

[Simulation](#) from [Nuclear Proliferation](#)

# North Korean Nuclear Threat (UNSC)

North Korea has reportedly acquired the technological capability to hit North America with a nuclear weapon.

## Case Overview

*Fictional, set in the present day.* The Democratic People's Republic of Korea (North Korea) has for decades pursued its nuclear ambitions to the dismay of both Western countries and its neighbors in East Asia. It recently announced the successful launch of a satellite from a three-stage rocket, and U.S. and allied intelligence services conclude that North Korea now possesses the reentry technology for an intercontinental ballistic missile that could reach the North American west coast. The director of national intelligence has concluded that the missile launch, combined with North Korea's ongoing nuclear tests and its mastery of warhead miniaturization technology, means the country is capable of following through on past threats to fire a nuclear-armed missile against the United States. The president has called an emergency meeting of the United Nations Security Council to present this new intelligence and discuss an international response to North Korea's enhanced capabilities.

## Guide

## Global Literacy

Global literacy is the ability to understand and engage effectively in today's interconnected world. Today's interdependent global economy and geopolitical landscape connect America's interests more than ever to the actions and interests of other countries and their citizens. To ensure students understand this interconnected world, they need to be globally literate. [Learn more about global literacy.](#)

The United Nations is the largest and most prominent international organization. The membership of the UN includes nearly all the world's countries. It was established in 1945, after the end of World War II, by the United States and some four dozen other countries in an effort to build a more peaceful and cooperative postwar world. The United Nations has [four main priorities](#): to keep peace throughout the world, promote fundamental human rights, strengthen international law, and pursue "social progress" and higher standards of living.

One of the most important functions of the United Nations is the maintenance of international peace and security. This is primarily the task of the UN Security Council, a decision-making body that comprises fifteen countries. Five of these countries hold permanent seats and ten are elected on a rotating basis. The five permanent members (known as the P5) are the United States, China, France, Russia, and the United Kingdom. The council's main responsibilities are to evaluate threats to international peace and security and to promote the peaceful resolution of disputes. When a peaceful settlement cannot be reached, the Security Council can impose diplomatic or economic sanctions. The Security Council can even authorize using force to resolve conflicts and prevent new ones. The Security Council has addressed a variety of issues, such as civil wars, terrorism, arms control, and natural disasters.

Despite its prominent position the Security Council's influence is limited. Any action requires the unanimous agreement of the P5. This means that no resolution can be adopted if even one permanent member votes no—or vetoes—the measure. This kind of agreement is often difficult to reach, especially when a permanent member thinks its interests will be jeopardized if the measure passes. Moreover, the United Nations lacks its own military forces and has no enforcement power. In short, the Security Council can only do that to which its member states agree. These factors mean that countries, especially major powers, can bypass the Security Council or ignore its decisions. Nonetheless, the United Nations is the only organization with essentially universal membership, making it an important feature of international affairs.

Resources related to UN:

- [“What is the UN Security Council,”](#) CFR Education, April 25, 2023.
- [“Current Members | United Nations Security Council,”](#) United Nations.
- [“What Happens When the UN Security Council Can't Agree?,”](#) Better World Campaign, October 21, 2023.
- Séverine Autesserre, [“The Crisis of Peacekeeping: Why the UN Can't End Wars,”](#) *Foreign Affairs*, December 11, 2018.

Since its founding in 1945, the United Nations has grown to include 193 member states. The United Nations has several subsidiary bodies, and a network of offices and programs around the world. The nature of the issues on the UN agenda has evolved over time. The Cold War and its associated conflicts dominated for much of the twentieth century. Hostility between the United States and the Soviet Union held up much UN activity. During the Cold War, the Security Council was often deadlocked, given the veto each country held as a permanent member. After the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, this dynamic began to change. In the past twenty years, issues including climate change, terrorism, and international migration have shifted the UN focus away from interstate conflict. Increasingly, the focus is on problems that transcend national borders.

## Organs

The United Nations is divided into six principal organs or parts: the General Assembly, the Secretariat, the Economic and Social Council, the Trusteeship Council, the International Court of Justice (ICJ), and the Security Council.

The General Assembly deliberates on the widest range of issues, spanning all areas of the United Nations' work. The General Assembly is the only body in which all 193 UN member states are represented, each having one vote. General Assembly resolutions are nonbinding. In other words, they are recommendations.

The Secretariat carries out the institution's day-to-day work. Led by the secretary-general and comprising tens of thousands of staff members from various countries, it staffs UN offices around the world. The Secretariat administers peacekeeping missions and operates communications, financial, and many other functions. As the organization's chief administrative officer, the secretary-general attends sessions of UN bodies, consults with world leaders and others, reports on the work of the United Nations, and acts as a spokesperson.

The United Nations also includes the [Economic and Social Council](#). This body is tasked with coordinating and discussing economic, social, and environmental issues. The United Nations also includes the [Trusteeship Council](#), created to provide international supervision for decolonization and now largely inactive. Another organ of the United Nations is the [International Court of Justice](#) (ICJ), responsible for settling legal disputes between countries.

The Security Council is tasked with identifying and addressing threats to international security. In addition, it makes recommendations to the General Assembly for the appointment of the secretary-general and the admission of new members to

the United Nations. Security Council decisions are communicated through [resolutions](#). These are formal texts that outline steps to be taken and the reasoning behind those steps. In the absence of agreement, the body could also issue [presidential statements](#). Presidential statements are similar in content and form to a formal resolution but do not legally bind member states.

## Structure

### Membership

The United States, China, France, Russia, and the United Kingdom make up the permanent members of the council. The remaining ten members are elected by the General Assembly to serve two-year terms. In electing nonpermanent council members, the General Assembly considers two factors. It must consider the “contribution of Members of the United Nations to the maintenance of international peace and security and to the other purposes of the Organization.” This stipulation means that aggressive, norm-defying countries tend not to be elected to the council and that countries that contribute significantly to the United Nations (financially or in the form of personnel and equipment) appear more frequently. Second, nonpermanent members must reflect an equitable geographic distribution, meaning members must be elected from each of the major regions of the world.

### Presidency

The Security Council presidency is held on a rotating basis by both permanent and nonpermanent member states. The position rotates in English alphabetical order by country name, each country holding office for one month. The president presides over meetings and serves as the Security Council’s representative before all other UN organizations. However, the UN secretary-general, not the Security Council president, sets the agenda for council meetings. The president simply approves this agenda.

### Subsidiary Organs

Various subsidiary organs exist to support the Security Council’s mission and implement its resolutions. These range from committees on sanctions, counterterrorism, and nonproliferation to international criminal tribunals that prosecute those responsible for genocide and war crimes. The council also maintains partnerships or close relationships with a variety of other elements in the UN system, such as the [Department of Peacekeeping Operations](#), and the [International Court of Justice](#).

## Proceedings

Meetings of the Security Council are typically called when a state—even a nonmember (one of the [two observer states](#) at the United Nations or other states whose sovereignty is disputed)—brings a dispute to the Security Council’s attention. Meetings of the Security Council can also be called when the General Assembly refers a question to the council, or when the secretary-general raises a concern about international peace and security. Once the president decides that a meeting is necessary, they call for a session to address the issue.

Both UN members and nonmembers—the latter if they are parties to a dispute being considered by the Security Council—are invited to participate, though nonmembers do not have a vote in the council’s discussions. If a Security Council member is party to the dispute being discussed, it must abstain (in other words, formally refrain) from voting.

Both Security Council members and invited participants can introduce a draft of a resolution—a ruling or recommendation made by a UN body—expressing a Security Council decision. After debating proposals, any member can call for a vote. A resolution needs nine votes to pass. A dissenting vote from any of the five permanent Security Council members can defeat a resolution, no matter how many affirmative votes it receives. This powerful dissenting vote is known as the veto. Permanent members can use their veto for any reason. Typically, they do so to stop resolutions that threaten their national interests. Security Council members can also abstain from voting. In any case, a resolution passes as long as it receives nine votes and no permanent member exercises a veto. Permanent members sometimes abstain from a vote if they disagree with a resolution but are not sufficiently opposed to veto it.

## Powers, Functions, and Tools

If a resolution passes, the Security Council has several powers that it can use to ensure that resolution's implementation. Certain Security Council resolutions are considered legally binding on all UN member states. This means that countries are obligated to comply with the terms of the resolution. This power sets the Security Council apart from other UN organs, which are empowered only to issue recommendations.

The United Nations' founding document, the UN Charter, lays out the tools the Security Council can use to execute its work. These are established in Chapter VI and Chapter VII of the charter. Under [Chapter VI](#), the council can only make recommendations of how parties should resolve a dispute. Under Chapter VII, the council can use more forceful methods. Generally, resolutions under [Chapter VII](#) are considered legally binding.

### Chapter VI: Peaceful Settlement of Disputes

Chapter VI allows the Security Council to seek solutions to disputes by “negotiation, enquiry, mediation, conciliation, arbitration, judicial settlement, resort to regional agencies or arrangements, or other peaceful means.”

Actions taken under Chapter VI include

- referring legal disputes to the International Court of Justice,
- recommending terms for the settlement of conflicts,
- facilitating dispute resolution through a formal arbitration, and
- launching peacekeeping missions.

The recommendations made under Chapter VI are just that—recommendations. They cannot be imposed on the parties concerned without their consent.

[Peacekeeping missions](#) can fall under Chapter VI or Chapter VII. In the case of Chapter VI missions, forces are deployed to help maintain a peace agreement, cease-fire, or other such arrangement that has already taken hold between warring parties. Peacekeeping missions under Chapter VI can include unarmed observers, lightly armed troops, or both. Their goal is to prevent new outbreaks of conflict and peacefully resolve disputes that arise. UN personnel tend to be stationed along a boundary line and their role is usually to report infractions of peace agreements rather than to intervene. Chapter VI peacekeeping missions require the consent (or agreement) of the parties involved in the conflict, are considered impartial, and do not use force except in self-defense.

### Chapter VII: Maintaining or Enforcing Peace

Chapter VII addresses “action with respect to threats to the peace, breaches of the peace, and acts of aggression.”

Actions taken under Chapter VII include

- severing diplomatic relations;
- imposing economic sanctions, travel bans, and financial or diplomatic restrictions;
- creating international tribunals, such as those for Rwanda and the former Yugoslavia;
- establishing or modifying peace enforcement or peace-building missions; and

calling for military intervention, either by multinational forces (organized, e.g., by the North Atlantic Treaty Organization [NATO]) or by regional organizations (such as the African Union).

Unlike Security Council resolutions issued under Chapter VI, those adopted under Chapter VII are binding. Two examples of Chapter VII resolutions are Resolution 1695, which in 2006 imposed sanctions on North Korea for its nuclear program. Likewise, resolution 1973 in 2011 established the legal basis for military intervention in the Libyan civil war.

One of the most frequently used tools under Chapter VII is the imposition of [sanctions](#). Sanctions are restrictions on a country, organization, or individual, typically limiting the target's ability to travel, trade, or access financial resources. They can be used to discourage certain future actions, such as building nuclear weapons, to pressure a party to act, or to punish it for violating international rules. Sanctions can target entire sectors of a country's economy. Generally, the Security Council pursues targeted sanctions—sometimes called smart sanctions—against certain industries, businesses, or individuals. These can include arms embargoes, travel restrictions, or financial asset freezes.

Sanctions have become a popular tool because they offer a way to intervene in an issue without the risks and costs associated with using military force. However, sanctions have raised some concerns as well. Critics have argued that even highly targeted sanctions can have unintended consequences, especially on already vulnerable populations. Furthermore, the Security Council lacks a concrete method of enforcing its sanctions. Instead, it must rely on individual countries to enact them. If sanctions are weakly enforced, the target could possibly work around them, avoiding their effects and potentially discrediting the value of sanctions in the future.

If nonmilitary options, such as sanctions, fail to resolve a dispute, the Security Council can authorize a peace enforcement mission. Unlike Chapter VI peacekeeping missions, Chapter VII enforcement missions do not require the consent of the parties involved. [Chapter VII enforcement missions](#) are authorized to “take such action by air, sea, or land forces as may be necessary to maintain or restore international peace and security.” The personnel involved can include heavily armed troops and can use force in situations other than self-defense. Chapter VII peace enforcement missions can take different forms. Sometimes they are undertaken by UN peacekeeping forces and operate under UN command. In other instances they can be led by a coalition of member states authorized to do so by a Security Council resolution.

The line between Chapter VI and Chapter VII missions is not always clear. A Security Council resolution does not need to explicitly refer to the chapter it is invoking. A mission's mandate—or description of its mission—can change over time to adjust to changing circumstances; a mission established under Chapter VI can be expanded to also fall under Chapter VII if the situation evolves and requires a more robust intervention.

## Current Issues

The Security Council was able to greatly expand its activities at the end of the Cold War. Without the United States and the Soviet Union in direct opposition, the number of vetoes declined significantly. The council was able to take action on a greater range of issues, including civil conflicts and humanitarian crises. During the 1990s, the Security Council authorized more peacekeeping missions than it had in the previous forty years combined. It authorized UN-led missions such as those in Rwanda and the former Yugoslavia. The Security Council also authorized coalition operations such as the 1990 Gulf War. Following the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, international terrorism also came to the forefront of the council's agenda.

The Security Council has also broadened its view of international security in recent years, adopting resolutions on issues such as HIV/AIDS, the protection of women and children in humanitarian crises, and climate change. In 2015, the UN General Assembly adopted a series of seventeen Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) aiming to promote global economic development, environmental protection, and social well-being. The SDGs emphasize the interconnected nature of global challenges and the need for cooperation across governments and institutions. Accordingly, the Security Council has paid increasing attention to the ways in which social, economic, and environmental factors influence the maintenance of peace and security.

Despite this increased activity, the Security Council continues to face significant challenges. The United Nations greatly expanded its peacekeeping efforts after the Cold War. But peacekeeping missions have faced criticism for being underfunded, for being limited in scope, and for abuses committed by peacekeepers themselves. In some cases, such as in Rwanda in 1994, peacekeepers have been accused of [failing to prevent genocide](#). Those failures led many countries to argue for a new understanding of peacekeeping and foreign intervention. In 2005, UN member countries adopted the [responsibility to protect](#)

(R2P) doctrine. This doctrine establishes that countries have a responsibility to intervene in cases of genocide or crimes against humanity that a national government cannot or will not stop. This remains a nonbinding norm, and its applicability in specific situations is often disputed. Moreover, conflicting interests among the security council's veto-wielding permanent members often curtail the possibility of approving a robust intervention.

In recent years, renewed tension among the United States, China, and Russia has emerged as an obstacle to Security Council action. Observers and Security Council members themselves have [sharply criticized](#) the council's inability to take action on the Syrian civil war. This inability to take action is in spite of multiple reports of war crimes and an estimated death toll of at least [five hundred thousand people](#). Russia, an ally of Syria's government, has vetoed several resolutions aimed at stabilizing the conflict and alleviating the growing humanitarian crisis, arguing that any such resolution would be a violation of Syria's sovereignty. Vetoes have increased in the last decade, with Russia and the United States casting the majority of them.

These challenges have led many UN members, including the United States, to call for changes to the Security Council. Many observers argue that the council's composition, which allots the five permanent seats to the winners of World War II (the United States, China, France, Russia, and the United Kingdom), does not reflect the power structure of today's world. They argue instead for extending permanent membership to more countries and adjusting the regional distribution of permanent membership. These reforms could help better represent large and growing populations in Africa and South America. Another source of criticism has been the P5's veto, which, critics assert, undermines the council's ability to take action. In recent years, a growing number of UN member states—including France, a permanent member—have supported calls for P5 members to voluntarily refrain from using their veto power in situations involving mass atrocities. Other member states have suggested that the veto power be removed altogether.

Reform is controversial and complicated. Any reform of the Security Council would likely require an amendment to the UN Charter that is approved and ratified by a two-thirds vote of the General Assembly and then a vote in the Security Council. Permanent members of the Security Council would retain their usual right to veto. Given this, any reform of the UN Security Council that is not supported, or at least tolerated, by the P5 is unachievable, and garnering such support or tolerance will almost certainly prove impossible.

## Case Notes

Fuel a lively classroom discussion with simulations that put your students in the shoes of either the National Security Council or the UN Security Council.

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[Instructions](#)

[How to Run a CFR Simulation Role-Play](#)

## The Issue

The Democratic People's Republic of Korea, also known as North Korea, has been pursuing nuclear weapons for decades. This has led to growing concern among Western countries and North Korea's neighbors in East Asia. In September 2017, North Korea conducted its most powerful nuclear test yet. Following the test, North Korea declared that the country had perfected its nuclear warhead design. However, analysts doubt that North Korea has the rocket technology to accurately deliver a nuclear weapon to the continental United States. Still, most analysts agree that North Korea has a reliable nuclear weapons capability to strike Japan and South Korea.

The UN Security Council, alongside many individual countries, has condemned the nuclear testing and used [sanctions](#) to try to convince North Korea's leadership to give up its nuclear weapons. Despite these efforts, North Korea's leader, Kim Jong-un, continues to pursue the ability to strike the country's adversaries, mainly the United States, with a nuclear weapon. He is also determined to deter any initial conventional or nuclear attack by building a nuclear arsenal that could survive such a strike. Analysts believe that if Kim Jong-un gains these capabilities, dealing with the North Korean threat will become much more difficult for the United States and other countries.

## Hypothetical Decision Point

U.S. intelligence officials now believe, based on debris recovered from a recent North Korean satellite launch, that North Korea has the technology needed to reach the west coast of North America. The launch came days after Kim walked away from nuclear negotiations with the United States. Kim cited concerns over proposed inspections of its nuclear sites. The U.S. director of national intelligence has concluded that the launch means that the country is now capable of following through on past threats to fire nuclear-armed missiles at the United States. The United States has requested a meeting of the UN Security Council to present this new intelligence and discuss an international response to North Korea's enhanced capabilities.

## Background

At the end of World War II in 1945, the United States and the [Soviet Union](#) each helped liberate Korea from Japanese control. The two countries agreed to divide Korea at the thirty-eighth parallel into two occupation zones. The zones would later become North Korea (backed by the Soviet Union and China) and South Korea (backed by the United States). North and South Korean leaders each wanted to reunify the peninsula under their own leadership and thought that they could do so with the support of their backers. This led to the Korean War, a three-year conflict that started when North Korea invaded the South in an attempt to take control of the entire peninsula. The military conflict ended with an [armistice](#) in July 1953. To date, there has been no peace treaty to officially end the war. Throughout much of the [Cold War](#), the two Koreas, each backed by a superpower, competed politically, economically, and militarily for control of the entire peninsula. This struggle has continued to the present day.

North Korea's leaders have tried to develop nuclear weapons since at least the mid-1950s. They were impressed by the power of the [atomic](#) bomb that the United States used on Japan. North Korea was also on the receiving end of U.S. nuclear threats during the Korean War. Because of this, North Korean leaders came to see nuclear weapons as a way to ensure survival and enhance their status. This desire for nuclear weapons became even more pressing following the end of the Cold War when the Soviet Union collapsed. Without the support of its former ally, North Korea found itself in a more vulnerable position. By the early 1990s, South Korea had a much larger economy, a better international reputation, and an increasingly powerful military. It was also a young democracy and U.S. ally. North Korea, by contrast, was in economic ruin, militarily weak—at least in terms of conventional, nonnuclear, military power—and largely isolated from the rest of the world (other than China).

North Korea's continuing nuclear development became a growing concern for many countries in the 1990s when North Korea threatened to pull out of the [Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty \(NPT\)](#), designed to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons technology. Initially, efforts to negotiate with North Korea over nuclear weapons produced some success, with the country promising in 1994 to dismantle its nuclear program. By 2003, however, these efforts had collapsed. That year, North Korea, then led by Kim Jong-il (Kim Il-sung's son), withdrew from the NPT, kicked out international inspectors from a nuclear facility, and prepared to conduct nuclear tests and declare itself a nuclear weapons state. Attempts to bring it back to the negotiating table through an initiative known as the [Six Party Talks](#) failed over the following years. On October 9, 2006, North Korea conducted its first nuclear test. The UN Security Council condemned the test and imposed [sanctions](#) in response.

North Korea's continuing nuclear development became a growing concern for the United States in the 1990s. In 1992, Pyongyang threatened to pull out of the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT), designed to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons. Initially, efforts to negotiate the issue with North Korea seemed successful. In 1994, the country promised to dismantle its nuclear program. By 2003, however, these efforts had collapsed. That year, North Korea pulled out of the NPT, kicked out international inspectors from a nuclear facility, and prepared to conduct nuclear tests. Attempts to bring North Korea back to the negotiating table through an initiative known as the Six Party Talks failed over the following years, and on

October 9, 2006, North Korea conducted its first nuclear test.

North Korea's longtime dictator Kim Jong-il died in 2011. The rise of his son Kim Jong-un, gave some analysts and politicians hope that North Korea would return to the negotiating table. However, North Korea has continued to develop its nuclear program. The country conducted nuclear tests in 2013, twice in 2016, and in 2017.

So far, economic sanctions imposed by the United Nations, as well as individual countries, have not deterred North Korea's commitment to developing nuclear weapons. As a result, tensions on the Korean Peninsula have escalated. Although Kim has participated in denuclearization talks with both the United States and South Korea in recent years, these negotiations produced limited results. Since failed summits in 2019, North Korea entered a period of increasing diplomatic isolation. During this time, it repeatedly halted communications with both the United States and South Korea. The coronavirus [pandemic](#) along with ongoing sanctions has isolated North Korea economically as well. Despite strong financial pressures, North Korea continued to strengthen its nuclear development in 2020, testing short-range ballistic missiles and claiming that its nuclear ambitions are a [deterrence](#) strategy against U.S. threats.

Even amid growing isolation, North Korea is not completely without partners. China has opposed North Korean nuclear development, but also sees North Korea as a strategic buffer against a U.S.-allied South Korea. Accordingly, although it has supported some UN sanctions against the country, it has [undermined others and advocated for some to be lifted](#). Observers also claim that China regularly helps North Korea evade sanctions by exporting goods like coal to the country.

Russia also maintains a strategic relationship with North Korea. Like China, Russia has historically opposed North Korean nuclear development. However, Russia sees the country as a strategic partner in its opposition to the United States. Following Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, Russia has sought closer relations with North Korea. Russia has specifically sought to buy artillery shells from North Korea to replenish its dwindling stocks. This renewed cooperation is especially concerning for the United States. [Analysts fear](#) that in exchange for military supplies, Russia could provide North Korea with rocket technology and materials that could enable the country to improve its missile program.

## Role of the UN Security Council

North Korea's pursuit of a nuclear weapons program is motivated principally by the desire to develop a deterrent against an attack by external forces, particularly the United States or South Korea. North Korea's threats have been directed primarily toward the United States and its allies. The Kim regime regards the U.S. military presence in South Korea (which [hosts nearly 28,000 U.S. troops](#) as of September 2023) as an obstacle to a North Korea-led unification of the peninsula. It also sees the United States as the most dangerous military threat it faces.

The most important priority for the UN Security Council on this matter is eliminating North Korea's nuclear weapons program. The Security Council is a core part of global efforts to stop the spread, or proliferation, of nuclear weapons. Among other things, it is charged with responding to violations of the NPT. Most frequently, the Security Council acts by imposing [sanctions](#) on any country or group that violates the treaty. Since North Korea's withdrawal from the NPT in 2003, the Security Council has been at the center of international efforts to halt the country's nuclear development. After Pyongyang's first nuclear test in 2006, the Security Council unanimously approved a series of sanctions that have grown increasingly severe in response to tests.

North Korea already has the capability to hit South Korea and Japan with nuclear missiles. Advancements in its nuclear technology and missile capabilities could pose a serious security threat not just to the United States but also to its allies. Furthermore, the capabilities could pose a threat to the Asia-Pacific region more broadly. A nuclear attack by North Korea on one of its rivals could destroy cities and kill millions of people, potentially triggering a devastating conflict in the region.

North Korea's nuclear progress and the failure of international responses could encourage other countries to acquire nuclear weapons. Countries such as Japan and South Korea could face domestic political pressure to respond to acquire nuclear weapons of their own to deter North Korea. Such pressure would be a defeat for global nonproliferation efforts. Likewise, it would make any conflict in Northeast Asia far more destructive.

Any response to North Korea's nuclear development will need the approval of all five of the Security Council's [veto](#)-wielding permanent members (P5). Although the Security Council has been unanimous in its past condemnations of North Korea's nuclear endeavors, the diverging interests of the P5, especially of China, Russia, and the United States, could get in the way of any new action. China has offered only a mixed record of supporting and upholding sanctions against North Korea. It values North Korea as a buffer between itself and the thriving capitalist democracy of South Korea. Russia has increasingly seen North Korea as a strategic partner, especially since the war in Ukraine began. Both countries have reasons to oppose harsh penalties against North Korea.

## Preparation and Role-Play

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[Video: How to Run a CFR Simulation Role-Play](#)

## Roles Overview

Print these [custom placards](#) for use during your simulation. If you need to edit them, make a copy to your Google Drive.

## Roles

### **Permanent Member**

There are five permanent UN Security Council members, known as the P5: the United States, China, France, Russia, and the United Kingdom. Permanent members wield veto power, meaning they can block a resolution simply by voting "no." P5 representatives are responsible for attending meetings, presenting motions, making statements, and voting on behalf of their government, using a veto when necessary.

A P5 country's representative's goals are to

- promote their government's interests and values at the United Nations, specifically by drafting and negotiating Security Council documents;
- liaise and consult with other member states, nonmember states, UN staff, and other interested parties on behalf of their government; and
- analyze how policy options will affect the interests, reputation, and relationships of their country.

### Issues for Consideration

- How does North Korea, and particularly the situation presented in this case, threaten your country's national security?
- What national interests are at stake in this crisis? How should they be prioritized?

- What is the nature of the relationship between your country and North Korea? How does this inform potential national action in this case?
- What is your country's relationship with other parties relevant to this case? How does this affect your response to the proposed policy options?
- What are the costs, benefits, and risks that accompany each policy option open to the UN Security Council?
- Are there any policy options that you absolutely do not support? If this policy option came to a vote, would you use a [veto](#)? Why or why not?
- How has your country's veto usage changed over time? What issues does your country tend to use a veto on?
- Have other permanent members used vetoes on votes regarding this issue? What kind of policy options or resolutions have they vetoed? How should this influence your negotiation strategy within the Council?
- What are the trade-offs raised by the potential policy options in this case?
- What are the positions and interests of other countries and organizations that have a stake in North Korea's nuclear proliferation? How might they affect the current situation?

## Nonpermanent Member

Ten nonpermanent members—two-thirds of the council—are elected by the UN General Assembly to serve two-year terms. The representatives of nonpermanent members are responsible for attending meetings, presenting motions, making statements, and voting on behalf of their government. Because nonpermanent members are elected to represent one of five regional groups, they are often expected, but not required, to consult with other nonpermanent members of their regional group to ensure they are putting forward a unified policy.

A nonpermanent member country's representative's goals are to

- promote their government's interests and values at the United Nations, specifically by drafting and negotiating Security Council documents;
- liaise and consult with other member states, nonmember states, UN staff, and other interested parties on behalf of their government; and
- analyze how policy options will affect the interests, reputation, and relationships of their country.

## Issues for Consideration

- How does North Korea, and particularly the situation presented in this case, threaten your country's national security?
- What national interests are at stake in this crisis? How should they be prioritized?
- What is the nature of the relationship between your country and North Korea? How does this inform potential national action in this case?
- What is your country's relationship with other parties relevant to this case? How does this affect your response to the proposed policy options?
- Have permanent members used vetoes on votes regarding this issue? What kind of policy options or resolutions have they vetoed? How should this influence your negotiation strategy within the Council?
- What are the costs, benefits, and risks that accompany each policy option open to the UN Security Council?
- What are the trade-offs raised by the potential policy options in this case?
- What are the positions and interests of other countries and organizations that have a stake in North Korea's nuclear proliferation? How might they affect the current situation?

## UN Secretary-General

As the United Nations' chief administrative officer, the secretary-general attends sessions of UN bodies, consults with world leaders and other interested parties, issues reports on the work of the United Nations, and acts as a spokesperson for the organization. The secretary-general is the face of the UN system. Within the UN Security Council, the secretary-general represents the UN Secretariat and assists the council president by preparing agendas for meetings, maintaining the speakers list, and overseeing routine tasks such as the distribution of documents and the logistics for council meetings.

The Secretary-General's goals are to

- promote the maintenance of international peace and security by bringing relevant matters to the attention of the UN Security Council,
- build trust as an honest broker among the participants, and
- represent the interests of the UN Secretariat at the UN Security Council by making statements and setting meeting agendas.

## Issues for Consideration

- How does North Korea, and particularly the situation presented in this case, threaten global security?
- What role should the United Nations play in resolving this crisis? What are the benefits and costs of [unilateral](#) versus [multilateral](#) responses?
- What is the nature of the relationship between the United Nations and North Korea? How does this inform potential UN action in this case?
- What are the costs, benefits, and risks that accompany each policy option open to the UN Security Council?
- What are the trade-offs raised by the potential policy options in this case?
- What are the positions and interests of UN Security Council member states and other organizations that have a stake in North Korea's nuclear proliferation? How might they affect the current situation?

## Guide to the Memorandum

Your assignment prior to the role-play is to prepare a set of prepared clauses for a potential Security Council resolution. These clauses, along with those of other students, will form the basis of the discussion in the role-play.

You should bring

- two to three preambular clauses that describe the issue at hand, consider the international context, and outline previous agreements and existing organizations; and
- three to four operative clauses that present responses to the situation.

Each operative clause should present a complete proposal. Make sure that your proposed solutions are within the powers of the Security Council and are practical. Your operative clauses might be designed to work in concert (perhaps economic sanctions, mediation, and a peacekeeping force) or might be a set of alternatives from which you hope one will be adopted (perhaps three peacekeeping proposals that differ in their details).

In writing each of your operative clauses, consider the following points:

- Who: Who is acting, and for whose benefit?
- What: What is the response specifically?
- When: When will it be implemented? Is there a deadline, a time frame, or recurrence?
- Where: Where will it be implemented specifically?
- Why: Why is this solution effective?

- How: How will this solution be implemented? If countries must support the response, how will they be persuaded to do so?
- Funding: How will the response be funded?

If your operative clauses start to get long and messy, use subsidiary clauses!

The goal should be to create clauses that include all the information necessary for putting the plan into action. It can be helpful to imagine an official tasked with carrying out the resolution and asking whether they have all the information they need to implement it.

## Guide to the Role-Play

- There is no right or wrong way to participate in a role-play, but the better prepared you are, the more likely you will be able to advance a position effectively, and the more you and your peers will get out of the experience.
- Be patient during the role-play. Do not hold back from sharing your perspective, but be sure to give others a chance to do the same.
- Where there are competing interests, make the judgment calls that you would make if you were a government official, as informed by your earlier consideration of potential trade-offs. Ensure that the consequences of various decisions are carefully weighed.

Round	Timing	Objectives	Procedural Notes
One: Public Meeting	2 to 3 minutes per participant	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Receive a five-minute briefing from the secretary-general on the issue to be discussed.</li> <li>2. Present opening statements.</li> <li>3. Crystalize the central questions of debate.</li> </ol>	During opening statements, the president of the UN Security Council will recognize country representatives in the order in which they request to speak, and no representative may speak again if others have not yet spoken. Following opening statements, country representatives are free to openly debate the statements made, evaluating the various positions on their merits.
Two: Informal Meeting	30 to 60 minutes	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Debate each participant's proposed clauses.</li> <li>2. Edit, add, or drop proposed clauses and combine them into one or more draft resolutions.</li> <li>3. Draft a presidential statement using proposed clauses and/or new material if no draft resolution appears acceptable to the group.</li> </ol>	The president will recognize country representatives in the order in which they request to speak. Representatives should limit their statements to one minute each, but if time allows the president may permit them to speak longer. The president may also invite any participant to speak as they deem it appropriate. Any participant may motion for a ten- to fifteen-minute break, during which representatives can move freely and work on their draft resolutions individually or in small groups.
Three: Public Meeting	30 to 60 minutes	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Hear summaries of any draft resolutions as well as arguments for and against adoption.</li> <li>2. Vote on draft resolutions in order of submission.</li> <li>3. Attempt to adopt a presidential statement by consensus if no resolutions are proposed or passed.</li> </ol>	The president will call first on the draft resolution's main author(s) and then on other countries that wish to make arguments for or against the resolution. To be adopted, Security Council resolutions must receive at least nine votes in favor and no dissenting votes (vetoes) from any of the five permanent members. A state may abstain, often to indicate ambivalence or mild disapproval (in contrast to strong opposition). According to the charter, abstentions are mandatory if the state is a party to the dispute in question. Abstentions by permanent members do not count as vetoes; the resolution will pass if it receives the necessary nine votes.

## Wrap-up

Fuel a lively classroom discussion with simulations that put your students in the shoes of either the National Security Council or the UN Security Council.

CFR Education simulations can be run for several days or weeks and include background readings, videos, and assignments to help students understand the situation and their roles.

## Instructions

### Role-Play How-To Video

## The Debrief

If time permits, you will participate in a debrief following the UN Security Council's final vote.

Be active in this debrief. The role-play might seem to be the most challenging part of the experience, but the debrief is equally important. It will reinforce what you learned during the role-play exercise and refine your analytical skills. It will also force you to step out of your role and to view the case from a personal perspective. You will have the opportunity to discuss any challenges you encountered as you worked through the discussion with your peers and how you felt about the UN Security Council vote.

The debrief will close with a reflection on the complexities and challenges of multilateral negotiations. This should help clarify your understanding of what you learned and answer any lingering questions. This exercise will also assist you in completing your final assignment, the policy review memo.

## Reflecting on the Experience

The following questions are proposed to guide the discussion in the debrief. This is not an exhaustive list and may vary depending on how your role-play exercise unfolded. If your class or group does not hold a debrief, these questions will nonetheless help you reflect on the role-play and write your written reflection:

- Which issues received adequate attention during the role-play? Which, if any, received excessive attention or were left unresolved?
- Did the group consider long-term strategic concerns, or was it able to focus only on the immediate issue and the short-term implications of policy options?
- Did time constraints affect the discussion and influence the drafting process?
- What techniques did you use to convince others that your policy position was the best option? What were successful strategies employed by others?
- What were the most significant challenges to your position? Did any make you rethink or adjust your position?
- Did your points cause anyone else to change their arguments or position?
- What political, economic, and other issues arose that you had not previously considered?
- How did the simulation change your perspective on multilateral negotiations?
- If you could go back, what would you have done differently in presenting and advocating your point of view?

## Written Reflection

The written reflection is your final assignment in the simulation. In the debrief discussion after the role-play, you and your peers went beyond the role you played and thought about the issue from a variety of perspectives. Now that the UN Security Council meeting and debrief are behind you, you can consider whether you personally support your recommended policy given the subsequent discussion. Shedding your institutional role and writing from a personal point of view, you will craft a policy review memo that outlines and reflects on the policy options discussed, incorporating and critiquing the UN Security Council's decision where appropriate.

No matter which role you played originally, take into account all that you have learned. Your instructor or facilitator will want to see if and how your understanding of the issue and of the policymaking process has evolved from that expressed in your position memo.

More details about the written reflection are available under Student Resources.

## Student Resources

Fuel a lively classroom discussion with simulations that put your students in the shoes of either the National Security Council or the UN Security Council.

CFR Education simulations can be run for several days or weeks and include background readings, videos, and assignments to help students understand the situation and their roles.

[Instructions](#) [How-To Video](#)

## Reading List

### Country Resources:

Essential facts about your country

- [CIA World Factbook](#)
- [BBC Country Profiles](#)

Information about your country's foreign policy

- [Blue Book | The United Nations Office at Geneva](#)

### Essential Resources

- From CFR Education:
  - [“North Korean Nuclear Threat Case Study,”](#) YouTube video, 3:46, posted by CFR Education, Nov 16, 2016.
  - [“What is Nuclear Proliferation?,”](#) YouTube video, 7:02, posted by CFR Education, September 21, 2021.
  - [“The Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty,”](#) CFR Education, July 27, 2023.
  - [“Tools of Nonproliferation,”](#) YouTube video, 3:02, posted by CFR Education, June 18, 2019.
- [“North Korea’s Missile Programme,”](#) *BBC*, August 10, 2017.
- [“North Korea’s Military Capabilities,”](#) Council on Foreign Relations, June 28, 2022.
- [North Korea](#), Nuclear Threat Initiative.
- [“North Korea Crisis in 300 Words,”](#) *BBC*, June 12, 2018.
- Alex Ward, [“9 Questions About North Korea You Were Too Embarrassed to Ask,”](#) *Vox*, Last Updated Jun 11, 2018.
- Yarno Ritzen, [“North Korea: All You Need to Know Explained in Graphics,”](#) *Al Jazeera*, September 17, 2017.

- *Wall Street Journal*, "[The Rogue-State Nuclear Missile Threat](#)," February 11, 2016.
- Mark Thompson, "[Is It Time to Attack North Korea?](#)" *Time*, March 9, 2016.
- [YOUTUBE PLAYLIST](#)

#### Additional Resources

- Jayshree Bajoria and Beina Xu, "[The Six Party Talks on North Korea's Nuclear Program](#)," Council on Foreign Relations, September 30, 2013.
- "[What to Know about the Sanctions on North Korea](#)," Council on Foreign Relations, July 27, 2022.
- "[Nuclear Deterrence in the 21st Century](#)," *U.S. Department of Defense*.
- Reuters, "[Explainer: What will it Cost to Denuclearize North Korea?](#)" June 29, 2018.
- Zack Beauchamp, "[The Textbook Definition of Unstable': Why North Korea's Newest Nuclear Test Is Scary](#)," *Vox*, September 9, 2016.
- Madison Park, "[North Korea Declares 1953 Armistice Invalid](#)," *CNN*, last updated March 11, 2013.
- Zhenhua Lu, "[US Clashes with China and Russia over North Korea during UN Talk](#)," *South China Morning Post*, September 28, 2018.
- Eleanor Albert, "[The China-North Korea Relationship](#)," Council on Foreign Relations, June 25, 2019.
- Jane Perlez and David E. Sanger, "[John Kerry Urges China to Curb North Korea's Nuclear Pursuits](#)," *New York Times*, January 27, 2016.
- Georgy Toloraya, "[Russia's North Korea Conundrum](#)," *Diplomat*, March 17, 2016.

## How to Conduct Research and Use Sources

### Research and Preparation

- Draw on the case notes, additional case materials, and your own research to familiarize yourself with
  - the goals of the UN Security Council in general and of this Council meeting in particular;
  - the national interests at stake in the case for the country you're representing and their importance to national security;
  - the aspects of the case most relevant to your country;
  - the elements that a comprehensive UN Security Council resolution on the case should contain; and
  - the major debates or conflicts likely to occur during the role-play. You need not resolve these yourself, of course, but you will want to anticipate them in order to articulate and defend your position in the UN Security Council deliberation.
- Set goals for your research. Know which questions you seek to answer and refer back to the case notes, additional readings, and research leads as needed.
- Make a list of questions that you feel are not fully answered by the given materials. What do you need to research in greater depth? Can your peers help you understand these subjects?
- Using the case materials, additional readings, and discussions with your peers, weigh the relative importance of the interests at stake in the case. Determine where trade-offs might be required and think through the potential consequences of several different policy options.
- Conduct your research from the perspective of your assigned role, rather than the particular perspective of the person who currently inhabits that role. Make sure to consider the full range of country positions and foreign interests, whether diplomatic, military, economic, environmental, moral, or otherwise. This will help you strengthen your policy position and anticipate and prepare for debates in the role-play.
- Consider what questions or challenges the secretary-general or other UN Security Council members might raise regarding the options you propose and have responses ready.

### Sources

- Consult a wide range of sources to gain a full perspective on the issues raised in the case and on policy options. Seek out sources that you may not normally use, such as publications from the region(s) under discussion, unclassified and declassified government documents, and specialized policy reports and journals.
- Remember: Wikipedia is not a reliable source, but it can be a reasonable starting point. The citations at the bottom of each entry often contain useful resources.
- Just as policymakers tackle issues that are controversial and subject to multiple interpretations, so will you in your preparation for the writing assignments and role-play. For this reason, evaluate your sources carefully. Always ask yourself:
  - When was the information produced? Is it still relevant and accurate?
  - Who is writing or speaking and why? Does the author or speaker have a particular motivation or affiliation that you should take into account?
  - Where is the information published? Determine the political leanings of journals, magazines, and newspapers by reading several articles published by each one.
  - Who is the intended audience?
  - Does the author provide sufficient evidence for their analysis or opinion? Does the author cite reliable and impartial sources?
  - Does the information appear one-sided? Does it consider multiple points of view?
  - Is the language measured or inflammatory? Do any of the points appear exaggerated?
- Take note of and cite your sources correctly. This is important not just for reasons of academic integrity, but so that you can revisit them as needed.
- Ask your teacher which style they prefer you use when citing sources, such as Modern Language Association (MLA), Chicago Manual of Style, or Associated Press (AP).

## How to Write a UN Resolution

### What is a UN resolution?

A UN resolution is a formal expression of the opinion or will of a UN body. Resolutions follow a common, relatively strict format and are published online once approved. They are written and approved (or rejected) in a complex process. They typically go through several drafts, and multiple countries are typically involved, though a single country may write a draft resolution on its own and seek a direct vote. You will navigate an abbreviated version of this collaborative process in your role-play.

A Security Council resolution has three sections:

- header
- preambular clauses
- operative clauses

The entire resolution is one long sentence; individual items are separated by semicolons and commas. The header gives the date, an alphabetical list of countries that have contributed to the document (sponsors), and the name of the issuing body (in this case, the Security Council). This body serves as the subject of the sentence.

**Preambular clauses** provide a framework through which to view the issue by outlining past action on the subject (usually in treaties, conventions, and previous resolutions) and explaining the purpose of or need for a resolution. Preambular clauses are unnumbered, begin with adjectives or verbs, and end with commas. Common preambular words include

- alarmed by
- considering
- convinced
- emphasizing
- guided by
- having adopted
- keeping in mind
- mindful of
- (re)affirming
- recognizing
- taking note/noting
- underscoring

An example of an [existing](#) preambular clause is

- *Underlining* that the NPT remains the cornerstone of the nuclear non-proliferation regime and the essential foundation for the pursuit of nuclear disarmament and for the peaceful uses of nuclear energy.

**Operative clauses** state the opinion of the organ and the actions to be taken. Unlike preambular clauses, operative clauses are sequentially numbered and follow a logical progression, each clause calling for a specific action. Operative clauses begin with italicized verbs, sometimes modified by adverbs, and end with semicolons (with the exception of the last clause). Common operative words include

- authorizes
- calls for
- condemns
- decides
- emphasizes
- (re)affirms
- recommends
- reiterates
- requests
- stresses
- supports
- urges

The last operative clause in a Security Council resolution is almost always “*Decides* to remain seized of the matter.” In line with [Article 12](#) of the UN Charter, this language keeps the issue under the Security Council’s authority and prevents the General Assembly from taking its own action. An example existing operative clause is

- *Urges* all States that have either not signed or not ratified the Treaty, particularly the eight remaining Annex 2 States, to do so without further delay.

Click [here](#) to see a full example of a UN Security Council resolution.

## How to Write a Presidential Statement

If the Security Council is unable to come to agreement on a resolution, another option is to issue a presidential statement.

### What is a presidential statement?

A presidential statement is made by the president of the Security Council on behalf of the council. It is adopted at a formal council meeting, issued as an official document, and [published](#). No formal vote is taken on a presidential statement; instead, it is adopted by consensus (the agreement of all members, though some may abstain). Member states have the option of voicing opposition to the statement, which is then recorded in the document. Often released when the council cannot reach consensus on a resolution or is prevented from passing one by a permanent member's veto, presidential statements are similar in content and tone to resolutions but tend to be less specific. They are not legally binding.

All presidential statements generally follow the same loose structure, which is more flexible and relaxed than that of a UN resolution:

1. **Overview:** an overview of the meeting or informal session that gave rise to the statement in question.
2. **Body:** five to fifteen paragraphs, each beginning with "The Security Council," reflecting the consensus opinion of council members and sometimes providing an overview of past actions on the subject. A presidential statement is often used to reaffirm the council's support for ongoing UN missions and initiatives or to provide progress reports on these initiatives.
3. **Signature:** the signature of the president of the Security Council.

Click [here](#) to see a full example of a UN Security Council presidential statement.

## How to Prepare for Role-Play

### Role-play Guidelines

1. Stay in your role at all times. (Keep in mind that your role refers to the perspective and duties of the country or position you represent, and not the specific person currently holding that role.)
2. Follow the general protocol for speaking.
  1. **Signaling to Speak**
    1. The president of the UN Security Council will administer the meeting and should decide on a speaking order. Wait to be called on by the president.
    2. If you would like to speak out of turn, signal to the president, perhaps by raising a hand or a placard, and wait until the president calls on you.
  2. **Form of Speech**
    1. All UN Security Council members can be addressed as Mr./Madam/[Mx](#). Ambassador or simply Ambassador [last name]. Before you begin the role-play, share which title you would like to use, and make sure to respect the title your fellow UN Security Council members choose to use as well.
    2. Do not exceed predetermined time limits. If you exceed these limits, the president will cut you off.
    3. Frame your comments with a purpose and stay on topic.
  3. **Listening**
    1. Take notes while others are speaking.
    2. Refrain from whispering or conducting side conversations.
    3. Applause and boeing are not appropriate. Your words will be the most effective tool to indicate agreement or disagreement.

## How to Write a Written Reflection

### Guidelines

- **Subject (one short paragraph):** Offer a brief statement about the significance of the issue as it relates to global politics and international organizations. Provide just enough information about the crisis so the reader can understand the purpose and importance of your memo. Be sure to include an initial statement of whether you agree or disagree with the UN Security Council's decision.
- **Options and analysis (one paragraph per option):** Present and analyze the options that were discussed during the debate, deliberation, and/or debrief. Discuss their drawbacks, benefits, and resource needs. Be sure to acknowledge any weaknesses or disadvantages of the proposed options.
- **Recommendation and justification (several paragraphs):** Identify and explain your preferred policy option or options in more detail. Here, you can explain why you personally favor one or more of the recommendations that you initially presented or the UN Security Council voted on, or different options entirely. If you choose to support the options you presented in your position memo, make sure to justify why you feel yours is still the best position.
- **Reflection (one to two paragraphs):** Discuss how your position and the final UN Security Council decision are similar; if they are not, discuss how they are different. Use this section to give your thoughts on what the UN Security Council should have included in its resolution or presidential statement and what you would have done differently. Remember, this is from your point of view; you are no longer advocating on behalf of a country or a UN agency.

Click [here](#) to see a full example of a written reflection.

# North Korean Nuclear Threat (UNSC)

## Educator Simulation Guide

### Global Literacy

Global literacy is the ability to understand and engage effectively in today's interconnected world. Today's interdependent global economy and geopolitical landscape connect America's interests more than ever to the actions and interests of other countries and their citizens. To ensure students understand this interconnected world, they need to be globally literate. [Learn more about global literacy.](#)

### Case Overview

*Fictional, set in the present day.* The Democratic People's Republic of Korea (North Korea) has for decades pursued its nuclear ambitions to the dismay of both Western countries and its neighbors in East Asia. It recently announced the successful launch of a satellite from a three-stage rocket, and U.S. and allied intelligence services conclude that North Korea now possesses the reentry technology for an intercontinental ballistic missile that could reach the North American west coast. The director of national intelligence has concluded that the missile launch, combined with North Korea's ongoing nuclear tests and its mastery of warhead miniaturization technology, means the country is capable of following through on past threats to fire a nuclear-armed missile against the United States. The president has called an emergency meeting of the United Nations Security Council to present this new intelligence and discuss an international response to North Korea's enhanced capabilities.

### Decision Point

U.S. intelligence officials now believe, based on debris recovered from a recent North Korean satellite launch, that North Korea has the technology needed to reach the west coast of North America. The launch came days after Kim walked away from nuclear negotiations with the United States. Kim cited concerns over proposed inspections of its nuclear sites. The U.S. director of national intelligence has concluded that the launch means that the country is now capable of following through on past threats to fire nuclear-armed missiles at the United States. The United States has requested a meeting of the UN Security Council to present this new intelligence and discuss an international response to North Korea's enhanced capabilities.

### Learning Goals

CFR Education extended simulations use a variety of pedagogical tools to create an effective, meaningful, and memorable learning experience for students that builds their global literacy. Students will develop crucial skills such as critical thinking, communication, collaboration, and creativity. Students will complete authentic assessments that feel relevant: instead of five-paragraph essays and book reports, students will write policy memos and participate in a role-play of a meeting of a foreign policy-making body. There are no right or wrong answers in actual policy deliberations, and there are none here, either; students will walk away from this experience with an appreciation for the complexity of policy questions.

In this simulation, students will learn about the UN Security Council, as well as meeting these learning outcomes specific to this simulation:

- Students will understand the history of North Korea’s pursuit of nuclear weapons against the international community’s attempt to stop the proliferation of such weapons.
- Students will consider how the North Korean nuclear threat could undermine international peace and security.
- Students will evaluate the options available to the UN Security Council in response to the North Korean nuclear threat.

## Concepts and Issues

### Concepts

- [Alliances](#)
- [Nationalism](#)
- Nuclear nonproliferation
- [Sanctions](#)
- [Deterrence](#)
- Negotiations
- Rogue states
- Preventive attacks

### Issues

- Security and diplomacy in Northeast Asia
- Legacy of the [Cold War](#) and the Korean War
- Chinese support of North Korea
- Nuclear-related agreements and institutions

## Policy Options: Educator's Guide

North Korea’s pursuit of a nuclear weapons program is motivated principally by the desire to develop a deterrent against an attack by external forces, particularly the United States or South Korea. North Korea’s threats have been directed primarily toward the United States and its allies. The Kim regime regards the U.S. military presence in South Korea (which [hosts nearly 28,000 U.S. troops](#) as of September 2023) as an obstacle to a North Korea–led unification of the peninsula. It also sees the United States as the most dangerous military threat it faces.

The most important priority for the UN Security Council on this matter is eliminating North Korea’s nuclear weapons program. The Security Council is a core part of global efforts to stop the spread, or proliferation, of nuclear weapons. Among other things, it is charged with responding to violations of the NPT. Most frequently, the Security Council acts by imposing [sanctions](#) on any country or group that violates the treaty. Since North Korea’s withdrawal from the NPT in 2003, the Security Council has been at the center of international efforts to halt the country’s nuclear development. After Pyongyang’s first nuclear test in 2006, the Security Council unanimously approved a series of sanctions that have grown increasingly severe in response to tests.

North Korea already has the capability to hit South Korea and Japan with nuclear missiles. Advancements in its nuclear technology and missile capabilities could pose a serious security threat not just to the United States but also to its allies. Furthermore, the capabilities could pose a threat to the Asia-Pacific region more broadly. A nuclear attack by North Korea on one of its rivals could destroy cities and kill millions of people, potentially triggering a devastating conflict in the region.

North Korea’s nuclear progress and the failure of international responses could encourage other countries to acquire nuclear weapons. Countries such as Japan and South Korea could face domestic political pressure to respond to acquire nuclear weapons of their own to deter North Korea. Such pressure would be a defeat for global nonproliferation efforts. Likewise, it would make any conflict in Northeast Asia far more destructive.

Any response to North Korea's nuclear development will need the approval of all five of the Security Council's [veto](#)-wielding permanent members (P5). Although the Security Council has been unanimous in its past condemnations of North Korea's nuclear endeavors, the diverging interests of the P5, especially of China, Russia, and the United States, could get in the way of any new action. China has offered only a mixed record of supporting and upholding sanctions against North Korea. It values North Korea as a buffer between itself and the thriving capitalist democracy of South Korea. Russia has increasingly seen North Korea as a strategic partner, especially since the war in Ukraine began. Both countries have reasons to oppose harsh penalties against North Korea.

With those concerns in mind, the Security Council has a few options it could pursue in response to the North Korean nuclear threat.

## Condemn testing and call for negotiations to resume.

The UN Security Council could adopt a resolution condemning North Korea's latest missile test. This resolution could also call on it not to test or use missiles or nuclear weapons in the future. This resolution could also outline consequences if North Korea does not comply. Potential consequences include additional sanctions. The Security Council could further call for North Korea to return to negotiations over its nuclear program. In exchange, such negotiations could offer sanctions relief, economic aid, or a formal peace treaty ending the Korean War. Such negotiations could take place between the United States and North Korea alone, under the previous framework of the [Six Party Talks](#), or in a new format. If an agreement is achieved, the Security Council could also call on North Korea to admit outside inspectors to monitor the agreement's progress. This is the least ambitious option, but it is the most likely to pass. If successful, this option could reduce the threat of North Korean nuclear missiles and avoid rising tensions or even war. However, this option cannot guarantee any results. North Korea has ignored similar resolutions. Past negotiations have failed or led to broken promises from North Korea. The Security Council risks giving North Korea aid or sanctions relief and receiving nothing in return. At best, failed negotiations would result in no change to the situation. At worst, they could lead to the Kim regime increasing its nuclear development, damage the United Nations' reputation, and bring the world closer to nuclear conflict.

The Security Council could choose to pursue negotiations first; should they prove unsuccessful, it could then resort to one of two other options.

## Adopt new sanctions.

The UN Security Council could adopt a new round of sanctions against North Korea. This could further limit the country's access to fuel, raw materials, and luxury goods. The Security Council could also call for states to crack down on North Korea's illegal activities abroad to restrict its access to funds and nuclear materials.

Expanding sanctions would be driven by the assumption that the best path forward is to isolate North Korea until its government collapses or changes. The Security Council has approved sanctions in response to past nuclear tests, but so far these have not stopped North Korea's nuclear development. Stronger sanctions could finally produce change. However, there is no guarantee that sanctions will have the desired effect. Sanctions have already put North Korea's economy in a dire situation. Additional pressure on the economy could lead to further worsening conditions for North Koreans rather than any policy change on nuclear weapons. Moreover, sanctions take time to have an effect. During this time, North Korea's nuclear program would continue to pose a threat.

## Authorize preventive military strikes.

The UN Security Council could adopt a resolution calling on North Korea to denuclearize and authorize member states to enforce that resolution by force. This would lead the United States and possibly its other allies to launch a preventive military strike. This strike would be aimed at destroying as many missile and nuclear-related sites and as much equipment as possible. Even if these strikes could not completely eliminate North Korea's nuclear program, they could set it back for the foreseeable future. Given the current phase of North Korea's nuclear weapons development, this option would likely require a large-scale military operation to succeed.

This option offers a crucial benefit. It could reduce the threat of North Korea's missiles and nuclear weapons for years to come. Preventive strikes would also demonstrate a strong international commitment to nonproliferation. They could further send an effective warning to North Korea and others against developing nuclear weapons in the future.

However, China borders North Korea and has signed a security treaty with North Korea. It is unlikely to allow any military action by the United States or its allies. Moreover, a military intervention comes with significant risks. A preventive strike cannot guarantee the destruction of all North Korean nuclear capabilities. A military strike also risks a North Korean retaliation that could escalate and have devastating results. South Korea's densely populated capital, Seoul, is particularly vulnerable to North Korea's military because of how close it is to the border with the North. Even limited retaliation by North Korea could lead to many deaths and a high level of destruction in Seoul. Moreover, if North Korea fears losing its nuclear weapons, it could also decide to use them first.

## Running the Simulation

CFR Education extended simulations are project-based learning activities. Project-based learning (PBL) [leads to](#) better learning outcomes and improves skills, and is more fun than traditional instructional methods. The website that students will navigate throughout the simulation is divided into several parts:

In the **UNSC Guide**, students will learn about the UN Security Council, the body they will be simulating. Included are details on its history, how it works, who its major players are, and more. There is also a video interview with experts who have served on the body.

In the **Case Notes**, students dive into the actual situation they will be trying to solve in their simulation. At the beginning is a clear decision point: the question that students will debate during the role-play. This is followed by detailed background material and a discussion of the role that the United Nations plays.

**Preparation and Role-Play** includes details on the various roles students could take on, guidelines for the draft resolution clauses they will write, as well as an outline of how the discussion will flow during the role-play.

The **Wrap-Up** is an important part of the project and includes reflection questions and guidelines for reflecting in a class discussion and in a second memorandum. For historical cases, this section also includes a short description of how the decision point was addressed by policymakers in real life.

The simulation also includes **Student Resources**, which include a reading list to support research, additional directions and exemplars for writing assignments, and other tips students may find helpful.

## Tips for Role-Play

Once students have read the simulation and prepared their draft clauses, here is how we recommend structuring the role-play:

Round	Timing	Objectives	Procedural Notes
One: Public Meeting	2 to 3 minutes per participant	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Receive a five-minute briefing from the secretary-general on the issue to be discussed.</li> <li>2. Present opening statements.</li> <li>3. Crystalize the central questions of debate.</li> </ol>	During opening statements, the president of the UN Security Council will recognize country representatives in the order in which they request to speak, and no representative may speak again if others have not yet spoken. Following opening statements, country representatives are free to openly debate the statements made, evaluating the various positions on their merits.
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Three: Public Meeting	30 to 60 minutes	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Hear summaries of any draft resolutions as well as arguments for and against adoption.</li> <li>2. Vote on draft resolutions in order of submission.</li> <li>3. Attempt to adopt a presidential statement by consensus if no resolutions are proposed or passed.</li> </ol>	The president will call first on the draft resolution's main author(s) and then on other countries that wish to make arguments for or against the resolution. To be adopted, Security Council resolutions must receive at least nine votes in favor and no dissenting votes (vetoes) from any of the five permanent members. A state may abstain, often to indicate ambivalence or mild disapproval (in contrast to strong opposition). According to the charter, abstentions are mandatory if the state is a party to the dispute in question. Abstentions by permanent members do not count as vetoes; the resolution will pass if it receives the necessary nine votes.

### Tips for the President of the UN Security Council

In Round 1, you will chair a formal session. Make absolutely sure that every country gives their opening statement before any country is allowed to speak a second time. You will also have to use your judgment about when to move into the more informal meeting of Round 2. Give enough time for students to flesh out their positions and to identify potential allies, but do not wait too long—the most productive negotiations happen in informal meetings, so you want to save time for those in Round 2.

In Round 2, you will call on speakers one at a time. The time limits on speeches are a little looser, so pay close attention to make sure everyone is included and no one dominates. Deciding whether to grant a break for negotiations is a matter of balance. Negotiations can be advanced in small-group discussions, but it is also important for the whole body to be updated on what goes on during the breaks. You will want to strike a balance between breaks for negotiating, and informal meeting time for giving updates and rounding up support for resolutions. It is often helpful to set a deadline for the end of Round 2 to encourage negotiators to come to agreements in a timely manner.

In Round 3, completed draft resolutions will be presented, discussed, and voted on. Before starting, make sure you are clear on the order in which the resolutions were submitted and who is sponsoring each one. When it comes time to vote, it will be helpful to remind everyone of the unique voting rules of the Security Council. If none of the resolutions passes, you can allow further debate and attempt to vote again, or you can move on and guide the council through debate on a presidential statement.

Use your judgment about which process is more likely to be successful.

### Tips for Online Classes

We suggest conducting the role-play in three rounds and that three-round structure is a helpful way to approach chunking the role-play for online learning as well. You can conduct each round synchronously or asynchronously.

In round one, participants present their positions.

- In a synchronous meeting, you can go through opening statements using videoconferencing software, allowing for live clarifying questions.
- However, this is probably the easiest round to conduct asynchronously. You could disseminate positions in writing by having participants share their position memos or write a summary for the purpose of the role-play. You could also have participants record a video of themselves delivering their opening statement and disseminate it for all to watch.

In round two, participants debate the various policy options.

- In a synchronous setting, you can simply run a full-class discussion for round two. If you need more structure or want to prod reticent participants, consider starting by randomly assigning students to breakout rooms, assigning each breakout room one policy option. After working through pros and cons, representatives from each breakout room can share out to kick off the general discussion.
- In an asynchronous setting, consider a discussion forum, with a thread for each policy option.

In round three, debate begins to coalesce around the draft resolutions that have substantial support.

- This round can be approached similarly to round two. In this round, organize breakout rooms or threads around each draft resolution.

### Flashpoints

To add spice or challenge to the role-play, partway through the discussion throw in one of the following flashpoints—additional hypothetical developments that fit within the case’s existing decision point—or create your own.

1. North Korea conducts another missile test, firing a medium-range missile over the Sea of Japan. Unlike previous tests in which missile debris fell in waters near Japan, this time debris fall on the northern part of the main Japanese island of Honshu. Though the debris hit a rural area, some property damage and injuries—possibly fatal—are reported. Japan’s prime minister immediately declares on television that “Japan will take strong action, together with our allies, to combat the North Korean threat.”
2. Following a state visit by Kim Jong-un to the northern Chinese city of Shenyang, the Chinese government announces that China plans to strengthen its economic partnership with North Korea. China, which accounts for 90 percent of North Korea’s foreign trade, will increase the flow of both food and raw materials that could be used to develop North Korea’s missile program despite UN [sanctions](#). Analysis from the U.S. intelligence community, as well as the intelligence services of South Korea and Japan, indicates that the Chinese government is aiming to demonstrate that it will not fundamentally change its relationship with North Korea despite its concerns about Kim’s behavior.

After introducing a flashpoint, you might want to help students refocus their discussion by considering critical questions such as these:

1. Who is affected by this event or development, and how?
2. Is there any uncertainty about what has taken place? How credible is the report?
3. Does this event or development affect the feasibility of any policy options? If so, how?
4. Does this event or development affect the desirability of any policy options? If so, how?

## Case Assessment

1. Why is North Korea's nuclear and missile development considered a threat to international peace and security?
2. What have countries and organizations such as the United Nations done in the past to stop or limit North Korea's development of nuclear facilities, nuclear weapons, and missiles?
3. What interests and goals motivate North Korean policies, particularly in its pursuit of a nuclear program?
4. How do historical tensions, specifically those related to the [Cold War](#) and the Korean War, affect the dispute over North Korea's nuclear and missile development today?

## UNSC Assessment

1. What are the six organs of the United Nations system? What are their responsibilities?
2. How is the UN Security Council structured? How are Security Council decisions made?
3. What are the two categories of tools that the UN Security Council has at its disposal to implement its decisions, and what are the range of specific tools available in each?
4. What is the difference between a Chapter VI peacekeeping mission and a Chapter VII peace enforcement mission?
5. What are the main challenges and limitations that the UN Security Council faces as it carries out its work? What solutions have been proposed to address these challenges?

## Writing Assignments

Each CFR Education extended simulation involves writing assignments that help students think through policy options and reflect on their learning experience.

In UNSC cases, there are two types of writing assignments.

- Before the role-play, everyone writes draft clauses for a Security Council resolution.
- As part of the wrap-up, everyone writes a written reflection.

Simulations have instructions for written assignments (found under the Student Facing Simulation), rubrics, and samples for each of these writing exercises.

Samples:

- [UN example resolution](#)
- [UN example presidential statement](#)

## Rubric

Below are sample rubrics for your use in assessing the writing students will do as part of this extended simulation.

These are single-point rubrics. Jennifer Gonzalez, who writes the blog [Cult of Pedagogy](#), has a great [explainer](#), but the bottom line is that single-point rubrics are relatively easy for students to digest but still have all the advantages of giving structure to instructors' feedback.



**CONCERNS***What needs improvement***CRITERIA***What is expected***ADVANCED***What is excellent***Purpose**

- There are two to three preambular and three to four operative clauses
- Clauses are properly formatted and styled

**Preambular clauses**

- Accurately identify relevant prior agreements and existing organizations

**Operative clauses**

- Are practical and within the UN Security Council's powers
  - Address who
  - Address what
  - Address when
  - Address where
  - Address why
  - Address how
  - Address funding
- 

UN Security Council Written Reflection Rubric

## CONCERNS

*What needs improvement*

## CRITERIA

*What is expected*

## ADVANCED

*What is excellent*

### **Subject paragraph**

- Is brief
- Places the issue in the larger context of U.S. foreign policy
- Clearly states whether the writer agrees or disagrees with the president's decision

### **Options and Analysis paragraph**

- Discusses each option that came up during the role-play in discrete paragraphs
- Weighs the advantages and disadvantages of each option
- If options from the position memo are discussed, those options contain additional analysis

### **Recommendation and Justification paragraph**

- Makes a clear recommendation based on the writer's personal position
- Supports the recommendation effectively

### **Reflection paragraph or paragraphs**

- Reflects on and critiques the Security Council's decision
- Is written from a personal point of view, not that of the assigned role

Downloadable rubrics are available here:

- [UNSC draft clauses rubric](#)
- [UNSC written reflection rubric](#)