

Non-proliferation: Can the G7 Solve the North Korean and Iranian nuclear Threat?

JESSICA DAM
The University of Sheffield

Executive Summary

With the recent diplomatic fluctuations between both the US and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK), and the US and Iran, the issue of nuclear proliferation has become an even more sensitive subject on the international agenda due to its destabilising nature. This policy brief will evaluate whether the G7 plays a significant role in terms of effective nuclear disarmament in the DPRK and Iran, and strongly recommends that while a multilateral consensus for non-proliferation is vital, each country has to take individual steps to facilitate nuclear disarmament.

Deal or No Deal: Denuclearisation in Iran and the DPRK

International concern over US [withdrawal](#) from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA: commonly known as the Iranian nuclear deal) and President Trump's on-off attendance at the previously cancelled [US-North Korea Summit](#) mean that non-proliferation in Iran and the DPRK continues to be a significant issue for international security.

Historically, US interests as the leading world power have sat alongside its role as a key player in the main nuclear disarmament negotiations with Iran and the DPRK. This is exemplified by the Clinton Administration, which reached the 1994 Agreed Framework, and the Bush Administration's participation in the Six Party Talks with North Korea.

This, combined with the Obama Administration's key role in the JCPOA negotiations, illustrates previous US leadership in multilateral cooperation for nuclear disarmament. However, while this has been a trend in the last 25 years, the decision by the Trump Administration to withdraw from the Iranian nuclear deal poses the question of whether the G7 can effectively address nuclear disarmament when interests conflict.

One of the many issues the G7 aimed to address concerns North Korean and Iranian non-proliferation under the theme of a 'More Peaceful and Secure World'. This is of great importance to the US as the development of nuclear capabilities, combined with intercontinental missiles in North Korea, destabilizes US security alliances with South Korea and Japan, but also poses a national security threat to US territory. This was also the case for Iranian nuclear development prior to the JCPOA, as its nuclear development programme [destabilised the power dynamics in the Middle East](#) while posing a threat to the US and its

ally, Israel, as a result of its alleged state-sponsored terrorism. Thus, the US withdrawal from the JCPOA might trigger a revival in Iran's nuclear weapons programme and [continued hostility](#) towards Israel. Consequently, this could negatively affect North Korean nuclear disarmament negotiations at the US-North Korea Summit as the withdrawal raises the question of whether or not the US is genuinely committed to its treaties.

For Japan, North Korean nuclear proliferation poses a considerable national security threat to its territory but especially due to its constitutional restrictions on rearmament. According to Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, North Korean nuclear proliferation and its development of intercontinental missiles poses an [unprecedented threat](#) to Japan, due to its regional proximity and its security alliance with the US. The European and Canadian G7 leaders also recognise the threat of nuclear proliferation by 'rogue' nations that do not comply with international law and destabilise a rules-based international order. It is evident that the

overall consensus among G7 members revolves around the promotion of nuclear disarmament despite failed attempts to achieve full denuclearisation in Iran and the DPRK.

Does G7/8 Consensus Equal Successful Nuclear Disarmament?

Since the DPRK's [first missile test in 1984](#) and its six nuclear tests between 2003 and 2017, the issue of North Korean nuclear disarmament has been a recurring agenda item for the G7/8 leaders, as its unilateral actions have caused instability in East Asia. This is similar to Iran's nuclear development since the 1970s, but unlike the DPRK, the process of Iranian nuclear disarmament finally began when China, the US, Russia, the UK, France and Germany agreed the JCPOA in 2015 through joint multilateral cooperation.

Security concerns regarding nuclear weapons development have been a recurring theme on the G7/8 agenda. For example, the 1991 G7 Summit published the [Declaration on Conventional Arms Transfers and NBC](#)

[Non-proliferation](#), which stressed the G7 countries' commitment to non-proliferation regimes. However, nuclear proliferation concerns can be argued to have truly manifested themselves on the G7/8 agenda as part of President George W. Bush's ['War on Terror' discourse](#), in order to combat the 'axis of evil' supposedly comprised of Iran, Iraq and the DPRK, countries which allegedly sponsored terrorism and sought weapons of mass destruction to destabilise world peace. Subsequently, the emphasis on Iranian and North Korean non-proliferation became a more frequent item on G7/8 communiqués after 2002, [supported](#) by all G7 countries both morally and financially, in response to the 9/11 attacks. While not specifying Iran or the DPRK, the leaders agreed to set [six non-proliferation principles](#) aimed at terrorists, or anyone attempting to acquire or develop nuclear weapons. In addition, they established the G8 Nuclear Safety and Security Group at the 2002 G8 Summit. However, it was not until the following year's summit that Iran and the DPRK were specifically addressed in the [Non-](#)

[proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction Declaration](#), and emphasis was placed on the importance of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) to monitor the development of these countries' nuclear programmes. Ever since, there has been a [general consensus and strong rhetoric](#) for Iran and the DPRK to denuclearise, combined with a strong emphasis on the international rule of law, as seen in United Nations Security Council (UNSC) resolutions 2231 and 2397. In addition, economic sanctions played an important role in the G7's approach to nuclear non-proliferation. This included the multilaterally imposed [UN ban](#) on luxury goods and restrictions on oil exported to the DPRK, as well as an American and European [oil embargo](#) on Iran.

While there was an overall consensus on non-proliferation, multilateral cooperation certainly bore some fruit in the case of Iran. The JCPOA was unanimously supported by all G7 countries, and, multilaterally enacted by the US, France, Germany and the UK as G7 member states in the

process of lifting economic sanctions in exchange for nuclear disarmament. Subsequently, the issue of Iranian non-proliferation has not been strongly expressed in communiqués since 2015. For example, last year's [G7 Taormina Leaders' Communiqué](#) did not mention Iran's nuclear programme. However, despite united sanctions on the DPRK, little progress has been made in achieving North Korean nuclear disarmament through multilateral cooperation among the G7/8 countries.

Non-proliferation at Charlevoix: Overshadowed but Still Relevant

The [G7 Foreign Ministers](#) met on April 23 this year and their communiqué emphasised a peaceful Iranian nuclear development programme under the JCPOA, while expressing concern about the country's ballistic missile tests. Additionally, the G7 foreign ministers underlined their united support for the bilateral US-North Korea summit to promote nuclear disarmament on the Korean peninsula. There was an overall consensus among the foreign ministers that Iran

and North Korea adhere to relevant UNSC resolutions, indicating a partial shift from the previous two summits' communiqués in terms of refocusing on Iran's nuclear proliferation, while the attention on North Korean nuclear disarmament remained consistent with previous years.

Prior to the release of the joint [2018 G7 Charlevoix Communiqué](#) initially agreed by all seven countries and the EU, nuclear non-proliferation was included on the agenda. However, issues such as the threat of a '[trade war](#)' and President Trump's [call](#) to readmit Russia to the G8 overshadowed the discussion on non-proliferation in Iran and the DPRK. This was also evident in the [Joint Communiqué](#), where there was a strong emphasis on economic growth and gender equality rather than non-proliferation, which dominated the international agenda a month prior to the summit.

In terms of Iran, it is evident that the commitment to the JCPOA's role in securing peaceful Iranian nuclear

programme has changed. This clearly indicates that Trump's announcement to withdraw from the JCPOA has influenced the consensus among the G7 leaders on how non-proliferation in Iran can be achieved. In response to US withdrawal, G7 allies such as Prime Minister [Trudeau expressed regret over Trump's decision](#), and France, Germany and the UK made a the [united pledge](#) to remain in the deal, implying that the rest of the G7 countries are committed to the JCPOA. Rhetorically, this commitment has been disregarded and instead replaced by an emphasis on the importance of international reinforcement, thus denoting that while there is an overall consensus on Iranian non-proliferation, the method to achieve it is contested. This shift illustrates how conflicting interests can affect a previously agreed framework, which had consistently been supported by all G7 countries *a priori*. However, it is important that remaining G7 leaders individually play a proactive role in reinforcing the JCPOA to secure peaceful nuclear development in Iran, as this will bolster European, as well

as Chinese and Russian commitments to socialise as well as cooperate with Iran despite American withdrawal from the deal.

Regarding the issue of nuclear disarmament in the DPRK, this issue was addressed both in the bilateral meetings between Japan and the US prior to and during the G7 summit. The Joint Communiqué expressed strong unity and support for North Korean non-proliferation as in the Iranian case, and leaders acknowledged the recent developments within the DPRK to denuclearise, while emphasising full implementation of UNSC resolutions and urging DPRK to continue taking progressive steps. It is also evident that this issue has been discussed further due to the proximity of the two summits combined with Japanese pressure to address the issue. Despite not being mentioned in Prime Minister Trudeau's press conference, Prime Minister [Abe's press conference](#) on the last day of the summit, reiterated Japan's emphasis on North Korean non-proliferation, something he discussed with President Trump,

Prime Minister May and Chancellor Merkel in his bilateral meetings, and with all the leaders together in the G7 summit afterwards. Abe emphasised that it was unanimously agreed that the US-North Korea Summit was a historical moment, and all G7 countries stand united with the US as well as Japan's commitment to pursue bilateral negotiations with the DPRK. The juxtaposition with [President Trump's G7 press conference](#) is striking, in which he emphasised heavily unilateral US leadership to achieve North Korean nuclear disarmament at the bilateral summit in Singapore. While the G7 leaders are in consensus over North Korean nuclear disarmament and support President Trump with the US-North Korea Summit, US unilateralism is at the centre of the negotiations for North Korean nuclear disarmament. In this context, the rest of the G7 countries should take individual steps to negotiate and socialise the DPRK, rather than depending on one G7 member state because of the uncertainty of whether the DPRK will accept a deal with the US even in the



G7 Charlevoix Summit, June 2018



knowledge that it withdrew from the JCPOA.

***Jessica Dam** is a MA Contemporary Japan student at the University of Sheffield.*