

**THE NORTH KOREAN NUCLEAR
CRISIS IN 2017: CHALLENGES
AND RISKS**

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Executive Summary

1. With one hydrogen device test and three ICBM tests in 2017, North Korea's nuclear weapons development reached a level that threatens the security of the United States and that of its allies such as South Korea and Japan.
2. In particular, after the Hwasong-15 ICBM test in November 2017, North Korea declared the completion of nuclear deterrent. The denuclearisation option has apparently failed and a military measure that is being deliberated by the Trump administration may not only be unworkable but also generate a catastrophic result.
3. Trump's madman approach used by Richard Nixon to press North Vietnam has implied options ranging from a preemptive attack to dialogues, but it did not achieve the intended objective of bringing Pyongyang to the negotiation table. Kim Jong-un seemingly believes that he cannot be assured of security even if he concedes and hence continues to focus on strengthening nuclear deterrent.
4. North Korea's strategy is obviously revisionist and is accompanied by compellence. North Korea is attempting to not only break the status quo on the Korean peninsula on the military front but also coerce Washington and Seoul to accept its nuclear weapons state status.
5. The revisionist strategy aims to penetrate the weakness of US extended deterrence by driving a wedge between Seoul and Washington, and resulting in South Korea's fear of US abandonment.
6. As North Korea is seemingly unwilling to abandon nuclear statehood, deterrence becomes a realistic recourse to cope with nuclear North Korea. North Korea vis-à-vis the US-South Korea alliance will hence enter an era of mutual nuclear deterrence.
7. Challenges are aplenty. First, as there are more missile technologies that North Korea could advance, it is likely to continue to be provocative. It is likely to, for example, replace liquid fuel with solid fuel in ICBM to enhance the surprise attack

capability and complete submarine launched ballistic missiles called Bukkuksong-3. More missile launching tests could be expected.

8. Second, there are many unknown aspects of Pyongyang's nuclear operational posture. It is unknown if Kim would delegate C2 (command and control) to field commanders, particularly in crisis or wartime. The delegation will escalate the risk of a nuclear war.
9. The urgent and important need is a mediator to facilitate communication between North Korea and the world, hence eliminating the conditions necessary for opening a dialogue. The mediator should not have direct stakes on this issue but should have mediation experience.
10. As North Korea is distancing itself from China and the bilateral relationship is worsening to an unprecedented level, the EU or Germany may be an alternative. The mediator's challenging task is to break the present standoff brought about by Pyongyang's insistence on a nuclear weapons state status and Washington's demand for immediate denuclearisation.