

North Korea

The War that Never Ends

Summary

The struggle with North Korea and their possession of nuclear weapons began after the Korean War. The Korean War devastated North Korea. 635,000 tons of bombs were dropped in Korea. The United States dropped bombs on everything, including hydroelectric and irrigation dams, destroying crops. North Korea suffered greater damage during the war. Since North Korea suffered tremendous damage, they felt that they needed the capability to deter an American attack. The war ended in an armistice in 1953 (therefore the war is technically not over), and in 1980 North Korea built their first nuclear complex, Yongbyon, insisting that it is only peaceful. North Korea has only built up its nuclear program since then, testing their missiles frequently (some have been known to have the capability to reach US territory). In an effort to force North Korea to denuclearize, there have been sanctions placed, summits held and ambassadors elected.



Summits

A summit is a meeting of international heads of state or government usually with media exposure and a prearranged agenda. The Singapore summit in June 2018 between President Trump and North Korean leader Kim Jong-Un was the first summit between a US and North Korean leader. During this summit both leaders signed a statement where Trump committed to provide security to North Korea and Kim reaffirmed his commitment to complete denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula. Since then, there has been a second summit held in Vietnam between the two leaders.

Ambassador

An ambassador is an accredited diplomat sent by a country as its official representative to a foreign country. In 2018, the Trump administration appointed Stephen Biegun as the US Special Representative for North Korea. Biegun is responsible for leading US efforts to achieve President Trump's goal of the final, fully verified denuclearization of North Korea.



Sanction

An economic sanction is a ban, barrier or restriction on trade for a specific country or group of people. Many economic sanctions have been placed on North Korea by the United Nations (UN) and the US in order to try to force them to denuclearize. They have placed sanctions on heavy weaponry, missile technology and material, ban on mineral exports, ban on the selling of helicopters, ban on coal, oil and iron exports, select luxury goods. Every time they have held a nuclear test, the UN and US tries to combat it with heavier sanctions.



Who Is North Korea Trading With?

Percentage of imports and exports by country in 2015



Analysis

The United States and the United Nations have both tried diligently using these three tactics to denuclearize North Korea. However, North Korea has yet to denuclearize. To date, there has been two summits between North Korea and the United States leaders (most notable leaders include President Trump and Kim Jong Un). The summits have been a huge step forward in United States relations with North Korea because the two leaders were able to meet in person and show each other that each is semi-willing to work together to denuclearize North Korea, and relieve sanctions. However, during the first meeting only a vague document (that North Korea interpreted as relief of sanctions first, then denuclearization; while the United States interpreted the document as denuclearization first, then relief of sanctions) was signed that did not achieve any progress on denuclearization. The second meeting actually ended early, and again no progress was made on denuclearization. Therefore, these summits have not been successful in achieving the goal of denuclearization.

In order to prepare for this summit, Stephen Biegun, the ambassador that represents the United States in North Korea, works with his counterpart in the North Korea (Kim Hyokchol) and other North Korean officials to try to make a deal so that when the two leaders meet they can sign it. Having a United States representative for North Korea is progress, so that the United States and North Korea can be continuously working towards the end goal of denuclearization.

The sanctions used in North Korea have been somewhat successful. If North Korea fired missiles, or were making nuclear fuel, the United States and the United Nations would impose sanctions on them. This would then force North Korea back to the meeting table and they would try to compromise. The United States and the United Nations were able to use these sanctions to their advantage for negotiations due to North Korea's deteriorating economy, and they were able to create agreements for North Korea to (for example) shut down their nuclear facilities in exchange for fuel oil. However, North Korea has continuously violated these agreements made, and launched more rockets, and therefore receiving more sanctions.

North Korea has continuously violated the trust of the United States, making it hard to form an agreement on denuclearization. While North Korea wants the sanctions (relief first, the United States fears that they will once again continue to run its nuclear program (and the relief of sanctions will only fuel this). Overall, none of these tactics have achieved the goal of denuclearization, but they have put bandaids on the problems, and are all a step forward to the goal of denuclearization.

