



NORTH KOREA SECURITY ANALYSIS REPORT

AI-Assisted Open Source Intelligence Assessment

Analysis Period: June 18, 2026 - June 25, 2026

This report was produced using open-source intelligence analysis. The assessment is grounded in publicly available reporting and should be cross-referenced with primary sources. RSS feed articles are listed in the annex for reference.

Executive Summary

North Korea demonstrated a heightened focus on military modernization and nuclear expansion during the period of June 18-25, 2026, underscored by leader Kim Jong Un's directives at a key Workers' Party meeting. The commissioning of a new 5,000-ton destroyer, the Choe Hyon, signals a tangible step in Pyongyang's ambition for a nuclear-capable navy. Concurrently, the international community, particularly the G7 nations, intensified its condemnation of North Korea's illicit cyber activities, which are a primary funding source for its weapons programs. Regional tensions remained elevated with the commencement of significant trilateral military exercises by the United States, South Korea, and Japan, which North Korea views as provocative. Domestically, the regime tightened its grip through intensified phone surveillance, reflecting ongoing internal security concerns.

Key Security Developments

- Accelerated Nuclear and Military Buildup Directives

From June 20 to June 22, 2026, North Korean leader Kim Jong Un presided over the Second Plenary Meeting of the Ninth Central Committee of the Workers' Party of Korea, where he emphasized the "ceaseless expansion and strengthening of nuclear forces" and the thorough exercise of North Korea's status as a nuclear-armed state. Kim also reiterated the need to accelerate the buildup of national defense capabilities to a level that can "dominate the world," citing perceived threats from the military modernization efforts of the U.S. and South Korea. This signifies North Korea's firm commitment to its nuclear program as the cornerstone of its national defense strategy and its rejection of denuclearization.

- Commissioning of the Choe Hyon Destroyer

On June 23, 2026, North Korea formally commissioned its new 5,000-ton destroyer, the Choe Hyon, into its naval fleet at the port of Nampo, with Kim Jong Un in attendance. The vessel, which has undergone over a year of testing including weapons and navigation trials, is equipped with 74 vertical launch cells for strike and air defense missiles, a 127mm gun system, and is capable of launching nuclear-capable cruise missiles. Its deployment to the Western Fleet of the North Korean Navy marks a significant step in expanding the military's operational reach and preemptive strike capabilities, particularly in defending the country's western coast.

- Intensified Domestic Surveillance in North Pyongan Province

As of June 25, 2026, North Korean authorities in North Pyongan province have sharply intensified phone surveillance, intercepting both landline and mobile calls to crack down on traders conducting business across provincial boundaries. This heightened monitoring by the National Intelligence Agency (NIA) has led to increased fear among citizens, with many resorting to in-person communication or coded language, following a recent incident around June 10 where a gold trader was raided and detained after an intercepted call. This crackdown highlights the regime's ongoing efforts to control internal economic activities and information flow, particularly in border regions.

- South Korea Reaffirms "Enemy" Stance

On June 18, 2026, South Korea's Ministry of National Defense stated that its stance defining "the North Korean regime and military as our enemy remains unchanged," refuting media reports that this phrase might be removed from the upcoming "2026 Defense White Paper." This reaffirmation underscores the persistent adversarial relationship between the two Koreas, despite some diplomatic overtures from the Lee Jae Myung administration for peaceful coexistence.

- G7 Condemnation of North Korean Cybercrimes and Pyongyang's Response

During the G7 Summit in Évian-les-Bains, France, from June 15 to 17, 2026, leaders issued a joint declaration condemning North Korea's systematic cryptocurrency theft and cybercrime activities, identifying them as a direct threat to the global financial system and a primary funding mechanism for its nuclear and ballistic missile programs. In response, on June 18, Kim Yo Jong, sister of Kim Jong Un, denounced the G7 statement as an infringement of North Korea's sovereignty. This highlights the international community's growing concern over Pyongyang's illicit financial activities and North Korea's defiant posture.

- Nisos Report on North Korean Employment Fraud

A US-based cybersecurity firm, Nisos, released a report on June 18, 2026, detailing the operations of a 22-member North Korean employment fraud cell. This cell submitted over 166,893 job applications and participated in more than 21,645 interviews in a nine-month period from 2024 to 2025, primarily targeting high-salary, remote developer and engineering jobs. These fraud operations are estimated to earn hundreds of millions of dollars for Pyongyang, violating international sanctions and funding the regime's illicit programs.

- Allied Military Exercises in the Region

The United States, South Korea, and Japan commenced significant trilateral military exercises during this period. The US-Japan exercise Valiant Shield 2026 began on June 22 in the Philippine Sea, involving the USS George Washington Carrier Strike Group and Japanese warships, demonstrating allied naval power in the Indo-Pacific.

Concurrently, the US, South Korea, and Japan kicked off the five-day Freedom Edge multi-domain military exercise on June 22 in international waters off South Korea's southern island of Jeju, aimed at strengthening missile defense and joint response capabilities against North Korean threats. These drills, which also include the US-ROK Iron Mace tabletop exercise focusing on integrating nuclear and conventional capabilities, have been condemned by North Korea as "reckless muscle-flexing."

- Improved Precision of North Korean KN-23 Missiles

A Military Watch Magazine report on June 23, 2026, highlighted that North Korea's KN-23 tactical ballistic missile (Hwasong-11A) has achieved a new, improved level of accuracy with a Circular Error Probable (CEP) of 1-5 meters, as demonstrated in the Ukrainian theater. The missile has been extensively used by Russia in the conflict, and improvements to its precision strike capabilities are attributed to both combat testing feedback and technological advances in North Korea, potentially funded by exports to Russia. This development indicates a significant enhancement in North Korea's tactical missile capabilities.

- Ambitious Naval Modernization Plans

Beyond the commissioning of the Choe Hyon, North Korea's leadership, particularly Kim Jong Un, has reiterated plans to build two additional warships of the Choe Hyon-class annually for the next five years, aiming for a total of 12 destroyers. Satellite imagery from Radio Free Asia on June 16 (reported on June 23) showed expanded shipbuilding infrastructure at the port cities of Nampo and Chongjin, indicating efforts to accelerate this naval buildup. North Korea also claims it intends to construct a larger 10,000-ton warship, signaling a push for a more formidable "green-water navy."

- Russia-North Korea Information Cooperation

A June 23, 2026, report highlighted North Korea's likely efforts to cement its status as a nuclear power by pushing narratives favorable to its objectives through media cooperation with Russia. This builds on formalized cooperation from June 2024 and agreements in November 2025 and March 2026 between Russian and North Korean state media to combat "false information" and "fake news." This collaboration suggests a coordinated effort to influence international perceptions and undermine nonproliferation norms, with Russia increasingly supporting North Korea's nuclear program.

Geopolitical Impact and Regional Dynamics

North Korea's actions during this period have significantly heightened regional instability and further solidified its adversarial stance against the United States and its

allies. Kim Jong Un's explicit declaration of South Korea as the "most hostile state" and the institutionalization of severed ties effectively discard the long-standing policy of reunification, signaling a more confrontational approach on the Korean Peninsula. This rhetoric, coupled with the accelerated nuclear and conventional military buildup, is a direct challenge to regional security and the denuclearization goals of the international community. The commissioning of the Choe Hyon destroyer, capable of launching nuclear-capable missiles, introduces a new dimension to maritime security in the Yellow Sea and Sea of Japan, potentially leading to increased naval posturing and risks of confrontation.

The trilateral military exercises (Valiant Shield, Freedom Edge, Iron Mace) conducted by the US, South Korea, and Japan are a direct response to North Korea's evolving threats, aiming to enhance deterrence and response capabilities. However, these exercises are consistently condemned by Pyongyang as provocative, creating a cycle of action and reaction that escalates tensions. The G7's strong condemnation of North Korea's cybercrimes underscores a unified international effort to disrupt Pyongyang's illicit funding streams, which are crucial for its weapons programs. This collective pressure, however, is met with North Korea's defiance and its continued reliance on cyber operations for financial gain.

Relations with major powers are complex and evolving. North Korea's deepening military and information cooperation with Russia, as highlighted in reports, provides Pyongyang with a critical lifeline against international sanctions and potentially offers technological assistance for its weapons programs. While Chinese President Xi Jinping's visit to Pyongyang in early June (June 7-10) was touted by North Korea as a "diplomatic victory" and included agreements for substantive cooperation, including economic and military aid, it also reinforces a bloc-like dynamic in Northeast Asia. This growing alignment between North Korea, China, and Russia complicates efforts by the US and its allies to isolate Pyongyang and enforce sanctions, creating a more entrenched strategic landscape where North Korea feels emboldened to pursue its nuclear ambitions. The US, in turn, continues to urge UN member states to tighten sanctions against North Korea's illicit activities, indicating a sustained pressure campaign.

Military and Defense Analysis

North Korea's military posture during this period is characterized by an aggressive push for modernization and an explicit emphasis on its nuclear forces. Kim Jong Un's directive to "constantly expand and strengthen nuclear forces" and to accelerate the buildup of defense capabilities highlights a strategic shift towards a more robust and diversified nuclear arsenal. This includes plans for "more extensive, innovative, and encouraging plans related to nuclear technology." The constitutional embedding of

nuclear weapons and the power to delegate launch authority further solidify North Korea's nuclear doctrine, aiming to safeguard against decapitation strikes and force international recognition as a nuclear-armed state.

The commissioning of the 5,000-ton Choe Hyon destroyer is a significant development in North Korea's naval modernization program. Equipped with vertical launch cells for nuclear-capable cruise and ballistic missiles, this vessel enhances Pyongyang's maritime strike capabilities and its ability to project power beyond its immediate coastal defenses. Plans to build two more destroyers annually for the next five years, along with a larger 10,000-ton warship, indicate a long-term strategy to develop a "green-water navy" capable of more extensive operations. This naval expansion is supported by expanded shipbuilding infrastructure at Nampo and Chongjin. Furthermore, the reported improved precision of North Korea's KN-23 tactical ballistic missiles, demonstrated in the Ukrainian conflict, suggests ongoing advancements in its missile technology, potentially benefiting from combat feedback and Russian assistance. This continuous development of both nuclear and conventional capabilities, particularly in naval and missile domains, aims to create a formidable deterrent against perceived threats from the US and its allies.

Outlook and Forecast

Short-term trends (1-3 months): In the immediate future, North Korea is highly likely to continue its aggressive military modernization, particularly focusing on naval assets and missile development. We can anticipate further tests or public displays related to its new destroyers and potentially other advanced weaponry, in line with Kim Jong Un's recent directives for accelerated defense buildup. Pyongyang will also maintain its hardline diplomatic stance, rejecting dialogue overtures that do not acknowledge its nuclear status and continuing to condemn allied military exercises. Cybersecurity threats, including cryptocurrency thefts and employment fraud, will persist as a crucial revenue stream for the regime, prompting continued international warnings and countermeasures.

Critical flashpoints and risk areas: The most critical flashpoints remain the Korean Peninsula and the maritime borders, particularly the Yellow Sea and Sea of Japan. Any further North Korean missile launches, especially those involving new naval platforms or demonstrating enhanced capabilities, could trigger strong reactions from South Korea, Japan, and the US, potentially leading to counter-demonstrations or heightened alert levels. The increased presence of allied naval forces due to exercises like Valiant Shield and Freedom Edge, juxtaposed with North Korea's expanding navy, raises the risk of accidental or intentional maritime incidents. The intensified domestic surveillance in North Pyongan province could also lead to internal instability or increased human rights concerns, though these are less likely to directly impact

international security in the short term.

Indicators to monitor: Key indicators to monitor include any new missile tests (especially from naval platforms), further pronouncements from North Korean state media regarding military advancements or diplomatic positions, and the frequency and scale of allied military exercises. Monitoring satellite imagery for activity at key shipbuilding facilities (Nampo, Chongjin) and nuclear sites will be crucial. Additionally, tracking international efforts to counter North Korean cyber activities and any shifts in the diplomatic engagement strategies of China and Russia towards Pyongyang will provide insights into the evolving geopolitical landscape.

Strategic recommendations: Given North Korea's unwavering commitment to nuclear expansion and military modernization, a multi-faceted approach is recommended. Firstly, strengthen deterrence through continued and enhanced trilateral military cooperation between the US, South Korea, and Japan, ensuring robust missile defense and joint response capabilities. Secondly, intensify international pressure on North Korea's illicit financial activities, particularly cybercrime and employment fraud, by enforcing existing sanctions more rigorously and developing new mechanisms to disrupt these revenue streams. Thirdly, maintain open channels for conditional dialogue, while clearly communicating that denuclearization remains the ultimate goal, but acknowledging that North Korea's nuclear status is a de facto reality that must be managed. This could involve exploring arms control discussions, as suggested by some analysts, to prevent further escalation. Finally, engage China and Russia to leverage their influence on Pyongyang, emphasizing the shared interest in regional stability and non-proliferation, despite their growing alignment with North Korea.

Structured Assessment

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## ANNEX: COLLECTED ARTICLES BY SOURCE

### Source: NK News

- [Chinese kids set to visit UK-sanctioned North Korean Songdowon camp: tour firm](#) (2026-06-25 06:03)

Chinese children are set to visit North Korea's Songdowon International Children's Camp this summer, according to a Russian tour agency, weeks after the U.K. blacklisted the camp and prompted Pyongyang to recall its ambassador from London. The Russian travel firm Vostok Intur flagged the "expected arrival of Chinese schoolchildren" at Songdowon this year in a [...]

- [North Korea tightens control of local market prices since pandemic: report](#) (2026-06-24 10:37)

North Korea has expanded the state's role in regulating consumer goods prices since the COVID-19 pandemic as it continues to control economic activity within its borders, according to a Japanese journalist. Black markets (jangmadang), that sell food, clothes and foreign goods largely set their own prices until around 2020, but are now increasingly influenced by [...]

- [Lee visits island North Korea shelled, calls for deterrent to 'overwhelm' enemy](#) (2026-06-24 08:46)

South Korean President Lee Jae Myung visited Yeonpyeong Island near the maritime border with North Korea on Wednesday, one day before the 76th anniversary of the beginning of the Korean War. It marked the first time a sitting president has visited the Marine Yeonpyeong Unit in 14 years, since Lee Myung-bak's inspection in 2012. North [...]

- [South Korean court denies jury trial for Pyongyang-born woman seeking return](#) (2026-06-24 08:03)

A South Korean court on Monday rejected a request by a Pyongyang-born resident for a trial by jury in her National Security Act case, as she continues a yearslong push to return to North Korea and reunite with her family. Kim Ryon-hui's lawyer asked the Daegu District Court to grant a trial by her peers, [...]

- [North Korean soldier taken into custody from inter-Korean border](#) (2026-06-24 03:29)

This is a breaking news story and will be updated. A North Korean soldier was taken into custody by South Korean forces from the central area of the heavily fortified inter-Korean border Tuesday evening, the South's military said the next day. The lone soldier is currently under investigation, South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff told [...]

- [Kim Jong Un commissions North Korea's largest warship, vows naval expansion](#) (2026-06-23 23:15)

North Korean leader Kim Jong Un oversaw the commissioning of the country's first 5,000-ton naval destroyer on Tuesday, capping more than a year of development of a warship the country has hailed as the centerpiece of its naval modernization into a nuclear-capable force. The new multi-mission destroyer, named Choe Hyon, was formally inducted into the [...]

- [North Korean UNESCO official removed from Jeju Forum speaker lineup](#) (2026-06-23 10:18)

A North Korean education expert for UNESCO will no longer speak at a major South Korean peace forum this week after the U.N. organization replaced him with another official for a panel discussion on the future of education. Chang Gwang Chol, UNESCO headquarters' chief of education policy and a former official in North Korea's education [...]

- [Jeju governor-elect proposes table tennis diplomacy with North Korea](#) (2026-06-23 09:49)

Jeju Province's governor-elect has proposed expanding cooperation with North Korea through a multinational table tennis tournament hosted on the southern South Korean island. Wi Seong-gon, who is set to take office next month, told NK News he plans to orchestrate a table tennis tournament between South Korea, North Korea, China and Japan "to establish Jeju [...]"

- [Ambassador recall, remote work scams and the lives of North Korea's elites](#) (2026-06-23 05:31)

This week's episode of the NK News Podcast looks at North Korea's decision to recall its ambassador to the U.K. just weeks after his appointment, in protest over British sanctions on the Songdowon International Children's Camp. NK News Lead Correspondent Shreyas Reddy discusses why the camp holds symbolic importance for Pyongyang, its links to Russia [...]

- [Kim launches campaign to end North Korean coal industry's 'backwardness'](#) (2026-06-22 23:09)

This is a developing story. Please check back for updates. North Korean leader Kim Jong Un has unveiled a major campaign to modernize the country's coal industry and rebuild coal-mining communities nationwide, while reaffirming plans to expand nuclear and military capabilities and reshuffling senior leadership positions, according to state media. The decisions were announced during [...]

- [Award-winning Korea studies scholar accused of using AI-fabricated citations](#) (2026-06-22 09:25)

An award-winning Korea studies scholar based in the U.S. is facing scrutiny over allegations that she listed fabricated citations in a recent journal article. Two prominent scholars told NK News that they did not write the works attributed to them in the article by Aram Hur, Kim Koo Chair in Korean Studies at the Fletcher [...]

- [South Korean military alleges North’ s border fortification violates armistice](#) (2026-06-22 06:45)

North Korea has continued to fortify its side of the border by constructing miles of roads and barbed wire fencing, an act the South’ s military condemned on Monday as a violation of the two countries’ Armistice Agreement. North Korea installed a 10-kilometer barrier above the Northern Limit Line, the maritime boundary between the two Koreas, [...]

- [Lee says he asked Trump to ‘resolve’ North Korea nuke issue following Iran deal](#) (2026-06-19 08:20)

South Korean President Lee Jae Myung said he asked U.S. President Donald Trump to resolve the North Korean nuclear issue this week following the U.S. deal with Iran, advocating for a “phased approach” to denuclearization as the “realistic way forward.” During a press conference at the Blue House on Friday, Lee disclosed the details of [...]

- [Kim Yo Jong warns G7 ‘inviting disaster’ by calling for DPRK’ s denuclearization](#) (2026-06-19 05:38)

The North Korean leader’ s influential sister Kim Yo Jong denounced the Group of Seven (G7) industrialized nations for calling for Pyongyang’ s denuclearization, warning that those who pursue this “line of no retreat” will face consequences. In a statement published by the state-run Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) on Thursday, Kim criticized the joint declaration issued [...]

- [Ask a North Korean: How does DPRK society view people with disabilities?](#) (2026-06-19 03:37)

“Ask a North Korean” is an NK News series featuring interviews with and columns by North Korean defectors, most of whom left the DPRK within the last few years. Readers may submit their questions for defectors by emailing [ask@nknews.org](mailto:ask@nknews.org) and including their first name and city of residence. Today’ s question is about how North Korean [...]

- [North Korea reveals major bus crush caused over 20 casualties](#) (2026-06-19 01:43)

North Korean media has reported that a major bus crash in the countryside injured more than 20 passengers earlier this year, a rare acknowledgement of an accident in a country with dangerously outdated roads. According to Korean Central Television (KCTV) on Wednesday, a passenger bus traveling through Kangwon Province veered off the road on the [...]

- [Senate confirms Michelle Steel as US ambassador to South Korea](#) (2026-06-18 07:23)

The U.S. Senate confirmed former Republican congresswoman Michelle Steel to serve as the next U.S. ambassador to South Korea on Wednesday, as the allies navigate concerns over North Korea, defense and trade. The Senate voted 55-39 to approve President Donald Trump’ s nomination of Steel, which was submitted in April. The 70-year-old former U.S. representative from [...]

- [Seoul's Unification Ministry takes issue with calling North Korea 'enemy'](#) (2026-06-18 06:50)

Seoul's Unification Ministry has expressed reservations about a plan to label North Korea as the South's "enemy" in an upcoming defense white paper, highlighting continuing inter-Korean policy differences within the Lee Jae Myung administration. During a briefing on Thursday, a Defense Ministry spokesperson denied reports that it was considering dropping references to North Korea as [...]

- [Brian Davis on how the US military collects intel: North Korea Unpacked](#) (2026-06-18 04:14)

This month, retired U.S. Army Col. Brian Davis joins North Korea Unpacked with Jacco Zwetsloot to discuss lessons from his nearly 40-year career spanning some of the most consequential periods in U.S.-DPRK relations. He talks about how intelligence on North Korea is gathered and analyzed, how U.S. and South Korean military priorities shifted from conventional [...]

- [North Korean trade with China falls in May after hitting multiyear high](#) (2026-06-18 04:09)

North Korea's trade with China fell in May after hitting a multiyear high the previous month, official data shows, though both exports and imports remained above last year's levels. Sino-DPRK trade totaled nearly \$268 million last month, according to the new data released by Beijing's General Administration of Customs (GAC) on Thursday. This is down [...]

## Source: NK Pro

- [Why North Korea's anti-unification policies are an admission of weakness](#) (2026-06-24 10:21)

North Korean leader Kim Jong Un did the unthinkable when he renounced the idea of peaceful reunification with the South, with the recent reveal of constitutional revisions highlighting how the regime has institutionalized the new hardline policy. But what has arguably flown under the radar is what this policy change revealed about the DPRK's position [...]. The post Why North Korea's anti-unification policies are an admission of weakness appeared first on NK PRO.

- [What it would actually mean to accept North Korea as a nuclear state](#) (2026-06-22 09:37)

The Kim Jong Un regime has repeatedly insisted that it is a nuclear weapon state in recent weeks, defiantly asserting that it will never relinquish its arsenal and that would-be interlocutors must acknowledge this. So, what does it actually mean to accept North Korea as a nuclear weapon state? What steps would be necessary, and [...]. The post What it would actually mean to accept North Korea as a nuclear state appeared first on NK PRO.

- [China-North Korea processing trade holds firm with raw hair, wigs](#) (2026-06-22 09:18)

The trade of human hair led North Korea's business with China in both directions in May, according to data released by China's General Administration of Customs (GAC). Pyongyang also imported \$2.2 million worth of medicine, including drugs used to treat tuberculosis, as the country contends with one of the world's highest rates of the disease. [...] The post China-North Korea processing trade holds firm with raw hair, wigs appeared first on NK PRO.

- [North Korean hackers behind supply chain attack on AI platform: Microsoft](#) (2026-06-22 08:55)

North Korean cybercriminals were responsible for a sophisticated software supply chain attack that compromised more than 140 software packages tied to Mastra, a popular framework used to build artificial intelligence (AI) agents and applications, according to Microsoft. In a report published Friday, the U.S. software giant assessed with "high confidence" that the campaign was the [...] The post North Korean hackers behind supply chain attack on AI platform: Microsoft appeared first on NK PRO.

- [North Korea marks 2nd anniversary of mutual defense pact with Russia](#) (2026-06-19 03:52)

North Korean state media marked the second anniversary of the Pyongyang summit between leader Kim Jong Un and Russian President Vladimir Putin on Friday, praising the signing of a mutual defense treaty that paved the way for joint fighting against Ukrainian "neo-Nazis." Pyongyang kept up its outreach to friendly states. Kim sent a birthday message [...] The post North Korea marks 2nd anniversary of mutual defense pact with Russia appeared first on NK PRO.

- [How a North Korean IT worker cell built a 167K job application machine](#) (2026-06-18 07:53)

A North Korean cell of remote workers operated a highly organized employment network that submitted nearly 170,000 job applications and fraudulently secured dozens of positions at U.S. companies, according to a new investigation. In a report published Tuesday, Nisos — a cyber intelligence firm that specializes in "human risk management" — outlined the operations of [...] The post How a North Korean IT worker cell built a 167K job application machine appeared first on NK PRO.

- [North Korea, Russia still working on new car bridge ahead of scheduled opening](#) (2026-06-18 04:06)

North Korea and Russia are adding finishing touches to their new bridge across the Tumen River but have yet to complete supporting infrastructure, satellite imagery shows, ahead of its planned opening on Friday. The DPRK side has actively pushed forward the construction of its customs facility over the past few months, with the main building [...] The post North Korea, Russia still working on new car bridge ahead of scheduled opening appeared first on NK PRO.