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ISSUE BRIEF

It's Time to Get Serious about a Pressure Strategy to Contain North Korea

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As Joe Biden seeks to slow North Korea's growing nuclear and missile programs, the administration will not be able to rely on dialogue and incentives alone — it will also require instruments of pressure. The Biden administration should continue long-standing US efforts to engage with Pyongyang, despite the regime's repeated rejection of US entreaties for dialogue. Although eight previous denuclearization agreements have failed, that's not to say Washington shouldn't attempt a ninth. In the meantime, however, Washington must maintain enforcement of US laws and United Nations (UN) resolutions, and reenergize work toward their enforcement. During the Eight Party Congress, Kim Jong-Un took his traditional bellicose rhetoric during a US presidential transition one step further by calling the United States his country's "biggest enemy," vowing to augment his existing nuclear arsenal by developing tactical nuclear weapons and intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs) with longer range, enhanced precision, and multiple warheads.¹

Kim vowed that he would not use nuclear weapons unless the country's sovereignty was threatened, but North Korea has long warned that it may conduct preemptive nuclear attacks.² Since Kim Jong-Un took office almost a decade ago, he has overseen an exponential increase in North Korea's nuclear and missile programs. He has also committed far more violations of UN Security Council resolutions (UNSCRs) than either his father, Kim Jong-Il, or his grandfather, Kim Il-Sung, combined by at least fourfold. During the party congress, which ran for eight days starting January 5, Kim called for the development of ultra-modern tactical nuclear weapons, including new types of tactical rockets, submarine-launched ballistic-missile (SLBM) capability, and intermediate-range cruise missiles with the "most powerful warheads in the world."³ A North Korea with hundreds of nuclear weapons

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- 1 Jeongmin Kim and Kelly Kasulis, "North Korea Calls the US Its 'Biggest Enemy' and Vows to Keep Developing Nukes," NK News, January 8, 2021, <https://www.nknews.org/2021/01/north-korea-calls-the-us-its-biggest-enemy-and-vows-to-keep-developing-nukes/>; "On Report Made by Supreme Leader Kim Jong Un at 8th Congress of WPK," KCNA Watch, January 9, 2021, <https://kcna.watch.org/newstream/1610155111-665078257/on-report-made-by-supreme-leader-kim-jong-un-at-8th-congress-of-wpk/>.
- 2 "National Defense Commission, Foreign Ministry Issue Statements on Foal Eagle, Key Resolve," North Korea Leadership Watch: Research and Analysis on the DPRK Leadership, March 6, 2016, <https://nkleadershipwatch.wordpress.com/2016/03/06/national-defense-commission-foreign-ministry-issues-statements-on-foal-eagle-key-resolve/>.
- 3 "On Report Made by Supreme Leader Kim Jong Un at 8th Congress of WPK."

is very different from a North Korea that, according to a 2017 US Intelligence Community estimate, had 20–30 nuclear warheads, with fissile material for 30–60.⁴ A larger North Korean nuclear arsenal could lead the regime to engage in more coercive actions, or potentially export or transfer its weapons of mass destruction (WMD) technology in return for much-needed export revenue. North Korea cooperates with Iran, Libya, and Syria on nuclear-weapons systems, missiles, and other technologies.⁵ In 2016, the US Treasury Department imposed sanctions on Iranians working with North Koreans seeking broader ballistic-missile procurement for Iran's weapons programs.⁶

All of this should change the US calculus to focus on containing the regime's weapons program until North Korea is open to meaningful dialogue that works toward a negotiated settlement.⁷ If the objective is denuclearization, the Biden administration should be under no illusion about North Korean false pretenses or overtures. If the goal is arms control, or even just limits on the North Korean nuclear arsenal on the way to denuclearization, the administration will need to set realistic expectations for how to achieve compliance and verification. If it's an agreement toward a moratorium on testing, the price will be too high for a short-lived period given Kim's proclivities. All previous agreements were variations of moratoriums, and all of them collapsed due to North Korea's cheating or unwillingness to fulfill its agreed-upon obligations. Kim said he will never negotiate its nuclear and ballistic-missile programs and those are not a "bargaining chip," making it all the more important that the international community coordinate efforts to contain and deter the regime's efforts to proliferate.⁸

The pressure strategy to contain North Korea consists of four interwoven components that might advance serious diplomacy — or, failing that, at least hedge against more aggressive moves by Kim Jong Un: enforcement of

existing UN Security Council resolutions and US laws; diplomatic engagements with third countries to put pressure on North Korea; identifying new authorities, designations, and pressures on cyber, financial, trade, and human rights; and conducting ongoing research within the US Intelligence Community and all-of-government review to identify what worked or what didn't, rinse, and repeat. The goal is to penalize and isolate North Korean entities and individuals across financial, trade, and military sectors and subsectors as well as those in third countries supporting Pyongyang in its efforts while reenergizing alliances, existing military commitments, and diplomatic outreach to countries doing business with North Korea. Pyongyang should be allowed to continue importing food and medicine in the form of aid or trade, whether it rejects it or not. If Kim Jong-Un were as concerned about the North Korean people as he says he is, he would allow for food and medicine to reach the people who need it most.

Enforcement of existing UN Security Council resolutions and US laws

The Biden administration should identify where North Korea is violating existing authorities and who is helping the regime. Third-country and secondary-related affiliates wittingly working with or assisting North Korea should be named, shamed, and penalized. Those who are unwittingly involved should be given a chance to take corrective action against the illicit activity. Such areas include: disrupting North Korea's weapons trade and military cooperation with Iran and Syria, as well as countries in Africa and Southeast Asia; importers of North Korean commodities continuing in violation of UN bans (see the first three graphs for some noteworthy violations); those supporting the country's overseas-laborers program; and banks laundering North Korean transactions and holding accounts for front companies.

4 "Arms Control and Proliferation Profile: North Korea," Arms Control Association, last updated June 2018, <https://www.armscontrol.org/factsheets/northkoreaprofile>.

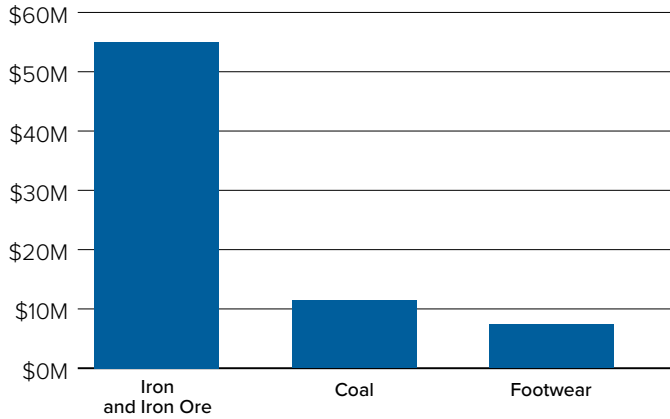
5 Paul K. Kerr, Steven A. Hildreth, and Mary Beth D. Nikitin, "Iran-North Korea-Syria Ballistic Missile and Nuclear Cooperation," Congressional Research Service, February 26, 2016, <https://fas.org/srgp/crs/nuke/R43480.pdf>; Ankit Panda, "North Korea Tests Missile Engine, Possibly Intended for an ICBM," Diplomat, September 20, 2016, <https://thediplomat.com/2016/09/north-korea-tests-missile-engine-possibly-intended-for-an-icbm/>.

6 "Treasury Sanctions Those Involved in Ballistic Missile Procurement for Iran," US Department of the Treasury, January 17, 2016, <https://www.treasury.gov/press-center/press-releases/Pages/jl0322.aspx>.

7 Andrea R. Mihailescu, "A North Korea Strategy for the Next Administration," Foreign Policy, September 9, 2020, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/09/09/north-korea-strategy-next-administration-biden-trump/>.

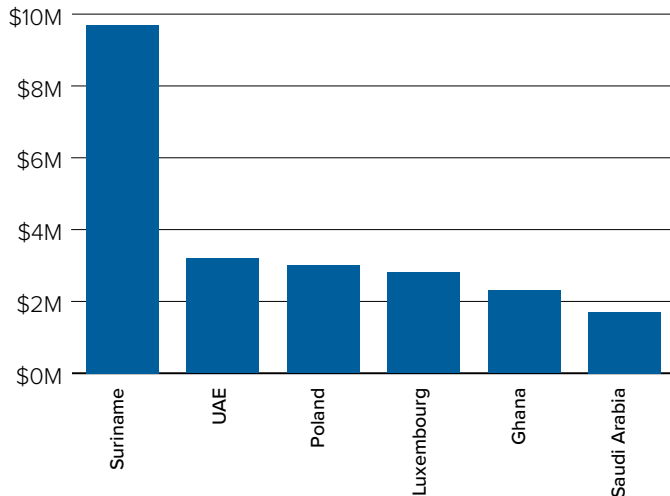
8 Joshua Berlinger, "If Kim Jong Un Destroyed North Korea's Economy to Keep Covid Out, Will Sanctions Stop Him from Pursuing Nuclear Weapons?" CNN, January 18, 2021, <https://www.cnn.com/2021/01/18/asia/north-korea-covid-sanctions-dst-intl-hnk/index.html>; Laurence Norman, "North Korea Says Nuclear Program Isn't 'Bargaining Chip,'" Wall Street Journal, September 27, 2014, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/north-korea-says-nuclear-program-isnt-bargaining-chip-1411858575>.

Graph 1. Chinese Imports of North Korean Coal, Footwear in Violation of UN bans, 2019



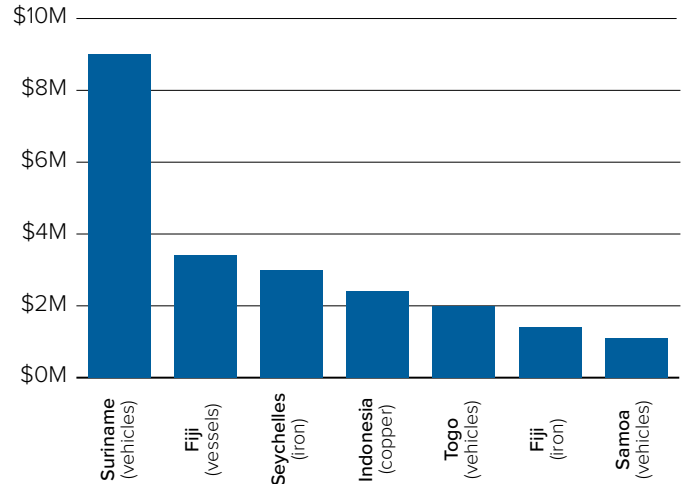
Source: “UN Comtrade Database,” United Nations.

Graph 2. Top Importers of North Korean Industrial Machinery in Violation of UN bans, 2019



Source: “UN Comtrade Database,” United Nations.

Graph 3. Top Importers of Vehicles, Vessels, Iron, Copper (other than China) in Violation of UN bans, 2019



Source: “UN Comtrade Database,” United Nations.

Note on UN Comtrade data: This information relies on countries accurately reporting their customs data and not mixing up North Korea and South Korea, which has occasionally happened in the past, making it all the more important to improve reporting on customs data. This list is not comprehensive, and includes only some of the top violators of UN bans.



People watch a TV that shows a file picture of a North Korean missile for a news report on North Korea firing short-range ballistic missiles, in Seoul, South Korea, July 31, 2019. REUTERS/Kim Hong-Ji.

China alone represented almost 25 percent of the total number of alleged violations across UN bans, including banking front channels, military sales and cooperation, and trade with the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) that the UN DPRK Panel of Experts investigated in 2019–2020.⁹ During that same period, Hong Kong had more than twenty violations, and Sierra Leone, Russia, and Indonesia each had ten or more alleged violations.¹⁰

The Biden administration should urge the UN Security Council to adopt the recommendations from the latest UN DPRK Panel of Experts reports, which include adding more designations, that countries should be on heightened alert that North Korean embassies not “use their property for extracting illegal” revenue, that the UN’s 1718 DPRK Sanctions “Committee prepare a more detailed list of luxury goods [and] Member States harmonize their

export control lists to reflect the list of prohibited luxury goods,” and that member states implement Financial Action Task Force standards to manage and mitigate risks to banks, including on virtual assets.¹¹ All nations agreed to the report when it went public and named and shamed violators, so there should be no hesitation in implementing its recommendations.

Diplomatic engagements with third countries to put pressure on North Korea

This effort consists of three subcomponents: working with allies; urging China and Russia to enforce North Korea’s obligations under the UNSCRs and UN High Commission for Refugees; and imposing an ultimatum on countries

⁹ David Albright, Sarah Burkhard, and Spencer Faragasso, “Alleged Sanctions Violations of UNSC Resolutions on North Korea for 2019/2020: The Number is Increasing,” Institute for Science and International Security, July 1, 2020, https://isis-online.org/uploads/isis-reports/documents/North_Korea_PoE_sanctions_analysis_report_July_1_Final.pdf/.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ United Nations Security Council Report, August 28, 2020.

working with North Korea to do business with either the regime or the United States.

First, the Biden administration should aim to reenergize efforts to work with its allies.¹² The goal would be to harmonize existing sanctions and pressure efforts, introduce new ones, and coordinate diplomatic pressure to isolate North Korea—including from Olympic games—and stop the country's illicit activities abroad. Other domestic priorities in South Korea and Japan will make it challenging for the Biden administration to coordinate an approach, but Washington needs to revitalize efforts toward being in sync, because they are critical to a successful strategy. Time and time again, Pyongyang divided Japan, South Korea, and the United States from each other, leveraging domestic priorities in Japan and South Korea for its own gain, and has used talks for short-term tactical concessions, including from the United States. On the eve of the Singapore summit, Donald Trump said Washington will stop using the term “maximum pressure.”¹³ In addition, the Trump administration overturned Treasury Department sanctions and did not sanction three hundred others, canceled a speech Mike Pence had scheduled that would have criticized North Korea's human-rights violations, and canceled allied military exercises.¹⁴

Second, as North Korea becomes more isolated, Pyongyang will significantly increase North Korea's dependence on China and Russia, particularly China. Beijing appears to share Washington's desire for a denuclearized Korean Peninsula—but often only in principle, and China does not believe it is achievable in the short term. Still, Xi Jinping seeks to leverage his relationship with Kim for short-term gains until those longer-term goals can be realized. China's ties with North Korea had grown distant until Trump's engagement with Pyongyang. Previously, China had joined the United States and other countries to support imposing and enforcing

new UN bans on the regime over its nuclear-weapons and ballistic-missile programs.¹⁵ Xi and Kim met five times in 2018 and 2019, during which time the State Department accused China of continuing to violate UN bans by hosting at least twenty thousand North Korean laborers who earn revenue that North Korea uses for its weapons programs, and of not stopping ships carrying prohibited North Korean coal or other sanctioned goods going to China on 555 separate occasions.¹⁶ China, meanwhile, is expected to become the world's largest economy by the end of the decade, but the amount of illicit activity passing through its borders from North Korea is embarrassing—and unacceptable.¹⁷

China is by far North Korea's largest trading partner, which gives China economic influence, but Pyongyang seeks security assurances, economic relief, and diplomatic recognition that only Washington can give it. In order for Beijing to increase its pressure levers on Pyongyang again, China will need to see improved enforcement of UN bans from countries doing business with North Korea (notably violators cited in graphs 2 and 3, as well as those in panel reports). Washington will have to recommit to sustained outreach, which will help incentivize China to join the United States once again.

Any meaningful progress will also require US leadership with high-level engagement in Beijing. The Biden administration will need to engage China repeatedly, seeking to take steps toward a regularized, private US-Chinese working group on North Korea to discuss identifying where North Koreans are violating UN bans, including through banking channels on Chinese soil.¹⁸ Washington should urge China to ban all North Korean hackers from operating on Chinese soil, using Chinese proxies, or gaining technology, equipment, or know-how from China. Through regularized engagement, the administration would give China a reasonable amount of time to work through the violations. If China ultimately

12 Mihailescu, “A North Korea Strategy for the Next Administration.”

13 Mark Landler and David E. Sanger, “Trump Veers to a Korea Plan that Echoes Failures of the Past,” *New York Times*, June 2, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/06/02/world/asia/trump-north-korea-nuclear-arms.html>.

14 Bruce Klingner, “Trump Undercuts ‘Maximum Pressure’ Strategy on North Korea,” *Hill*, March 30, 2019, <https://thehill.com/opinion/national-security/436180-trump-undercuts-maximum-pressure-strategy-on-north-korea>.

15 Josh Smith, “China's Xi Says Intends to Deepen Relations with North Korea: KCNA,” *Reuters*, October 9, 2020, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-northkorea-missiles-china/chinas-xi-says-intends-to-deepen-relations-with-north-korea-kcna-idUSKBN26U2JY>.

16 David Brunnstrom, “U.S. Accuses China of ‘Flagrant’ N. Korea Violations, Offers \$5 Million Reward,” *Reuters*, December 1, 2020, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-northkorea-china/u-s-accuses-china-of-flagrant-n-korea-violations-offers-5-million-reward-idUSKBN28B540>.

17 Tal Axelrod, “China Expected to Surpass US Economy in 2028: Analysis,” *Hill*, December 26, 2020, <https://thehill.com/policy/finance/531688-china-expected-to-surpass-us-economy-in-2028-analysis>.

18 Mihailescu, “A North Korea Strategy for the Next Administration.”

fails to take corrective action on its own, the United States would have to impose appropriate sanctions or penalties.

Lastly, the Biden administration should expand outreach to countries in Africa, Southeast Asia, and Latin America with illicit ties to North Korea and to those unwittingly assisting North Koreans. If it did not mislabel and mix up North Korea and South Korea, Suriname's total imports from North Korea increased more than 474 percent to \$20.1 million from 2018 to 2019, according to the trade data pulled from UN Comtrade—almost all of it derived from UN banned goods (HS Code 84 and 87). If illicit activities continue with countries in violation of the UNSCRs, the United States should threaten to cut off any aid, foreign assistance, or military cooperation. If countries ultimately fail to comply, the United States should proceed with cutting off said aid or military ties and impose penalties. The ultimate goal should also be to isolate North Korea diplomatically as much as possible.

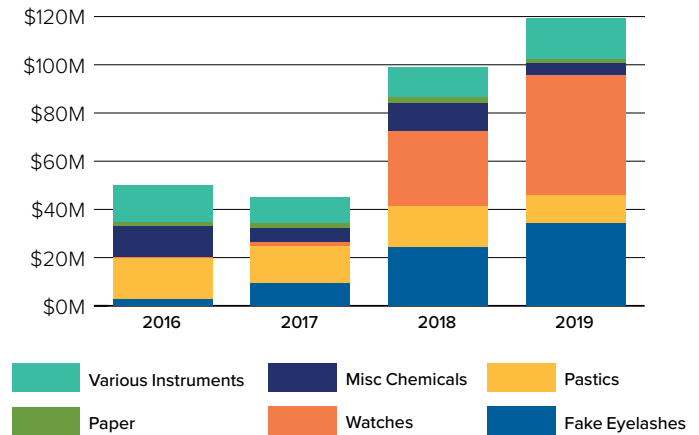
Last but not least, the United States should continue to work with allies in the region on existing joint military exercises, with boundaries that are appropriate given coronavirus restrictions. Those regularized exercises are important for maintaining readiness, and for supporting bilateral and multilateral diplomatic engagements and commitments.

Identifying new authorities, designations, and pressures on cyber, financial, trade, and human rights

UN Security Council resolutions are essential because they impose international legal obligations on member states, but they are not the only approach. Support from South Korea, Japan, and other foreign partners with sanctions authorities is also key. The overall multilateral approach reinforces robust national authorities. Washington should continue to enforce existing national authorities' absent language in any UNSCR, but still pursue adopting such language in a new UNSCR.

The Biden administration needs to have a draft UN Security Council resolution with additional measures, including those already captured under existing US authorities such as including a ban on cyber, human-rights abuses, financial, luxury goods, and trade export-

Graph 4. Top North Korean Exports of Non-Sanctioned Commodities, 2016-2019



Source: "UN Comtrade Database," United Nations.

Note on UN Comtrade data: This information relies on countries accurately reporting their customs data and not mixing up North Korea and South Korea, which has occasionally happened in the past. This list is not comprehensive, and includes only some of the top violators of UN bans.

control regimes. The UNSCR should include a list of new designations, including on banks processing transactions for North Korean front companies, ready to go for when Pyongyang conducts its next nuclear test or missile launch. The argument can be made that Kim Jong-Un's remarks at the party congress alone may warrant a new UNSCR. In the meantime, the United States should work with other countries to add new designations under existing resolutions as new evidence comes to light.

Since the 2014 Sony hack, North Korean cyber theft and hacks have exploded.¹⁹ Today, the regime engages in cybercrime to steal and launder money, extort companies, illegally acquire digital currencies to gain revenue that it ultimately uses for its nuclear-weapons program, and gain intelligence and know-how from abroad. In 2018, North Korea stole nearly \$250 million worth of digital currency and laundered it through other automated currency exchanges, while in 2016, North Korea got away with \$81 million in a cyber bank robbery, attempting to steal \$1 billion belonging to the Bangladesh central bank in the Federal Reserve Bank of New York (but, North Korea misspelled a word, and the entire transaction was not

19 David E. Sanger and Nicole Perlroth, "US Accuses North Korea of Cyberattacks, a Sign that Deterrence is Failing," New York Times, April 26, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/15/world/asia/north-korea-cyber.html>.



Self propelled artillery roll pass during a military parade marking the 70th anniversary of North Korea's foundation in Pyongyang, North Korea, September 9, 2018. REUTERS/Danish Siddiqui.

completed).²⁰ Hacks have also enabled North Korea to break into defense and intelligence networks of countries such as Israel, and some fear North Korea might have shared that information with Iran.²¹ Washington might eventually be able to freeze and dismantle, or at least contain, North Korea's weapons programs, but it will be impossible to reverse its cyber capabilities unless action is taken now to slow them down. Physical verifications are possible on tangible assets such as weapons sites and camps where human-rights abuses take place, but seeking reassurances from North Korea on illicit cyber activity would only result in empty promises.

Washington should coordinate with allies to enforce US authorities on North Korea's involvement in software- and hardware-related activities, as well as any of North

Korea's technology workers abroad and any related training, including those providing material support to North Korea's Reconnaissance General Bureau and to other North Korean bureaus engaged in illicit cyber activity. Pyongyang uses territories abroad to conduct cyber activities, as a way to obfuscate operations that may otherwise be attributed to it.²² It also receives support from China in training, technology sharing, and conducting operations.²³ Countries allowing such activity should be put on notice that they may face sanctions or penalties. Robust language targeting North Korea's cybercrime, and its ability to engage in such activity, should be added to the next UNSCR.

The administration should seek to fill any remaining UNSCR gaps using measures from national authorities

20 Ibid.; United Nations Security Council Report, March 5, 2019.

21 Ronen Bergman and Nicole Perlroth, "North Korean Hacking Group Attacks Israeli Defense Industry," New York Times, August 14, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/08/12/world/middleeast/north-korea-hackers-israel.html>.

22 "North Korean Tactics," Department of the Army, July 2020, <https://fas.org/irp/doddir/army/atp7-100-2.pdf>.

23 Jason Bartlett, "Why is North Korea So Good at Cybercrime?" Diplomat, November 13, 2020, <https://thediplomat.com/2020/11/why-is-north-korea-so-good-at-cybercrime/>; Mike Orcutt, "This is How North Korea Uses Cutting-Edge Crypto Money Laundering to Steal Millions," MIT Technology Review, March 5, 2020, <https://www.technologyreview.com/2020/03/05/916688/north-korean-hackers-cryptocurrency-money-laundering/>.

and from congressional legislation such as the North Korea Sanctions Policy Enhancement Act. The UN Security Council bans the export of luxury goods to North Korea, but it has delegated the definition of “luxury goods” to member states. Some goods, like North Korea’s import of Russian thoroughbred horses, are not clearly defined but are being used as luxury goods by the regime. The UN should update its list to reflect such luxury items.²⁴ There also needs to be clearer language in the next UNSCR regarding North Korea’s human-rights abuses and the regime’s practices.

With or without this approach, improving human-rights conditions in North Korea is regrettably challenging—If not impossible because Kim sees the entire societal structure as regime survival—but there are opportunities to leverage if South Korean President Moon Jae-In reverses legislation criminalizing the flow of information into North Korea from human-rights groups. The United States and allies—particularly South Korea, given North Korea’s sensitivity to any criticism from Seoul—should call out North Korea and promote efforts to send materials about the outside into North Korea. The Biden administration should work with South Korea and other countries to take appropriate action under the UNSCRs and UNHCR on North Korea’s atrocious human-rights conditions and any third parties affiliated with assisting Pyongyang—for example, the overseas laborers’ program or China repatriating defectors back to North Korea.

While enforcement of North Korean commodity violations per UN bans and national authorities remains mixed, exports of non-sanctioned goods have increased significantly over the years (see graph 4), helping North Korea offset some of the losses from sanctioned areas. It would behoove Washington to become more nimble on targeting North Korean non-sanctioned exports, particularly new growth areas such as watches and fake eyelashes, given how much the revenue feeds into weapons programs.

Some of those goods found themselves in the US marketplace. There are no bans on North Korean fake eyelashes, but US companies are prohibited from purchasing them (or any goods) from North Korea. One noteworthy case involved the Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) imposing \$1 million in penalties on California cosmetics company e.l.f. Beauty for violating North Korea Sanctions Regulations by importing 156 shipments worth \$4.43 million in false-eyelash kits from two Chinese suppliers that sourced materials from North Korea.²⁵ The violations took place from 2012–2017. This highlights further need for companies to do better supply-chain management and the need for due diligence as regulations become increasingly complex.

Given that payments are made through financial institutions, and North Korea has an army of banks wittingly processing transactions and holding accounts for its front companies, the Biden administration should work toward getting financial institutions to adopt artificial-intelligence (AI) models to help combat the hidden codes of money laundering.²⁶ While not infallible, AI is able to help detect cryptic and suspicious SWIFT (Society for Worldwide Interbank Financial Telecommunication) messages, erroneous invoice numbers, duplicate or linked addresses, and other signs of money laundering that are buried in the terabytes of transactional data that financial institutions are responsible for monitoring. AI has the ability to process faster and analyze data tirelessly for actionable intelligence 24/7. AI’s cost efficiency will benefit financial institutions in the long run. Instead of training a staff of fifty to discern patterns of money laundering, institutions pay a small team of five developers to code. Financial institutions have already been using AI and other machine-learning tools for almost three decades in fraud management. These tools need to be widely adopted to prevent money laundering. This would capture suspicious transactions worldwide, including some illicit cyber thefts, not only in high-risk jurisdictions such as North Korea.

24 “Additional Items and Luxury Goods,” UN Security Council Committee, last updated December 21, 2016, https://www.un.org/securitycouncil/sites/www.un.org/securitycouncil/files/list_items_and_luxury_goods.pdf.

25 Courtney Reagan, “Elf Beauty Pays Nearly \$1 Million for Violating North Korea Sanctions—With False Eyelashes,” CNBC, January 31, 2019, <https://www.cnbc.com/2019/01/31/elf-beauty-pays-1-million-for-violating-north-korean-sanctions.html>.

26 Mihailescu, Andrea R. “The Lap of Luxury: Using Open-Source Data to Trace North Korea’s Procurement of Luxury Goods.” Pepperdine University’s School of Public Policy & the Atlantic Council



Residents hold US and North Korean flags while they wait for motorcade of North Korea's leader Kim Jong Un en route to the Metropole Hotel for the second US- North Korea summit in Hanoi, Vietnam February 28, 2019. REUTERS/Kham.

Conducting ongoing research within the US Intelligence Community and all-of-government review to identify what worked or what didn't, rinse, and repeat

As the above three components work their way through, the US Intelligence Community needs to examine what works and what doesn't, while the policy community will need to identify an appropriate course of action. It would be helpful to examine why something worked or why it didn't. This will help assess any lessons learned and how best to realign priorities, fix what didn't work, and reinforce what did.

The research here would provide persistent lessons and analysis that would feed back into the policy discussion. The spectrum of examination and responses to past policies will, over time, create improved feedback mechanisms for better policy formulation.

Conclusion

Engagement with countries on North Korea is complex because foreign policy obviously does not operate in a vacuum, and other items will compete with DPRK issues on the US bilateral agenda with China and other countries. Domestic priorities also complicate efforts toward a coordinated approach. Some countries are, arguably, far away from the threat and have little incentive to cut off relations with North Korea, but this is a global security issue, not one just impacting the United States, South Korea, Japan, or China. Everyone is directly or indirectly affected.

North Korea's nuclear program began in the 1950s when its survival seemed much less certain. The threats against which Pyongyang sought security assurances then are not the same threats of today, and certainly not the same threats since the fall of the Soviet Union. To varying degrees, China and Vietnam have engaged in market reform; Cuba and North Korea continue to struggle with economic reform. The challenge is that Kim doesn't seek security assurances for North Korea; he seeks security

assurances for the Kim regime at the cost of everything, including the lives of ordinary North Koreans.

Being hopeful for meaningful dialogue or back channels should not be ruled out, but the expectations that either will lead toward denuclearization in the foreseeable future under Kim should be measured. Seeking any form of arms control with Kim under the status quo is not an acceptable alternative, because it only legitimizes his hostility and sets a dangerous precedent. It also sets the expectation that Kim would agree to verification and compliance. Seeking a moratorium on nuclear and missile testing would potentially keep North Korea from further perfecting the weapons systems it has already tested and advancing new systems it would like to introduce, but this would require giving Kim tangible incentives at too high a price. And for how long, realistically, would he comply?

Containment will likely outlast any US administration.²⁷ It will require resources, commitment, and patience over years—if not decades—until Kim or a successor is open to meaningful dialogue. This effort will be monumental, but the alternative is unacceptable. Everyone, including China, ultimately knows it, but it will require sustained US leadership, because the current situation is not a sustainable option.

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The views and opinions expressed in this paper are solely those of the author and do not reflect the official policy or position of the State Department or any other agency.

27 Mihailescu, "A North Korea Strategy for the Next Administration."



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