

North Korea Backgrounder



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The Jamestown Foundation

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Introduction:

We at the Jamestown Foundation are pleased to introduce this backgrounder on North Korea. Drawing on an array of sources including Korean-language media, satellite imagery analysis and NGO databases, we have compiled what we believe are a number of core facts about the country: its political system, military, economy, agricultural system, demographics and geography. Our goal is not to comprehensively cover North Korea, but rather to highlight important facts in a way that allows both experienced analysts and those less familiar with the country to quickly find information essential for decision making or analytic judgments. In particular, we focus on what is described in analytic communities as “normative factors”—baselines for analysis like geography, times for planting and harvest, politically important dates—or other characteristics that shape behavior, and regulate how a state behaves. Such factors are frequently overlooked in discussions of state behavior. In the case of North Korea, where there is a tendency to ascribe behavior not to a rational nation-state but to the actions of an unstable dictator, attention to such factors is even more important, as they provide a baseline for judging if actions, be they rocket launches, military parades or harsh rhetoric are in fact noteworthy.

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Key Points in Modern Korean History

- 1882: Korea concludes Treaty with the U.S., its first with a Western power
- 1894–1895: First Sino-Japanese War ends with Qing-dynasty China giving up Korea as a tributary state
- 1905: Japan annexes Korea
- 1945: WWII ends with Soviet troops occupying the northern half of the Korean peninsula, US troops the south
- 1946: Korean Workers' Party founded
- 1948: Democratic People's Republic of Korea founded, led by Kim Il Sung
- 1950: South declares independence; North Korea invades
- 1953: Armistice ends Korean War | U.S.-ROK Defense Treaty
- 1958: Chinese People's Volunteers withdraw from North Korea
- 1961: Sino-North Korean Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Assistance
- 1968: A North Korean commando team attempts to assassinate the South Korean president | Pueblo Incident - USS Pueblo, an intelligence gathering boat captured by North Koreans | U.S. signals intelligence aircraft shot down by North Korea killing 31 Americans
- 10/1983: An assassination attempt against ROK President Chun Doo-hwan in Rangoon, Burma kills 21 and wounds 46
- 11/1987: North Korean agents bomb flight KAL 858, killing all 115 passengers & crew.
- 1991: Soviet Union dissolves; Critical aid to North Korea, including oil exports, stop
- 1994-1998: Arduous March – widespread famine. As many as 3.5 million North Koreans die
- 07/1994: Kim Il-sung dies. He is succeeded by his son, Kim Jong-il
- 1998: *Songun* (military first) officially enshrined as a guiding policy principle
- 1998-2008: Sunshine Policy – South Korea's engagement policy toward the North, which attempted to use economic inducements and people-to-people exchange to stabilize the relationship
- 2003: Kaesong Industrial Park established
- 09/2005: Macau-based Banco Delta Asia accused of money laundering – DPRK-related assets frozen
- 10/2006: North Korea's first nuclear weapons test
- 05/2009: Second nuclear weapons test
- 03/2010: ROK Navy Corvette Cheonan sunk by DPRK torpedo. 104 personnel killed.
- 11/2010: Yeonpyeong Island bombarded by DPRK artillery – 4 ROK military and civilians killed
- 12/2011: Kim Jong-il dies and is succeeded by his son Kim Jong-un, at age 28
- 09/2013: China bans items that North Korea could use to make missiles or WMD
- 02/2013: Third nuclear weapons test
- 03/2013: *Byungjin* policy (parallel development of both the economy and nuclear weapons) declared at Worker's Party meeting
- 12/2013 Sony Pictures hacked – FBI accuses North Korea of being culprit

A Prussian military advisor to Japan in the 1880s described the Korean Peninsula as "A dagger pointed at the heart of Japan". Since ancient times, the modern-day Democratic People's Republic of Korea and the Republic of Korea have been fought over for their fertile land, rich mineral wealth and most of all their strategic geography. The 20th century and the Cold War introduced the United States and Soviet Union to a global geopolitical game that had until then mostly been played between China, Japan and the Koreans themselves.

The DPRK initially had the stronger military position on the peninsula, bolstered by Soviet arms, troop exchanges with China, as well as the majority of the previously unified countries' industry and minerals. However, the UN Command forces' bombing campaign, guided by U.S. leadership, left the country in ruins. In the South, from 1961 to 1979, under the administration of autocratic President Park Chung-hee, the South's economy took off, further tipping the balance of power. In the North, the Kim family increasingly isolated itself and its country. As the North's conventional military deterrent was rapidly counterbalanced by moves in the South in the 1960s, the focus shifted to asymmetric and terror attacks, and included attempts to strike down their enemy or provoke the South and the United States into all-out war through a commando raid against the ROK's presidential residence and seizing the USS Pueblo failed.

Despite signing the *Treaty of Friendship Cooperation and Mutual Assistance* in 1961, which forged close economic

ties with the Soviet Union, North Korea's development stagnated.

As the son of DPRK founder Kim Il-sung, Kim Jong-il, rose to prominence, he ordered a series of terror attacks and assassination attempts in the early 1980s.

As Deng Xiaoping's China and Gorbachev's Soviet Union embraced market reforms, North Korea's isolation increased. With the fall of the Soviet Union, North Korea lost access to vital economic support, culminating in a period of great famine known in North Korea as the Arduous March, a four-year period of intense famine and economic malaise from 1994 to 1998. Estimates vary, but it is clear that hundreds of thousands—if not more—died during this period.

The DPRK's founding father, Kim Il-sung, died on July 8, 1994, just as the country was entering the Arduous March.

With Kim Il-sung's death, Kim Jong-il sought to strengthen the loyalty of the army through *Songun* (military first policy) and accelerating the country's nuclear weapons program. Two progressive administrations in South Korea pursued a Sunshine Policy that attempted to open North Korea to reforms through economic cooperation and people-to-people exchanges.

ROK President Kim Dae-jung met Kim Jong-il in 2000. As a sign of warmer ties, U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright visited Pyongyang later that year.

In October 2006, North Korea detonated its first nuclear weapon. An additional test followed in 2009. By this time Kim Jong-il was apparently ailing and his heir apparent, Kim Jong-un, began to make public appearances. In 2011, Kim Jong-il died and the 28-year-old took the reins of power. He quickly moved to consolidate his position. Like his father, he needs the backing of the military to remain in power.

Significantly, in 2013 he announced the *byungjin nosun* (parallel development, often known simply as the *byungjin* line), a policy that equally prioritizes economic and nuclear weapons development. Kim Jong-un is doubling down on seeking the prestige and security that North Korea believes only nuclear weapons and the ability to strike the U.S. can afford. Unsurprisingly then, the past two years have been dominated by news of North Korean missile tests as North Korea enhances this capability and attempts to deter the United States and its allies.

Key Recent Events:

- 2016-2017: Pace of missile and nuclear tests increases, exceeding all previous years combined
- 01/2016: Fourth nuclear test, this time allegedly of a hydrogen bomb
- 02/2016: South Korea shuts down its operations at Kaesong Industrial Complex, a joint project located north of the DMZ
- 05/2016 Kim Jong-un elected leader of Workers' Party of Korea at first party congress since October 1980
- 08/2016: North Korea carries out test of a submarine-launched ballistic missile, indicating a possible 'second-strike' capability
- 09/2016: Fifth nuclear test
- 11/2016 UN Security Council ratchets up sanctions by restricting coal exports by 60 percent
- 02/2017 Kim Jong-nam, Kim Jong-un's older half-brother, is assassinated in Malaysia; New IRBM, the Pukguksong-2, test fired
- 04/2017: Three long-range missiles displayed during annual military parade; several additional ballistic missile tests held
- 05/2017: Three missile tests carried out – one lands within Japan's EEZ
- 06/2017: Otto Warmbier, U.S. student detained in North Korea since January 2016, released due to brain injury, passes away upon returning home
- 7/2017: North Korea tests new Hwasong-14 ICBM
- 9/2017: Sixth nuclear test

Backgrounder: North Korea

Political Calendar

One of the most important things to keep in mind when analyzing a foreign country is its political calendar. In the United States, certain types of political rhetoric, displays of patriotism, and propaganda can be expected during election years. Our attentions are more focused and the federal government operates somewhat differently when there are major holidays.

In the North Korean context, these punctual political events are important, as they play a significant role in the country's internal and external signaling. In addition to symbolic importance, external factors like the changing of the seasons have important material effects on North Korea's economy and even its military readiness.

Political theater:

Given the central role of the Kim family in North Korean politics and society, the birthday of North Korea's founder, Kim Il-sung, is a key holiday and generally features a large military parade in Pyongyang. In recent years this parade has been used to unveil new weapon systems to the world.

Military Exercises:

The United States and the Republic of Korea regularly hold joint military exercises to build trust, improve interoperability, and do some signaling of their own. Although these exercises have been carried out for decades, North Korea views them as a direct threat and typically responds by holding its own drills at the same time, testing new rocket systems and generally making bellicose statements.

Political Calendar, Holidays and Military Exercises		
Month	Event	Significance
January	1st: New Year's Day	
February	8th: Birthday of Kim Jong-il	
March	Foal Eagle & Key Resolve US-ROK exercises Planting time	DPRK typically responds with aggressive propaganda, including displays of military power and/or missile testing, sometimes including civil mobilization This also marks conclusion of the Winter Training Cycle Late March and April also coincides with planting time, meaning most of society is busy
April	15th: Day of the Sun (Birthday of Kim Il-sung) 25th: Foundation Day of the Korean People's Army	Military parade
May	1st: May Day Festival	May 5th by lunar calendar A spring holiday after sowing and transplanting
June		
July	27th: Victory Day	Anniversary of signing 1953 Korean Armistice Agreement
August	15th: National Liberation Day Harvest time	Celebrates 1945 liberation of Korean Peninsula from Japanese rule An autumn holiday after harvesting. Koreans visit their family's graves to maintain them and hold memorial services Much of military and other parts of society needed to be involved to avoid famine
September	9th: Day of Foundation of the Republic Ulchi-Freedom Guardian US-ROK military exercises	Typically elicits aggressive propaganda response, including displays of military power and/or missile testing
October	10th: Day of the Foundation of the Worker's Party of Korea	Celebrations include political speeches, artistic performances and mass events including military parades Ordinary citizens receive food rations and electricity
November		
December	27th: Day of the DPRK Socialist Constitution	Winter Training Cycle Begins

These statements sound alarming by design, as North Korean propaganda uses forceful language to convey dissatisfaction.

Despite this, these statements' regularity and lack of follow-on actions indicate they are usually formulated for messaging, rather than credible deterrence or intention to act.

Planting and Harvest:

North Korea's highly regimented economy, leading economic role of the military and limited agricultural land (covered later in this report) requires its military to be involved in labor-intensive periods of the planting and harvest cycle. For North Korea to avoid famine, it is imperative that the military (which controls much of the limited gasoline supply and heavy machinery) assist with planting during much of March-April and again during August-September—with a direct impact on military readiness.

Key Takeaways:

- Observers of North Korean rhetoric or military exercises should factor in timing—proximity to major political events or U.S.-ROK military exercises when making assessments about normalcy or unusualness of official statements.
- The end of March, in particular, coincides with annual U.S.-ROK exercises (increasing tensions) and the end of the Winter Training Cycle for the KPA, which typically culminates in an intense exercise period.
- Seasonal factors should be considered when assessing military readiness due to constraints on the availability of manpower, transport, and fuels.

Geography

In spite of its isolation, North Korea lies at the crossroads of East Asia; it shares land borders with the Republic of Korea (237 km), the People's Republic of China (1,352 km), and Russia (18 km).¹ The DPRK's northern border is formed by the Amnok (Yalu), and the more shallow Tuman (Tumen) Rivers, naturally separating it from China and Russia. There are at least twelve border crossings (by bridge) between China and North Korea and one with Russia. Though trade is mostly conducted between Dandong, China, and Sinuiju, North Korea, and both sides closely monitor the border, it is more porous than generally given credit. North Korea is bordered on the east by the Sea of Japan (*Donghae*, or East Sea) and on the west by the Korea Bay and Yellow Sea (*Seohae*, or West Sea). Numerous islands lie in close proximity to the coasts.

To the south, the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) runs approximately 250 km long and 4 km wide, separating the DPRK and ROK since the signing of the Korean War Armistice

Agreement of 1953.² The DMZ intersects the 38th parallel north but does not follow it; geographically it represents the end state of what the UN command called the Main Line of Resistance at the conclusion of the Korean War. The zone is ironically one of most heavily militarized areas in the world and has belts of fortifications and more than one million landmines.

The highest point on the Korean Peninsula is Paektu Mountain (2,744 m), which extends into Jilin, China. According to the *Socialist Constitution of the DPRK*, "the sacred mountain of the revolution" features on the country's national emblem.³ The lowest points are at sea-level along the Eastern coast. The country's area of 120,408 km² is slightly larger than Virginia and slightly smaller than Mississippi.⁴ Several mountain ranges traverse the country: the Jangbaek Mountains along the Sino-Korean border, and the Nangnim Mountains range from north to south, forming a divide between the eastern and western slopes of the peninsula.⁵ Due to the mountainous terrain, the eastern half of the country is by far the most fertile and densely populated.

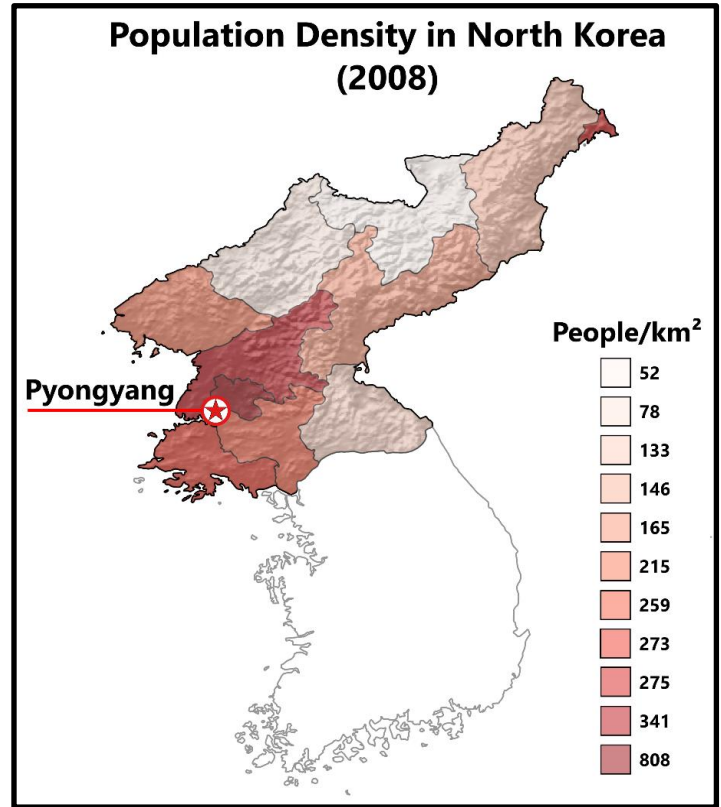


Demographics

One of the most dramatic and effective comparisons of the two Koreas is also one of the simplest: population. South Korea's population is more than double that of North Korea's, and in 2015 surpassed 50 million people. South Korea has grown steadily between the 1960s and 1990s and has now entered the population flattening phase common to developed countries, especially in Northeast Asia. With 2016 displaying the lowest number of births in South Korean history, and the fact that the country has been unable to escape the "lowest-low fertility rate country" category by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) since 2001, the population will likely soon begin to decrease.⁶

	Total Population (2015)	GDP (USD; 2016)
DPRK	25,155,317	\$28.5 billion
ROK	50,617,045	\$1.4 trillion

The DPRK, faced with extreme poverty and significant government control, still managed to double its population in the same time the South did, yet currently has roughly the same population as the South in 1960. The mid-1990s were a demographic catastrophe for North Korea, and will likely have knock-on effects as reduced fertility leads to a smaller workforce in the future. The scale of the urban-rural divide also significantly impacts the lives of DPRK citizens, with under-five mortality rates 1.2 times higher in rural than urban areas.⁷



The raw numbers of the two countries' economies are also striking: South Korea's economy is just shy of being 50 times the size of North Korea's. The fundamental demographic and economic inequality between the two Koreas further complicate their relationship.

Key Takeaways:

- Economic inequality is a primary concern in any discussions of Korean reunification. The scope of difference between the two is vastly greater than the East German Republic and West Germany when they reunified, a project whose legacy can still be felt almost 30 years later.
- The differences also complicate Kim Jong-un's position—his nation's military power is demonstrably weaker by comparison and there is no way to compete in terms of conventional arms. This likely drives—in part at least—his desire for a reliable nuclear deterrent.



Society

Key Concepts: Juche, Suryong, Byungjin, and Songbun

Juche is a key concept underpinning the North Korean political system, often translated as “self-reliance” or “autonomy.” Juche was explained by Kim Il-sung as “the ability to act independently without regard to outside interference.” In 1970, *juche* became the official guiding principle of the Party. Although Marxism-Leninism had dominated the foundations of the North Korean political system, Kim Il-sung determined *juche* served as a “creative” but authoritative application of these ideologies, thus allowing him to solidify political control by purging pro-Soviet and pro-Chinese dissenting elements.

The *suryong* is the Korean supreme leader with a mandate of heaven. Although the term “Great Leader” is reserved for Kim Il-sung, the declination “supreme leader” is now attributed to Kim Jong-il and Kim Jong-un. After the Sixth Workers’ Party of Korea (WPK) Congress, and especially after the death of Kim Il-sung, Kim Jong-il monopolized the right to interpret *juche* under the concept of the “Leader’s Revolutionary View,” so that the “sociopolitical living body” is organized and led by the *suryong*. The Leader’s Revolutionary View emphasized the utmost loyalty of the masses to the *suryong*.

Since then, *juche* as a standalone concept has eroded in weight, especially with the introduction of “*Songun Jeongchi*” (or “military-first”) as a guiding principle in the state’s decision-making processes. After Kim Jong-un consolidated power in 2011, he affirmed Kimilsungism-Kimjongilism as North Korea’s sole guiding principle in the 2012 iteration of the WPK rules. *Songun* was defined in 1998 as “a unique style of politics that applies maximum force to reinforcing the Korean People’s Army (KPA) and propels overall undertakings of revolution and construction based on KPA strength.”

Byungjin (parallel development) combines the goals of economic development with building a nuclear deterrent. It tacitly acknowledges North Korea’s need to allow for markets to provide consumer goods but also emphasizes

the centrality of possessing nuclear weapons to the security of the DPRK. Sanctions do not appear to be dampening local economic growth thus far, with new markets appearing all over North Korea and year-on-year growth at 17-year highs.⁸

Songbun class system

North Korea is a stratified society based on one’s party affiliation and that of one’s relatives. *Songbun* is the system that defines that class. It is divided into three main categories:

Core Loyal Class	25%
Wavering Class	55%
Hostile Class	20%

In practice, this is a hereditary caste system with political status passed from parent to child and affecting access to goods, education and housing. Relatives of revolutionaries and those close to the Kim family receive preferred status, versus those who descend from capitalists or whose families collaborated with US and UN forces during their occupation of North Korea in autumn of 1950.

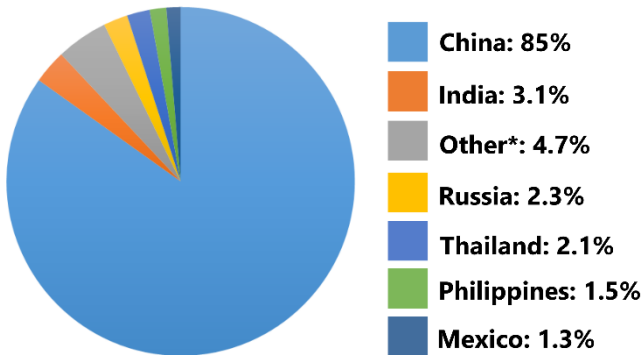
Economy

The following charts make the DPRK's reliance on China glaringly obvious. China is the destination of 83 percent of the value of DPRK exports, and the source of 85 percent of the value of DPRK imports. Interestingly, DPRK imports goods from 76 different countries, but exports to 108.

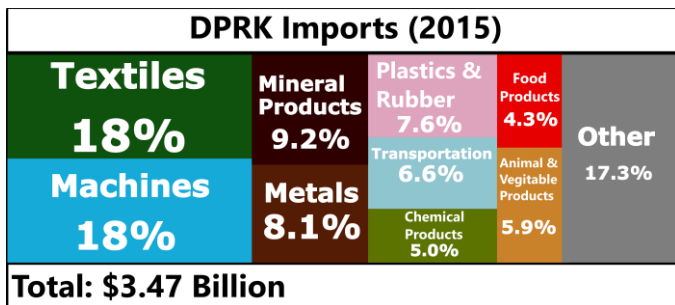
Imports

North Korea's imports are mostly sourced from China, followed by Russia (2.3%), Thailand (2.1%), The Philippines (1.5%), and Mexico (1.3).⁹The remainder of North Korea's imports comes from 104 different countries, with only thirteen individual nations each being the source of more than 0.1 percent of the total value of imports, and of which only three are the source of more than 0.23 percent.

Value of DPRK Imports by Country of Origin (2015)



* : 70 countries, worth less than 1% of total DPRK imports



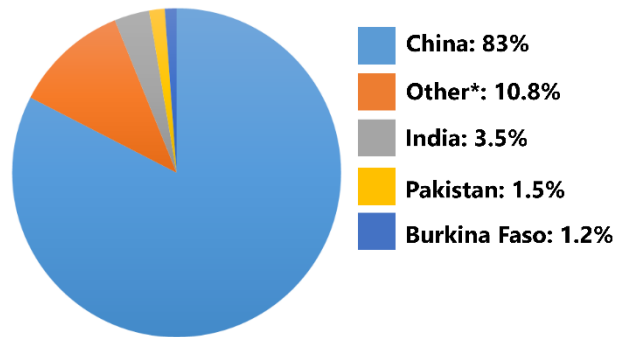
¹⁰

Exports

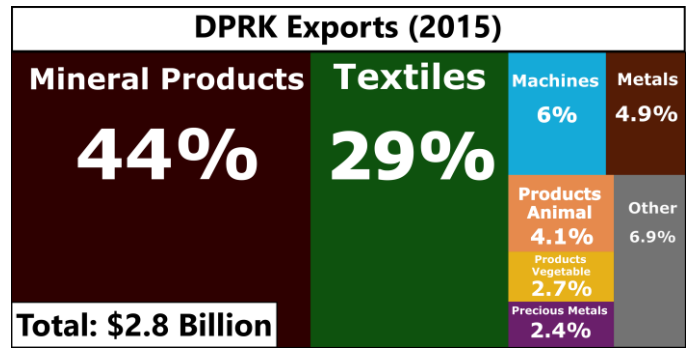
Fragmentation of the DPRK's clientele and patrons reinforces China's buying and selling power. North Korea's next largest export recipients are India (3.5%), Pakistan (1.5%), and Burkina Faso (1.2%). The other 104 export destinations together form 11.3 percent of the total value, but only five of these countries represent an individual value

greater than 0.5 percent, and 78 represent an individual value below 0.1 percent of exports.

Value of DPRK Exports by Country of Destination (2015)



* : 104 countries, worth less than 1% of total export value



Other Income

North Korea also regularly sends workers abroad to earn currency for the government. In China, many Korean restaurants are run by North Koreans. Some 15,000–20,000 North Koreans regularly work in factories in Dandong China, just across the Yalu River.¹¹ Another 30,000–50,000 work in Russia.

Key Takeaways:

- The DPRK has become incredibly reliant on China. No other individual or combination of buyers and/or sellers can even hope to approach the same clout.
- The U.S. potentially has leverage through its close relations with India and the Philippines, though the impact on North Korea is negligible compared to the economic influence of China.

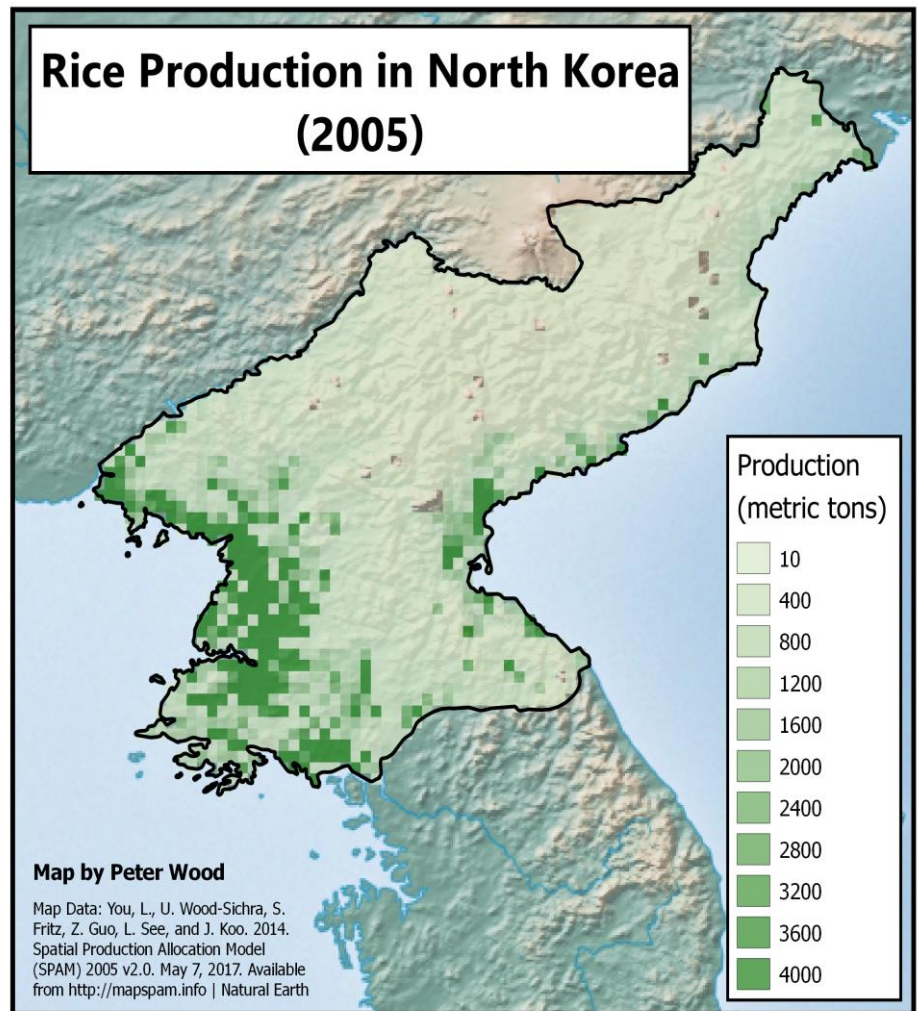
Agriculture

North Korea's main dietary staples are rice and corn, supplemented with potatoes and soybeans for protein. Meat is not a regular part of the diet of most North Koreans, and protein intake is generally low. According to UN statistics, the average caloric intake is 2,100 kcal per day per person—lower than the recommended 2,500 kcal for men.¹² Average per capita food consumption is estimated at 175kg.¹³ This is below the DPRK government target rate of 207 kg per person per year, and helps explain the average food deficit of 350 kcal per person per day, along with the undernourishment of over 40 percent of the population (10.5 million persons).¹⁴

Korea's mountainous geography has a significant impact on its agricultural output. Only the west coast of the country is suitable for agriculture, an area representing 17 percent of available land. Further, up to 20 percent of total agricultural output is produced on sloping land—cultivated land with a 15 to 30-degree slope.¹⁵ The map to the right, which is based on satellite infrared imagery analysis to determine the presence of crops, illustrates the limited area available for rice production. Further complicating agricultural production is the lack of quality seeds and proper fertilizer, along with the increasing frequency of droughts and flooding.¹⁶ Despite an increase in diesel and petrol consumption in 2016, mechanized land preparation could only be carried out on approximately 60 percent of the arable area, with the remaining being prepared by oxen.¹⁷ Adding to this is post-harvest loss. A 2014 UNDP, FAO, and DPRK government study found that post-harvest loss of rice, maize, and wheat & barley, was 15.6%, 16.7%, and 16.4% of total production respectively.¹⁸ These conditions create—amongst others—a cereal production deficit, estimated for 2016-2017 at 458,000 tons. The official import target of 200,000 tons leaves an uncovered deficit of 258,000 tons.¹⁹

Between 1994 and 1998 North Korea suffered a combination of economic and environmental crises, which resulted

in a deadly famine. The “Arduous March” saw precipitous drop-offs in productivity and grain production. These crises caused farmers and peasants to explore new avenues of agricultural production, leading to a vast and persistent clearing of forests on sloped land. While this practice marginally increased food production and access to fuel in the short term, it has also created a host of unintended con-

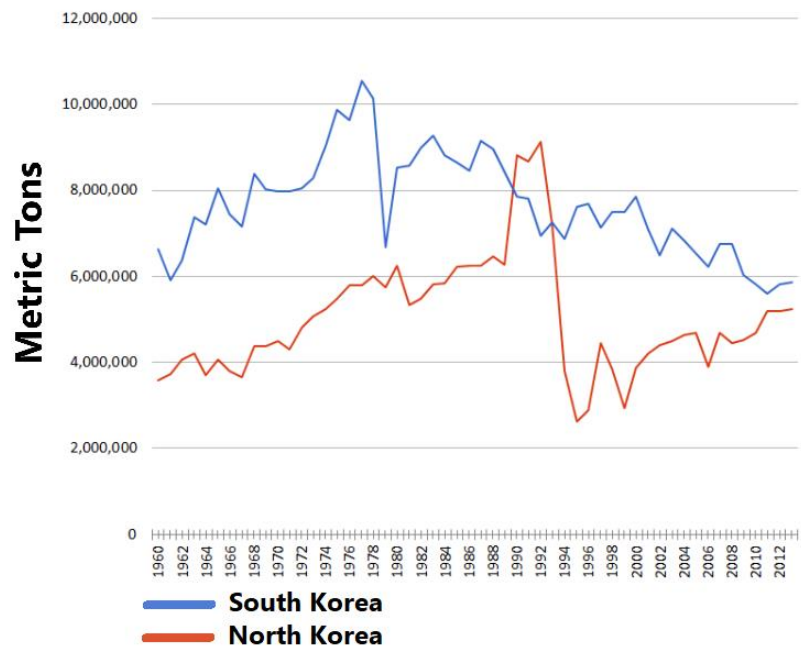


sequences such as reducing fertility and increasing acidity of the soil. These forests also served as a natural barrier to soil erosion, and their absence during droughts and floods has led to landslides heavy in loss of life and crop. The problem has become so severe that Kim Jong-un has reportedly declared that “the country...[has] reached a crossroads—whether to perish for ever or to be restored. ... Unauthorized felling of trees is tantamount to

treachery.”²⁰ In practice, the problem remains despite reforestation efforts and international cooperation, with one soil scientist stating that “the landscape is just basically dead.”²¹

Particularly after the Arduous March, restricted space and additional constraints on trade have made food security a priority for the DPRK government. Under Kim Jong-il, the country attempted to resolve its quandary by razing the forests that cover much of the country to increase the amount of tilled land. This deforestation program has had terrible consequences for the land it covered. Lacking trees, the soil eroded and landslides frequently occurred under heavy rain.

Cereal Production, ROK vs DPRK, 1960-2013



Key Takeaways:

- North Korea’s ability to feed itself is limited by geography and exacerbated by decades of poor management.
- The demands of maximizing production from limited sources impose real costs on the broader economy and military, forcing much of the labor force and armed forces to assist with planting and harvest.
- Deteriorating environmental conditions are compounding agricultural malpractice and leaving the country more reliant on foodstuff imports.

Sanctions

North Korean individuals and corporations have been targeted by U.S. sanctions for missile-related activities for decades. However, in 2006 the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) also began sanctioning the regime. It is now one of the most heavily sanctioned countries in the world. In July of 2006, North Korea violated its self-imposed moratorium on the testing of long-range missiles by firing seven ballistic missiles. In October of the same year, North Korea conducted its first nuclear test, with international estimates placing the yield at one kiloton. Additional nuclear tests and satellite launches by the DPRK resulted in further sanctions. The sanctions have given UN member-states increasingly broad powers of interdiction of North Korean vessels in their respective territories, and have drastically limited the regime's access to dual-use goods and hard cash. Yet, the 1718 Sanctions Committee has indicated that only 80 out of the 193 countries have submitted reports on the implementation of resolution 2321 (2016) and 95 on the implementation of resolution 2270 (2016), implying a lack of oversight of North Korean-related activities by most countries.²² What follows is a brief chronological overview of the major UNSC resolutions sanctioning North Korea, and the U.S. Executive Orders currently in place—the most stringent to date.

United Nations Sanctions

Security Council Resolution 1695 (2006)²³ requires all Member States to “prevent the procurement of missiles or missile related-items, materials, goods and technology from the DPRK, and the transfer of any financial resources in relation to the DPRK’s missile or WMD programs.”

Security Council Resolution 1718 (2006)²⁴ prohibits member states from supplying, selling, or transferring heavy weaponry, armored vehicles, large-caliber artillery, combat aircraft, attack helicopters, warships and missile systems to North Korea, whether directly or indirectly, along with spare parts for the aforementioned or any luxury goods. Member states are also required to freeze the funds or financial assets of entities designated by the Security Council as providing support for North Korea’s nuclear, missile, or other WMD programs. The resolution states that the DPRK shall abandon all nuclear weapons and existing nuclear programs, and all other existing weapons of mass destruction and ballistic missile programs in a complete, verifiable and irreversible manner. The resolution also stipulates that the DPRK shall suspend

all activities related to its ballistic missile program and in this context, re-establish its pre-existing commitments to a moratorium on the launching of missiles.

Security Council Resolution 1874 (2009)²⁵ prohibits member states from importing or exporting all weapons, excluding small arms. Member states are also called upon to stop providing public financial support for trade with North Korea, and to refuse them loans and credit, except for humanitarian or development purposes. Member states are authorized to inspect North Korean cargo on land, air and sea, if the state through which the cargo is to pass suspects that prohibited goods are on board. If, on inspection, the cargo is found to contain prohibited goods, the state can seize it. DPRK vessels can be refused bunkering, maintenance and repair if they are suspected of containing prohibited goods.

Security Council Resolution 2087 (2013)²⁶ directs the sanctions committee to take action in identifying individuals or entities that have assisted in sanctions evasion. UNSCR 2087 also listed individuals and entities subject to the travel ban, who must pay asset freeze penalties.

Security Council Resolution 2094 (2013)²⁷ adds nuclear and missile dual-use technologies and further luxury goods to the list of banned imports. The resolution adds individuals and entities to the lists of travel bans and asset freezes, and extends the designation to those suspected of acting on behalf of, or for, any of the prior sanctioned individuals and entities. Bulk cash transfers online are now prohibited, and physical ones can be interdicted by the states through which the cargo passes. DPRK banks’ access to the international banking system is also severely limited.

Security Council Resolution 2270 (2016)²⁸ expands the arms embargo to any item that could contribute to the development of the DPRK’s operational capability. States are now required to inspect all cargo related in any manner to North Korea that transits through their borders, and are prohibited from leasing vessels or crew services to North Korean entities. Further luxury goods are banned. The assets of all North Korean government employees and Worker’s Party of Korea individuals and entities who are associated with prohibited activities are frozen, and their travel is banned, before they are repatriated abroad. Financial sanctions forbid the opening of new financial institutions or bank branches in the DPRK. The resolution also requires states to shutter existing DPRK bank branches abroad, along with any financial institution that

may be supporting proliferation activities in North Korea. Any joint venture with the DPRK is to be terminated. Finally, the resolution prohibits the supply, sale or transfer, of coal, iron, iron ore, gold, titanium ore, vanadium ore, and rare earth minerals, along with aviation fuel, by or to North Korea. Some minor exceptions apply to coal, iron, and iron ore.

Security Council Resolution 2321²⁹ imposes a cap on the sale or transfer of coal to and from the DPRK, and introduces a real-time system to report and monitor these exports; bans the sale or transfer of copper, nickel, silver, and zinc. The resolution suspends all scientific and technical cooperation between member states and any individual who represents or is sponsored by the DPRK, except for medical exchange. The resolution calls on states to limit staff and bank accounts for diplomatic missions. The DPRK is forbidden from selling statues or helicopters, and cannot be insured by foreign nationals or entities.

Security Council Resolution 2371³⁰ it bans the sale and transfer to or from North Korea, of coal, iron, iron ore, lead, lead ore, and any kind of seafood. The resolution also prohibits countries from allowing additional DPRK laborers to work in member states. The resolution adds new sanctions on North Korean individuals and entities, and prohibits joint ventures between North Korea and member states. The resolution allows the Security Council to deny international port access to vessels tied to violations of Security Council resolutions. Finally, the resolution asks Interpol to publish Special Notices on listed North Koreans, for the purpose of issuing travel bans.

United States Sanctions

According to the State Department, current sanctions on the DPRK and the Worker's Party of Korea "are the most restrictive to date." **Executive Order 13687 Imposing Additional Sanctions with Respect to North Korea** came into force on January 2, 2015, in response to the North Korean cyberattacks targeting Sony Pictures Entertainment.

As of September 2017, five Executive Orders sanctioning North Korean activities are in effect: 13466 (June 2008), 13551 (August 2010), 13570 (April 2011), 13687 (January 2015), and 13722 (March 2016).

Executive Order 13722 (2016) Blocking Property of the Government of North Korea and the Workers' Party of Korea, and Prohibiting Certain Transactions with Respect to North Korea in response to repeated missile and nuclear tests.

E.O. 13687 (2015) declares that all property and interest in property that is in the United States, or come within possession or control of a U.S. person from agents and controlled entities of the Government of North Korea or the Worker's Party of Korea (and similar) are now blocked. This means that people or firms cannot hire North Korean workers in the U.S. or overseas, and that North Koreans cannot migrate except to claim asylum.

Key Takeaways:

- North Korea is rapidly running out of legal options, forcing it to deepen its reliance on illicit sources of income, technological knowhow and raw materials—often at a cost.³¹
- International sanctions have caused severe disruptions to humanitarian operations as banking channels are regularly interrupted, and procurement in licensing and materiel is heavily impeded. This has led to a radical decline in donor funding since 2012.³²
- International sanctions are complex and increasingly pervasive. While they have some effectiveness at hampering North Korea's ability to obtain goods and services for its missile and nuclear programs, they are hard to reverse if the regime changes course, potentially decreasing its incentive to do so.

Military

Conventional Forces

North Korea is famed for its “million-man army,” a number that belies the total number ready to be called up in a conflict. Under the *Songun Jeongchi* (“military first” policy), much of the country’s resources have been concentrated on its military. While sanctions have impeded most arms sales, North Korea actively produces a number of important weapon systems on its own or has developed them with assistance from Iran and Pakistan.

According to the U.S. Department of Defense, “four to five percent of North Korea’s [population] serve on active duty, and another 25 to 30 percent are assigned to a reserve or paramilitary unit subject to wartime mobilization.³³ Despite being less than half the size of its southern neighbor, the DPRK maintains a military that is nearly 50 percent larger. This is in line with the *Songun* policy discussed earlier in the Society section.

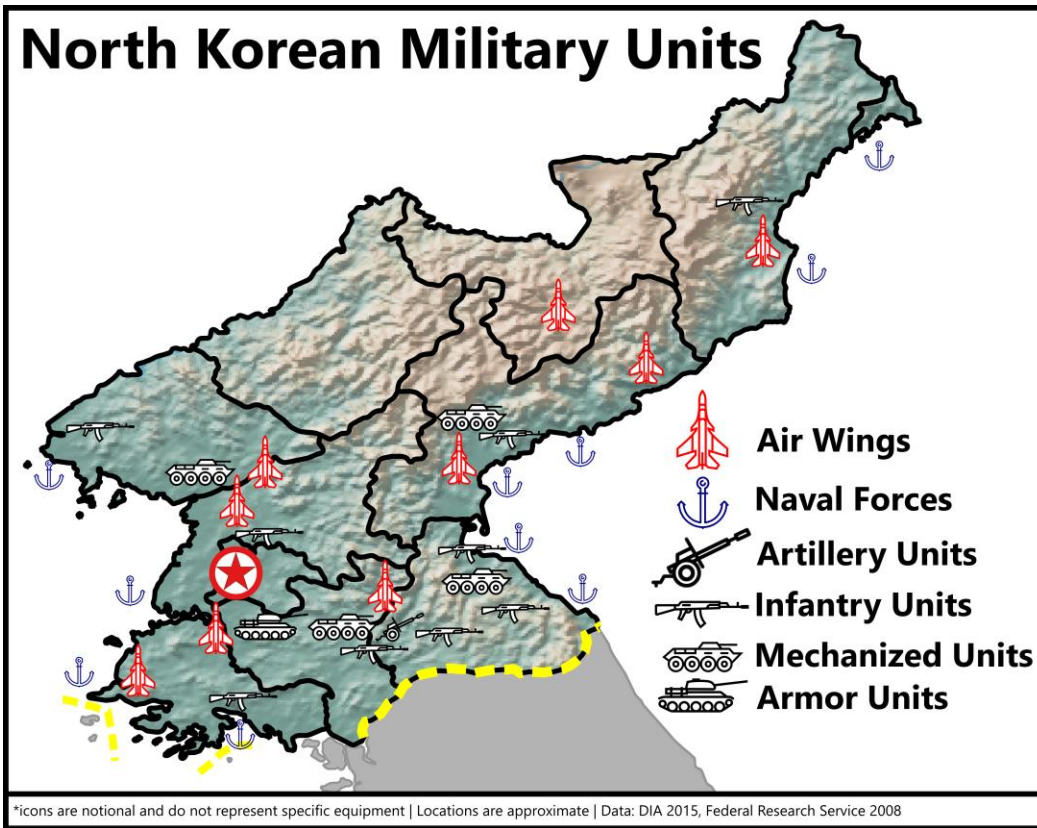
According to the South Korean Ministry of Unification, North Korea’s military strategy is to engage in preemptive surprise attacks simultaneously on the South’s front and rear, before moving its massive ground forces to take and hold as much ground as possible before U.S. reinforcements arrive—perhaps informed by U.S. performance in Busan and Incheon during the 1950-1953 phase of the un-concluded conflict.³⁴ This model of blitzkrieg or “quick war, quick end” (*sokjeonsokkyeol*) is thought to be preferred for two reasons: first, the North’s capacity for prolonged conflict is limited by its economic poverty; second, the South’s human, economic, and technological resources are likely to field an even more powerful fighting force once domestic institutions are converted to a war-making objective.³⁵ Finally, North Korea simply cannot compete against the United States, so seizing and holding territory before U.S. intervention would likely be the North’s best option to strengthen its bargaining position.

Asymmetric Capabilities

The military superiority of North Korea’s opponents have led it to prioritize developing asymmetric capabilities. These are particularly useful against highly networked,

Korean People’s Army: Major Organization and Equipment		
Major Units	Major Equip-ment	Numbers
Ground Forces	<i>Troops</i>	1,100,000
10 Corps	Tanks	4,300
2 Mechanized Corps	Armored Vehicles	2,500
1 Armored Division	Artillery	8,600
4 Mechanized Infantry Divisions	Multiple Rocket Launch System	5,500
Navy	<i>Troops</i>	60,000
Naval Command	Surface Combatants	430
East Sea Fleet	Amphibious Vessels	250
West Sea Fleet	Submarines	70
Air Force	<i>Troops</i>	110,000
5 Flight Divisions	Fighter Aircraft	~810
1 Tactical Transport Brigade	Transport Aircraft	330
2 Air Force Sniper Brigades	Helicopters	290
Strategic Force	<i>Troops</i>	10,000
Reserve	<i>Troops</i>	7,620,000

conventionally superior forces. One example of North Korean ingenuity in making the most of outdated technologies is its heavy use of An-2s—an agriculture-intended bi-plane first produced in 1946. These small planes are cheap and easy to maintain, can carry up to 12 passengers, and have reportedly had their stealth characteristics enhanced by replacing most of the aircraft’s metal with wood or canvas.³⁶ These slow-flying, ground-hugging aircraft make very difficult targets for both look-down, shoot-down radar on the South’s modern aircraft and traditional surface-to-air missile systems.³⁷ In the event of a conflict the North plans to insert 10,000 special forces using these biplanes and midget submarines, and have been photographed training for such insertions on many occasions.



- This is offset through a preponderance of cheap but effective capabilities, particularly artillery embedded in tunnels dug during and since the Korean War. This means that even in a scenario where North Korea’s nuclear or strategic missile threats were neutralized, it would still have a high probability of inflicting mass casualties upon the South.

- North Korea has constructed over 8,000 deep tunnels to protect leadership and important equipment or penetrate South Korea in the event of a conflict.³⁹ Such tunneling—and the DPRK’s complicated terrain—would make a

Another key, and sometimes underappreciated, aspect of North Korean warfare is its emphasis on cyber operations in peace and wartime. All DPRK cyber operations come under the purview of the Reconnaissance General Bureau for intelligence, clandestine, commando and sabotage operations, while more traditional cyber command such as electronic, information, and psychological warfare are conducted by the General Staff Department of the KPA.³⁸ These departments can carry out low-cost, low-intensity provocations during peacetime and disruptive attacks in wartime.

Key Takeaways:

- The KPA’s core strength is its manpower. Its equipment, despite an advanced missile program, is almost entirely antiquated. Tanks are obsolete, and fighter pilots rarely train due to fuel shortages and the fear of defection. The Ground Forces, however, are beginning to modernize and benefit from more regular training.

preemptive airstrike or commando mission against nuclear weapons facilities and leadership compounds complicated.

- The North’s focus on asymmetric capabilities and its inability to sustain itself in a prolonged conflict raise the value of a preemptive, all-out first move. This leads to a dangerously steep escalation chain.
- Given the DPRK’s development of its cyber forces, it is likely to expand their role in provocation and coercion as they are cheap and effective, especially and do not currently generate a reciprocal response.

Notes

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