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# North Korea is a nuclear power beyond all control



The nuclear arms control regime on the Korean Peninsula no longer functions. Institutions exist, but without access to the field, there is no verification, and without verification, there is no control.

In mid-April, Rafael Grossi, Director of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), warned in Seoul that the agency was monitoring the construction of a new facility in Yongbyon, North Korea, which evidence suggests is intended for uranium enrichment.

The assessment indicates increased capacity that may result in a rise in the number of nuclear warheads.

The key fact is this: the agency has no access to North Korea. No inspections, no samples, no physical checks. All estimates are based on satellite images and indirect indicators. IAEA inspectors have not had access to North Korea since 2009.

That is not control; it is observation without the possibility of confirmation.

## System without basic function

The IAEA exists to verify, not to assume. Its role under the [Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons](#) is based on a physical approach: inspectors on site, samples from the facility, direct monitoring of processes. None of this is present on the Korean Peninsula.

North Korea expelled the inspectors, abandoned the agreement, and closed all channels of inspection. Since then, there has been no verification, only observation from afar.

Currently, estimates rely on satellite imagery, facility performance analysis, and comparison with established models. This offers indications, but not certainty.

**No country has a reliable understanding of the actual size of the North Korean arsenal**

Therefore, terms such as "probably" or "estimate indicates" reflect data limitations. In the case of Yongbyon, the conclusion regarding the new facility is based on its similarity to previously identified facilities in dimensions, layout, and technical elements. This is a reasonable analysis, but it does not constitute proof.

That is precisely the problem: the system that should confirm the facts is now operating without the ability to do so. Such an assessment may be correct or wrong. There is no way to verify it.

This means the international community does not have a reliable picture of the fundamental question: what is Pyongyang's actual **nuclear capacity**.

Western intelligence estimates range from several dozen nuclear warheads. This is not hard data, but a working estimate based on limited information.

No country has a reliable understanding of the actual size of the North Korean arsenal, the exact number of weapons, their condition, or their degree of operability. This means a key security fact is estimated rather than known.

## A prolonged absence of consistent policy

The explanation that Washington is currently focused on Iran and the Middle East is accurate, but it does not address a problem that has persisted for three decades.

American policy towards North Korea lacks continuity, alternating between brief periods of intense diplomacy and prolonged intervals with neither negotiation nor genuine pressure. These interruptions are not neutral.

Any pause in policy towards Pyongyang leads to a period without pressure, during which North Korea continues to advance its nuclear and missile capabilities unimpeded.

This pattern is evident after the failure of the 2019 **Hanoi summit** between Donald Trump and Kim Jong-un. Since then, there has been no serious diplomatic process, but continuous technical progress has occurred.

### North Korea has expanded its conventional capabilities and opened a new dimension of military cooperation with Russia

During this period, North Korea has developed more reliable intercontinental ballistic missiles, transitioned to solid-fuel systems that reduce launch preparation time and the likelihood of timely detection, and improved the operational usability of these systems.

This means capabilities evolve in real time, while the political framework remains unchanged. The difference between these processes explains why the current situation is not the result of a single crisis or mistake, but the consequence of a prolonged absence of consistent policy.

**North Korea** has also expanded its conventional capabilities and opened a new dimension of military cooperation with Russia.

In 2026, with ongoing ballistic tests and no diplomatic process, the issue of the Korean Peninsula is not resolved; it has simply been sidelined. This does not change the situation on the ground. On the contrary, it enables Pyongyang to continue development without political pressure.

### Seoul's lack of independent instruments

South Korea's position remains constrained. Seoul formally advocates dialogue and denuclearisation, but that goal no longer has an operational basis. North Korea shows no willingness to negotiate, and South Korea lacks the instruments to change that stance independently.

In practice, official policy serves as a political line to be maintained but has no real influence on Pyongyang's behaviour. Seoul cannot influence Pyongyang's decisions independently, as all relevant instruments are tied to the United States, including security guarantees, economic measures, and political initiatives.

Without this framework, any South Korean initiative remains ineffective, regardless of its content or intent.

This is evident in Pyongyang's response to attempts to initiate dialogue. There is no stage in which positions are examined, no exchange of terms, and no effort to sustain the process even at a minimal level. The responses pre-emptively close any possibility of further conversation.

### South Korea is shifting its security policy towards strengthening its own military capabilities

This means the issue is not that negotiations are difficult, but that the other side currently has no reason to enter the negotiation process at all.

Meanwhile, South Korea is shifting its security policy towards strengthening its own military capabilities, as shown by the launch of a nuclear-powered submarine programme supported by the United States.

This signals a shift from seeking a political solution to building capacity for long-term deterrence.

Previously, the development of such systems would have raised serious concerns about the spread of sensitive military technologies.

Today, it is seen as an expected response to a situation where there is no negotiation, no control, and no prospect of limiting the North Korean programme through political means.

This clearly demonstrates a shift in framework: security policy is no longer based on the

assumption that denuclearisation is an achievable goal, but on the assessment that the current situation must be balanced in the long term by military means.

## Russia as a factor of stability for Pyongyang

The most significant change compared to the previous period is **Russia's** role.

From 2024, relations between Moscow and Pyongyang have gained concrete substance, including **military cooperation**, political alignment, and protection in the **UN Security Council**.

This has altered North Korea's position; it is no longer under the same level of pressure as previously.

**The IAEA formally states that there is no confirmation of the transfer of Russian nuclear technology**

The consequences are clear. Sanctions are less effective than before. There is no real possibility of strengthening them further, as Russia is blocking these efforts. Pyongyang therefore has greater freedom to continue developing its nuclear programme without additional restrictions.

The IAEA formally states that there is no confirmation of the transfer of Russian nuclear technology. At the same time, it admits it has no means to verify this. That is the key point: it is not a question of whether a transfer exists, but that there is no mechanism to confirm or rule it out.

## The system exists. The function does not

There are no indications that the situation will change soon. North Korea continues to

develop its programme without external pressure to negotiate.



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The United States does not have an active initiative towards Pyongyang, and South Korea lacks the capacity to initiate the process independently.

The IAEA will continue to monitor the situation using satellite images and indirect data. That is currently the maximum possible. There are no inspections or field checks. This means the system formally exists but lacks its basic function.

The consequence is clear: North Korea is a nuclear state beyond any regime of control. There is no mechanism that can reliably determine the extent of its programme or limit it.

This is not a question of future escalation, but of an already established situation.