

NORTH KOREAN SECURITY CHALLENGES

A net assessment

IISS Press Release

North Korean provocations increase risk of retaliation

North Korea's growing arsenal and provocative behaviour increase the risk that eventually there will be retaliation, according to a new in-depth report from the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS). Although the most visible North Korean security challenges come from its weapons of mass destruction and huge conventional forces, diverse forms of state-sponsored crime and the complications arising from the regime's mistreatment of its own people pose additional security challenges.

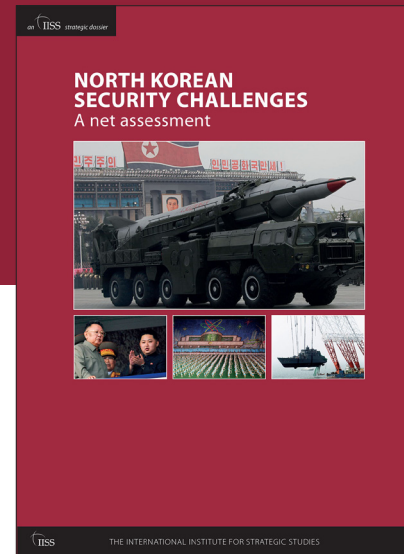
The latest IISS Strategic Dossier, *North Korean Security Challenges: a net assessment*, is the most systematic and thorough public analysis of the range of threats emanating from the state. This includes its two nuclear programmes, the world's third largest chemical weapons arsenal, a range of ballistic missiles – all of which it appears willing to sell – plus the world's fourth largest army. North Korea is the most militarized country on earth. North Korea is also threatening because of the criminality that seems hard-wired into the regime and the human security problems created by its repression and economic mismanagement.

'Nowhere can one find a more comprehensive accounting of the entire set of problems that North Korea poses for its people, its neighbours and the wider world,' said IISS Director-General and Chief Executive Dr John Chipman. 'The dossier also explains why the dynastic succession now underway could make North Korea an even more dangerous nation.'

In almost all respects, conditions are less favourable for this succession than for the first dynastic transfer after the death of Kim Il-sung in 1994. The Kim family will have to rely heavily on physical power exercised by the military and the state-security apparatus in order to ensure a successful power transition. This exacerbates the potential for conflict.

Conclusions include:

- An invasion of South Korea has less credibility today due to long economic decline in the North and enhanced capabilities in the South but the North has many ways to inflict harm and sow terror without invading.



- North Korea has enough plutonium for probably fewer than ten nuclear weapons. North Korea sees its nuclear arsenal as permanent and no longer talks of trading it for political or economic gains.
- The nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles largely serve a political purpose. North Korea perceives them as the only way to compensate for economic deficiencies.
- North Korea has relied on foreign sources for its ballistic missiles and may no longer be able to export them in large numbers or to expand its missile forces appreciably. But prematurely fielding new, unreliable missile systems may have value for political and deterrence purposes.
- With North Korea under more pressure than ever before, the possibility that the regime might begin to unravel cannot be ignored. Its possession of nuclear weapons further complicates an intricate and dangerous situation in the event of a disputatious collapse.
- There is greater need than ever to plan for unification and to anticipate various scenarios. But neither can one rule out a continuation of the status quo.
- One plausible scenario is that North Korea may increasingly become a de facto satellite of China. Since mid-2010 Chinese policy has moved sharply and visibly to prop up the Kim Jong-il regime and strengthen ties at all levels.

Notes for editors

The IISS is a think tank concentrating on politico-military conflict. It has been influential in setting the agenda on nuclear deterrence, non-proliferation and arms control since its formation in 1958. Headquartered in London, the IISS has offices in Washington, Bahrain and Singapore.

The editor of the dossier, Director of the IISS Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Programme Mark Fitzpatrick, is available for interview.

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