



Iran And North Korea: A Global Nuclear Crisis

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The relationship between North Korea and Iran is built on nuclear cooperation – and it is advanced! During the Iran-Iraq war, Iran received missiles from North Korea, which marks the start of a long-lasting, mostly secret, military alliance. It is a cooperation that revolves around the sharing and trading of nuclear information and technology with the goals of regime survival and the undermining of US regional interests in both the Middle East and East Asia.

For more than three decades, North Korea and Iran have strategically cooperated, have developed illicit ballistic missiles and other nuclear-related technologies - sidestepping international sanctions - and worked together on sharing nuclear test data and weapon designs. Iranian and North Korean scientists work together to study results of nuclear tests (re: in 2006 an Iranian delegation was present in North Korea at the launch of the Taepodong 2 missile). And there is more. A confidential UN report, leaked in 2011, stated that prohibited ballistic missile-related items were suspected to have been transferred between North Korea and Iran. North Korea provides Iran with a special programme called MCNPX 2.6.0, which simulates nuclear bomb detonations. Intelligence agencies have suggested that the sharing of this computer programme was part of a larger \$100 million deal between the countries that included nuclear training and missile technology. Also, a report of the National Council of Resistance of Iran stated that both countries have an ongoing collaboration in nuclear warhead development at a secret site in Khojir, Iran, code named B1-Nori-8500, where nuclear warheads and intermediate-ranged ballistic missiles are developed. With many Middle Eastern regimes facing arms embargoes and China and Russia only cautiously supplying certain states in order to avoid international pressure, North Korea fills the gaps and sells both conventional and unconventional weapons to anyone willing to pay.

Regime survival also plays an important role in the cooperation between the two states. For Iran, this refers to the power of the Ayatollah, his successors and the clerical security establishment that needs



to be kept intact to rule over the Islamic Republic of Iran. Also, Iran, in order to achieve regime survival, must find a market for its abundant energy resources.

For North Korea regime survival depends on the survival of the feudalistic Kim family which has held the country in an iron grip for three generations. For both countries, the survival of their regimes goes hand-in-hand with undermining the US' regional interests and international sanctions. Even though both have faced international efforts to impede their nuclear development, they continue their nuclear cooperation, and this poses serious strategic challenges.

For the US, this situation is very complicated; it seeks to sanction North Korea and force it to abandon its nuclear goals while at the same time does not want to push North Korea too far on its own. The US is in search of allies to shoulder the burden of this conflict. However, it will not find such allies in Russia or China due to their own foreign policy interests, a part of which is their common goal to diminish US power. But for Europe, the risks are also immense as North Korea's ICBM's are able to reach the continent's mainland and Article 5 of NATO may drag member states into conflict anyway.

The likelihood that North Korea abandons its nuclear arsenal and ballistic programme is remote. North Korea assumes that the US will not directly attack the country due to Chinese aversion to increased US troops deployed in the region, and since China - the wild card - sees North Korea as a buffer between China and US forces stationed in Japan and South Korea, fears of a wider conflict may deter action against Pyongyang.

As the international community faces two crises – in the Middle East and East Asia – it is time to expose the reality behind the shrouds – that North Korea and Iran are two rogue-states that work together to undermine international order. They need to be stopped by the collective weight of international powers and not relegated to the US which cannot contain both.