



---

**What the Commission Report says on:**

## NORTH KOREA AND IRAN

There are significant differences between these two country situations: Iran remains within the NPT while North Korea has purported to withdraw from it; Iran has conducted no nuclear test explosions while North Korea has conducted two; Iran appears not to possess any nuclear explosive devices while North Korea has several; and Iran insists that it will never be a nuclear-armed state while North Korea asserts that it already is. But what they have in common is that, between them, they pose by far the greatest current challenges to the global non-proliferation regime. The behaviour, capability and perceived intentions of both states deeply troubles their neighbours; both have acted in defiance of Security Council resolutions; and neither situation looks likely to be resolved by the further application of coercive sanctions. Nor in the absence of any actual aggression by either state does resort to military force appear to be any solution: such action would pose disproportionately – and perhaps catastrophically – high risks for those who would notionally benefit most from the destruction (if this could, indeed, be accomplished) of Pyongyang's and Tehran's present capability. The satisfactory resolution, by negotiation, of the North Korea and Iran nuclear problems remains a very high priority for the international community.

**North Korea.** Achieving a satisfactory negotiated solution of the North Korean problem will be immensely difficult, but in the Commission's judgment is by no means impossible. We have been there before: the Agreed Framework, negotiated in 1993–94 after the initial revelations of Pyongyang's clandestine activities, achieved for eight years its primary purpose of freezing the North's plutonium production program, and – although it is clear that Pyongyang did not meet its obligations under the agreement, not least in its secret dealings with the A.Q. Khan network to acquire centrifuge technology during this period – that it broke down was not a matter of entirely one-sided fault. North Korea has dug itself into deeper

holes since, with growing evidence of a supplementary uranium enrichment program; its two underground tests of explosive devices in 2006 and 2009; a series of provocative missile tests; and its insistence that its departure from the NPT is final and that it is, will remain, and should be recognised as, a fully-fledged nuclear-armed state.

But Pyongyang remains under immense pressure from China, the U.S., South Korea Japan and Russia to return to the Six-Party Talks process initiated in 2003, and knows very well that there remains on the table a deal that would, in return for its complete, verifiable and irreversible commitment to denuclearization of the Korean peninsula, deliver it serious security assurances and major economic support. It knows that the consequences of its nuclear-weapons program have been economic deprivation, the termination of civil nuclear cooperation and development, and no additional national or regime security. And it knows that no one intends to invade North Korea militarily to achieve a regime change.

Some analysts continue to insist that North Korea has no interest in ever giving up its nuclear weapon capability: not only because of the perception, objectively well-based or not, that this would protect it from any possible attack or direct attempt at regime change, but because it still nurses hegemonic ambitions over the whole peninsula, sees nuclear weapons as raising its strategic position in the region and wider world, possibly still sees an international market for its bomb technology, fissile material and hardware, and fears that any opening up of its economy as part of a denuclearization deal would inexorably generate internal pressure for regime change. Others are convinced otherwise, seeing the whole program as ultimately just negotiating coin – to be traded for aid, trade, investment and security guarantees, and finding other explanations for some of Pyongyang's most intransigent behaviour

---

**The full text of *Eliminating Nuclear Threats: A Practical Agenda for Global Policymakers*, Report of the International Commission on Nuclear Non-proliferation and Disarmament, Co-chairs Gareth Evans and Yoriko Kawaguchi (November 2009), is available at [www.icnnd.org](http://www.icnnd.org)**

(e.g. succession anxiety – and the need for Kim Jong Il to demonstrate to the military that they had nothing to fear from his son – as the main reason for the backward steps in early 2009).

The reality, given the very opaque character of the North Korean system, is that no-one can be sure of *what* its leadership' intentions are, and that the only way forward is to treat the present government, or one very much like it, as the one with which the world has to deal, and continue to act as though a negotiated solution is possible. That does not mean conceding that North Korea is already a nuclear-armed state, or that such capability as it has already has bought it immunity from attack should it engage in any form of aggression. Nor does it mean giving ground on sanctions, or "selling the same horse twice", simply to get it back to the negotiating table. But it does mean all the relevant players being willing to make clear the benefits that would flow from cooperation, being flexible about process (within the general framework of the Six Party Talks), and above all being patient.

Buying time is something that the North Koreans have used to their advantage in the past, but for the foreseeable future it will not relevantly change the overall security balance even if there is some further development of the missile and weapons hardware capability which, understandably, continues to concern its neighbours. Pyongyang can have nothing more for years ahead than a tiny arsenal of not very survivable weapons, and any aggression of any kind would be suicidal. As frustrating as the process has been, and will no doubt continue to be for a good while yet, persistent, determined, intelligent and patient negotiation – fully deploying both incentives and disincentives (including the continuing application of all current Security Council measures until North Korea's behaviour changes) – is the only available way forward, and is in everyone's interests.

*Recommendation:* Continuing efforts should be made, within the framework of the Six-Party Talks, to achieve a satisfactory negotiated solution of the problem of North Korea's overt pursuit of a nuclear weapons program, involving verifiable denuclearization and resumed commitment to the NPT in return for security guarantees and economic assistance. [17.52–56]

**Iran.** On the face of it the Iran situation is more readily susceptible than North Korea to an early negotiated solution, if for no other reason than things have not gone so far. Tehran is undoubtedly close to – and may already possess – breakout capability, but it has not yet crossed the red-line that really matters by actually acquiring nuclear weapons, and continues to proclaim that it has no

intention whatever of doing so. There will be those who remain deeply sceptical that the situation is retrievable, and they have a good deal of evidence to call in aid. Iran is clearly not in full compliance with its comprehensive safeguards agreement or a series of related IAEA Board of Governors and UN Security Council decisions and resolutions. It has a long history of complying (or almost complying) with the letter of its safeguards obligations but not their spirit, responding to inquiries and offers at (or just beyond) the last possible moment, and replying to accusations with lengthy obfuscation. The revelation of the Qom enrichment facility in September 2009 is just the latest in a line of such cases, and given that Tehran has been obviously keen to disperse and harden its facilities as a precaution against military attack, and deeply reluctant to declare any of them until forced to do so, more can probably be expected.

Moreover, it has become increasingly obvious that Iran is in no mood to yield, now or at any time in the foreseeable future, on what has been until now the irreducible demand of the international community – expressed through the six governments (China, France, Germany, Russia the UK and U.S., known as the P5+1 or the E3+3) that have been engaging with it on this issue, and through the UN Security Council – that it give up on its uranium enrichment capability. Add to that Iran's continued extreme hostility to Israel, particularly as expressed in the language of President Ahmedinejad; the suspicion with which its regional ambitions are regarded by most of its Arab neighbours; and an increasingly authoritarian, albeit disunited, leadership in the aftermath of the disputed 2009 presidential election, the situation may not seem likely any time soon to lend itself to a solution acceptable to the wider international community.

The Commission is persuaded, however, that negotiation remains the only way forward, and that a satisfactory outcome can eventually be achieved, with the support of the Security Council and the members of the IAEA, which is consistent both with the security concerns of the region and the wider world, and Iran's own needs and aspirations. Among the issues at stake for Iran is its national pride (long battered by a series of perceived humiliations going back to the overthrow of President Mossadegh and beyond), its sense of grievance about international double standards (most acutely felt in the context of the West's support for Iraq, and indifference to Baghdad's use of chemical weapons, in the bloody war of 1980-88), its desire to demonstrate its sophisticated technological capability, and its determination to be accepted as a major regional power.

The elements of a workable deal would seem to include acceptance by the international community

of the reality of Iran's enrichment program, notwithstanding the latent break-out capability that it will continue to represent, but only in exchange for acceptance by Iran of a very intrusive safeguards inspection and verification regime, of at least Additional Protocol, and desirably "Additional Protocol Plus" level, combined with agreement to significantly slow down that program, and to accept some international role in its management, all of a kind which would give the wider world real confidence that Tehran will never proceed to weaponisation. These core elements would need to be accompanied by a wider package of incentives, including normalisation of diplomatic relations and the lifting of sanctions, and clearly articulated disincentives, not excluding a full range of coercive measures should the agreement be breached. They would also need to be accompanied by efforts to fully engage and integrate Iran as a cooperative partner in addressing the region's many security and other problems. The process would be greatly facilitated, in turn, if Iran were to declare its lack of hostile intent against Israel and make clear its renunciation of any support for terrorist activities.

There were signs in October 2009, as the Commission was concluding its deliberations on this report, of a willingness on both sides to find constructive ways forward, but many more twists and turns can no doubt be expected before the issue is finally resolved, and in a way which preserves the reality, and the integrity, of the global non-proliferation system.

*Recommendation:* Continuing efforts should be made by the P5+1, Security Council and IAEA member states to achieve a satisfactory negotiated resolution of the issue of Iran's nuclear capability and intentions, whereby any retention of any element of its enrichment program would be accompanied by a very intrusive inspection and verification regime, giving the international community confidence that Iran neither has nor is seeking nuclear weapons.

[Section 17, Paras 17.57–60, Recs 59, 60]