



NORTH KOREA SECURITY ANALYSIS REPORT

AI-Assisted Open Source Intelligence Assessment

Analysis Period: April 29, 2026 - May 06, 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's security posture from April 29 to May 6, 2026, was characterized by aggressive cyber operations, continued advancements in its nuclear and missile programs, and a deepening strategic alignment with Russia and China. Pyongyang's state-sponsored hacking groups were responsible for the vast majority of global cryptocurrency theft in early 2026, demonstrating sophisticated capabilities and a clear intent to fund illicit weapons programs. Concurrently, North Korea continued to accelerate its nuclear warhead production and ballistic missile development, exploiting global geopolitical distractions to enhance its deterrence capabilities against the United States and South Korea. Diplomatic engagements solidified its "northern turn," with Russia openly defying UN sanctions to expand military cooperation and China strengthening strategic ties. This period underscores North Korea's unwavering commitment to its military modernization and its growing confidence in challenging international norms.

Key Security Developments

- Cybersecurity Attacks and Illicit Financing

North Korean hacking groups, including APT37 (BirdCall) and Lazarus Group (TraderTraitor), were highly active, with new reports emerging on May 6, 2026, detailing a campaign targeting ethnic Koreans in China with Android malware. This "BirdCall" malware allowed for extensive data theft, including audio recording, call logs, and private keys, likely aimed at refugees or defectors in the Yanbian region. Furthermore, blockchain intelligence firm TRM Labs reported on April 30, 2026, that North Korean actors were responsible for approximately 76% of all global cryptocurrency hack losses in the first four months of 2026, totaling \$577 million from just two major incidents in April: the \$292 million KelpDAO exploit and the \$285 million Drift Protocol attack. The Drift attack reportedly involved months of in-person meetings between North Korean proxies and Drift employees, indicating a high level of sophistication and social engineering. On May 3, 2026, North Korea's foreign ministry rejected these US accusations of cyber threats, calling them fabrications.

- Accelerated Nuclear and Missile Program

North Korea continued to rapidly expand its nuclear capabilities and arsenal, with analyses published on April 29 and May 5, 2026, indicating a capacity to produce fissile material for up to 20 nuclear warheads annually. This pace could lead to an

arsenal of 290 warheads by 2035, comparable to France. Leader Kim Jong Un has tasked the nuclear program with developing large warheads capable of threatening the United States and smaller tactical warheads to deter South Korea. Throughout April 2026, North Korea conducted multiple ballistic missile tests, including those armed with cluster munition warheads. These tests, some from the eastern coastal Wonsan area and Sinpo, are part of Pyongyang's strategy to develop capabilities designed to evade US and regional missile defenses.

- Deepening Military Ties with Russia

Military cooperation between North Korea and Russia intensified significantly during this period. On April 26-27, 2026, Russian Defence Minister Andrei Belousov visited Pyongyang, where both nations agreed to establish "long-term" military cooperation and plan to sign a cooperation plan for the 2027-2031 period later this year. This visit also included a ceremony for a Memorial Museum of Combat Feats for Overseas Military Operations in Pyongyang, honoring North Korean soldiers killed while fighting in Russia's Kursk region. On April 30, 2026, Russia openly stated at a UN Security Council meeting that it would continue military cooperation with North Korea, despite it violating UNSC resolutions, and confirmed the deployment of approximately 16,000 North Korean troops, including special forces, to assist Russia in the Ukraine war since October 2024, resulting in over 6,000 casualties.

- Strengthened Diplomatic Relations with China

Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi's visit to Pyongyang in early April 2026, though just outside the reporting window, continued to be a significant topic of analysis, highlighting North Korea's "northern turn" in diplomacy. During his meetings with Kim Jong Un and Foreign Minister Choe Son Hui, both sides agreed to strengthen "strategic communication and support cooperation" and deepen multifaceted exchanges, particularly in light of the 65th anniversary of their 1961 mutual aid and cooperation treaty. Kim Jong Un explicitly voiced full support for China's "one-China" principle and its efforts to build a "multipolar world".

- UN Condemnation and Weakening Sanctions Regime

On April 30, 2026, the UN's political affairs chief, Rosemary DiCarlo, expressed "serious concern" to the Security Council regarding North Korea's continued pursuit of nuclear weapons and ballistic missile development, which violates multiple Security Council resolutions. She noted Pyongyang's new five-year military development plan and its strategy to develop "new secret arsenals". The effectiveness of the international sanctions regime was further undermined by Russia's veto in 2024 of a resolution to renew the UN independent panel monitoring sanctions.

- South Korea's Shifting Denuclearization Strategy

South Korea, on May 6, 2026, emphasized a more flexible, "step-by-step approach" to North Korea's denuclearization, signaling a pragmatic shift in policy. This adjustment

comes amid growing concerns over Pyongyang's advancing weapons programs and the weakening of global enforcement mechanisms, including the dissolution of the UN Security Council panel of experts. The South Korean Ministry of Unification is also exploring prioritizing "peaceful coexistence" over reunification, even using terminology like "ROK-Joseon relations," which North Korea might interpret as an acceptance of its demands.

- North Korea's Stance on US Relations

North Korea reiterated its conditional openness to diplomacy with the United States, but firmly stated that any bilateral talks would require Washington to recognize North Korea as a nuclear-armed state and withdraw its "hostile policy". Kim Jong Un's remarks from the Ninth Party Congress in February 2026, which were still being analyzed, indicated Pyongyang's readiness for "peaceful coexistence or eternal confrontation" depending on the US attitude.

Geopolitical Impact and Regional Dynamics

North Korea's recent security developments have significantly reshaped regional stability and its relations with major powers. The deepening military alliance with Russia, exemplified by the agreement for "long-term" cooperation and the deployment of North Korean troops to Ukraine, directly challenges the international non-proliferation regime and undermines UN Security Council resolutions. This alignment provides Pyongyang with crucial economic and technical support, helping it circumvent international sanctions and further its weapons programs. Russia's open defiance at the UN regarding military cooperation with North Korea signals a growing disregard for international norms, emboldening Pyongyang and complicating efforts by the US and its allies to pressure the regime.

Simultaneously, North Korea's strengthened ties with China, highlighted by Foreign Minister Wang Yi's visit and Kim Jong Un's support for a "multipolar world," reinforce Pyongyang's strategic pivot away from engagement with the West. This "northern turn" provides North Korea with a robust diplomatic and economic buffer, reducing its motivation to engage in denuclearization talks with Washington and Seoul. The trilateral cooperation between North Korea, China, and Russia creates a formidable bloc that seeks to counter US influence in the Indo-Pacific, further fragmenting the global strategic landscape.

The accelerating nuclear and missile programs, coupled with North Korea's explicit rejection of unification and diplomatic overtures from South Korea, exacerbate tensions on the Korean Peninsula. South Korea's shift to a "phased strategy" for denuclearization reflects a pragmatic acknowledgment of these new realities and the diminishing prospects for immediate, comprehensive denuclearization. The US, while

maintaining its deterrence posture, faces the challenge of a North Korea increasingly confident in its nuclear status and bolstered by powerful allies, potentially leading to a reevaluation of missile defense capabilities and diplomatic approaches. The ongoing conflicts in the Middle East and Ukraine are perceived by Pyongyang as opportune moments to accelerate its military development, viewing the current global environment as a "lawless zone" where international standards are less applicable.

Military and Defense Analysis

North Korea's military and defense posture during this period reflects a determined drive towards advanced, survivable, and diversified strike capabilities. The rapid expansion of its nuclear warhead arsenal, with an estimated annual production capacity for 20 warheads, indicates a strategic goal of achieving a robust nuclear deterrent that can threaten both the US mainland and regional targets. Kim Jong Un's directive to develop both large intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) warheads and smaller tactical nuclear warheads underscores a dual-track approach to deterrence and potential battlefield use.

The continued ballistic missile tests in April 2026, including those with cluster munition warheads and from various launch sites like Wonsan and Sinpo, demonstrate ongoing efforts to refine missile technologies. North Korea is prioritizing the development of Multiple Independently Targetable Reentry Vehicle (MIRV) payloads and advanced solid-fuel missile systems, which are designed to evade existing US and regional missile defenses. Furthermore, the emphasis on the "nuclear weaponization of naval surface and underwater forces," including the Choe Hyon-class guided missile destroyers functioning as nuclear missile platforms, signals a strategic shift towards a more dispersed and harder-to-detect nuclear deterrent, moving towards a "green-water navy" capability. This modernization, supported by military cooperation with Russia, aims to enhance North Korea's ability to conduct "swarming attacks" to overwhelm defense systems.

Outlook and Forecast

Short-term trends (1-3 months): In the immediate future, North Korea is highly likely to continue its aggressive cyber operations, particularly targeting cryptocurrency exchanges and individuals, as a primary means of illicit revenue generation. We can anticipate further reports of sophisticated malware campaigns, potentially integrating AI tools as speculated by analysts. Militarily, Pyongyang will probably conduct more missile tests, focusing on validating new warhead designs, solid-fuel systems, and potentially submarine-launched capabilities, especially given the ongoing global

distractions. Diplomatic rhetoric towards South Korea will remain hostile, with continued rejection of dialogue and emphasis on a "two hostile states" theory. The military and economic cooperation with Russia is expected to deepen further, with progress on the 2027-2031 cooperation plan and continued deployment of North Korean personnel to support Russia's war efforts.

Critical flashpoints and risk areas: The Korean Peninsula border, particularly the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ), remains a critical flashpoint, especially with North Korea's directive to fortify its border with South Korea. Any miscalculation during military exercises or border incidents could rapidly escalate. The East Sea (Sea of Japan), where North Korea frequently conducts missile tests, poses a risk to regional maritime and air traffic. The cyber domain is another high-risk area, with North Korean attacks potentially causing significant financial disruption or even targeting critical infrastructure in South Korea, the US, or other nations. The Kursk region of Russia, where North Korean troops are reportedly deployed and suffering casualties, represents a direct military involvement that could draw further international condemnation and potentially lead to unforeseen consequences for Pyongyang.

Indicators to monitor: Key indicators to monitor include the frequency and sophistication of North Korean missile launches, particularly any new types or those demonstrating MIRV capabilities or submarine launches. Reports from international intelligence agencies and cybersecurity firms on North Korean cyber activities and cryptocurrency theft will be crucial. Developments in Russia-North Korea military and economic cooperation, including any new agreements or visible transfers of technology, should be closely watched. Statements from Pyongyang regarding its nuclear program and its conditions for dialogue with the US will also provide insight into its strategic intentions. Finally, any shifts in South Korea's denuclearization policy or inter-Korean engagement will be important to observe.

Strategic recommendations: Given North Korea's current trajectory, a multi-faceted approach is recommended. Firstly, strengthening cyber defenses and international cooperation to counter North Korean illicit financing activities is paramount, including enhanced intelligence sharing and asset tracing capabilities. Secondly, the US and its allies should continue to bolster integrated missile defense systems and enhance deterrence capabilities, while also exploring arms control discussions that acknowledge North Korea's de facto nuclear status, as a purely denuclearization-first approach appears increasingly ineffective. Thirdly, diplomatic efforts should focus on isolating North Korea's illicit activities while maintaining channels for communication, potentially leveraging China's influence where possible, despite Pyongyang's "northern turn". Finally, continued monitoring of the humanitarian situation and human rights in North Korea remains essential, as the regime's focus on military development often comes at the expense of its populace.

Structured Assessment

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## ANNEX: COLLECTED ARTICLES BY SOURCE

### Source: NK News

- [Lee Hong-koo, key official in inter-Korean negotiations, dies at 92](#) (2026-05-06 05:22)

Lee Hong-koo, the former South Korean prime minister who helped shape Seoul's early post-Cold War unification strategy and negotiated terms with North Korea for a hopeful inter-Korean summit in 1994, died Tuesday at 92. Lee's role in politics was described as a "consensus builder" and he was a central figure across multiple presidential administrations following [...]

- [Drone strike near DPRK embassy dims prospects for a Kim Jong Un visit to Moscow](#) (2026-05-05 10:46)

A Ukrainian drone strike near the North Korean Embassy in Russia this week has likely dimmed the prospects of a visit by DPRK leader Kim Jong Un and heightened security measures ahead of a major Russian military parade. Kim's potential visit at the invitation of President Vladimir Putin has been in the works for years, [...]

- [What happened to denuclearizing North Korea?](#) (2026-05-05 10:20)

A former National Security Council official who long championed the U.S.'s policy on North Korea's denuclearization has declared it a "failure," saying Washington's "overreliance on sanctions" was a mistake. In a Foreign Affairs essay that drew weeks of editorials and ministerial-level responses in Seoul, Victor Cha, the NSC's director for Asian Affairs during the George [...]

- [China's envoy to North Korea pledges more taekwondo exchanges](#) (2026-05-05 05:13)

China's ambassador to North Korea on Saturday visited Pyongyang's preeminent training ground for taekwondo, praising the martial art with "a history of more than 2,000 years" that reflects the "perseverance and resilience of the North Korean people," according to a news release from the Chinese embassy. Chinese Ambassador to North Korea Wang Yajun and North [...]

- [Fear from a vibrating cellphone: A North Korean defector's tale of grief](#) (2026-05-05 04:14)

"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. This week, "Ask A North Korean" columnist [...]

- [Jacco Zwetsloot: A look back and a new chapter for the NK News Podcast](#) (2026-05-05 03:33)

In this handover episode of the NK News Podcast, new host Alannah Hill sits down with longtime host Jacco Zwetsloot to look back on his time leading the show since its launch in Feb. 2018. They revisit the podcast's first episode with Andrei Lankov, the major North Korea stories that defined that period and how [...]

- [Westerners enter North Korea for spring trade fair for the first time in 7 years](#) (2026-05-04 08:53)

A business delegation traveled to Pyongyang by train to participate in a spring trade fair, the first time in seven years Western visitors are participating in the annual exhibition. Rowan Beard, a tour manager at the Young Pioneer Tours (YPT) travel agency, said on social media Monday that the group traveled to North Korea for [...]

- [North Korea warns of retaliation over US 'slander' of DPRK cyber threats](#) (2026-05-04 07:17)

North Korea denounced the U.S. on Sunday for its persistent warnings of Pyongyang's growing "cyber threat," saying attempts at "confrontation" in the digital realm will lead to retaliation. In a statement published by the state-owned Korean Central News Agency (KCNA), a DPRK Foreign Ministry spokesperson disputed the warnings given by "U.S. government organs, reptile media [...]"

- [Vietnam appoints new ambassador to North Korea after envoy's lengthy term](#) (2026-05-04 07:01)

Vietnam recently appointed a new ambassador to North Korea, replacing its previous envoy after a longer-than-usual tenure in Pyongyang. Vietnamese President To Lam on Tuesday designated as ambassador to the DPRK Doan Khanh Tam, the deputy director of the Foreign Ministry's Information and Documentation Center at the Diplomatic Academy, according to Hanoi's state-run Vietnam News [...]

- [More than 14K North Koreans currently fighting for Russia against Ukraine: Kyiv](#) (2026-05-04 05:50)

Over 14,000 North Korean soldiers are currently fighting for Russia against Ukraine alongside mercenaries from 136 countries, including South Korea, according to Kyiv's military intelligence. Dmytro Usov, a Ukraine's Defense Intelligence representative and Secretary of the Coordination Headquarters for the Treatment of Prisoners of War, announced the figures at a Friday presentation of a new [...]

- [Russian farm celebrates North Korean female workers with concert](#) (2026-05-04 05:23)

A large Russian farm celebrated its female North Korean workers by throwing a concert, releasing a video of dozens of DPRK laborers likely employed at the facility in violation of U.N. sanctions. The Agro-Invest agricultural complex, based in Russia's Kaluga region southwest of Moscow, held a tree-planting procession and a concert “with the participation of [...]”

- [North Korean women's soccer team to play in South for first time in 12 years](#)

(2026-05-04 04:04)

A North Korean women's soccer club is scheduled to visit South Korea for the first time in about 12 years, in a rare instance of cross-border sports amid frozen ties between the two countries. North Korea's Naegohyang Women's Football Club is scheduled to arrive in South Korea on May 17 to compete in the final [...]

- [North Korean youth vow to become the 'militant reserve' of country](#) (2026-05-01 08:53)

North Korea this week emphasized the need for the country's youth to maintain utmost loyalty to Kim Jong Un during a once-in-five-years political gathering, positioning the DPRK's leading youth organization as the “militant reserve” dedicated to advancing the ruling party's vision. The 11th Congress of the Socialist Patriotic Youth League, held in Pyongyang from Tuesday [...]

- [Former DPRK diplomat peels back curtain on Pyongyang's foreign policy apparatus](#)

(2026-05-01 07:44)

North Korea's diplomats are often seen delivering rigid statements from behind podiums, but a new insider account suggests the real work of Pyongyang's foreign service happens far from public view. Drafting reports for Kim Jong Un. Navigating turf battles between rival state and party organs. Moving hard currency through overseas embassies under mounting pressure. That [...]

- [Russia, China back North Korea's rejection to follow UN sanctions](#) (2026-05-01 07:29)

Russia, China and North Korea mounted a joint defense of Pyongyang at a U.N. Security Council (UNSC) meeting, attacking sanctions and dismissing evidence of alleged DPRK violations, two years after Moscow's veto dismantled the U.N. panel charged with monitoring restrictions against North Korea. The UNSC convened on Thursday to discuss North Korea's nuclear issue at [...]

- [South Korea's top court upholds jail sentence for man who hired DPRK hacker](#)

(2026-04-30 09:57)

South Korea's highest court upheld the one-year prison sentence of a man who hired a North Korean cybercriminal to carry out attacks in support of an illegal gaming server. The Supreme Court's First Division on Thursday delivered the judgement against the South Korean national, identified solely by his surname Oh, for violating the National Security [...]

- [5 Korean War POWs forced to work in North Korean coal mine are suing the regime](#) (2026-04-30 09:23)

Five prisoners of war seeking compensation for physical and psychological damages after the Korean War filed a joint lawsuit against North Korea and leader Kim Jong Un in Seoul Central District Court on Thursday. The POWs are each suing for 21 million won (\$14,187) after alleging they were forcibly sent to work in North Korean [...]

- [Police bust Donbas-tied arms dealers peddling guns for Kim Jong Un: Kyiv](#) (2026-04-30 08:49)

Ukraine claimed to have busted an arms smuggling network used by a Donbas warlord to procure “award” weapons for high-profile individuals, including DPRK leader Kim Jong Un, actor Steven Seagal and Russian officials. Ukraine’s National Police said Tuesday that Kyiv disrupted a smuggling route controlled by Donbas warlord Denis Pushilin, who has served as the [...]

- [Russian Far East plans to boost trade with North Korea: officials](#) (2026-04-30 08:34)

A region in Russia’s Far East is seeking to boost trade with North Korea by setting up a new trade promotion body, local authorities said, ahead of the opening of a cross-border road bridge between their two countries. Primorsky Krai plans to establish a working group under its Vladivostok-based Export Council tasked with “expanding trade [...]

- [South Korea’s navy to lead around 40 warships in large-scale RIMPAC exercise](#) (2026-04-30 05:39)

A South Korean navy admiral will command warships during the U.S.-led Rim of the Pacific Exercise (RIMPAC) for the first time, a milestone one expert says could bolster Seoul’s ability to lead allied naval forces in a contingency with North Korea. Troops from 30 countries will participate in the biennial exercise scheduled June 24 to [...]

- [South Korean police probe for North Korean ties in golf course data hack](#) (2026-04-29 09:36)

South Korean police are investigating whether North Korean cybercriminals were involved in a customer data breach of a golf course, following the leak of personal information from its website. A spokesperson for the Korean National Police Agency’s (KNPA) cybersecurity investigation division told NK News on Monday that it is probing a cyberattack carried out in [...]

- [New Zealand flags 35 ‘vessels of interest’ in latest North Korea maritime patrol](#) (2026-04-29 08:03)

New Zealand’s military said it detected signs of an illegal ship-to-ship transfer involving North Korean goods during its monthlong patrol of waters near the Korean Peninsula. A Royal New Zealand Air Force P-8A Poseidon aircraft patrolling the Yellow Sea and East China Sea “observed a possible ship-to-ship transfer of illicit goods,” Wellington’s military said in [...]

- [North Korea eyes exports of libido drugs, instant noodles to Russia: records](#) (2026-04-29 06:41)

North Korean firms are set to export to Russia “horny goat weed-based” libido enhancers among other supplements, cosmetics and instant noodles, official records show. Corporate entities from Moscow and Vladivostok filed eight import declarations covering seven DPRK companies since mid-April, according to Russia’s Federal Service for Accreditation (FSA). The most recent application as of Wednesday [...]

- [Heir apparent? What to look for in North Korea’s possible successor](#) (2026-04-29 05:14)

South Korean experts assessed that North Korean leader Kim Jong Un’s daughter is showing early signs of being trained as a successor, but noted that the country has yet to begin the formal steps required for a power transition. The assessment came during a seminar hosted by the Seoul-based think tank East Asia Institute (EAI) [...]

- [Eunhee Park: Surviving North Korea and reclaiming identity in the South](#) (2026-04-29 03:53)

Content warning: This episode contains discussion of sexual violence. NK News Data Correspondent Anton Sokolin kicks off the podcast this week by discussing the long-running debate over the transfer of wartime operational control, or OPCON, from the U.S. to South Korea, following comments made by U.S. Forces Korea Commander Gen. Xavier Brunson. He also examines [...]

- [North Korean fishery officials tour Chinese company specializing in algae](#) (2026-04-29 03:02)

A North Korean delegation of fishery experts visited an algae production company in China earlier this month, underscoring Pyongyang’s continued interest in strengthening its food security situation through Beijing’s expertise. The delegation from the Pyongyang No. 1 Sub-branch of the North Korea Fisheries Development Company visited the Shandong Jiejing Group Corporation on April 23, according [...]

## Source: NK Pro

- [North Korean hackers poison Chinese games in apparent bid to spy on refugees](#) (2026-05-06 04:14)

A North Korean cybercrime group compromised a Chinese gaming platform popular with ethnic Koreans living near the DPRK-China border and used it to plant spyware on the devices of unsuspecting players, according to security researchers. The attackers, identified by researchers as the espionage-focused group ScarCruft, tampered with Android and Microsoft Windows games hosted on sqgame[.]net, [...]

The post North Korean hackers poison Chinese games in

apparent bid to spy on refugees appeared first on NK PRO.

- [How military AI is changing warfare on the Korean Peninsula](#) (2026-05-04 09:11)

As North and South Korea pursue contrasting approaches to integrating artificial intelligence (AI) into their militaries, the Korean Peninsula is racing toward becoming a testing ground for the promises — and perils — of algorithmic warfare. Both sides are compressing decision-making timelines in ways that could reshape deterrence and crisis stability: from Pyongyang's pursuit of [...] The post [How military AI is changing warfare on the Korean Peninsula](#) appeared first on NK PRO.

- [North Korea in April 2026: A month in review and what's ahead](#) (2026-05-01 09:07)

About the Month in Review Every month, NK Pro conducts an in-depth analytic review of news on the Korean Peninsula. This Month in Review covers the period of April 1, 2026 to April 30, 2026. In addition to an executive summary providing top-line findings, the following review includes detailed analysis on a wide range of [...] The post [North Korea in April 2026: A month in review and what's ahead](#) appeared first on NK PRO.

- [Blood-stained letters on display at North Korea's new war memorial museum](#) (2026-05-01 01:49)

The opening of North Korea's Memorial Museum of Combat Feats at the Overseas Military Operations dominated state media this week, carrying both diplomatic and domestic significance. Visits by Russian State Duma Chairman Viacheslav Volodin and Defense Minister Andrei Belousov underscored the deepening Pyongyang-Moscow ties, while at home, the memorial was used to glorify troops killed [...] The post [Blood-stained letters on display at North Korea's new war memorial museum](#) appeared first on NK PRO.