea to reconsider its withdrawal from the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and abide by its international obligations.

https://armscontrolcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/START-I-Fact-Sheet.pdf

- The agreement between President George H.W. Bush and Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev, known as the START treaty, limits the deployment of offensive nuclear weapons abroad.

https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB421/docs/19940131.pdf

- American Special Report on China's potential response to a North Korean attack.

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