



In December 2017, USIP hosted a radio townhall event with Public Radio International, America Abroad Media, and WNYC's The Takeaway to discuss the potential for peace on the Korean Peninsula amid North Korea's nuclear provocations. WNYC's Todd Zwillich moderated a panel of four experts, including USIP's Frank Aum, and took live questions from the audience as well as pre-recorded questions from the South Korean public.

CURRENT SITUATION

For decades, North Korea's provocative behavior and pursuit of nuclear weapons have threatened peace and stability in Northeast Asia. Various strategies to address the problem—including diplomatic, financial, and security incentives and disincentives—have delayed, but not ended, North Korea's nuclear program. In the face of international condemnation, North Korea's insistence on keeping its nuclear weapons has led to a diplomatic stalemate and the need for creative solutions to prevent a crisis.

Since assuming control in 2012, Kim Jong Un has accelerated the development of a nuclear deterrent capability, conducting more nuclear and ballistic missile tests than his grandfather and father combined. In 2017, tensions escalated to the highest level in years when North Korea conducted its sixth nuclear test in September and a new, successful test of an intercontinental ballistic missile in November, which can reach all of the continental United States.

In 2018, various factors helped reduce the potential for conflict and create an opening for diplomacy. South Korea hosted the Winter Olympics in 2018 and President Moon Jae-in invited North Korean participation, leading to senior-level talks and three inter-Korean summits. Kim, claiming North Korea's nuclear force development was complete, announced a strategic shift toward economic development and began a charm offensive with the international community. In addition, President Trump made the unconventional decisions to suspend major joint U.S.-South Korea military exercises and meet directly with Chairman Kim in Singapore—marking the first-ever meeting between a sitting U.S. president and a North Korean leader.



At the historic Singapore Summit in June 2018, the United States and North Korea committed to establish “new U.S.-DPRK relations” and “join their efforts to build a lasting and stable peace regime on the Korean Peninsula.” North Korea also committed to work toward the “complete denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula.”

Since then, however, the two countries have been mired in a diplomatic stalemate, disagreeing about what each side should concede. The large gap in the two positions was reflected at the second summit in Hanoi in February 2019, where no negotiated agreement was signed.

USIP'S CURRENT WORK ON NORTH KOREA

For decades, the U.S. Institute of Peace has supported efforts to strengthen peace and stability and prevent crisis on the Korean Peninsula. USIP collaborates with U.S. and regional experts, government officials, and diplomats to lead dialogues and conduct research exploring strategies for enhancing diplomacy, avoiding conflict, and managing crises related to North Korea.

Facilitating High-Level Dialogues. In the absence of formal ties between Washington and Pyongyang, the Institute regularly engages governmental officials and nongovernmental experts from South Korea, Japan, China, and other relevant countries to strengthen security in Northeast Asia and reduce the risk of violent conflict on the Korean Peninsula. These recurring, private dialogues create opportunities to share insights and policy ideas that might not emerge through official diplomatic channels.

Convening Experts. USIP partners with think tanks and other organizations to engage experts on strategies and concrete actions to enhance the use of diplomacy in resolving the North Korea issue. In 2018, USIP convened a senior study group that examined China's role in North Korean peace and denuclearization negotiations. The Institute also collaborates with government, non-government, and other likeminded experts to improve flows of information to, from, and within North Korea.

Promoting Independent Research and Analysis. USIP supports research and analysis that sheds new light on regional strategies toward North Korea and explores creative approaches to enhancing cooperation to strengthen mutual security. In 2017, the Institute published reports examining China's changing strategy toward North Korea and highlighting the need to launch a trilateral U.S.-China-South Korea dialogue to help manage the North Korea crisis.

Educating Policymakers, Academics, and the Public. USIP convenes public and private panels and roundtable discussions that inform U.S. policymakers and the public about the viability of different diplomatic strategies for dealing with North Korea. USIP also hosts university students and military scholars to engage in comprehensive discussions about the political, economic, military, and social situation in North Korea.