

A Short History of US Relations with the DPRK

US-Korean Relations before Partition

The United States established diplomatic relations with Korea in 1882, the first Western power to do so. The treaty required that either country extend their “good offices” should “other powers deal unjustly or oppressively with either government.”¹ Korea had abandoned its traditional isolationist policies and opened up to the West in order to preserve its independence; in the following decades, however, Korea increasingly became a target of regional rivalries, first between Japan and China, and then between Japan and Russia. The United States hosted the 1905 conference at Portsmouth, New Hampshire, that ended the Russo-Japanese War and turned Korea into a Japanese protectorate. In a meeting between US Secretary of War William Howard Taft and Japanese Prime Minister Katsura Taro in July 1905, captured in the “Taft-Katsura Memorandum,” each side tacitly recognized the others’ claim to influence in the Philippines and Korea, respectively.² Japan formally annexed Korea in 1910.

The Korean War

At the close of World War II in 1945, in what was supposed to be a temporary measure, the Korean Peninsula was divided into two halves, under the Soviet sphere of influence in the north and under the U.S. sphere of influence in the south. In August 1948, the southern government declared the establishment of the Republic of Korea (ROK). In September 1948, the northern government declared the establishment of the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK). Both desired to unify the peninsula under their own government.

After several years of cross-border clashes, war broke out between the North and South on June 25, 1950. UN forces, led by the United States, intervened on behalf of the ROK; later that year China intervened on behalf of the DPRK. An armistice ending hostilities was signed in 1953. A peace treaty has not been signed. The fortified border, known as the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ), has been the site of occasional military incidents. Maritime military incidents have also occurred, including North Korea’s seizure of the USS Pueblo in 1968. The Northern Limit Line (NLL), a sea boundary drawn by the UN Command, is contested by the DPRK.³

The Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty

In December 1985, North Korea agreed to join the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) but did not complete a safeguards agreement⁴ with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). North Korea later linked fulfillment of IAEA provisions to US

withdrawal of nuclear weapons from South Korea.⁵ In September 1991, President George H.W. Bush announced the withdrawal of all tactical nuclear weapons abroad, including approximately 100 based in South Korea.

In 1992, North Korea ratified the IAEA safeguards agreement and declared the existence of seven nuclear sites and about 90 kilograms of plutonium. Upon discovery of discrepancies in North Korean reports in February 1993 the IAEA demanded special inspections, which North Korea initially refused. In February 1994 North Korea agreed to allow IAEA inspectors to visit all seven declared nuclear sites. However, North Korea refused access to the plutonium processing plant at Yongbyon.⁶

The Agreed Framework

Former President Jimmy Carter visited Pyongyang in June 1994 and negotiated a resumption of bilateral talks shortly before the death of Kim Il-Sung in July. In October 1994, the United States and North Korea signed the Agreed Framework,⁷ under which North Korea agreed to freeze its plutonium reprocessing program, allow special inspections, and remove 8000 spent nuclear fuel in exchange for energy assistance from the United States including funding for the construction of light water nuclear reactors (LWRs). In Title II the Agreed Framework laid out the actions the two sides would take “toward full normalization of political and economic relations.” Each side lived up to some provisions of the agreement, though not all of them.⁸ North Korea maintained the 1994 freeze of its plutonium facilities until the agreement collapsed in 2002.

Missile Talks and the Perry Report

At bilateral talks in April 1996 and June 1997, the United States pressed the North to end its sales of missile components and technology. In return, North Korea demanded compensation for lost revenue. Following the August 1998 launch of a three stage Taepo-dong 1 rocket carrying the Kwangmyongsong satellite over Japan, the United States and the DPRK met twice more for missile talks in October 1998, and March 1999, both with inconclusive results.

In November 1998 President Clinton appointed former Secretary of Defense William Perry as the US North Korean Policy Coordinator. He was tasked with reviewing U.S. foreign policy towards North Korea.⁹ The resulting “Perry Report” called for “a comprehensive and integrated approach to the DPRK’s nuclear weapons- and ballistic missile-related programs” and negotiations with the DPRK, coordinated with Japan and the ROK.¹⁰

In September 1999 North Korea agreed to a self-imposed missile moratorium in exchange for the United States partially lifting economic sanctions, which it did in 2000. However, the moratorium did not prohibit missiles sales, which remained robust during this period.

In October 2000 Vice Marshal Jo Myong Rok, First Vice Chairman of the DPRK National Defense Commission visited the United States. North Korea reaffirmed the moratorium and the two countries issued the October 2000 Joint Communiqué.¹¹ Both sides declared the usefulness of resolving the missile issue. Missile talks continued but were inconclusive by the end of the Clinton administration.¹²

Breakdown of the Agreed Framework

In response to the incoming Bush administration's skepticism over the effectiveness of the Agreed Framework¹³ the DPRK warned that it could not maintain the moratorium "indefinitely."¹⁴ Questioning whether a missile agreement could be "adequately verified,"¹⁵ the administration delayed resumption of missile talks while it undertook a comprehensive policy review. Tensions increased further following the inclusion of North Korea in the "Axis of Evil" in President Bush's 2002 State of the Union Address.

Concerns over a clandestine DPRK uranium program had existed for years and came to a head in an October 2002 meeting in Pyongyang. The U.S. government claimed that the DPRK admitted to having a uranium enrichment program; the North denies this. The United States declared that North Korea had violated the Agreed Framework and suspended energy shipments to North Korea. In response, North Korea declared the 1994 agreement nullified, withdrew from the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty in January 2003, and began to reprocess plutonium.¹⁶

Six-Party Talks

In April 2003 the United States, China and North Korea began trilateral talks over the North's nuclear program. These talks evolved into Six-Party Talks, encompassing Japan, South Korea, and Russia.¹⁷ In March 2005, North Korea conditioned its return to nuclear negotiations on a U.S. apology for calling it part of an "axis of evil" and announced that it had ended its self-imposed missile test moratorium.¹⁸

Negotiations resumed in September 2005 culminating in the issuance of a "Joint Statement," in which the DPRK committed to abandoning its nuclear program and return to the NPT in exchange for food and energy assistance from the other Six-Party members. The agreement also outlined the parameters of future negotiations, including the normalization of relations with the United States, Japan and South Korea.¹⁹

The momentum forged by the 2005 Joint Statement disappeared almost immediately due to disputes over the timing of the provision of a civilian nuclear program²⁰ (The Joint Statement declared vaguely that the provision of LWRs to the DPRK would be discussed at "an appropriate time"). Negotiations deteriorated further when the U.S. Department of Treasury designated Banco Delta Asia (BDA), a bank in Macau as a "primary money laundering concern." In response Macau froze approximately \$24 million in North Korean funds. North Korea made unfreezing these funds a pre-condition for further talks.²¹

North Korea's 2006 Long-Range Missile and Nuclear Tests

In July 2006, the DPRK test-fired an array of ballistic missiles over the Sea of Japan. The United Nations Security Council (UNSC) adopted Resolution 1695 condemning the action and calling on the DPRK to return immediately to the Six-Party Talks.

In October 2006 the DPRK conducted an underground nuclear test. The UNSC subsequently adopted UN Resolution 1718 under Chapter VII of the UN Charter, applying a wide range of sanctions on North Korea. Following this episode, the six parties met in mid-December 2006, followed by two rounds of US-DPRK bilateral talks in January and another round of Six-Party Talks in February 2007.²²

The February Joint Statement

The February meeting resulted in the "Initial Actions for the Implementation of the Joint Statement,"²³ which called for North Korea to shut down and seal its Yongbyon facility, and issue a declaration of all nuclear programs. In response, the United States would initiate the process to remove North Korea from the list of state sponsors of terrorism, and terminate sanctions applied under the Trading with the Enemy Act. North Korea would initiate bilateral talks with the United States and Japan. The Six Parties would provide heavy fuel oil, and working groups* would be formed to discuss the specifics of carrying out the agreement.²⁴

The Six Parties reconvened in March 2007 but talks stalled after the North Koreans refused to negotiate until they had received the BDA funds. The BDA funds were transferred to North Korea in June and IAEA inspectors were allowed into North Korea to monitor, inspect, and verify the shutdown of the Yongbyon nuclear facility. The IAEA confirmed the shutdown in July 2007.²⁵ Six-Party Talks and US/DPRK bilateral talks resumed and culminated in an agreement reached in early October 2007: the Second Phase Actions for Implementation of the Joint Statement.²⁶

With a team of U.S. experts observing, North Korea began to disable its nuclear facilities at Yongbyon in November 2007. However, the DPRK failed to submit a complete declaration of its nuclear program by the December 31 2007 deadline.²⁷

2008 Negotiations and Removal from the List of State Sponsors of Terror

By February 2008 eight of eleven North Korean disablement steps had been completed.²⁸ Negotiations continued through April 2008, when the details of the Second Phase Actions were finalized. President Bush suspended sanctions on North Korea implemented under the U.S. Trading with the Enemy Act in late June. However, this was a largely symbolic act as President Bush reinstated many of the restrictions in Executive Order 13466 signed on the same day.²⁹ North Korea submitted a declaration detailing

* The five working groups: Normalization of DPRK-US Relations, Denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula, Normalization of North Korea-Japan Relations, Economy and Energy Cooperation and A Northeast Asia Peace and Security Mechanism.

the extent of its nuclear program in June 2008.³⁰ This declaration has not been made public. In a highly visible event attended by U.S. observers, North Korea demolished the cooling tower at its Yongbyon reactor.³¹ While negotiations over the details of an inspection regime continued, North Korea was removed from the list of state sponsors of terrorism on October 11, 2008.³²

However disagreements continued over a verification regime and the United States said the declaration was incomplete. North Korea accused the Bush administration of delaying action on removing it from the terrorism list and later protested that several Six-Party members (Japan and the ROK) had not fulfilled their commitments to deliver 1 million tons of heavy fuel oil as promised in the agreement. The year 2008 ended in a deadlock.³³

The Obama Administration

Candidate Obama declared his willingness to engage in bilateral dialogue with North Korea.³⁴ The Obama administration appointed the eminently qualified Stephen Bosworth as Special Representative for North Korea Policy. Amb. Bosworth's part-time status raised questions about the priority the administration had assigned North Korea.

Second Nuclear Test and UNSCR 1874

On April 5, 2009 the DPRK launched a multi-stage Unha-2 (modified Taepodong-3) rocket carrying the Kwangmyonsong-2 communications satellite. The international community declared the test as a violation of UNSCR 1718. The UNSC issued a Presidential Statement announcing sanctions targeting North Korean companies involved in nuclear and WMD programs.

On May 25, 2009 the DPRK conducted a second nuclear test. The UNSC unanimously adopted Resolution 1874, condemning the test and strengthening the sanctions regime imposed by Resolution 1718.³⁵

After the nuclear test, the administration adopted a policy it calls "strategic patience:" it implements extensive economic and financial sanctions while waiting for North Korea to come back to the negotiating table.³⁶

Uranium Enrichment Program Revealed

On September 4, 2009, North Korea announced that it possessed a uranium enrichment program entering its final phase of testing, thereby giving the DPRK a potential second pathway to developing nuclear weapons.³⁷

In November 2010 a Stanford University delegation led by Dr. Siegfried Hecker visited North Korea's nuclear facilities at Yongbyon. The team was shown a uranium enrichment facility with over a thousand gas centrifuges. The North Korean government maintains that the facility is operational and producing Low-Enriched Uranium (LEU) for use as fuel in its experimental Light Water Reactor (LWR). While the intent (and

functionality) of North Korea's uranium enrichment program remains unclear, Dr. Hecker noted, "The uranium enrichment facilities could be readily converted to produce highly-enriched uranium bomb fuel."³⁸

The Cheonan Incident³⁹

On March 26, 2010, the ROK corvette Cheonan broke apart and sank near Baekryong Island, just south of the disputed Northern Limit Line (NLL), a maritime border established by the UN Command in 1953. Forty-six South Korean marines died. In May 2010 the Civilian-Military Joint Investigation Group convened by the ROK Ministry of National Defense concluded that the Cheonan had sunk as the result of a torpedo attack launched by a North Korean midget submarine.⁴⁰ North Korea has strongly denied involvement in sinking the Cheonan. In response to the incident President Obama signed Executive Order 13551, expanding U.S. economic sanctions against North Korea to further curtail North Korean money laundering and counterfeiting operations⁴¹ and the United States and South Korea conducted a series of military exercises "designed to send a clear message to North Korea that its aggressive behavior must stop."⁴²

Yeonpyeong Shelling

On November 23, 2010 the North and South traded artillery fire in the Yellow Sea. The North, referring to the maritime border it had claimed in 1999, said the South had initiated the clash by firing shells into its territorial waters during its military exercises. The South said all its shells fell within its territorial waters, referring to the NLL.⁴³ The clash resulted in the deaths of 2 South Korean soldiers and 2 South Korean civilians. The number and severity of Northern casualties from the exchange is unknown.⁴⁴

The United States strongly condemned the attack and reiterated its support and commitment to the defense of the Republic of Korea.⁴⁵ Shortly following the attack, the United States and South Korea engaged in a 4-day joint naval exercise in the Yellow Sea.⁴⁶ In reaction to these events, the United States has sought to deepen its security alliances with the ROK and Japan.

Resumption of Talks

In late July 2011 Amb. Stephen Bosworth met with DPRK Deputy Foreign Minister Kim Kye-gwan for 'exploratory talks' regarding the resumption of Six-Party negotiations. U.S. officials have expressed skepticism that Pyongyang is ready to "take concrete and irreversible steps toward denuclearization."⁴⁷ The meeting was characterized as "constructive," however the United States emphasized that it would not rush back into negotiations before consulting with its allies and other Six-Party members.⁴⁸

Congress has weighed in heavily on North Korean policy. Sen. John Kerry argues that the United States must take the lead to resume nuclear discussions with the North, even engaging in bilateral talks.⁴⁹ However, other senators oppose the pursuit of bilateral talks, especially if this runs counter to ROK policy.⁵⁰ The House has passed an amendment barring certain funds from being used for food aid for North Korea⁵¹ and

Rep. Ros-Lehtinen has called for the DPRK to be re-listed as a State Sponsor of Terrorism.⁵² Further administration action on the DPRK will likely require significant political capital.

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¹ US-Korea Treaty of Peace, Amity, Commerce, and Navigation (1882).

[<http://www.instrok.org/instrok/resources/Draft%20and%20Final%20Versions.pdf>]

² The Taft-Katsura Agreed Memorandum, July 29, 1905. [<http://www.icasinc.org/history/katsura.html>]

³ Roehrig, Terence, "Korean Dispute over the Northern Limit Line: Security, Economics or International Law?" p. 7.

[<http://digitalcommons.law.umaryland.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1193&context=mscas&sei-redir=1#search=%22Terence%20roehrig%20northern%20limit%20line%22>,

³ ROK Ministry of Defense 2010 White Paper. p.320

[http://www.mnd.go.kr/cms_file/info/mndpaper/2010/2010WhitePaperAll_eng.pdf]

⁴ "Chronology of US-North Korean Nuclear and Missile Diplomacy." Arms Control Association. June 2003, [<http://www.armscontrol.org/factsheets/dprkchron>]

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Albright, David and Brannan, Paul. "The North Korean Plutonium Stock, February 2007." Institute for Science and International Security. February 20, 2007, p.2. [<http://www.isis-online.org/publications/dprk/DPRKplutoniumFEB.pdf>]

⁷ NCNK issue brief, "Text of 1994 Agreed Framework"

http://www.ncnk.org/resources/publications/AgreedFrameworkText.pdf/file_view

⁸ See Robert Carlin and John W. Lewis "Negotiating with North Korea: 1992-2007." January 2008, p. 5.

http://iis-db.stanford.edu/pubs/22128/Negotiating_with_North_Korea_1992-2007.pdf

⁹ Dutra, Michael and Kampani, Gaurav. "The Forthcoming Perry Report." Center for Nonproliferation Studies. 1999, [http://cns.miis.edu/archive/country_north_korea/perry.htm]

¹⁰ Dr. William J. Perry, U.S. North Korea Policy Coordinator and Special Advisor to the President and the Secretary of State, "Review of United States Policy Toward North Korea: Findings and Recommendations, Unclassified Report, Washington, DC, October 12, 1999."

[http://www.state.gov/www/regions/eap/991012_northkorea_rpt.html]

¹¹ "US-DPRK Joint Communiqué."

[http://www.ncnk.org/resources/publications/US_DPRK_Joint_Communique_2000.pdf/?searchterm=jo%20omyong%20rok]

¹² "Chronology of U.S.-North Korean Nuclear and Missile Diplomacy." Op. cited.

¹³ Donald G. Gross, "U.S.-Korea Relations: Slow Start in U.S. Policy toward the DPRK." Comparative Connections, 1st Quarter 2001, Vol. 3, No. 1, April 2001. p.

3. [http://csis.org/files/media/isis/pubs/0101qus_korea.pdf.]

¹⁴ "Spokesman for DPRK Foreign Ministry on new U.S. administration's policy towards DPRK." KCNA. February 22, 2001. [<http://www.kcna.co.jp/item/2001/200102/news02/22.htm#1>]

¹⁵ Donald G. Gross, "U.S.-Korea Relations: Slow Start in U.S. Policy toward the DPRK." op. cited. p. 3.

¹⁶ "Chronology of U.S.-North Korean Nuclear and Missile Diplomacy." Op. cited.

¹⁷ For links to official documents produced during the Six-Party Talks process, see <http://www.ncnk.org/resources/briefing-papers/six-party-talk-documents-archive>.

¹⁸ "North Korea ends missile-test moratorium, raising nuclear stakes." Agence France-Presse, March 2005. [<http://www.spacewar.com/2005/050303133800.odute9s2.html>.]

¹⁹ "September 19, 2005 Joint Statement."

[http://www.ncnk.org/resources/publications/September_19_2005_Joint_Statement.doc/?searchterm=September_19_2005_joint_statement]

²⁰ "Chronology of U.S.-North Korean Nuclear and Missile Diplomacy." Op. cited.

²¹ See [the NCNK briefing paper on economic issues](http://www.ncnk.org/resources/briefing-papers/all-briefing-papers/u-s-economic-policy-toward-north-korea) for more information on the BDA issue:

[<http://www.ncnk.org/resources/briefing-papers/all-briefing-papers/u-s-economic-policy-toward-north-korea>]

²² For more information on the 2006 nuclear test and UNSCR 1718 please see [NCNK Issue Brief: United Nations Security Council Resolution 1718](http://www.ncnk.org/resources/briefing-papers/all-briefing-papers/united-nations-security-council-resolution-1718) [<http://www.ncnk.org/resources/briefing-papers/all-briefing-papers/united-nations-security-council-resolution-1718>]

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[http://www.ncnk.org/resources/publications/Feb_13_2007_Agreement.doc/file_view]
- ²⁴ Ibid.
- ²⁵ “North Korea’s Nuclear Weapons: Latest Developments, Updated December 5, 2007.” P. 5.
[http://www.ncnk.org/resources/publications/CRS_DPRK_Nuclear_Developments_Dec_2007_RL34256.pdf/?searchterm=2007%20yongbyon%20shutdown]
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- ²⁷ U.S. Department of State, “Background Note: North Korea.” [http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/2792.htm]
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- ²⁹ Executive Order 13466, June 26, 2008. [http://edocket.access.gpo.gov/2008/pdf/08-1399.pdf]
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[<http://www.nytimes.com/2008/06/28/world/asia/28nuke.html>]
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- ³⁴ Traub, James, “Is (His) Biography (Our) Destiny?” NY Times Magazine, November 4, 2007
[<http://www.nytimes.com/2007/11/04/magazine/04obama-t.html?ref=politics&pagewanted=print>]
- ³⁵ For more information on North Korea’s second nuclear test and UNSCR 1874, please see NCNK Issue Brief: [United Nations Security Council Resolution 1874](#) [http://www.ncnk.org/resources/briefing-papers/all-briefing-papers/united-nations-security-council-resolution-1874]
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- ³⁸ For more information on North Korea’s nuclear program, please see the NCNK Issue Brief: [North Korea’s Nuclear Program](#) [http://www.ncnk.org/resources/briefing-papers/all-briefing-papers/dprk-nuclear-weapons-program]
- ³⁹ For more information on the Cheonan and Yeonpyeong incidents, please see the NCNK Issue Brief: “An overview of South Korea’s North Korea Policy.” [http://www.ncnk.org/resources/briefing-papers/all-briefing-papers/an-overview-of-south-korea2019s-dprk-policy]
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⁴⁷ Spillius, Alex, "U.S. and North Korea Conclude 'Constructive' Talks." The Telegraph, July 29, 2011, [<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/asia/northkorea/8671971/US-and-North-Korea-conclude-constructive-talks.html>]

⁴⁸ Bosworth, Stephen, "Remarks After Meeting with North Korean Vice Foreign Minister." July, 29, 2011 [<http://www.state.gov/p/eap/rls/rm/2011/07/169451.htm>]

⁴⁹ Kerry, John, "North Korea: The Land of Lousy Options." The Los Angeles Times, June 26, 2011, [<http://www.latimes.com/news/opinion/commentary/la-oe-kerry-north-korea-20110626,0,4538130.story>]

⁵⁰ Senators McCain, Kyl and Lieberman have written to the Secretary of State calling for close coordination with South Korea; one of their letters (this one written with Sen. Webb), has been released: <http://www.pii.com/blogs/nk/?p=1434>

⁵¹ "Amendment to H.R. 2112." [http://www.ncnk.org/resources/publications/ROYCE_044_xml%20-3.pdf/file_view] Whether or not the amendment survives conference remains to be seen.

⁵² Remarks of the Honorable Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, Chairman, Committee on Foreign Affairs, "North Korea's Sea of Fire: Bullying, Brinkmanship, and Blackmail." March 10, 2011.