

# Politics of Disarmament: A Case Study of North Korea and Iran

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## Abstract

The politics of disarmament in North Korea and Iran is a complex interplay of global power dynamics, regional security concerns, and the pursuit of national interests. Both nations' endeavours to develop nuclear capabilities have spurred intense international scrutiny, prompting multifaceted negotiations and diplomatic efforts to curb their nuclear programmes. North Korea's persistent pursuit of nuclear capabilities has sparked global tensions, leading to extensive diplomatic engagements involving key stakeholders. Despite intermittent breakthroughs, achieving complete denuclearization remains elusive, reflecting the challenges of negotiating with a regime known for its unpredictability. Similarly, Iran's nuclear ambitions have positioned it at the heart of a protracted diplomatic standoff. The 2015 Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) aimed at curbing Iran's nuclear programme but faced complications following the US withdrawal and subsequent sanctions, highlighting the intricate dynamics of geopolitical interests and regional rivalry. The quest for disarmament in both countries navigates a complex web of historical animosities, domestic politics, and security concerns. Achieving meaningful progress requires delicate diplomacy, fostering trust, addressing underlying security issues, and offering credible incentives for disarmament. Understanding the politics of disarmament in North Korea and Iran requires a nuanced comprehension of global power shifts, regional complexities, and the delicate balance between national sovereignty and international obligations. Resolving these challenges demands sustained multilateral engagement and a comprehensive approach that acknowledges the intricate interdependencies shaping global security.

## **Background to the Study**

Politics refers to the activities, actions, and processes associated with governance, power, decision-making, and influence within a society (Segal, 2015). Understanding politics involves analyzing the dynamics of power, studying the structures and processes that shape decision-making, and recognizing the complexities involved in reconciling conflicting interests and viewpoints within societies and among nations (Segal, 2015). Disarmament refers to the reduction or elimination of military forces, weapons, or capabilities held by a country or countries. The primary goal is to decrease the potential for armed conflict, enhance global security, and promote peace. It involves various types of arms reduction, including nuclear, conventional, chemical, and biological weapons (Cha, 2012). Efforts toward disarmament often require sustained political will, diplomatic negotiations, mutual trust-building, and cooperation among nations to overcome these challenges and work towards a more peaceful and secure world. The politics of disarmament involves intricate negotiations, strategies, and diplomatic efforts aimed at reducing or eliminating weaponry, particularly in the context of global security and international relations (Cha, 2012).

The pursuit of disarmament in North Korea and Iran stands as a pivotal chapter in global geopolitics, marked by intricate negotiations, regional dynamics, and persistent challenges. Both nations' nuclear ambitions have been focal points of international concern, sparking extensive debates and diplomatic efforts aimed at curbing their nuclear programmes (Olimat, 2016). North Korea, through its relentless pursuit of nuclear capabilities, has remained a focal point of global tension (Solingen, 2017). The country's strategic manoeuvres and repeated nuclear tests have raised alarms worldwide, prompting extensive multilateral discussions involving major stakeholders, such as the United States, China, South Korea, and Japan (Down & Jones, 2019). The intricate web of historical animosities, regional security concerns, and the elusive nature of North Korea's intentions have compounded efforts to achieve substantive disarmament agreements (Kang, 2017). According to Blair et al. (2017), despite periodic diplomatic breakthroughs, the path to complete denuclearization remains elusive, reflecting the complexities inherent in negotiating with a regime known for its unpredictability. Similarly, Iran's nuclear ambitions have placed it at the centre of a protracted diplomatic standoff with the international community (Katzman, 2020). As noted by Ramberg (2018), the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), signed in 2015, is a landmark agreement aimed at curbing Iran's nuclear programme in exchange for sanctions relief. However, the subsequent withdrawal of the United States from the deal in 2018 and the re-imposition of sanctions created a renewed impasse (Ramberg, 2018). The nuances of Iranian domestic politics, coupled with regional rivalries and security concerns, have added layers of complexity to the pursuit of a lasting disarmament framework (Sagan, 2012). Efforts to revive and renegotiate the JCPOA have faced challenges, reflecting the intricate interplay of geopolitical interests and the delicate balance between national sovereignty and international obligations (Esfandiary, 2018).

In both cases, achieving meaningful disarmament requires navigating a labyrinth of political, strategic, and ideological considerations (Thakur, 2016). The intricate

interdependencies among global powers, regional dynamics, and the aspirations of these nations for security and sovereignty contribute to the complexity of disarmament negotiations (Shahram, 2019). Success hinges not only on diplomatic finesse but also on addressing underlying security concerns, fostering mutual trust, and providing viable incentives for disarmament (Moon, 2018). The politics of disarmament in North Korea and Iran serve as a poignant reminder of the complexities inherent in managing global security challenges (Heinonen & Wehner, 2017). Resolving these issues demands sustained dialogue, multilateral engagement, and a nuanced understanding of the diverse factors shaping the ambitions and insecurities of these nations (Nakhle, 2015). The pursuit of disarmament is a testament to the intricate dance between power, diplomacy, and the quest for a more stable and secure world order.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Both North Korea and Iran's pursuit of nuclear capabilities has raised concerns about regional stability and security. The potential possession of nuclear weapons or advanced nuclear technologies poses a threat to neighbouring countries and regional alliances. The inability to establish effective diplomatic channels and reach sustainable agreements on disarmament measures has led to a prolonged impasse. Disagreements over the sequencing of denuclearization steps, sanctions relief, verification processes, and trust-building measures have hindered progress. The lack of successful disarmament in North Korea and Iran undermines global efforts aimed at preventing nuclear proliferation. Failure to contain or reverse these nuclear programmes sets challenging precedents and impacts the credibility of international non-proliferation initiatives.

The imposition of sanctions on North Korea and Iran, intended to curb their nuclear programmes, has had severe economic repercussions on the populations of these nations. This raises ethical concerns about the humanitarian impact while evaluating the efficacy of sanctions as a tool for disarmament. Deep-rooted mistrust between the involved parties, including the United States, regional powers, and the affected countries, contributes to security dilemmas. Addressing the trust deficit and security concerns is pivotal to any meaningful progress in disarmament discussions. The geopolitics surrounding North Korea's and Iran's nuclear ambitions involve a complex web of international relations, regional power dynamics, and strategic interests. Resolving these issues requires navigating multifaceted geopolitical considerations and divergent national interests. This necessitated this research work.

### **Aim and Objectives**

This work aimed to evaluate the politics of disarmament in North Korea and Iran. The objectives were to:

1. Describe the politics of disarmament in North Korea.
2. Discuss the politics of disarmament in Iran; and
3. Ascertain the global implications of politics of disarmament in North Korea and Iran.

## **Research Questions**

- i. What is the politics of disarmament in North Korea?
- ii. What is the politics of disarmament in Iran?
- iii. What are the global implications of politics of disarmament in North Korea and Iran?

## **Literature Review**

### **Conceptual Framework**

#### **Korean Nuclear Programme**

According to Thukur (2016), with help from the former USSR, North Korea started its nuclear programme at the end of the 1950s, when many facilities were constructed in a nuclear complex at Nyongbyong. The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) classified North Korea's second phase as "indigenous," starting in 1979, when the country constructed a five-megawatt reactor at Nyongbyong (Allison & Neumann, 2020). Although North Korea signed the Treaty on the Non-proliferation of nuclear weapons (NPT) in 1985, it was not until 1992 that it finalized its safeguards agreement with the IAEA (Allison & Neumann, 2020). During that time, it completed and put into service a reprocessing unit for the extraction of plutonium from spent nuclear fuel, put into service a five-megawatt reactor, and began work on two much larger reactors. The IAEA inspectors discovered anomalies shortly after inspections started in 1992, suggesting that North Korea might have weapons-grade plutonium hidden from the agency and these differences suggested the reprocessing plant had been operated more frequently than North Korea had reported (Blair, 2017).

In 1993, North Korea declared its intention to exit the Treaty on the Non-proliferation of nuclear weapons, rejecting the IAEA's request for special inspections (Solingen, 2017). The UN Security Council was notified by the IAEA Board that North Korea had failed to comply with its safeguard's responsibilities (Cha, 2012). Limited IAEA inspections proceeded in 1993 and 1994 despite obstacles from the North Korean government. North Korea was "continuing to widen its non-compliance with its safeguards agreement," the IAEA found in June 1994. The US-North Korea Agreed Framework, which was signed in October 1994, permitted North Korea to carry out certain activities (Downs & Jones, 2019). The task of overseeing the dismantling of reactors and associated facilities used in the manufacture of plutonium was assigned to the IAEA, and although "frozen", the five-megawatt reactor and reprocessing plant continued to operate. Conversely, the bigger reactors were permitted to shrink to the extent that they could no longer be repaired. In the end, \$US5 billion in energy-related assistance, including two 1,000-megawatt light water nuclear power reactors, for which contracts were signed in 1999, was enough to persuade North Korea to suspend its nuclear weapons programme (Shahram, 2019).

According to Sagan and Wailtz (2012), the project was several years behind schedule by 2002 as a result of North Korea's persistent refusal to cooperate with the IAEA. After that, the project was put on hold in 2003 and ended in May 2006. It was discovered in October 2002 that North Korea had been using the centrifuge technology supplied by Pakistan to

covertly enrich uranium for use in weapons. The IAEA inspectors were told to leave North Korea in December 2002 after the organization had removed its seals from its Yongbyon facilities. To extract plutonium suitable for use in weapons, it then started reprocessing some 8,000 radioactive fuel rods.

North Korea declared that it would leave the NPT with effect from January 11, 2003. Since then, talks have been held in an attempt to reach a consensus on limiting North Korea's nuclear weapons programme (Sagan & Waitz, 2012). The UN Security Council was notified about North Korea's underground nuclear weapon test in October 2006, which took place close to Gilju. North Korea was subject to sanctions by Resolutions 1695 and 1718 of the UN Security Council and targeted sanctions, a prohibition on trading conventional weapons with North Korea, and the supply of support for its efforts to create weapons of mass destruction and their delivery systems (Esfandiary, 2018). Along with financial and travel restrictions against individuals the UN Security Council identified as assisting North Korea's efforts to develop weapons of mass destruction and their delivery systems, a ban was also placed on the export of specific luxury products to North Korea (Esfandiary, 2018). In exchange for help with energy needs, North Korea agreed to shut down and seal the Yongbyon reactor and related facilities, including a reprocessing plant, within 60 days and accept IAEA monitoring of this, according to an agreement reached in February 2007 in the Six-Party Talks involving China, Japan, Russia, South Korea, and the United States. July 2007 saw the closure of the reactor, and other facilities were closed, with IAEA verification (Esfandiary, 2018).

As observed by Ramberg (2018), it was necessary to stop the plants, give a comprehensive inventory of radioactive materials, and reprocess used fuel in Russia or the UK rather than returning them. The original deadline of December 2007 was extended to June 2008, when Yongbyon's cooling tower was destroyed and the transfer of fissile and weaponry items took place. On 22 September 2008, North Korea asked the IAEA to remove the seals and surveillance equipment from the reprocessing plant at Yongbyon (Heinonen & Wehner, 2017). This was completed by 24 September, when the Agency was also informed that its inspectors would no longer have access to the reprocessing plant. The IAEA was granted access to some facilities at Yongbyon between October 2008 and April 2009. On 14 April 2009, the Director General reported to the IAEA Board that North Korea had decided to cease all cooperation immediately with the IAEA, request the IAEA personnel at the site to remove all Agency containment and surveillance equipment, and no longer allow IAEA inspectors access to facilities once the containment and surveillance equipment was removed; and that IAEA inspectors would be required to leave North Korea at the earliest possible time. Prior to their departure on 16 April 2009, the IAEA inspectors were informed that North Korea "had decided to reactivate all facilities and to go ahead with the reprocessing of spent fuel" (Heinonen & Wehner, 2017).

In May 2009, North Korea exploded another nuclear device underground. This test, in contravention of UN Security Council resolutions, attracted condemnation from around

the world. In a statement to the House of Representatives, the Prime Minister, the Hon Kevin Rudd MP, said: "This is an unacceptable, provocative, and destabilising act by North Korea. These actions obtain the absolute condemnation of the government of Australia." The Prime Minister called on the international community to take a strong and unified position against the actions of North Korea, which he described as a "flagrant breach of UN Security Council resolution 1718". The United Nations Security Council also condemned the nuclear test and adopted Resolution 1874 on 12 June 2009, which tightened sanctions against North Korea, by blocking funding for nuclear, missile, and proliferation activities through targeted sanctions on additional goods, persons, and entities, widening the ban on arms imports-exports, and calling on Member States to inspect and destroy all banned cargo to and from that country -on the high seas, at seaports and airports -if they have reasonable grounds to suspect a violation. The resolution also called for North Korea to return at an early date to the NPT and IAEA safeguards and the Six-Party Talks. In the IAEA's safeguards report of 30 July 2009, the IAEA stated that, since 15 April 2009, the Agency has been unable to carry out any monitoring and verification activities in North Korea (Heinonen & Wehner, 2017). It was, therefore, unable to provide any conclusions regarding the DPRK's nuclear activities.

### **Iran Nuclear Programme**

Iran's nuclear programme started in 1957, when it agreed to obtain material and technical support from the US for building and running nuclear research reactors (Olimat, 2016). The US sent Iran nuclear fuel and equipment for the ensuing ten years and Iran ratified the NPT in 1970, signed it when it became open for signatures in July 1968 and reached a Safeguards Agreement with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) in 1974 (Kang, 2017). After the Safeguards Agreement ended, Iran declared that it would significantly increase the scope of its nuclear programme and it also signed agreements with French and German corporations to build large-scale nuclear power reactors, with US support. Iran insisted that the IAEA was in charge of all of its nuclear-related operations and that its nuclear programme was peaceful. Later in the 1970s, worries about Iran's potential to acquire nuclear weapons started to surface (especially after India successfully tested nuclear weapons in 1974). As a result of the diplomatic fallout from Iran's Islamic Revolution in 1979, the US, France, and Germany stopped providing any support for Iran's nuclear programme (Nakhle, 2015; Brennan, 2016). Iran now has only two large-scale nuclear power reactors that are partially finished.

Over the following ten years, Iran's nuclear programme made little headway, partly because Ayatollah Khomeini, the country's new leader, was opposed to nuclear technology (Moon, 2018). Rebuilding Iran's nuclear programme was the top priority for Ayatollah Khamenei, the country's new leader after Ayatollah Khomeini passed away in 1989, and Iran restarted development on its two partially completed large-scale nuclear reactors and started building a vast network of uranium mines, fuel processing facilities, and research reactors, with help from Russia, China, and, reportedly, Pakistan and North Korea (Kang, 2017). According to Korolev (2020), Iran insisted that its actions were carried out for peaceful reasons, and IAEA safeguards were still in place for known sites

and operations. Information on Iranian nuclear facilities that were either under construction or in operation but had not been revealed started to surface in 2002, mostly through Iranian activist groups and state intelligence agencies (Kim, 2017). These facilities included a heavy-water manufacturing plant and a fuel enrichment unit (Kim, 2017). Iran later disclosed to the IAEA that it had hidden some aspects of its nuclear programme from the Agency. The IAEA increased the scope of its inspections in response. Iran was found to have violated the Safeguards Agreement in 2003 (the first breach happened in 1991) by not providing several documents about the import, processing, and storage of uranium as well as design data for two facilities (Kim, 2017).

Katzman (2020) asserts that the fact that Iran appeared to be pursuing two different routes to a nuclear weapon –uranium enrichment and the creation of heavy water for the eventual manufacturing of plutonium –was one of the biggest worries that sprang from these advances. In response to these disclosures, the international community threatened Iran and offered financial incentives to get it to comply with international standards for its nuclear programme (Downs & Jones, 2019). The 2004 "Paris Agreement," which included Iran, the UK, France, and Germany, promised security and financial advantages in exchange for Iran ceasing its enrichment activities, despite threats to report Iran to the UN Security Council (Downs & Jones, 2019). This two-pronged strategy, issuing incentives and warnings, on the one hand, and offering rewards, on the other hand, has since defined the international community's attempts to rein in Iran's purported nuclear aspirations. In response to this international pressure, Iran ceased its fuel-enrichment activities and signed an Additional Protocol to give the IAEA greater access to its nuclear programme, including any reprocessing capability (Downs & Jones, 2019).

However, Iran soon reneged on these commitments by refusing to ratify and implement its In May 2009, North Korea exploded another nuclear device underground. This test, in contravention of UN Security Council resolutions, attracted condemnation from around the world. In a statement to the House of Representatives, the Prime Minister, the Hon Kevin Rudd MP, said: "This is an unacceptable, provocative, and destabilising act by North Korea. These actions obtain the absolute condemnation of the government of Australia." The Prime Minister called on the international community to take a strong and unified position against the actions of North Korea, which he described as a "flagrant breach of UN Security Council resolution 1718". The United Nations Security Council also condemned the nuclear test and adopted Resolution 1874 on 12 June 2009, which tightened sanctions against North Korea, by blocking funding for nuclear, missile, and proliferation activities through targeted sanctions on additional goods, persons, and entities, widening the ban on arms imports-exports, and calling on Member States to inspect and destroy all banned cargo to and from that country –on the high seas, at seaports and airports –if they have reasonable grounds to suspect a violation. The resolution also called for North Korea to return at an early date to the NPT and IAEA safeguards and the Six-Party Talks. In the IAEA's safeguards report of 30 July 2009, the IAEA stated that, since 15 April 2009, the Agency has been unable to carry out any monitoring and verification activities in North Korea (Heinonen & Wehner, 2017). It was,

therefore, unable to provide any conclusions regarding the DPRK's nuclear activities. Additional Protocol, and in 2005, it resumed and began to expand its enrichment activities. In response, the IAEA declared Iran “non-compliant” with the NPT and referred the matter to the UN Security Council (Blair, 2017). In July 2006, the UN Security Council issued Resolution 1696, which required Iran to provide a range of information and access to the IAEA in order to clarify and resolve the breaches of its Safeguards Agreement, ratify its Additional Protocol and provide the IAEA with increased access and information as is required under the Additional Protocol, and suspend all enrichment and reprocessing-related activities. Iran began to tentatively address the first requirement through cautious cooperation with the IAEA and the provision of such information as is required under their Safeguards Agreement. Iran, however, persisted in disobeying the other two conditions.

Resolution 1737, passed in December 2006, forbade the transfer of any nuclear or ballistic missile technology or training that could be used for further proliferation to Iran. Resolution 1747, passed in March 2007, restricted the transfer of financial services and aid to Iran. Resolution 1803, passed in March 2008, instituted an asset freeze, a travel ban, and cargo inspections on specific individuals and organizations suspected of aiding Iran's nuclear programme (Thukur, 2016; Olimat, 2016 & Ramberg, 2018).

The five permanent members of the UN Security Council and Germany, the "5+1" Group, engaged in diplomatic relations with Iran concurrently with the imposition of these sanctions, adhering to the principles of the 2004 Paris Agreement. Starting in 2006, Iran was presented with a sequence of ever more extensive incentive packages by the 5+1 Group in exchange for stopping its enrichment programmes and ratifying the Additional Protocol (Olimat, 2016; Ramberg, 2018). Iran declared that it would continue its enrichment programme and would not abide by requests to adopt its Additional Protocol, appearing to essentially defy all restrictions and incentives. The UN Security Council then approved a second resolution urging Iran to comply. The IAEA announced in February 2008 that all violations of Iran's Safeguards Agreement found since 2003 had been remedied because of Iran's ongoing cooperation. Iran had thus now fulfilled one of the three primary conditions specified by the UN Security Council in Resolution 1696 of 2006. Still, Iran did not ratify its Additional Protocol and carried on enriching uranium (albeit under IAEA inspection) (Olimat, 2016; Ramberg, 2018).

Iran announced in March 2009 that it would activate its first large-scale nuclear reactor in September 2009, with Russian help and under IAEA safeguards. Currently, the IAEA continues its inspections under Iran's Safeguards Agreement and is able to verify the non-diversion of declared nuclear material. The Director General's Report to the IAEA Board of Governors of 5 June 2009 indicated, however, that there remained a number of outstanding issues which gave rise to concerns, and which need to be clarified to exclude the possible military dimensions of Iran's programme (Olimat, 2016; Ramberg, 2018). Owing to Iran's refusal to implement its Additional Protocol, the IAEA's inspections and verification have been limited and the Agency is unable to make a conclusion about



possible undeclared activities and other matters in the country. Furthermore, Iran has not suspended its enrichment-related activities or its work on heavy water-related projects, as required by the UN Security Council.

The dual approach of the international community to dealing with Iran's nuclear programme also continues (Thukur, 2016 & Olimat, 2016). In April 2009, the 5+1 Group again strongly urged Iran to engage in talks on its nuclear programme. The Committee noted that, on 28 August 2009, the Director General circulated to the IAEA Board of Governors a report on Iran, which updated the 5 June 2009 report. This report was considered by the Board on 7 September 2009 but it is not yet publicly available (Thukur, 2016; Olimat, 2016)

### **Theoretical Framework**

#### **Arms Control Theory by John Steinbruner, Jonathan Dean, and Stuart Croft (1945)**

Arms control theory revolves around the concept of regulating and managing the development, deployment, and proliferation of weapons among states. It focuses on establishing agreements, treaties, and mechanisms that aim to limit the quantity, capabilities, or use of arms, including nuclear, conventional, or other weapons systems, by setting limits on the number of arms or their capabilities. Arms control aims to prevent an arms race and promote stability among nations. This stability is crucial to avoiding misunderstandings, miscalculations, and conflicts arising from unchecked proliferation. That is, the Arms Control theory is based on the premise that, by negotiating and implementing agreements to limit and regulate arms, nations can enhance security, reduce tensions, and promote stability in the international system. It is a proactive approach aimed at managing the risks associated with the proliferation and use of arms, contributing to global peace and security.

Following the principles of the Arms Control Theory could be crucial in implementing verifiable disarmament measures and ensuring the security concerns of North Korea might be a way forward. The inclusion of regional powers and providing security assurances could incentivize disarmament. Employing the principles of the theory involves negotiating verifiable limits on Iran's nuclear programme and building trust through transparency and verification mechanisms. Offering economic incentives could encourage compliance. Ensuring regional stability and addressing security concerns in the Middle East are also critical.

#### **Nuclear Taboo Theory by George and Richard Smoke (1945)**

The Nuclear Taboo Theory centers on the deeply ingrained norm or taboo against the use of nuclear weapons. It argues that there exists a widely shared moral, ethical, and practical aversion to the use of nuclear weapons due to their catastrophic and indiscriminate effects. It is rooted in historical experiences, such as the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki during World War II. These events, coupled with public awareness campaigns and cultural narratives, have contributed to the widespread belief that nuclear weapons should never be used again. The theory posits that the collective

understanding of the extreme and indiscriminate nature of nuclear weapons has fostered a normative framework that strongly discourages their use. It asserts that this norm has become a powerful factor influencing state behaviour and policy choices, contributing to the overall stability and non-use of nuclear weapons since World War II.

This theory could serve as a basis for diplomatic negotiations by emphasizing the global norm against nuclear weapons. Discussions around disarmament with North Korea might involve reinforcing this norm and encouraging the regime to consider the international condemnation of nuclear weapon use. The theory influences global perceptions and discussions regarding Iran's nuclear ambitions. There is a significant emphasis on preventing the proliferation of nuclear weapons, based on the normative belief that their use or acquisition is undesirable. In negotiations with Iran, this theory could be invoked to underscore the international community's consensus against the use of nuclear weapons. It could serve as a basis for discussions on limiting Iran's nuclear programme and preventing weaponization. The theory contributes to shaping international norms and perceptions regarding the use of nuclear weapons. This can influence diplomatic discussions and strategies in approaching disarmament negotiations.

### **Methodology**

The study employed a qualitative approach (descriptive), using content analysis to look at secondary data. Internet materials, periodicals, journals, textbooks, and published and unpublished studies were among the many sources consulted.

### **Discussion of Findings**

#### **The Politics of Disarmament in North Korea and Iran**

The politics of disarmament in North Korea has been a longstanding and complex issue, particularly concerning its nuclear weapons programmes (Brannan, 2016). North Korea's pursuit of nuclear capabilities has been a significant source of tension in East Asia and a concern for global security. North Korea's interest in nuclear technology dates back to the 1950s (Kim, 2017). Initially, its focus was on nuclear research for peaceful purposes, including the establishment of nuclear energy capabilities. Assistance from the Soviet Union helped initiate this programme. During this period (1970s-1980s), North Korea made significant strides in developing its nuclear programme (Allison & Neumann, 2020). It constructed the Yongbyon Nuclear Scientific Research Centre, which included a reactor capable of producing weapons-grade plutonium (Allison & Neumann, 2020). However, North Korea's intentions regarding the use of nuclear technology remain largely covert. North Korea's nuclear programme came under international scrutiny in the 1990s amid concerns about its nuclear ambitions (Allison & Neumann, 2020). The country's pursuit of nuclear capabilities led to increased tensions with the United States and its allies (Korolev, 2020). In an attempt to address these concerns, the United States and North Korea reached an agreement known as the Agreed Framework (1994). Under this deal, North Korea agreed to freeze and eventually dismantle its nuclear reactors in exchange for economic aid, fuel shipments, and construction of light-water reactors for

energy purposes (Korolev, 2020). However, the implementation of this agreement faced obstacles, including issues with fuel shipments and delays in the construction of alternative reactors (Korolev, 2020).

North Korea officially withdrew from the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty (NPT) in 2003 (Cha, 2012). This move was a significant action, signaling its intent to pursue nuclear weapons capabilities outside the bounds of international agreements. It conducted its first nuclear test in 2006, followed by subsequent tests in 2009, 2013, 2016, and 2017 (Solingen, 2017). These tests demonstrated advancements in its nuclear capabilities, raising concerns within the international community and leading to increased sanctions against North Korea (Kang, 2017). Over time, North Korea's nuclear programme made strides in the miniaturization of warheads, development of long-range ballistic missiles, and advancements in their nuclear weapon design, indicating progress in both missile technology and nuclear weapons capabilities (Katzman, 2020). Despite intermittent talks and diplomatic engagements aimed at denuclearization, North Korea has continued its nuclear activities. The government views nuclear weapons as a crucial element of its national security strategy and a deterrent to perceived threats from the United States and its allies (Sagan, 2012). The development of North Korea's nuclear programme has been a source of regional and global concern, contributing significantly to geopolitical tensions and efforts to persuade North Korea to abandon its nuclear ambitions in exchange for economic and diplomatic incentives (Thakur, 2016).

In the view of Heinonen and Wehner (2017), the primary forum for diplomatic negotiations regarding North Korea's nuclear programme was the Six-Party Talks. This involved North Korea, South Korea, the United States, China, Russia and Japan. The initial phase of talks focused on establishing principles for North Korea's denuclearization and providing economic and energy assistance in exchange for dismantling its nuclear programme. Agreements were reached, including the September 2005 Joint Statement, where North Korea pledged to abandon its nuclear weapons programme in exchange for security assurances and aid (Nakhle, 2015). Despite some progress, the talks faced challenges, including disagreements over verification methods and the sequencing of steps for denuclearization. High-profile summits between North Korean leader Kim Jong-un and former U.S. President Donald Trump, such as the Singapore Summit in 2018 and the Hanoi Summit in 2019, aimed to kick-start denuclearization talks (Brannan, 2016). These summits generated international attention but ultimately did not lead to concrete, lasting agreements on denuclearization.

China, North Korea's closest ally and a key regional power, has played a crucial role in diplomatic efforts (Kim, 2017). It has advocated dialogue, supported sanctions when necessary, and provided diplomatic support for negotiations. South Korea has engaged in various forms of dialogue with North Korea, including bilateral meetings, summits, and economic cooperation initiatives aimed at reducing tensions and fostering peace on the Korean Peninsula (Allison & Neumann, 2020). The United Nations Security Council imposed multiple rounds of sanctions on North Korea in response to its nuclear tests and

missile launches. These sanctions aimed to pressure North Korea to abandon its nuclear programme (Allison & Neumann, 2020). Despite numerous diplomatic efforts over the years, achieving substantial progress toward complete denuclearization of North Korea has remained elusive. This is because North Korea's perception of nuclear weapons as a crucial component for regime survival and as a deterrent to perceived threats has been a fundamental aspect of its national security strategy because of its historical experience, particularly the devastation and trauma of the Korean War (1950-1953) (Allison & Neumann, 2020). The war ended in an armistice rather than a peace treaty, leaving the Korean Peninsula technically in a state of war. North Korea views the United States and its allies, especially South Korea and Japan, as potential adversaries (Korolev, 2020). Continuous military exercises, the presence of US forces in the region, and historical tensions contribute to North Korea's perception of external threats (Korolev, 2020). Also, North Korea sees nuclear weapons as a powerful deterrent against potential attacks or attempts at regime change by external powers. The regime believes that possessing nuclear capabilities enhances its defense posture and reduces the likelihood of foreign intervention (Cha, 2012). The leadership in North Korea, particularly the Kim dynasty, perceives nuclear weapons as essential for regime survival (Ramberg, 2018).

North Korean leaders have consistently emphasized the importance of nuclear weapons for their security. Official statements, speeches, and propaganda highlight the role of nuclear capabilities in safeguarding North Korea's sovereignty and deterring perceived threats (Down & Jones, 2019). North Korea's conduct of multiple nuclear tests and missile launches is seen as a demonstration of its military capabilities (Olimat, 2016). These actions serve to reinforce the perception of North Korea's strength and readiness to defend itself against external threats. North Korea's negotiation strategies often revolve around the premise of ensuring its security. It seeks security guarantees and assurances of non-aggression as part of any discussions on denuclearization (Kang, 2017). North Korea's pursuit of international recognition as a nuclear power and its desire for economic concessions in exchange for disarmament have been significant elements of its diplomatic strategy, North Korea has employed a pattern of alternating between periods of provocations (such as nuclear tests or missile launches) and offers of dialogue or negotiations (Kang, 2017). This strategy aims to create a sense of urgency and compel other nations to engage in talks to address North Korea's demands. By showcasing its nuclear capabilities and willingness to advance its programme, North Korea seeks to elicit concessions from other countries. These concessions may include economic aid, sanctions relief, security guarantees, or diplomatic recognition (Kang, 2017).

Downs & Jones (2019) argue that North Korea views its nuclear stockpile and ballistic missile programme as important sources of political leverage in dealing with more powerful countries. These programmes have allowed a small, economically devastated country to command international attention and to bolster what otherwise would be a weak bargaining position vis-à-vis the rest of the global community.

The politics of disarmament in Iran, especially concerning its nuclear programme, has been a contentious and complex international issue, marked by negotiations, agreements, sanctions, and regional tensions. Iran's nuclear programme commenced in the 1950s, with Western support, particularly from the United States under the Atoms for Peace programme (Esfandiary, 2018). This initiative aimed to promote the peaceful use of nuclear technology for energy production, medical purposes, and scientific research. The US provided assistance and technology to Iran, including the Tehran Research Reactor, to foster Iran's development of nuclear energy for civilian use. Under the rule of Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi, Iran pursued an ambitious nuclear agenda, envisioning a nuclear energy programme to meet growing domestic energy demands (Shahram, 2019). The 1979 Iranian Revolution and the subsequent establishment of the Islamic Republic significantly altered Iran's political landscape. This change raised international concerns about the true nature and intent of Iran's nuclear programme (Kim, 2017). There was suspicion that Iran might be pursuing clandestine activities aimed at developing nuclear weapons, despite officially stating that its nuclear pursuits were for peaceful purposes. Reports and intelligence suggested potential weaponization efforts, triggering international scrutiny and alarm (Moon, 2018).

Iran's nuclear activities came under intense scrutiny from the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and the international community. The IAEA requested access to Iranian nuclear facilities for inspections to verify the programme's compliance with international safeguards. Iran's enrichment of uranium, construction of nuclear facilities, like the Natanz and Fordow enrichment plants, and its refusal to provide full transparency about its nuclear programme intensified suspicions regarding its true intentions (Blair et al, 2017). Iran's membership in the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty (NPT) obligated it to adhere to safeguards and inspections by the IAEA. Concerns emerged when Iran failed to fully comply with some of these obligations, raising questions about the peaceful nature of its nuclear activities (Segal, 2015). Ensuring Iran's compliance with nuclear agreements, particularly concerning allowing rigorous inspections and transparency of its nuclear activities, remains a challenge (Korolev, 2020). This requires a robust verification mechanism to monitor Iran's nuclear programme effectively (Nakhle, 2015). The imposition of sanctions on Iran, particularly by the United States, has significantly impacted its economy. Reaching an agreement that guarantees sanctions relief in exchange for verifiable steps toward denuclearization while addressing concerns over Iran's regional activities presents a complex balancing act (Moon, 2018).

The Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), commonly known as the Iran nuclear deal, was an agreement between Iran and several world powers aimed at curbing Iran's nuclear programme in exchange for lifting economic sanctions (Katzman, 2020). This agreement was reached in 2015 but faced a significant setback when the United States, under the Trump administration, unilaterally withdrew from the deal in 2018, re-imposing sanctions on Iran. The JCPOA was a multilateral effort involving countries like the United States, China, Russia, France, Germany and the United Kingdom. Its goal was

to ensure that Iran's nuclear activities remained peaceful. After the US withdrawal, Iran resumed some of its nuclear activities, citing the failure of other signatories to provide the economic benefits promised in the deal (Moon, 2018). There are efforts to revive the JCPOA, with negotiations between Iran and the remaining signatories (China, Russia, France, Germany, and the UK), as well as indirect talks with the United States. The challenge lies in rebuilding trust, agreeing on terms that satisfy all parties, and addressing concerns about Iran's nuclear activities while providing economic relief from sanctions (Moon, 2018).

The situation in Iran reflects another criticism of the nuclear non-proliferation regime: that the institutions which govern, implement, and enforce non-proliferation measures may be perceived by some to serve political interests over genuine non-proliferation concerns. For example, Nakhle (2015) asserts that Iran illustrates the difficulty of separating genuine non-compliance issues and “politically motivated” issues. Dr Ben Saul also told the Committee about the perceived politicization of the UN Security Council and its resolutions, as seen in the use of the UN Security Council and its binding resolutions to deal with situations in Iran (Ramberg, 2018). The League of Arab States and others often argue that the UN Security Council is seen as some kind of tool of Western hegemony or great power hegemony, particularly on the nuclear issue. There is certainly a concern about the unequal treatment of countries, such as Iran under those sanctions' regimes compared with other countries which equally possess serious and dangerous nuclear capabilities, such as Israel and the United States. This perception characterised Iran's response to the 2006 and 2007 sanctions implemented by the UN Security Council. Iran's Foreign Minister said:

*The Security Council is being abused to take unlawful, unnecessary, and unjustifiable action against the peaceful nuclear program of the Islamic Republic of Iran ... To give [these sanctions] a semblance of international legitimacy, [the advocates of the sanctions] ... have taken advantage of their substantial economic and political power to pressure and manipulate the Security Council to adopt three unwarranted resolutions within 8 months where certain members of the Security Council decided to hijack the case from IAEA and politicize it.*

According to Kang (2017), the wider geopolitical dynamics in the Middle East, including Iran's involvement in regional conflicts and tensions with neighbouring countries, add layers of complexity to negotiations. Addressing regional security concerns alongside nuclear discussions presents a challenge. Internal political dynamics within Iran, including hard-line factions opposed to making concessions on the nuclear programme, create hurdles in reaching a consensus on negotiating terms and commitments.

In both North Korea and Iran, the politics of disarmament is deeply intertwined with complex geopolitical, security, and domestic factors. Achieving substantial progress toward disarmament requires navigating these challenges, building trust, addressing security concerns, and finding a delicate balance between diplomatic incentives and sanctions to incentivize compliance with international obligations (Kang, 2017).

### **Global Implications of the Politics of Disarmament in Korea and Iran**

According to Korolev (2020), the politics of disarmament in North Korea and Iran have significant global implications that extend beyond regional security concerns. These implications encompass geopolitical, diplomatic, proliferation, and economic dimensions, impacting various stakeholders worldwide. The nuclear ambitions of North Korea and Iran have heightened regional tensions, destabilizing neighbouring countries and the broader regions of East Asia (in the case of North Korea) and the Middle East (in the case of Iran). The efforts to contain and address the nuclear aspirations of North Korea and Iran have influenced regional alliances and strategic partnerships, impacting the security calculus of neighbouring states and global powers. The failure to address and contain North Korea's and Iran's nuclear programmes raises concerns about nuclear proliferation. It sets precedents for other countries to pursue similar paths, thereby challenging global efforts toward non-proliferation. The possibility of North Korea or Iran sharing nuclear technology or know-how with non-state actors or countries poses a grave threat to global security and stability (Katzman, 2020). The nuclear ambitions of North Korea and Iran have strained diplomatic relations among the involved nations, including the United States, China, Russia, European countries, and neighbouring states. This has led to a complex web of negotiations, disagreements, and diplomatic rifts. The actions and responses related to North Korea and Iran's nuclear programmes have tested the effectiveness of international agreements and frameworks aimed at non-proliferation, such as the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty (NPT) and the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). The international sanctions imposed on North Korea and Iran due to their nuclear activities have had far-reaching economic repercussions, affecting global trade, investment, and energy markets. The effectiveness of these sanctions and their impact on regional and global economies is a matter of concern and the geopolitical uncertainties surrounding Iran's nuclear programme have influenced oil markets and energy security, with consequences for global energy prices and supply dynamics (Olimat, 2016).

The politics of disarmament in North Korea and Iran have wide-ranging global impacts that transcend regional boundaries. These impacts affect international relations, regional stability, nuclear proliferation risks, diplomatic engagements, economic factors, and the effectiveness of global non-proliferation efforts. Addressing these challenges requires concerted efforts by the international community to find diplomatic solutions that ensure security, stability, and non-proliferation in a volatile geopolitical landscape (Shahram, 2019). In both cases, the politics of disarmament involves navigating complex diplomatic relationships, balancing security concerns, addressing regional dynamics, and finding common ground among various stakeholders to achieve the ultimate goal of denuclearization.

### **Conclusion**

The politics of disarmament in North Korea and Iran is complex and multifaceted, impacting regional stability, global non-proliferation efforts, and diplomatic relations. The challenges of addressing nuclear ambitions, verification, sanctions, and regional

security dilemmas have led to prolonged impasse and strained international relations. Addressing the politics of disarmament in North Korea and Iran demands a comprehensive and concerted effort involving diplomatic finesse, strategic negotiation, regional cooperation, and a commitment to international security and stability. It requires a delicate balance of incentives, assurances, and pragmatic steps toward denuclearization while addressing the complex geopolitical realities in the respective regions.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the findings, the following are recommended:

1. Renewed and sustained diplomatic efforts involving all stakeholders (world powers) are crucial; direct negotiations, high-level dialogues, and multilateral talks must be prioritized to foster mutual understanding and trust.
2. Confidence-building measures such as reciprocal steps, freeze-for-freeze agreements, or small-scale concessions to build trust and pave the way for larger disarmament commitments must be initiated.
3. The world powers should emphasize the importance of robust verification mechanisms and enhanced transparency in monitoring nuclear activities by ensuring comprehensive and intrusive inspections by international bodies to verify compliance.
4. The world powers should reassess the effectiveness of sanctions as a tool for disarmament by tailoring sanctions relief as an incentive for tangible, verified steps towards denuclearization, and balance economic incentives with diplomatic pressure to encourage compliance.
5. The world powers should engage neighbouring countries and regional stakeholders in dialogue and cooperation by addressing regional security concerns through multilateral frameworks, to foster stability and confidence-building measures.
6. The world powers should encourage sustained commitments from all parties involved and recognize that achieving complete disarmament is a gradual and long-term process requiring patience, persistence, and mutual concessions.



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