

Nuclear Proliferation and Global Security: A Comparative Analysis of State Responses to Iran and North Korea's Nuclear Programs

Yagazie E. Ihedioha & Ronald Badru

Department of Politics & International Relations,
Lead City University, Ibadan, Nigeria
Corresponding author: yagazieihedioha@yahoo.com

Abstract

This study provides a comparative analysis of international responses to the nuclear programs of Iran and North Korea within the broader context of global security. The proliferation of nuclear weapons by these states has posed significant challenges to the global non-proliferation regime, triggering varied responses from the international community. While Iran has been subjected to a mix of diplomacy and sanctions, North Korea has faced a more hardline stance dominated by isolation and coercive containment. The problem, however, lies in the inconsistency, selectivity, and limited effectiveness of these responses in achieving long-term denuclearization and regional stability. The study is anchored in the theoretical frameworks of realism and constructivism, which help explain both the strategic motivations of the states involved and the normative expectations of the international system. Methodologically, the research adopts a qualitative comparative case study approach, utilizing secondary data from institutional reports, journal articles, and policy documents. Findings reveal that while diplomacy and institutional engagement have produced partial success in Iran, the case of North Korea highlights the failure of sanctions and isolation in achieving nuclear rollback. The paper concludes that global responses are often shaped more by geopolitical interests than by consistent legal norms, weakening the credibility of the non-proliferation regime. It recommends a recalibrated approach combining credible diplomacy, enhanced institutional oversight, and regional security frameworks to address future proliferation threats. By aligning strategic interests with normative enforcement, the international community can better manage the evolving threats to global security posed by nuclear proliferation.

Keyword: Nuclear Proliferation, Global Security, Iran, North Korea, Nuclear Programs

Introduction

The proliferation of nuclear weapons continues to be a critical issue in international security, presenting substantial challenges to global stability and peace. Iran and North Korea are among the nations that have garnered significant attention for their nuclear aspirations. Both nations have engaged in nuclear initiatives that undermine the global non-proliferation framework, resulting in increased tensions and eliciting diverse reactions from the international community.

The nuclear program of Iran has been a central issue in international diplomacy and apprehension. Notwithstanding Iran's claims that its nuclear endeavours are intended for peaceful reasons, evidence indicates otherwise. In November 2022, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) reported that Iran had persistently contravened its obligations under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) by not

supplying a comprehensive and precise account of its nuclear activities. The IAEA's failure to verify the peaceful intent of Iran's nuclear program highlights the difficulties in maintaining adherence to international accords (International Atomic Energy Agency, 2022).

North Korea's nuclear ambitions have likewise undermined regional and global security. In 2022, North Korea executed almost 70 ballistic missile tests, including intercontinental ballistic missiles capable of striking remote targets. These efforts not only contravene United Nations Security Council resolutions but also demonstrate Pyongyang's dedication to enhancing its nuclear capability. The global community, especially the United States and its allies, has reacted with a blend of sanctions and diplomatic initiatives; yet, North Korea persists in flouting international standards (United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs, 2022).

The differing strategies employed by Iran and North Korea in their pursuit of nuclear capability have provoked diverse reactions from international stakeholders. Despite attempts at diplomatic negotiations, such as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) with Iran, their efficacy remains uncertain. The JCPOA sought to restrict Iran's nuclear endeavours in return for the alleviation of sanctions; yet, Iran's subsequent transgressions have undermined the agreement's effectiveness. Conversely, North Korea's exit from the NPT and its blatant disregard for UN sanctions underscore the inadequacies of current non-proliferation frameworks (French Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs, 2022).

The problems presented by Iran and North Korea's nuclear programs highlight the necessity for an exhaustive examination of state reactions to nuclear proliferation. Comprehending the efficacy of diplomatic initiatives, sanctions, and other measures is essential for devising ways to avert the proliferation of nuclear weapons (Institute for Science and International Security, 2022). This paper seeks to examine and contrast the international community's reactions to the nuclear aspirations of Iran and North Korea, evaluating the consequences for global security and the non-proliferation framework.

This paper analyses the instances of Iran and North Korea to elucidate the intricacies of nuclear proliferation and the diverse techniques utilised to confront it. The study will conduct a comparative examination of the accomplishments and failings of multinational initiatives, providing insights into the overarching issues of sustaining global security amid nuclear threats.

Theoretical Framework

Comprehending the global reactions to the nuclear aspirations of Iran and North Korea necessitates a comprehensive theoretical framework that encapsulates the intricacies of state conduct, international standards, and institutional interactions. This section utilises three principal theoretical frameworks in international relations; Realism, Constructivism, and Regime Theory to elucidate the incentives driving state behaviour and the international reactions to nuclear proliferation.

Realism and the Security Dilemma

Realism, especially its neorealist form, underscores the anarchic character of the international system, wherein nations are the primary actors motivated by the quest

for survival and power (Waltz, 1979). Nuclear weapons are regarded as instruments of deterrence and self-preservation, particularly by states that consider themselves threatened or isolated. Iran and North Korea, confronted with strategic uncertainty and historical animosity from Western powers, perceive nuclear capabilities as vital for ensuring regime survival. North Korea's nuclear strategy exemplifies a traditional realist rationale: it aims to prevent external interference and affirm its sovereignty in the context of U.S. military deployment in East Asia. Iran views its nuclear program as a countermeasure to regional adversaries like Israel and Saudi Arabia, as well as a protection against U.S. military coercion.

The realism perspective elucidates the diverse reactions of global powers. The United States has implemented a containment approach in both instances, influenced by national interests and danger assessments. Although diplomacy was emphasized over Iran, North Korea's continual defiance has resulted in dependence on sanctions and military deterrent. This disparity illustrates realists' conviction that nations react variably according to strategic considerations rather than normative obligations.

Constructivism and Norms of Non-Proliferation

Constructivism provides an alternative analytical perspective, emphasizing the influence of international norms, identity, and social structures on state behaviour. In contrast to realism, constructivism posits that the international system is not solely a material environment but is socially produced through collective understandings (Wendt, 1999). Within the framework of nuclear proliferation, the non-proliferation standard, established by the NPT, is crucial in delineating legitimate from illegitimate conduct. The global condemnation of Iran and North Korea arises not only from the tangible threat of their nuclear initiatives but also from their emblematic rejection of universally recognized international standards. Constructivists emphasize the manner in which global players designate "rogue states" and galvanize international sentiment to ensure adherence to norms. The JCPOA was not merely a technical accord but a normative framework designed to reintegrate Iran into the global order via compliance and verification (Perkovich, 2022). Similarly, North Korea's persistent noncompliance solidifies its status as an outlier, warranting further global pressure and isolation.

Regime Theory and International Institutions

Regime Theory, grounded on liberal institutionalism, examines how international regimes—such as the NPT, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), and the UN Security Council—influence state behaviour via rules, monitoring, and enforcement mechanisms. These regimes facilitate collaboration, diminish uncertainty, and set expectations among states (Keohane, 1984). In both Iran and North Korea's situations, foreign organizations have been pivotal in settling disputes and striving to ensure adherence. The IAEA's oversight of Iran's nuclear facilities has proved vital to verification endeavours, notwithstanding Iran's sporadic limitations on access. In North Korea's situation, the regime's departure from the NPT and the expulsion of IAEA inspectors in 2003 signified a collapse in institutional participation, resulting in improvised diplomatic initiatives such as the Six-Party Talks (Finaud, 2022). The variable performance of these regimes highlights their reliance on the consensus of major powers and the political resolve of member nations.

Collectively, these theoretical viewpoints offer a comprehensive framework for examining global reactions to Iran and North Korea. Realism elucidates the security incentives and power-centric calculations of states, constructivism illuminates the significance of identity and norms, whilst regime theory underscores the relevance and constraints of institutional systems. The study integrates these theories to elucidate both the material and ideational factors influencing state behaviour and global security governance.

Methodology

This research uses a qualitative comparative case study methodology to analyze global reactions to the nuclear initiatives of Iran and North Korea. The research is designed to examine the nature, efficacy, and consequences of global responses specifically via diplomatic, economic, and institutional mechanisms regarding the nuclear aspirations of these two nations. The case study method is chosen for its capacity to provide a thorough examination of intricate political and security processes within particular situations. Iran and North Korea are selected as pivotal cases due to their respective challenges to the global nuclear non-proliferation regime, albeit through distinct methods. Iran continues to be a signatory of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), but North Korea exited the treaty in 2003. This differentiation facilitates comparative analysis of international responses based on treaty status, regional dynamics, and geopolitical factors.

The data for this study is predominantly derived from secondary sources, encompassing peer-reviewed journal articles, official documents from international entities such as the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), policy reports from think tanks, and credible news media. The sources are examined through document analysis, a technique that allows the researcher to systematically assess texts to discern patterns, contradictions, and recurring themes pertinent to the study's objectives. The analysis is organized topically according to essential response dimensions: diplomatic engagement (e.g., JCPOA and Six-Party Talks), sanctions, verification and monitoring, and institutional support. Each subject is analyzed across the two situations to evaluate parallels, differences, and the overall influence on global security and non-proliferation standards. This methodology aims to yield detailed findings that elucidate not just the strategies employed but also the reasons behind the success or failure of certain actions, so enriching broader conversations on the efficacy of global security governance.

Overview of Iran and North Korea's Nuclear Programs

The nuclear initiatives of Iran and North Korea have consistently been significant issues in global security discussions, influencing international diplomacy, regional stability, and the integrity of the global non-proliferation framework. While both nations have sought nuclear capabilities, the backdrop, trajectory, and international reactions to their programs vary markedly, providing essential insights into the complexities of nuclear governance.

Iran's Nuclear Program

Iran's nuclear aspirations originated in the 1950s during the U.S.-backed called Atoms for Peace initiative. Following the 1979 Islamic Revolution, Iran's nuclear program adopted a more clandestine approach, heightening concerns regarding its genuine

objectives. Notwithstanding its status as a member to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), Iran faced allegations of engaging in undisclosed nuclear operations, particularly throughout the early 2000s. The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) initiated investigations, which uncovered that Iran had not disclosed significant nuclear facilities, particularly in Natanz and Arak (IAEA, 2022).

This resulted in heightened diplomatic pressure and economic sanctions imposed by the United Nations and Western nations. In 2015, following extensive discussions, Iran attained an accord with the P5+1 (the United States, United Kingdom, France, Russia, China, and Germany), culminating in the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). Under this agreement, Iran consented to restrict its nuclear operations and permit IAEA inspections in return for the alleviation of sanctions. In 2018, the United States unilaterally exited the JCPOA, leading Iran to progressively reduce its obligations. In 2022, Iran recommenced uranium enrichment beyond the limits established by the JCPOA, heightening apprehensions regarding its nuclear progression (Perkovich, 2022).

North Korea's Nuclear Program

North Korea's nuclear program is characterized by its opacity and contravention of global standards. North Korea, originally a member of the NPT, declared its departure in 2003 due to conflicts regarding compliance and access for IAEA inspectors. It then advanced its nuclear program with escalating audacity, executing its inaugural nuclear test in 2006 and several further tests in the ensuing years (Finaud, 2022).

In contrast to Iran, North Korea explicitly regards its nuclear armament as an essential element of its national security strategy. The leadership asserts that its nuclear arsenal is essential to counter perceived threats from the United States and South Korea. Diplomatic initiatives, including the Six-Party Talks with China, the U.S., Japan, South Korea, and Russia, sought to denuclearize the Korean Peninsula but failed in 2009 due to mutual distrust and verification conflicts. By 2022, North Korea had conducted numerous tests of intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs) capable of striking the U.S. mainland, indicating substantial progress in their nuclear delivery systems. Notwithstanding severe UN sanctions and diplomatic seclusion, North Korea persists in augmenting its nuclear arsenal, rendering disarmament prospects progressively improbable (UNODA, 2022).

Comparative Perspective

Although both Iran and North Korea's programs have elicited extensive censure, the international response has differed. Iran, although remaining within the NPT framework, has participated in multilateral diplomacy and inspections, though with inconsistency. In contrast, North Korea has entirely dismissed international control. This disparity partially elucidates why the international community has adopted a strategy for North Korea that is more reliant on sanctions and deterrence, in contrast to the diplomacy-oriented approach taken with Iran (Miller, 2022). Furthermore, regional dynamics and the interests of large powers have influenced reactions. The strategic significance of the Middle East and the participation of European stakeholders facilitated the establishment of the JCPOA, but strategic rivalry in East Asia has resulted in an increasingly militaristic confrontation with North Korea. These

divergent situations highlight the intricacies of regulating nuclear proliferation and the necessity for context-specific approaches.

Comparative Analysis of International Responses

The international community's reactions to the nuclear programs of Iran and North Korea have highlighted significant disparities in strategy, efficacy, and consistency. These differing methods arise from disparities in geopolitical circumstances, treaty commitments, regime conduct, and regional security dynamics. This section compares the international responses to both cases across four major dimensions: diplomatic engagement, sanctions, institutional frameworks, and great power politics.

Diplomatic Engagement

In the context of Iran, diplomacy has constituted the fundamental element of the international response. The drafting and ratification of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) in 2015 constituted a significant milestone in multilateral diplomacy. This accord, facilitated by the P5+1 and the European Union, established verifiable constraints on Iran's nuclear endeavours in return for the alleviation of sanctions. Notwithstanding the U.S. exit in 2018, European entities and international organizations have persisted in endeavours to rejuvenate the agreement through conversation (Perkovich, 2022).

In contrast, diplomacy with North Korea has been inconsistent and predominantly ineffective. The Six-Party Talks, comprising North Korea, South Korea, the United States, China, Japan, and Russia, first had potential in the mid-2000s but disintegrated in 2009 following Pyongyang's reinitiation of nuclear tests. The U.S.-North Korea summits from 2018 to 2019 briefly rekindled optimism, although they produced no substantial agreements and did not impede North Korea's nuclear progress (Revere, 2022). In contrast to Iran, North Korea has persistently declined long-term commitments and verification protocols.

Sanction Regimens

Iran and North Korea have both faced extensive international sanctions, however their effects have differed. Sanctions placed by the United Nations, United States, and European Union on Iran specifically targeted critical industries, including oil exports and banking, profoundly impacting its economy. These influences influenced Iran's choice to engage in discussions that resulted in the JCPOA (Katzman, 2022).

North Korea has encountered increasingly stringent UN sanctions, particularly after its nuclear and missile tests. Nevertheless, the nation's profound isolation, along with minimal dependence on global commerce, has mitigated the effects of sanctions. Furthermore, North Korea has allegedly employed sanction evasion methods like cryptocurrency theft, unlawful shipping, and clandestine exports, complicating enforcement efforts (UN Security Council, 2022).

Institutional Frameworks

Iran continues to be a signatory of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), which has established a legal framework for IAEA inspections and reporting. This institutional linkage has facilitated a reasonably organized and regulation-based worldwide reaction. The IAEA has a crucial role in overseeing Iran's nuclear facilities, but access has been limited since 2021. Conversely, North Korea's

2003 exit from the NPT and the expulsion of IAEA inspectors completely eliminated institutional monitoring. Since that time, international institutions have had challenges in overseeing its nuclear program. The absence of access has compelled the international community to depend on satellite imagery and intelligence reports, which are less dependable and frequently politicized (Finaud, 2022).

Great Power Politics

The interests of great powers have profoundly influenced the character and coherence of international responses. The relative convergence among the P5+1 in the context of Iran enabled a cohesive diplomatic strategy. Notwithstanding the U.S. exit from the JCPOA during the Trump administration, Europe, China, and Russia continued to uphold diplomatic engagement. North Korea, meanwhile, occupies a pivotal position in the geopolitical rivalry within East Asia. China and Russia have frequently protected North Korea from more severe punitive actions, apprehensive of government collapse and regional unrest. Consequently, the United Nations Security Council has been constrained in its capacity to respond decisively to provocations from North Korea (Miller, 2022).

Discussion

The varying international reactions to the nuclear initiatives of Iran and North Korea offer significant insights into the overarching dynamics of global security, diplomacy, and the constraints of the existing non-proliferation framework. This section critically evaluates the patterns, effectiveness, and strategic implications of these responses, emphasizing their impact on regional stability, international law, and the global nuclear order.

Strategic Rationality and Nuclear Deterrence

A prominent theme arising from the examination is the rationale behind the nuclear ambitions of both Iran and North Korea. Notwithstanding divergent political philosophies and regional contexts, both states have utilized their nuclear programs as strategic instruments for deterrence and the preservation of their regimes. North Korea's overt advancement of nuclear weapons signifies its intention to counter perceived threats from the U.S. and its allies, especially following the collapse of regimes in Iraq and Libya that possessed insufficient deterrents. This strategic assessment corresponds with realist principles in international relations, which regard nuclear capability as a mechanism for power equilibrium and the preservation of sovereignty (Waltz, 1979).

Iran's nuclear program, despite its uncertain intentions, has also functioned as a leverage point in international negotiations. Iran's partial adherence to the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) indicated its readiness to exchange nuclear moderation for economic alleviation, although this has varied according on the consistency and reliability of Western nations (Perkovich, 2022). This suggests that governments may utilize nuclear capabilities as both a deterrent and a diplomatic tool, particularly when they view the international system as inequitable or adversarial.

The Limits of Sanctions and Coercion

Sanctions have been a prevalent instrument utilised by the international community to mitigate nuclear proliferation. Nonetheless, their efficacy has been inconsistent. In Iran's situation, sanctions severely affected the economy, resulting in extensive

internal pressure and, ultimately, participation in discussions (Akindoyin, 2024). The JCPOA is frequently referenced as a successful example of employing sanctions to compel a nation to engage in negotiations (Katzman, 2022). The U.S. exit from the agreement in 2018 compromised its credibility and diminished the overall efficacy of coercive diplomacy. Since that time, Iran has escalated its uranium enrichment efforts, indicating its dissatisfaction with the West's inconsistencies.

Conversely, North Korea's reaction to sanctions highlights their constraints. Notwithstanding the imposition of one of the most extensive sanctions regimes globally, Pyongyang has persistently enhanced its nuclear and missile capabilities. This resiliency is partly attributable to its political isolation, centralized economy, and support from allied nations like China and Russia. Furthermore, North Korea's capacity to adjust to sanctions via illegal commerce, cyber activities, and clandestine networks has diminished the overall efficacy of economic pressure (UN Security Council, 2022). These findings underscore that sanctions, although essential, are inadequate in isolation without continuous diplomatic engagement and enforcement.

The Role of International Institutions and Norms

The efficacy of global non-proliferation initiatives is significantly contingent upon institutional backing and the normative significance of treaties like the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). Iran's prolonged involvement in the NPT has facilitated a measure of institutional monitoring, albeit persistent conflicts with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). The IAEA's monitoring and verification systems were crucial in assuring adherence throughout the early execution of the JCPOA. These instruments fostered global confidence, if temporarily, and illustrated the promise of institutional participation (IAEA, 2022).

North Korea's total disengagement from the NPT and the expulsion of IAEA inspectors, however, considerably diminished institutional authority. The absence of official participation has compelled the international community to depend on satellite surveillance and intelligence reports, which are constrained in breadth and susceptible to political interpretation. This highlights the significance of maintaining states inside institutional frameworks, especially in instances of noncompliance, as a total collapse in engagement frequently results in prolonged strategic stagnation.

Geopolitical Interests and Inconsistent Application

A significant obstacle to effective non-proliferation efforts is the inconsistency of global powers in exerting pressure and maintaining standards. In the context of Iran, the P5+1 exhibited much unanimity in seeking a diplomatic accord, however U.S. policy shifts undermined this cohesion. Simultaneously, the geopolitical interests of China and Russia in North Korea have frequently undermined unified international efforts, especially within the United Nations. These inconsistencies provide ambiguous messages to other nations, thereby fostering proliferation by indicating that enforcement depends on strategic interests rather than international rules (Miller, 2022). Moreover, the disparate treatment of Iran and North Korea may be perceived by other nations as proof that holding a nuclear deterrent is more successful in preventing external interference than adhering to legal obligations. This impression may weaken the normative framework of the NPT and encourage other states to secretly seek nuclear capability.

Conclusion

The comparative analysis of global reactions to the nuclear programs of Iran and North Korea elucidates significant insights into the increasing difficulties of international security and non-proliferation governance. Both instances illustrate how state-specific contexts—historical, geopolitical, and strategic—influence not just the quest for nuclear capabilities but also the international community's response to them. Notwithstanding variations in diplomatic approaches, sanctions implementation, and institutional structures, both scenarios highlight the inadequacies of current institutions in effectively restraining nuclear proliferation.

Iran and North Korea exemplify two divergent yet equally intricate nuclear scenarios. Iran's ongoing involvement in the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) and its provisional compliance with the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) underscore the prospects of enduring diplomacy and global supervision. Iran's incremental departure from JCPOA obligations after the United States' withdrawal in 2018 exemplifies the vulnerability of multilateral agreements, especially in the absence of enduring assurances and continuous enforcement. Conversely, North Korea's total dismissal of international standards, exemplified by its exit from the NPT and its explicit nuclear armament efforts, has rendered the global community with limited effective diplomatic or institutional mechanisms to interact with the regime.

The international reaction to Iran has predominantly been defined by diplomacy and conditional incentives, with the objective of incorporating Tehran into the rules-based order. The strategy against North Korea has predominantly relied on sanctions and strategic deterrence, with less opportunity for enduring diplomatic advancements. These disparate reactions indicate a fundamental inconsistency in the enforcement of global non-proliferation standards. Although both nations have contravened international expectations, the global community's response has been influenced not only by the nature of the nuclear threat but also by regional interests, alliances, and the dynamics of great power politics.

This contradiction prompts significant inquiries regarding the legitimacy of the international nuclear framework. If adherence to the NPT and collaboration with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) fail to produce enduring security and economic advantages, as evidenced by Iran, the motivation for non-nuclear states to maintain compliance diminishes. In contrast, North Korea's advancement in nuclear weaponization, despite international isolation, indicates that defiance, supported by strategic deterrence and geopolitical safeguards may protect governments from the gravest repercussions of proliferation.

The international community must adopt a more cohesive, consistent, and context-sensitive approach to solve these concerns. Initially, diplomatic engagement must be shielded from domestic political fluctuations, especially among large powers, to maintain the legitimacy of accords such as the JCPOA. Secondly, sanctions should be accompanied by substantial diplomatic incentives and frameworks for progressive reintegration, rather than employed as mere punitive measures. Third, global

organisations like the IAEA and the UN Security Council should be endowed with enhanced, depoliticized enforcement mechanisms to impartially uphold non-proliferation standards.

In conclusion, the nuclear aspirations of Iran and North Korea present significant risks to global peace and security, and their juxtaposition provides insightful lessons. The global community must acknowledge that effective non-proliferation initiatives rely not alone on punitive measures but also on credible diplomacy, strategic forbearance, and the strengthening of legal standards. A balanced and ethical strategy is essential for global players to effectively manage the dangers of nuclear proliferation and reinforce the foundations of collective security.

Recommendations

The comparative review of global reactions to the nuclear programs of Iran and North Korea reveals substantial limits in present techniques. The international community must adjust its strategies to successfully tackle nuclear proliferation dangers in a comprehensive, consistent, and adaptable manner. The subsequent recommendations aim to augment the effectiveness of international responses to nuclear threats and strengthen the overarching framework of global security.

- i. A fundamental conclusion from the Iran situation is that diplomacy can yield concrete outcomes when supported by cohesion and political will among significant states. Consequently, the international community, particularly the P5 (China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom, and the United States), must recommit to multilateral diplomacy with Iran and North Korea. Efforts should be undertaken to restore or amend the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) to reimpose verifiable constraints on Iran's nuclear program. This may entail extensive regional negotiations that tackle Iran's security issues, missile program, and regional conduct in return for economic incentives and reintegration into the global economy.
- ii. A new diplomatic framework for North Korea—potentially comprising reformed Six-Party Talks or ASEAN-mediated negotiations—should be established with pragmatic goals. The objective should not be instantaneous disarmament, but rather a phased accord that commences with the cessation of further nuclear development, the implementation of transparency measures, and the cultivation of confidence. Diplomatic forbearance and pragmatic deadlines are essential, especially with regimes that perceive nuclear weapons as guarantees of survival.
- iii. A significant shortcoming in the global non-proliferation framework is the inconsistent enforcement of international regulations. Although Iran has seen substantial repercussions for its nuclear endeavours, North Korea has frequently evaded collective world condemnation owing to geopolitical support from China and Russia. This mismatch diminishes the credibility of institutions such as the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), which depend on a sense of equity and neutrality.
To resolve this issue, the permanent members of the UNSC must recommit to the depoliticization of nuclear enforcement. The creation of an independent nuclear compliance council within the UN, separate from the Security Council, might offer more objective oversight and recommendations. This would enhance accountability and guarantee that all states—irrespective of alliances—are subjected to uniform criteria.
- iv. The IAEA is a vital entity for nuclear oversight and verification. Nonetheless, its authority and access have been contested in both Iran and North Korea. Member

states should augment finance, technical resources, and legal backing for the IAEA to strengthen its efficacy. Efforts should be made to upgrade inspection technologies and implement systems for a more prompt response to breaches. Furthermore, the IAEA should be authorized to do independent investigations and provide binding recommendations when member states impede its operations. This would augment the institution's reputation and refine early warning systems for nuclear infractions.

- v. Sanctions alone haven't worked, especially when it comes to North Korea. This means that we should use a strategy that mixes pressure with diplomatic incentives. Sanctions need to be specific, possible to follow, and have obvious means for people to receive relief if they follow the rules. For example, if Iran or North Korea took verifiable steps toward disarmament, they could be granted a step-by-step incentives system that included things like economic aid, partial sanctions relaxation, or technical collaboration. Also, regional groups like the European Union, African Union, and ASEAN should work together better to impose sanctions so that there are no gaps and the black market doesn't grow.
- vi. Lastly, any attempt to stop nuclear ambitions must also look at the security situation in the region as a whole. Iran and North Korea both work in areas where people don't trust one other, there are proxy wars, and people think there are threats from outside. Iran may help lower tensions and encourage collaboration by including Gulf governments in a regional security conversation. If North Korea could work out a peace treaty with South Korea and the US, it might feel less like it needs nuclear weapons to protect.

References

- Akindoyin, D. I., & Obafemi, A. O. (2024). Regional power dynamics and security approaches: A comparative study of SADC and ECOWAS. *African Journal of Stability and Development (AJSD)*, 16(2), 245-23.
- Finaud, M. (2022). *Institutional challenges of nuclear non-proliferation: Lessons from Iran and North Korea*. Geneva Centre for Security Policy.
- French Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs. (2022). *Focuses of the fight against nuclear proliferation*. <https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/en/french-foreign-policy/security-disarmament-and-non-proliferation/disarmament-and-non-proliferation/treaty-on-the-non-proliferation-of-nuclear-weapons/focuses-of-the-fight-against-nuclear-proliferation>
- International Atomic Energy Agency. (2022, November). *Verification and monitoring in the Islamic Republic of Iran in light of United Nations Security Council resolution 2231 (2015)*. IAEA. <https://www.iaea.org>
- Institute for Science and International Security. (2022). *The IAEA's Iran NPT safeguards report – November 2022*. <https://isis-online.org/isis-reports/detail/the-iaeas-iran-npt-safeguards-report-november-2022>

- Katzman, K. (2022). *Iran sanctions*. Congressional Research Service.
<https://crsreports.congress.gov>
- Miller, S. E. (2022). Dealing with nuclear outliers: Comparing the cases of Iran and North Korea. *Survival*, 64(2), 7–34.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/00396338.2022.2054212>
- Perkovich, G. (2022). *Reimagining non-proliferation diplomacy: The case of Iran*. Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.
- Revere, E. J. R. (2022). *North Korea: A chronicle of failure and unkept promises*. Brookings Institution.
- United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs (2022). *Disarmament Yearbook 2022: Chapter I – Nuclear weapons*. <https://yearbook-archive.unoda.org/2022/chapter1.html>
- Waltz, K. N. (1979). *Theory of international politics*. Addison-Wesley.
- Wendt, A. (1999). *Social theory of international politics*. Cambridge University Press.