North Korea’s Nuclear Program at a Glance
June 11, 2018

Nuclear arsenal

North Korea is estimated to have between 10 and 35 nuclear warheads. Based on assessments of the nation’s fissile material stockpiles and a modest production rate, some estimate that North Korea has as many as 50–60 weapons. These nuclear weapons have a destructive power of 10 to 25 kilotons, which is roughly equivalent to the power of the atomic bombs the United States used against Hiroshima and Nagasaki. North Korea also claims to have created a hydrogen bomb and even demonstrated that it possesses a bomb with destructive power of 200 to 250 kilotons—equivalent to that of a hydrogen bomb.

Nuclear program

The Yongbyon Nuclear Scientific Research Center—the heart of North Korea’s nuclear program—is where North Korea produces plutonium and enriches uranium. There is speculation that a second, secret uranium enrichment facility exists as well. North Korea is estimated to have 20–40 kilograms of plutonium and 175–645 kilograms of highly enriched uranium. Experts believe that North Korea possesses enough material for between 30–60* weapons. Experts also estimate that North Korea could produce between three and seven nuclear weapons annually.

Ballistic missile program

North Korea has a highly developed ballistic missile program; its operational ballistic missiles are capable of reaching a range of 120 to 1,500 kilometers. This puts U.S. allies such as Japan and South Korea—as well as the U.S. territory of Guam—well within range of an attack. North Korea is also thought to have 200 Nodong missiles, which can hit Japan; 600 Scud missiles, which can reach South Korea and parts of Japan; and less than 50 Taepodong and Musudan missiles, which can hit Guam and potentially the
United States’ West Coast. While North Korea has yet to prove that its intercontinental ballistic missiles can survive atmospheric re-entry and be fit with a nuclear warhead, experts believe the missiles are capable of hitting the entire United States.

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Chemical and biological weapons programs

North Korea has chemical and biological weapons programs, but there is little public information about the programs’ scope or capacity. The chemical weapons program is believed to have up to 5,000 tons of chemical weapons agents—including sarin and VX—as well as the ability to weaponize them. Experts also believe North Korea has the ability to manufacture biological agents such as anthrax and smallpox, but it remains unclear if they can be weaponized.

*Correction, September 11, 2018:* This fact sheet has been updated to reflect the accurate number of weapons experts believe North Korea could create.

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Endnotes


