

ASSESSING THE UTILITY OF SANCTIONS: HALTING NUCLEAR PROLIFERATION IN NORTH KOREA AND IRAN

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ABSTRACT

The aftermath of World-War One indicated a pivotal change in the course of global history, initiating the era of nuclear weapons. US set this trend by becoming the first nation to use a nuclear weapon against another country i.e. Japan. Subsequently, other major world powers, including the Soviet Union, Britain, France and China, followed suit, solidifying their status as recognized nuclear states. However, the proliferation of nuclear ambitions extended beyond these five powers. Nations such as Pakistan and India successfully joined the nuclear club in 1998, while others like Iran, North Korea and Israel have been embroiled in their pursuit of these formidable weapons. Originally launched for ostensibly peaceful purposes, the nuclear programs of both DPRK and Iran have been subjected to contentious scrutiny by the global community, especially the United States. Despite efforts to engage in diplomatic negotiations, the US has encountered challenges in reaching agreements with these nations, leading to mounting concerns over their nuclear intentions. To deter their progress, the U.S has resorted to a variety of measures, including economic sanctions, trade restrictions, travel bans, and embargoes. This paper aims to shed light on the nuclear arms program of DPRK and the Islamic Republic of Iran, examining the effectiveness of the imposed sanctions. Employing an exploratory research method and drawing data from secondary sources, we will delve into the intricacies of their nuclear pursuits. It is important to note that the recommendations presented in this study are subjective and represent the authors' viewpoints, and not definitive conclusions.

Key words: North Korea, Iran, United States, Sanctions, Negotiations

INTRODUCTION

Nuclear proliferation has remained a significant concern since the Cold War era, with America being the first state to use weapons of mass destruction, subsequently leading to a race among nations to acquire nuclear power. While some states, such as the United States, China, Britain, Russia and France are internationally recognized nuclear powers, others, like Pakistan and India, joined the nuclear club in 1998. America was the first state ever that used nuclear weapons, which was followed by the Soviet Union (USSR). This marked the period of the escalated military buildup in the world. Before the cold war period, the states felt threatened by the use of conventional weapons but after the nuclear attack on the Japanese cities, Nagasaki and Hiroshima by

the United States, a new threat emerged. As nuclear weapons assure mutual destruction they are rather used as a tool to ensure security for a state. If we see the past examples, USSR developed Nuclear Weapons because it feel threatened by the United States. Pakistan started its nuclear program after India had acquired nuclear weapons. This was because of the hostile past that both states shared. Pakistan thought that India's nuclear weapons can pose a serious threat to Pakistan's security. The commonality between these two cases is that both USSR and Pakistan felt threatened from the nuclear energy acquired by United States and India respectively.

North Korea started developing its nuclear program after the Korean War. This was because North Korea felt insecure about a US-backed government in South Korea and also the presence of nuclear missiles there. It took its lesson from the past that if a nuclear bomb could destroy a state like Japan, it could destroy any state. Initially, USSR supported North Korea in its pursuit of nuclear energy but after the Cuban Missile Crisis North Korea decided to develop weapons on its own. It deemed it necessary for its survival. (Bryce Wakefeild, 2010)

Iran started the nuclear program for peaceful purposes under the Pahlavi dynasty. The United States helped Iran in this respect and a program 'Atoms for Peace' was started. However later on Relations between the two deteriorated and the International Atomic Energy Agency reported that the Islamic Republic of Iran was developing nuclear weapons.

America and other regional powers resorted to the use of sanctions as a tool to deter North Korea and Iran from developing nuclear weapons. The chapter on sanctions started at the very end of the 20th century and continues to date. Despite international opposition and sanctions, North Korea and Iran persist in their pursuit of nuclear weapons. In this discussion, we will focus on the nuclear programs of Democratic People's Republic of Korea and Islamic Republic of Iran and explore the reasons behind their pursuit while examining the effectiveness of sanctions imposed on these nations. This research is focused to find answers to the questions such as whether these sanctions were an effective tool to deter the nuclear threat. What are the other tools that can be used to limit the nuclear aspirations of these states (Iran & North Korea)?

Literature Review:

The pursuit of weapons of mass destruction by DPRK and Iran threatens the regional security of East Asia and the Middle East the most. If North Korea can develop nuclear weapons, this will pose a serious threat to Tokyo and Seoul. On the other hand, Iran's nuclear capability will lead the Middle Eastern States to an arms race. Out of all these states, the gravest threat is posed to the American influence in these respective regions once these states acquire nuclear power. Both states however, are miles apart in their nuclear development capabilities. (Gallucci, 2006)

The reason that Iran is unable to develop a nuclear bomb to date is its adherence to the Nuclear Proliferation Treaty, unlike DPRK which backed out from the treaty in 2003. Although the world had the same aim for both states (to bring an end to nuclear proliferation), there was a visible difference in the outcomes of the sanctions applied to both states. With every step North Korea takes towards becoming a nuclear power, more sanctions are imposed on Iran. This means that the world wants to curtail Iran from becoming another North Korea.

The UN Security Council Resolution no. 1540 under the UN charter chapter no seven declares the Weapon of Mass Destruction as a risk to the world's security, peace and prosperity. This also provides a framework of sanctions against DPRK and Iran. The US works with the UN to counter these states through sanctions. It often use such tools unilaterally as well. (Go, 2013)

Secondary sources are used to collect data for this research. Exploratory research method has been used. Data was collected through electronic sources such as websites, e-journals and e-newspapers etc. Limitations remain in the research due to the day-to-day events occurring around the world and not every detail could be included due to the word limit.

Deterrence Theory:

Nuclear deterrence as a political theory gained relevant importance after the world war two concluded. Brodie, a Western scholar believed that nuclear weapons have no other purpose than to avert the threat of war. According to scholars the prospect of 'Mutually Assured Destruction' has decreased the threat of war. It is very much easy to persuade the enemy through the use of threats to not use nuclear weapons. (Abbasi, 2020)

Deterrence simply means the use of threat by a state to another state that your actions will be met by certain consequences. The term "deterrence" commonly brings to mind nuclear deterrence or the use of force. However, it's important to note that sanctions can also be employed as a means of deterrence. (What Is Deterrence?, n.d.) Sanctions are retaliatory measures enforced by one or more states or International Organizations on another state or entity to influence their behaviour or policies. They can include economic sanctions, trade restrictions, financial penalties, travel bans, and diplomatic measures. The main objective of sanctions is to

impose costs or limitations on the targeted party to discourage them from engaging in specific undesirable actions or policies. (Masters, 2019) While military deterrence and nuclear deterrence are well-known aspects of international relations, sanctions serve as a form of non-military deterrence, leveraging economic and political pressure to achieve their goals without resorting to military force.

Using Sanctions as a mode of deterrence dates back to the Ancient Greek century however, the last few years of the 20th century are mainly termed as the 'sanctions' decade. The most effective sanctions are applied by the United Nations but major powers also use this as a tool of deterrence against their adversaries. Such is the case of Iran and DPRK. The United States along with other major powers have been using sanctions to deter North Korea and Iran from becoming the nuclear powers.

Nuclear Showdown: Unraveling North Korea and Iran's Atomic Ambitions

Both Iran and DPRK have been engaged in the pursuit of nuclear energy despite the dissent shown by the world powers. The nuclear program of Iran and North Korea dates back to the 1960s. The following information provides a little insight into the nuclear ambitions of both states.

The Nuclear Program of North Korea:

North Korea's interest in nuclear power dates back to the early days of the Cold War. Following the Korean War, North Korea sought to counter the influence of its arch-enemy, the US, which was in turn, the friend of South Korea. The country's scientists began studying nuclear sciences as early as 1948, and even before officially joining the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) in 1974, DPRK had already initiated its covert nuclear program. In 1985, it became a member of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), but it continued to pursue its nuclear ambitions. (Bryce Wakefeild, 2010)

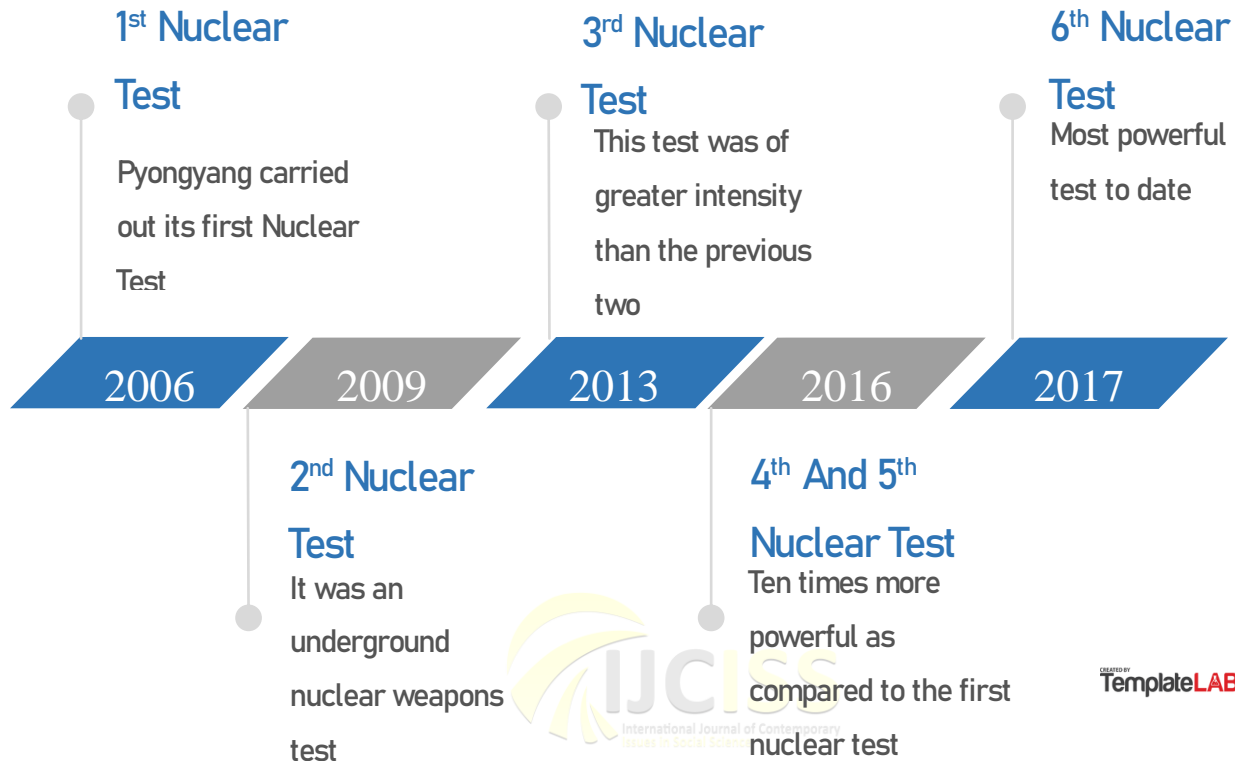
Despite their differences, both America and DPRK attempted to address the nuclear proliferation issue through diplomacy. Initiatives like the 'Agreed Framework' (Agreed Framework of 21 October 1994 between the United States of America and The Democratic People's Republic of Korea, 2002)¹ in 1994 and the 'Six-Party Talks (Liang, 2022)² starting in 2003 exemplify these diplomatic efforts. However, due to the lack of consensus and North Korea's refusal to abandon its nuclear program, international powers, led by the United States, resorted to employing other tools such as sanctions and embargoes. In 2003, North Korea left Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty and tested its first nuclear arm in 2006.

¹ It was signed between the United and North Korea in 1994 in Geneva. This agreement insisted on the need to make the Korean Peninsula, a nuclear-free zone. For this purpose, DPRK's graphite-moderated reactors would be replaced with Light Water Reactor Power Plant. The United States will provide its full support and both states will move towards cooperation.

² A round of talks between North Korea, the United States, China, South Korea, Russia and Japan from 2003 to 2009. Consisted of Initially both the United States and North Korea decided to have better relations after DPRK dismantles its nuclear reactors. Ended in 2009 after the prolonged tension between U.S. and DPRK.

Figure 1

North Korea Nuclear Weapons Test



Source: By Author. Data taken from Al-Jazeera (Timeline of North Korea’s Nuclear Tests,” Nuclear Weapons News, 2017)

Nuclear Program of the Islamic Republic of Iran:

Iran's nuclear program began in the twentieth century. In 1957, the interstate relations between Islamic Republic of Iran and America flourished and the United States itself helped Iran develop its first nuclear program for peaceful purposes when Iran was its ally. An initiative was taken known as the ‘Atoms of Peace Program’. This program led to an agreement between the two countries in which they cooperated to develop nuclear weapons for peaceful purposes. A decade apart America provided nuclear reactor and Uranium to Iran. (“Photos: The Troubled History of Iran-US Relations,” In Pictures, 2022) It was the cold war era and the United States was helping its allies to make them stronger against any threat. Iran got its first reactor in 1967 which would produce up to 600 grams of plutonium per annum. Iran made contracts regarding nuclear energy with

other Western nations such as France, and Germany as well.

An organization named the Atomic Energy Organization was established in Iran in 1974, Iran was strictly following the safety rules and procedures regarding nuclear non-proliferation. In 1979, the Iranian Parliament ratified the NPT which was active since 1970.

The U.S was the one who helped Iran develop its nuclear program but later on, this program proved to be a source of dispute between the two states.

Until 1984 the new cleric leader of Iran Ayatollah Rouhollah Khomeini considered the nuclear program as ‘un-Islamic’. As relations between Iran and U.S got intensified after the revolution, aid regarding the nuclear program was also hindered. Due to this reason, Iran was forced to contact other countries for support. Although Pakistan and China helped Iran in this regard, the nuclear reactor agreement between

Iran and China was hindered by the United States. This left Iran in a very uncertain situation as it could not leave its nuclear program (for peaceful use) midway.

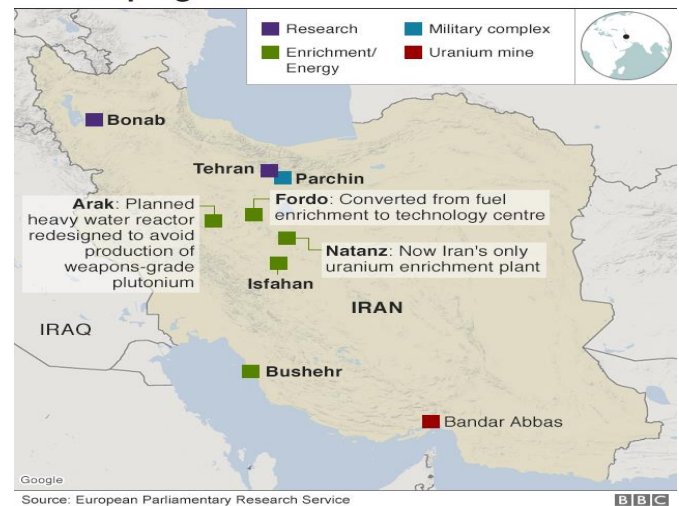
It was not until 1987 that Iran imported centrifuges from other states. In early 1992 Iran agreed with North Korea. This was related to the missiles. This agreement was a point of concern for America as it considered both Iran and North Korea, a great threat against its nuclear non-proliferation efforts. (Malus, 2018)

Although not much is known about when Iran started to pursue its nuclear weapons program, a wild guess suggests that it started by the end of the 20th century and the start of the 21st century. This program was named 'Project Amad'. According to the received information, this project ended abruptly in 2003. In early 2003, Iran signed the advanced protocol with International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) that allowed IAEA to have access to Iran's nuclear facilities. After almost three years of this agreement, IAEA discovered the unrevealed areas of the nuclear program. This led to the imposition of sanctions by America. Right after backing out from the IAEA agreement Iran declared that it was building its nuclear facilities further. After almost four years Iran announced that it was capable of producing highly enriched uranium which was enough to build nuclear weapons. This amount of uranium was far greater than the amount required for nuclear power plants (used to generate electric energy) and for other peaceful purposes. After this announcement by Iran, the International community gave a very harsh reaction. Further sanctions were enforced by America and other countries.

The Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) was an agreement that resulted through the talks between P5+1 (United States, France, Britain, Russia, China) and Germany and Iran which started in 2006. This agreement was validated under UN resolution 2231. The Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action was focused on progress of Iran's atomic program for peaceful purposes while keeping in mind the concerns of the Western states. JCPOA was a result of efforts by Barak Obama and Hassan Rouhani to ease the tensions between Iran and the United States. (Asghar, 2009) This plan was based upon cooperation and gradual confidence building among the Western states and Iran regarding the nuclear issue, which in turn would ease the tensions regarding other issues and pave the way for trade and

better future relations. (Joint comprehensive plan of action, 2015)

Figure 2:
Changes agreed under Iran deal to limit nuclear programme



Source: Changes under Iran Nuclear Deal

(Trump 'Asked for Options on Strike on Iran Nuclear Site, 2020)

The United States would ease the sanctions imposed on Iran regarding banking transactions, trade etc. It would also allow the trade of air crafts to Iran. The U.S. would allow the trade of goods such as metals and other services to Iran. If IAEA confirms that Iran is abiding by the provisions of the JCPOA after eight years it would look into further easing the sanctions. It was not until 2018 that the Trump administration decided to finally walk out of the nuclear deal. During his speech, President Trump announced that America was going to withdraw from the JCPOA. Although this move was already anticipated by the administration still it was a major setback for Iran and all the other states involved in this agreement. Iran and the other parties pledged that they won't withdraw from this agreement.

From Diplomacy to Pressure: Understanding Sanctions on Iran and North Korea

The following data will give an overview of the sanctions enforced by UN and the United States of America on DPRK and Iran.

North Korea:

Here's a little insight into the sanctions and embargoes enforced by the UN and the U.S on DPRK since its first nuclear weapons test in 2006.

North Korea has been sanctioned on nearly everything from food items to equipment, from the ban on labour exports to limiting the technical cooperation of North Korea with other states. United

States however has focused more upon the economic sector, freezing bank accounts and assets of the North Korean Nationals. (Editors C. , 2022)

Table 1: Sanctions on North Korea by the UN:

Date	Resolution No.	Targeted Sector
Oct 14, 2006	Resolution 1718	Heavy Weaponry Supplies, luxury goods, missile technology
June 12, 2009	Resolution 1874	Strengthened previous sanctions
January 22, 2013	Resolution 2087	Strengthened sanctions
March 7, 2013	Resolution 2094	Expanded sanctions on individuals
March 2, 2016	Resolution 2270	Banning the export of aviation fuel
November 30, 2016	Resolution 2321	Mineral exports and helicopter sales.
August 5, 2017	Resolution 2371	Ban on exports of coal and oil
September 11, 2017	Resolution 2375	Ban on labour exports, restriction on refined petroleum export
December 22, 2017	Resolution 2397	Sanctions related to agriculture and various metal export.

Source of Data: Center for Arms Control and Non-proliferation
 (Editors, 2022)

Table 2: Sanctions by the United States:

Date	Executive Order	Targeted Sector
May 1, 2005	EO 13382	Blocked the Property containing weapons of mass destruction, Proliferators and facilitators.
June 27, 2008	13466	Restricted North Korean Government and Nationals
September 1, 2010	13551	Blocked properties of Certain North Korean Nationals
April 18, 2011	13570	Limited certain transactions towards North Korea
January 2, 2015	13687	Additional Sanctions
March 16, 2016	13722	Blocked properties of the North Korea’s Government and Worker's Party of DPRK
September 21, 2017	13810	Additional Sanctions Imposed

Source of Data: US Department of State
 (Democratic People’s Republic of Korea Sanctions - United States Department of State, 2023)

Effect of these Sanctions:

These sanctions have affected North Korea a great deal. Due to the sanctions on the products of daily use, the people of Korea have been affected a lot. Although the first round of UN sanctions targeted the leaders. However, it indirectly caused harm to the general public. As per reports, the exports of North Korea were reduced to half in 2018. Due to a complete cut-off from the International Markets, DPRK has seen a great decline in its Per Capita Income. (North Korea: Legislative Basis for U.S. Economic Sanctions, 2023)

Food insecurity:

As per the DPRK's priority plan for 2020, around 10.1 per cent of the total population suffers from food insecurity. North Korean citizens urgently need humanitarian aid and the country continues to suffer due to the lack of modern agricultural equipment (due to the sanctions on these sectors). (DPR Korea Needs and Priorities Plan 2020 (Issued April 2020) in DPR Korea., 2020)

Effect on North Korean Nationals:

Under the US sanctions, not only the industries within North Korea are affected but also any other business company which has any links with the North Korean companies are affected. Moreover,

international companies are restricted not to using any North Korean labour as the sanctions restrict North Korean labour to work overseas. This is mainly to avoid the influx of dollars to the North Korean Government. (Spokesperson, 2018)

Iran:
 In case of Iran, the negotiations and nuclear sanctions goes hand in hand.

Sanctions Imposed on Iran:

Date	Executive Order	Targeted Sector
September 23, 2001	13224	Applied on the supporters of terrorism
June 28, 2005	13382	This applies to the supporters of Iran's nuclear activities
July 1, 2010		Amends the Iran Sanction Act of 1990
September 29, 2010	13553	This applies to Iranian officials involved in Human Rights Abuse
May 23, 2011	13574	Further increases the already existing sanctions
November 21, 2011	13590	Applied on persons involved in certain activities in Iran’s petrochemical and energy sector.
December 31, 2011		Imposes sanctions on Iran’s Central Bank
February 6, 2012	13599	Blocked properties of the Iranian Government
April 23, 2012	13606	Blocked Entry of Iranian people involved in activities of Human Rights violation
May 1, 2012	13608	Blocks transactions with Iran
July 30, 2012	13622	Sanctioned the public and private industries on knowingly buying Iranian Oil
August 1, 2012	HR 1905	Targets the companies who do business with Iran's national oil companies
October 9, 2012	13628	Additional Sanctions on Iran
June 3, 2013	13645	Targets Iran's automotive sector, Iranian Rial
August 6, 2018	13846	Re-imposed the sanctions which were lifted due to the 2015 Iran Nuclear Deal
May 8, 2019	13871	Targets Iran's oil, steel and copper sector
June 24, 2019	13876	Directed towards the supreme leader of Iran, Ayatollah Ali Khomeini
January 10, 2020	13902	Barred the entry of any Iranian transaction into America's financial system
September 21, 2020	13949	Secondary sanctions on any person supporting Iran’s Nuclear program.

Source of Data included in the table: **The Iran Primer** (Nada, 2023)

Effects of these Sanctions:

Humanitarian Impacts:

In a comprehensive 47-page report named "Maximum Pressure: US Economic Sanctions Harm Iranians' Right to Health," it has been observed that the wide-ranging restrictions on financial transactions, along with assertive statements from US officials, have severely limited Iranian entities' ability to afford crucial humanitarian

imports, including essential medicines and medical equipment. Despite the American administration relief for humanitarian supplies within its sanctions framework, the reality on the ground, as revealed by Human Rights Watch, indicates that this relief has not effectively countered the hesitancy of US and European industries and banking sector to engage in the exported of these exempted humanitarian

supplies, fearing potential sanctions and legal repercussions. Consequently, Iranians have been deprived of access to vital medicines, impinging upon their fundamental right to health. As per international law, it is incumbent upon the U.S to carefully assess the impact of these restrictions on the rights of Iranians and take appropriate measures to rectify any violations caused by the sanctions. (Iran: Sanctions Threatening Health, 2020)

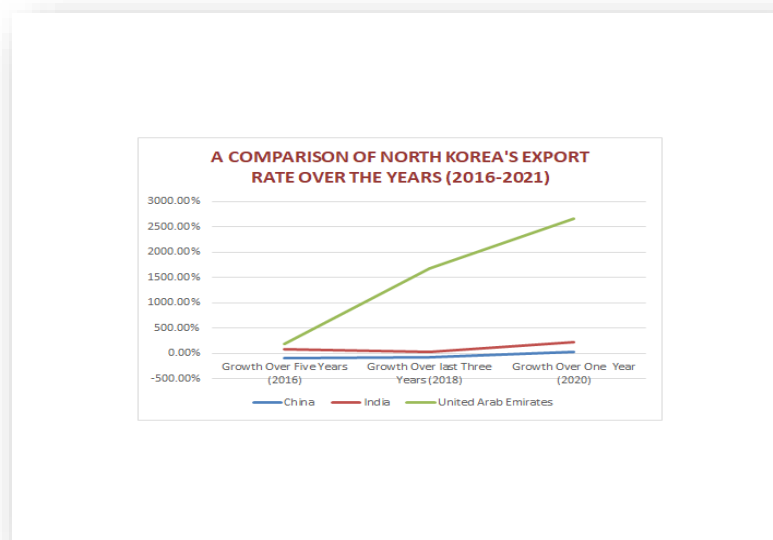
Economic Impacts:

Iran's economy has been severely affected by enduring US sanctions, prompting Tehran to insist on the suspension of these restrictions as a precondition for resuming nuclear talks. Following the signing of the nuclear accord, the Islamic Republic's economy saw rapid expansion in 2016, reaching 12.5%, but this growth was short-lived. The country's economy contracted around 4.9% in 2020, demonstrating a steady decline since 2017. The estimates indicate that Iran's economy experienced a 4.99% drop in 2020, continuing the negative trend that commenced in 2017. (Muhammad, 2023)

The Ineffectiveness of Sanctions in Bringing About Change In North Korea:

One reason of this ineffectiveness is that these sanctions are not imposed all at once thus they are not much effective. Also most of the time China and

Figure 3:



Source: Graph by the Author. Data taken from (North Korea (PRK) Exports, Imports, and Trade Partners, n.d.)

From the data given, it is concluded that nothing is stopping North Korea from developing nuclear weapons. This may mean that sanctions are not that much of a useful tool until China and Russia are allies of North Korea. Despite these sanctions, Korea can export and import from various states including China, India and UAE.

In Iran:

Sanctions have served as a means for the world community to demonstrate its resolve against Iran's nuclear activities. They send a clear message that the world stands united in opposing Iran's defiance of nonproliferation efforts while remaining open to a peaceful resolution. However, these embargoes have had some unforeseen consequences, such as strengthening the current government's grip on power while adversely affecting the pro-Western factions that could possibly become an ally of the U.S in the near future. The economic hardships caused by sanctions have helped the Iranian administration to amplify greater authority over the economy and shield regime allies from their impact. On the other hand, those most adversely affected by the sanctions are often individuals who would support a more moderate Iranian government and hold favourable views of the US or the general public. While Iran has not fully complied with international demands, there are indications that it may be more open to a negotiated compromise involving sanctions relief. The Iranian government has shown a willingness to halt certain problematic aspects of its nuclear program, but it emphasizes the need for sanctions to be lifted in return e.g. Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action. (Laicie Heeley, 2013)

Fostering Global Security: The Path to Resolving Nuclear Proliferation

In the face of nuclear proliferation, it is evident that stable negotiations between nations are the key to finding lasting solutions. Whether we consider Iran or Democratic People's Republic of Korea, it is essential to engage in constructive and trustworthy dialogues. However, history has shown that negotiations can be complex and unpredictable, often

facing abrupt interruptions due to issues arising from any involved state. To overcome these hurdles, confidence-building measures are vital, and a trilateral summit involving the United States, North Korea, and Iran, with two neutral observer or mediator states, could provide the necessary platform for progress.

The Power of Economic Concessions:

When seeking common ground, economic concessions prove to be a far more effective tool than imposing sanctions. A significant point of contention between the United States and Iran revolves around Iran's oil exports through the Strait of Hormuz. By allowing Iran to export oil freely, the United States can demonstrate its friendship and foster trust with Iran. Moreover, addressing other issues such as FTO³ and Hezbollah will pave the way for more constructive discussions.

Avoid taking mistrust inducing Decisions:

Hasty decisions that single out states and induces mistrust among them must be avoided. As was done in 2017 by President Donald Trump, when the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps was listed as a foreign terrorist organizations. Such steps tend to hinder the process of negotiations. Instead, multilateral dialogue and cooperation are essential for achieving fruitful outcomes. All parties must approach discussions with openness and understanding, focusing on mutual interests and common ground.

Ensuring a Nuclear-Free Korean Peninsula:

With DPRK escalating its nuclear arsenal and the U.S deploying more missiles in South Korea, the situation demands urgent attention. The vision of a nuclear-free Korean Peninsula must be embraced, and steps should be taken to prevent any further arms race in the region. This includes addressing concerns that have led South Korea to consider developing its nuclear weapons. (Jean Mackenzie, 2023)

The Role of Sanctions:

While sanctions have historically been an effective tool in curbing nuclear proliferation, their impact on Iran and DPRK has been limited. This can be

time in the history that a government institution was named as a foreign terrorist organization

³ Foreign Terrorist Organization. Iranian Revolutionary guard corps was added in the list of FTO in 2017 by Donald Trump. It was the very first

attributed to their non-democratic governments, which do not necessarily prioritize public opinion. To make sanctions more effective, a nuanced approach must be adopted, focusing on targeted measures that encourage dialogue rather than isolation.

Conclusion:

In the pursuit of global security and a world free from the threat of nuclear proliferation, stable and meaningful negotiations are paramount. Building trust between nations is crucial, and this can be achieved through dialogue, confidence-building measures, and economic concessions. Instead of relying solely on sanctions, we should strive for cooperative solutions that address the underlying concerns of all parties involved. By fostering understanding and a commitment to peace, we can create a brighter and safer future for the world.

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