Boiling Over on the Back Burner: Why Downplaying North Korea’s Nuclear Ambitions is a Dangerous Proposition

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Research Question:
How does the increase in development of North Korea’s nuclear weapons technology affect regional and global stability?

Purpose
To present the dangers of a nuclear-capable North Korea to regional and global stability

Nuclear Technology
• Fission - nuclei of certain atoms split, releasing energy
• Fusion - Nuclei “fuse” together (thermonuclear/hydrogen)
• Uranium or plutonium based
• United States developed first nuclear weapon in 1945

North Korea’s Nuclear Program
• First began in 1956
• Yongbyon nuclear complex is currently the main source for the DPRK’s weapons-grade nuclear material
• Estimates suggest North Korea has enough nuclear material to produce up to 100 devices by 2020

North Korea’s Missile Technology
• Scud (Hwasong) - up to 500km
• Musudan - up to 3,500km
• Taepodong (Unha) - up to 15,000km
• Claimed SLBM test in August 2016

Regional Threats
1. Threats against South Korea, Japan, and U.S. assets in East Asia
2. Potential for “land grab” by DPRK (Russia & Crimea, China & island claims)
3. Could lead to development of nuclear weapons by South Korea and Japan
4. South Korea or an ally could preemptively strike against the North. This could cause retaliation by the North, possibly with nuclear weapons

Global Threats
1. Indirectly causes tensions with China and Russia (deployment of THAAD, increase in military activities and troop levels by U.S. and allies)
2. Regional point two could lead to a global military reaction by a U.S. coalition, United Nations, or other military force
3. Threat to CONUS and other allies in 5-10 years
4. Regional point four could lead to global involvement/conflict

Recommendations
• Increase sanctions on the DPRK, China, and any country/group affiliated with DPRK
• Increase propaganda efforts against DPRK
• Destroy North Korean missiles if trajectory crosses a U.S. ally
• Discussions with North Korea, China, and regional allies through United Nations

References