

# Litany of breakdowns on North Korea's nukes

**T**he only good news on nuclear issues in recent times was that the bellicose rhetoric between North Korea and the United States stopped, and both sides took a step back from the precipice and agreed to talk at Singapore last year. The problem is that although everyone breathed a sigh of relief, nothing of substance was agreed.

There was no timetable or verification mechanism to ensure that North Korea would keep its promise to 'denuclearise', or that the lifting of sanctions on North Korea would begin. In fact, compared to precedents in 1992, 1994 and 2005, what was agreed at Singapore failed to make even the entry level.

The first time this puzzle was almost solved followed North and South Korea agreeing in 1992 that neither would test, manufacture, deploy or use nuclear weapons. They even promised a joint nuclear commission and inspections of suspect locations.

Building on this success, and the intervention of former US President Jimmy Carter following concerns North Korea may have been trying to secretly enrich uranium, in 1994 Bill Clinton signed



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the Agreed Framework with Kim Jong Il.

This framework froze Pyongyang's nuclear programme at specifically listed sites and sought to normalise their bilateral relations. To do this, America promised help with new nuclear energy sources (which would not allow the creation of weapons grade material) and to provide conventional fuel.

The United States also renounced the use of nuclear weapons against North Korea, promised to remove North Korea from the list of countries believed to sponsor terrorism, and end the Korean War with a peace treaty.

Despite such high hopes, during Clinton's time the Americans were slow to start the building of the promised new nuclear energy sources for North Korea and fuel shipments were often delayed. During George W Bush's time, post September 11, North Korea was portrayed as a part of the "axis of evil". Both presidents were also very slow to lift the unilateral sanctions American had placed on North Korea and neither took action to actually end the Korean War. Meanwhile, the large scale military exercises continued.

By 2002 it was apparent North Korea was still pursuing technology for a uranium enrichment programme (at previously unknown sites).

This was enough for the hawkish Bush administration to shatter the 1994 Framework. North Korea responded by rebooting all of the nuclear activities it had pledged it would stop, expelled all of the international inspectors in the country, and announced it was withdrawing from the (nuclear) Non-proliferation Treaty.

After the 1994 Agreement fell over, the international community attempted to resurrect the denuclearisation process in 2005. Once more it appeared the pathway for North Korea to nuclear status could be averted after North Korea committed to "abandoning all nuclear weapons and existing nuclear programs and returning, at an early date, to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons".

The optimism of this second breakthrough was short lived. Evidence was produced that some North Koreans were not acting in good faith, there was uncertainty over whether the United States would provide safe nuclear reactors to North Korea, and there were

further difficulties on access to economic assistance, especially from the United States. The result was that the atmosphere turned very sour before October 9, 2006, when North Korea exploded its first nuclear device.

Although the international talks continued, the disagreements became entrenched, especially as UN sanctions began to get placed on North Korea (and would slowly tighten to unprecedented levels). The dialogue finally collapsed in 2009 following a North Korean test of a long-range missile. Over the next 10 years this would grow to perhaps 60 nuclear weapons with some being at least 10 times the size of what destroyed Hiroshima.

President Trump and Supreme Leader Kim Jong Un will be meeting tonight in Vietnam. What we have to watch is not the pageantry, but whether their agreement reaches the standards of 1992, 1994 or 2005, whether either of them has learned anything from the mistakes of the past, and how Trump will respond if he feels he has been tricked.

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