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REPORT

Impact Assessment: North Korea's *Malligyong-1* Satellite Launch

March 2024

Chris Georgiou



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Executive Summary

- Sanctions against North Korea have failed to limit its progress in space. The *Malligyong-1* launch took place despite international sanctions, and North Korea has indicated that it will continue to launch more satellites in future.
- The *Malligyong-1* launch has solidified North Korea as both a space power and threat actor. Its ability to reach low-earth orbit confers the ability to target other satellites within it, lending credence to threats made against other space powers.
- North Korea's satellite programme serves as a bargaining chip for international leverage. Whereas talks have historically targeted North Korea's nuclear programmes, its success in space raises the prospect of it featuring in future sanctions negotiations.
- The launch represents improved ties with Russia. North Korea's satellite programme has been made feasible through an exchange of artillery for rocketry expertise with Russia. It is unclear to what extent this will continue, although it is expected to continue in the short term, and likely throughout Russia's war in Ukraine.
- The launch signals a low point in inter-Korean relations. Since the launch, the Kim regime has publicly abandoned its goal of Korean reunification. Reactionary satellite launches by South Korea in collaboration with SpaceX have exacerbated this decline.



Section 1

Introduction

On 21st November 2023, North Korea successfully launched its *Malligyong-1* satellite into lower earth orbit, successfully achieving what only a handful of nations have thus far managed. In doing so, it has established itself as an actor in the space domain and altered the geopolitical landscape. It has also established itself as a potential threat in space, and – through such – earned itself a potential bargaining chip to leverage in future sanctions negotiations.

This report provides an impact and near-term assessment of the *Malligyong-1* launch on broader space security and regional geopolitics. It factors in and considers the historical context of North Korea's space programmes and related ambitions and the international community's responses to it. It will then assess the impact of the launch on space as a security domain, and the geopolitical impact on surrounding nations and regional powers.



Section 2

Contemporary North Korean Space Development

North Korea's expansion into the space domain has continued in spite of international sanctions, and has served multiple purposes. Historical satellite launches have been externally perceived as both cover for ballistic missile tests, and a means by which to attempt the militarisation of space. They have also served as a means to secure domestic political capital, providing propaganda to support the Kim regime ¹.

The DPRK's domestic space agencies have evolved since the foundation of the Korean Committee of Space Technology ("KCST") in the 1980s; in 2013, it was replaced with the National Aerospace Development Administration ("NADA") and rebranded the "National Aerospace Technology Administration ("NATA") in April 2023 ². The DPRK attempted the launch of their first satellite - *Kwangmyongsong-1* - from the Tonghae Satellite Launching Ground ("Tonghae") which resulted in failure. A successor launch, *Kwangmyongsong-2*, also failed upon launch from the same complex in 2009, and is understood by U.S. intelligence and North Korean media to have resulted in the death of 14 North Korean soldiers. In 2012, the state succeeded on two fronts: firstly, by opening the Sohae Satellite Launch Center ("Sohaе") and secondly by successfully launching the *Kwangmyongsong-3-2* satellite in December of that year, following a previous failed attempt that April. Even though the satellite itself is reported to have lost all functionality upon deployment, its successful insertion into lower earth orbit ("LEO") represented a technological milestone for the DPRK ³.

¹ Adam Schrader, 'North Korea Officially Begins Spy Satellite Program after Launch of Malligyong-1 - UPI.Com', UPI, accessed 15 January 2024,

https://www.upi.com/Top_News/World-News/2023/12/03/north-korea-officially-begins-satellite-program/7291701624855/; Bruce Bennett, 'North Korea's Satellite Launch: Part of a Bigger Problem for Kim Jong-Un?', 4 December 2023,

<https://www.rand.org/pubs/commentary/2023/12/north-koreas-satellite-launch-part-of-a-bigger-problem.html>.

² Workers World, 'Despite Clinton, Korea Has Rights', Workers World, 25 February 2009,

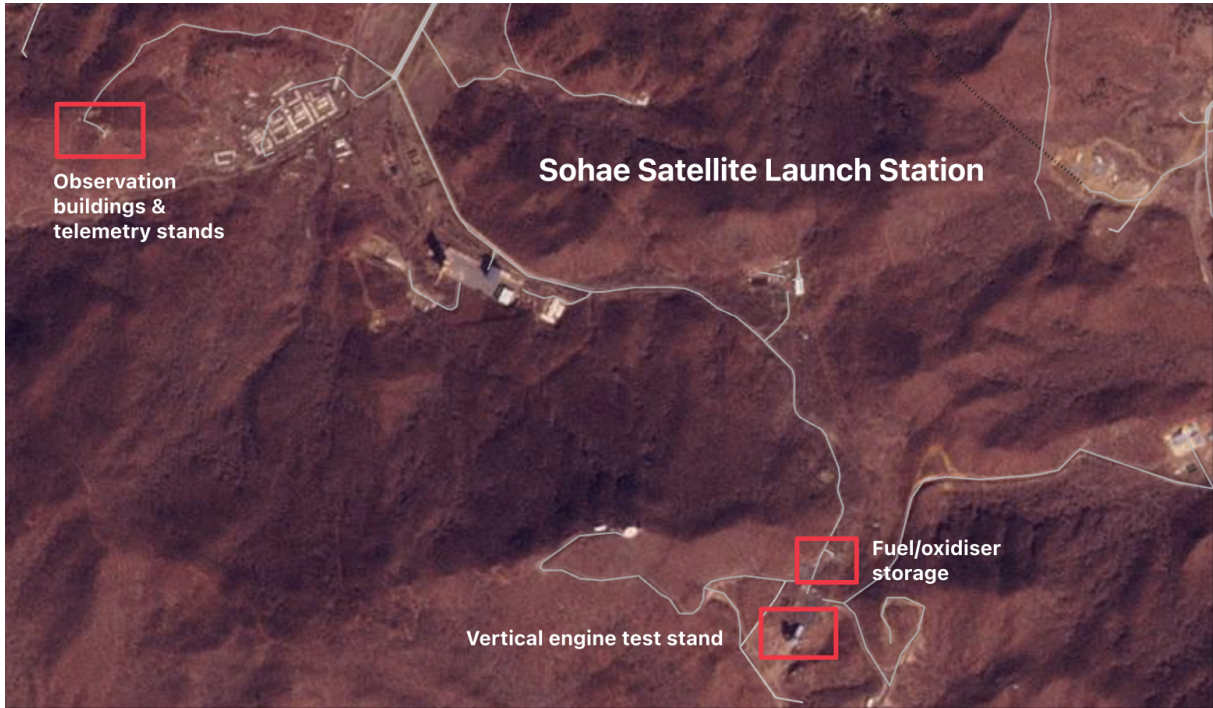
https://www.workers.org/2009/editorials/korea_0305/; Korean Central News Agency (KCNA), '9th Session of 14th SPA of DPRK Held', 28 September 2023,

<http://kcna.kp/en/article/q/9c38c667ab8fc1a8ab39bde693ee120.kcmsf>.

³ Anton Sokolin, 'North Korea's Last Remaining Satellite to Burn up in Atmosphere Soon: Experts | NK News', NK News - North Korea News, 12 September 2023,

<https://www.nknews.org/2023/09/north-koreas-last-remaining-satellite-to-burn-up-in-atmosphere-soon-experts/>.

Sohae Launch Station: March 2024
PlanetScope SuperDove satellite



Tonghae Missile Launch Pad: March 2024
Satellite: PlanetScope SuperDove satellite





This achievement, deemed in violation of UN Security Council Resolution 1974 (2009), led to a swift condemnation by the United Nations Security Council (“UNSC”) ⁴. This, and related sanctions, highlight the primary concern of the international community; that space-related technologies developed by the DPRK are ‘dual-use’, and thus could be repurposed in order to aid its military programme. This is not without good reason; North Korea’s satellite tests have historically taken place against the backdrop of increasingly bellicose anti-Western rhetoric and nuclear weapons tests ⁵.

Despite long-standing international concern, the *Malligyong-1* satellite was launched on 21st November 2023 from Sohae. This also marked the first launch of the *Chollima-1* launch rocket on which it was carried, believed to be derived from a *Hwasong-17* ICBM. The satellite itself operates in LEO in a sun-synchronous orbit (“SSO”) and is intended for reconnaissance purposes. Considered a ‘spy satellite’, the *Malligyong-1* has reportedly been used by the state to capture satellite imagery of American, South Korean and Japanese military installations ⁶. The *Malligyong-1* launch represented a significant increase in DPRK space capabilities; utilising the *Chollima-1* as a launch vehicle instead of the *Unha-3* highlights technological advancement from conventional launch vehicles to adapted ICBMs. The successful launch has also been leveraged by the state for propaganda purposes, resulting in state broadcaster the Korean Central News Agency (“KCNA”) publishing a propaganda poster on its website on the day of the launch ⁷.

⁴ United Nations, ‘UN Chief and Security Council Condemn Rocket Launch by DPR Korea’, United Nations, 12 December 2012,

<https://news.un.org/en/story/2012/12/428092-un-chief-and-security-council-condemn-rocket-launch-dpr-korea>; United Nations Security Council, ‘S/RES/1874 (2009)’, United Nations Security Council, 12 June 2009, <https://www.un.org/securitycouncil/s/res/1874-%282009%29>.

⁵ John Gittings, ‘North Korea Fires Missile over Japan’, *The Guardian*, 1 September 1998, sec. World news, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/1998/sep/01/northkorea>; the CNN Wire Staff, ‘North Korea Threatens “a Sea of Fire” upon South Korea’, CNN, 25 November 2011,

<https://www.cnn.com/2011/11/24/world/asia/north-korea-sea-of-fire/index.html>; K. J. Kwon, ‘North Korea Proclaims Itself a Nuclear State in New Constitution’, CNN, 31 May 2012,

<https://www.cnn.com/2012/05/31/world/asia/north-korea-nuclear-constitution/index.html>; Voice of America, ‘North Korea Boasts of Ability to Destroy US Military in “Single Blow”’, Voice of America, 24 April 2012, <https://www.voanews.com/a/north-korea-boasts-of-ability-to-destroy-us-military-in-single-blow-148848865/370091.html>; Jethro Mullen, ‘North Korea Threatens “special Actions” to Take out South Korean Government’, CNN, 23 April 2012, <https://www.cnn.com/2012/04/23/world/asia/north-korea-threats/index.html>.

⁶ Security Council Report, ‘DPRK (North Korea): Open Briefing*’, Security Council Report, 24 November 2023, <https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/whatsinblue/2023/11/dprk-north-korea-open-briefing-6.php>; N2YO, ‘Technical Details for Satellite MALLIGYONG-1’, N2YO.com - Real Time Satellite Tracking and Predictions, 21 November 2023, <https://www.n2yo.com/satellite/?s=58400>; Justin McCurry, ‘North Korea Claims Spy Satellite Has Photographed White House and Pentagon’, *The Guardian*, 28 November 2023, sec. World news, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/nov/28/north-korea-claims-spy-satellite-has-photographed-white-house-and-pentagon>.

⁷ Seok-Joo Hwang, ‘N. Korean Posters on Successful Launch of Spy Satellite’, Yonhap News Agency, 7 December 2023, <https://en.yna.co.kr/view/PYH20231207026700315>.

Section 3

Space Security Concerns

The *Malligyong-1*'s successful launch and orbit have solidified outer space as a domain of conflict and highlighted vulnerabilities in existing legal frameworks designed to contain space development.

3.1 Offensive Capabilities in Space

As a security domain, the implications of the *Malligyong-1* launch on space are noteworthy; North Korea has become one of fourteen countries able to launch satellites into orbit⁸. Launching items into LEO implies the ability to target objects within it, and through such to conduct kinetic attacks against other satellites. The North Korean state has given this idea credence; following the launch of *Malligyong-1*, it announced that any attack against their satellite – particularly those conducted by “the U.S. Space Force” – would be considered an act of war, and that retaliatory actions against “an adversary’s space and counterspace capabilities” would be conducted in such a scenario⁹.

Whilst easy to brush off as DPRK rhetoric, this must be considered in the context of LEO, which the *Malligyong-1* inhabits. Approximately 11,000 satellites are believed to operate in LEO, and this number is set to rise. As a consequence, the overcrowding of LEO has been considered by Zurich as a major future risk factor¹⁰. The increasing congestion of LEO raises the risks of a collision-induced Kessler Effect, where debris resulting from an impact in space may themselves trigger further chain impacts¹¹. This concern is warranted; China’s 2007 ASAT test targeting its *Fengyun-1C* satellite resulted in a debris cloud of over 2,000 objects,

⁸ World Population Review, ‘Countries with Space Programs 2024’, World Population Review, 2024, <https://worldpopulationreview.com/country-rankings/countries-with-space-programs>.

⁹ Islam Uddin, ‘North Korea Warns US of Counter Action If Its Spy Satellite Is Targeted’, 2 December 2023, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/asia-pacific/north-korea-warns-us-of-counter-action-if-its-spy-satellite-is-targeted/3070891>.

¹⁰ Zurich, ‘Space Congestion: An Increasingly Contested and Crowded Frontier’, Zurich, Zurich, 2022, <https://www.zurich.com/en/media/magazine/2022/from-moonshot-to-musk-how-the-rules-of-the-game-are-changing-in-space>; Zurich, ‘The Global Risks Report 2022’, 2022, <https://www.zurich.com/knowledge/topics/global-risks/the-global-risks-report-2022>.

¹¹ European Space Agency, ‘The Kessler Effect and How to Stop It’, European Space Agency, accessed 15 January 2024, https://www.esa.int/Enabling_Support/Space_Engineering_Technology/The_Kessler_Effect_and_how_to_stop_it.



sparking concerns of further damage to orbiting satellites¹². A Chinese space station, *Tiangong*, was forced to take evasive manoeuvres following 'close encounters' with *Starlink* satellites in 2021, over which Beijing lodged formal complaints with the United States¹³. Through access to LEO, North Korea has thus conferred upon itself the means by which to disrupt other satellites in space.

3.2 Space Development as Cover for Missile Development

Chollima-1's usage also indicates a link between North Korea's space ambitions and its domestic ICBM programme. Whilst it is not unusual for ICBM[VM1] programmes to be converted for space-faring purposes – the Soviet Union and United States programmes both progressed in similar manners – there is concern that satellite launches are a means by which Pyongyang can further develop ballistic capabilities. This does not appear likely. Whereas its ICBM technology appears to have aided its space ambitions through adapting the *Hwasong-17*, North Korea has continued to develop its ballistic capabilities separately to its space capabilities in spite of sanctions. To this extent, North Korea hailed successful tests of hypersonic missiles in January 2024 without any attempt to disguise such as 'space-oriented'¹⁴.

3.3 Legal Implications

From a legal perspective, the launch highlights the ineffectiveness of international treaties and sanctions designed to curtail North Korean activities and ensure the controlled use of space. North Korea has been under continuous sanctions since 2006 by the UNSC, EU and individual states as a direct result of its nuclear weapons programme. These sanctions specifically target and prohibit all ballistics tests¹⁵. In spite of this, the country has successfully continued to evade sanctions and reportedly continue its nuclear development

¹² John Lambert, *Fengyun-1C Debris Cloud Evolution Over One Decade*, 2018, <https://ui.adsabs.harvard.edu/abs/2018amos.confE..50L>.

¹³ Jon Henley and Rhoda Kwan, 'China Berates US after "Close Encounters" with Elon Musk Satellites', *The Guardian*, 28 December 2021, sec. World news, <https://www.theguardian.com/science/2021/dec/28/china-complains-to-un-after-space-station-is-forced-to-move-to-avoid-starlink-satellites>.

¹⁴ CBS News, 'North Korea's First 2024 Missile Test Was Conducted with Remote U.S. Targets in Region in Mind, Analysts Say', 15 January 2024, <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/north-korea-missile-test-first-2024-remote-us-targets-region/>.

¹⁵ Kelsey Davenport, 'UN Security Council Resolutions on North Korea', January 2022, <https://www.armscontrol.org/factsheets/UN-Security-Council-Resolutions-on-North-Korea>; Council on Foreign Relations, 'What to Know About Sanctions on North Korea', Council on Foreign Relations, 27 July 2022, <https://www.cfr.org/background/north-korea-sanctions-un-nuclear-weapons>.



programme as of 2023¹⁶. The *Malligyong-1* launch is also emblematic of the state's willingness to ignore international agreements for the sake of developing its domestic capabilities; North Korea had previously agreed to destroy its Sohae launch site following an agreement between the DPRK and the United States in 2018, yet it remains operational¹⁷.

The state's willingness to overcome sanctions to enter the space domain does not bode well for its attitude to agreements signed once there. North Korea ratified the Outer Space Treaty ("OST") and Convention on Registration of Objects Launched into Outer Space ("the Convention") in 2009, seemingly in order to legitimise itself as a responsible space power, and to this effect notified Japan prior to the *Malligyong-1* launch¹⁸. Whilst seemingly innocuous, the legal concerns stem from the legal frameworks themselves; the OST explicitly prohibits the use of space for military purposes, but also contains no verification method for identifying whether an object in space can be used for such a purpose or not. It lacks legal claws, and fails to propose what entity - if any - should hold jurisdiction in the instance that a rogue state defies the articles laid within it¹⁹. In regards to North Korea, ratification of these treaties appears to provide its space programme with international credibility whilst doing little to limit its space ambitions.

¹⁶ Michelle Nichols, 'North Korea Developing Nuclear Weapons, Evading Sanctions in 2023 - UN Report', *Reuters*, 10 August 2023, sec. Asia Pacific, <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/north-korea-developing-nuclear-weapons-evading-sanctions-2023-un-report-2023-08-10/>; King Mallory, 'North Korean Sanctions Evasion Techniques' (RAND Corporation, 23 September 2021), https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RRA1537-1.html.

¹⁷ Matt Spetalnick, 'U.S. Identifies North Korea Missile Test Site It Says Kim Committed to Destroy', *Reuters*, 21 June 2018, sec. World, <https://www.reuters.com/article/idUSKBN1JH02O/>.

¹⁸ Soo-Hyang Choi and Chang-Ran Kim, 'North Korea Claims It Launched First Spy Satellite, Promises More', *Reuters*, 22 November 2023, sec. Asia Pacific, <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/north-korea-flags-plan-launch-satellite-rocket-between-nov-22-dec-1-japan-says-2023-11-20/>; Alexander Starun, 'North Korean Space Program Legitimization Efforts', 17 August 2017, <https://www.securityoutlines.cz/north-korean-space-program-legitimization-efforts/>.

¹⁹ UNOOSA, 'The Outer Space Treaty', UNOOSA, accessed 15 January 2024, <https://www.unoosa.org/oosa/en/ourwork/spacelaw/treaties/introouterspacetreaty.html>.



Section 4

Geopolitical Impact Assessment & Future Trends

4.1 International Relations

International responses to the *Malligyong-1's* launch have varied. Whereas the United States, South Korea and Japan were quick to condemn the launch, no official state response was given by Russia or China²⁰. Russia did, however, block an attempt by the UNSC to condemn the launch. This reflects broader geopolitical developments relating to North Korea and its recent actions; the *Malligyong-1* has represented the DPRK's ability to pursue its technological goals in spite of Western sanctions, and also the continued culmination of military capabilities in comparison to South Korea and Japan.

4.2 Russia

Critically, the satellite launch represents improved ties with Russia. Vladimir Putin hosted Kim Jong-Il during a state visit in 2023, at which time he is reported to have requested aid from Russia in regards to developing North Korea's space programme²¹. Reports from South Korea have also indicated that Russian support may have enabled the successful launch of the *Malligyong-1*²². Reports and United States intelligence have indicated that this was provided in exchange for missiles, artillery and weaponry to be used in Russia's ongoing war against Ukraine²³.

²⁰ Kanishka Singh, 'US, S.Korea, Japan Condemn N.Korea's Ballistic Missile Launches; Urge Dialogue', *Reuters*, 21 December 2023, sec. World, <https://www.reuters.com/world/us-skorea-japan-condemn-nkoreas-ballistic-missile-launches-urge-dialogue-2023-12-21/>.

²¹ Guy Faulconbridge, Soo-Hyang Choi, and Guy Faulconbridge, 'Putin and North Korea's Kim Discuss Military Matters, Ukraine War and Satellites', *Reuters*, 14 September 2023, sec. World, <https://www.reuters.com/world/nkoreas-kim-meets-putin-missiles-launched-pyongyang-2023-09-13/>.

²² Tong-Hyung Kim, 'South Korea Says Russian Support Likely Enabled North Korea to Successfully Launch a Spy Satellite', *AP News*, 23 November 2023, <https://apnews.com/article/north-korea-spy-satellite-russia-assistance-6461d7216fa5bd3fa0945efeb06530c6>.

²³ Hyung-Jin Kim and Tong-Hyung Kim, 'North Korea Has Likely Sent Missiles as Well as Ammunition and Shells to Russia, Seoul Says', *AP News*, 2 November 2023, <https://apnews.com/article/north-korea-russia-missiles-ammunitions-5fd4221d9c4844240011632fd9b9e849>; Aamer Madhani, 'US Says North Korea Delivered 1,000 Containers of Equipment and Munitions to Russia for Ukraine War', *AP News*, 13 October 2023, <https://apnews.com/article/north-korea-russia-us-munitions-ukraine-war-7091eaba254b680888a9b1ec8a68135f>.

The mutual need between Russia and North Korea appears borne of Russia's need for military supplies to conduct war in Ukraine and North Korea's need for technical expertise to boost its heavily-sanctioned ballistics and satellite programmes. It is unclear, however, to what extent this is expected to continue; whilst nominally independent through its *Juche* philosophy, North Korea currently relies on Russia's GLONASS system for satellite navigation; most notably for the navigation of its intercontinental ballistic missiles ("ICBMs")²⁴. It is unclear to what level this relationship would be impacted should North Korea gain the ability to launch a domestic satellite navigation system into geostationary orbit ("GEO").

4.3 South Korea

Beyond the aforementioned condemnation, the launch of *Malligyong-1* was followed by reactionary launches of spy satellites by South Korea in conjunction with SpaceX – nominally to track military activity and development in North Korea²⁵. This indicates the risk of a potential 'security dilemma' between the two parties; by chasing security for themselves through reactionary launches, each party's actions may invertedly be perceived as aggressive by the other. This has been reflected by the stark decline of inter-Korean relations since the launch; following the launch of the *Malligyong-1*, North Korea has officially changed its long-term stance on reunification and has declared it '*impossible*', with state organs ordered to officially cease any and all inter-Korean activities, including ceasing the Inter-Korean Military Agreement²⁶. It has also officially designated South Korea as a separate state, with which it is at war²⁷. This represents a sharp turn from the espoused ultimate goal of reunification, put forward by North Korea since its foundation.

²⁴ Minnie Chan, 'North Korea "Using Russian Satellite Navigation System for Missile Tests"', South China Morning Post, 18 January 2022, <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/military/article/3163727/north-korea-using-russian-satellite-navigation-system-instead>.

²⁵ Hyunsu Yim and Soo-Hyang Choi, 'South Korea Boosts Surveillance after North Launches Spy Satellite', *Reuters*, 22 November 2023, sec. Asia Pacific, <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/south-korea-suspend-part-military-pact-after-north-claims-spy-satellite-launch-2023-11-22/>; The Guardian, 'South Korea Launches First Military Spy Satellite, Intensifying Space Race with Pyongyang', *The Guardian*, 2 December 2023, sec. World news, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/dec/02/south-korea-launches-first-military-spy-satellite-intensifying-space-race-with-pyongyang>.

²⁶ Kelsey Davenport, 'North Korea Ends Inter-Korean Military Agreement | Arms Control Association - <https://www.Armscontrol.Org/Act/2024-01/News/North-Korea-Ends-Inter-Korean-Military-Agreement>', accessed 15 January 2024, <https://www.armscontrol.org/act/2024-01/news/north-korea-ends-inter-korean-military-agreement>.

²⁷ Jeongmin Kim, 'Why North Korea Declared Unification "Impossible," Abandoning Decades-Old Goal', NK News - North Korea News, 1 January 2024, <https://www.nknews.org/2024/01/why-north-korea-declared-unification-impossible-abandoning-decades-old-goal/>.



4.4 North Korea

Beyond this security implication, the *bona fides* granted by a successful space launch have provided North Korea with substantial leverage for future negotiations concerning sanctions relief. Previous diplomatic efforts by Western states and multinational institutions have focused on North Korea's nuclear weapons capabilities, which in turn have secured temporary sanctions relief without leading to a substantial impact on the DPRK's nuclear capabilities²⁸. Its establishment as a space actor, and thereby a potential state threat, may be leveraged by the DPRK in future to secure similar broader relief or recognition.

It is unclear to what extent Western powers and sanctioning institutions will be willing or able to provide North Korea with either the sanctions relief or legitimacy it may be seeking. Through the launch of *Malligyong-1*, North Korea's proselytisation of "*Juche*" - its official state policy of strategic self-reliance - may prove too effective. Through every success the DPRK earns comes with it further evidence that sanctions do not seemingly work to blunt North Korea's ambitions in regards to technological development²⁹. This is best reflected through the 'Singapore Summit' held between Kim Jong-Un and Donald Trump, which ultimately resulted in collapse without resolution; a lack of sincere belief in North Korea's willingness to adhere to international norms for the sake of sanctions relief may ultimately limit its ability to secure such in the international arena³⁰.

²⁸ Kenji Yoshida, 'Tae Yong-Ho on North Korea's Purposeful Aggression', 13 January 2024, <https://thediplomat.com/2024/01/tae-yong-ho-on-north-koreas-purposeful-aggression/>.

²⁹ David Brunnstrom, 'Sanctions Fail to Halt North Korea's Accelerating Weapons Programs', *Reuters*, 7 November 2022, sec. Asia Pacific,

<https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/sanctions-fail-halt-north-koreas-accelerating-weapons-programs-2022-11-04/>; Jiawen Chen, 'Why Economic Sanctions on North Korea Fail to Work?', *China Quarterly of International Strategic Studies* 03, no. 04 (January 2017): 513–34, <https://doi.org/10.1142/S237740017500300>.

³⁰ Edward Wong, 'Trump's Talks With Kim Jong-Un Collapse, and Both Sides Point Fingers', *The New York Times*, 28 February 2019, sec. World, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/02/28/world/asia/trump-kim-vietnam-summit.html>.



Section 5

Conclusion & Future Considerations

The *Malligyong-1* launch has secured North Korea's position as a state able to conduct successful satellite launches, and with it has opened the prospect of North Korean involvement in space as a domain of conflict. Whilst the capabilities of the reconnaissance satellite appear low, the state has made clear its intentions to launch further satellites into orbit over 2024³¹. Beyond being an impressive technological feat in its own right, its ability to have developed satellite capabilities paints a broader picture in regards to the efficacy of multinational sanctions against the state. However, whilst North Korean sanctions evasion techniques may render these sanctions somewhat ineffective in regards to mitigating North Korean technological ambitions, this may further serve to undermine Western confidence in North Korea's willingness to adhere to international agreements. As such, the successful launch of the *Malligyong-1* could lead to a pitch shift away from diplomacy with North Korea. The emergence of North Korea in the space domain also represents a potential threat; with only one satellite in orbit, North Korea is arguably now able to cause far more damage to other states than it would sustain itself were it to attack another satellite, and – at worst – prompt the Kessler Effect in LEO.

The launch also represents warming relations between Moscow and Pyongyang, alongside a sharp cooling of inter-Korean relations. As Russia's war in Ukraine drags on and North Korea continues to develop its satellite capabilities in spite of sanctions, it appears likely that continued trade between the two nations will serve to bolster each other's interests in these areas. Whilst it is uncertain for how long this may continue, North Korea's recently announced intentions for space – its desire to send North Korean rocketry to the Moon – may point to this partnership being of continued benefit for North Korea for the foreseeable future³².

The development of North Korea's satellite capabilities has provided the state with a new bargaining chip to negotiate with on the international stage. Its ability to use this effectively may depend on the outcome of the election 'Super Bowl' taking place in 2024³³.

³¹ Cynthia Kim, Josh Smith, and Jack Kim, 'North Korea to Launch New Satellites, Build Drones, Says War Inevitable', *Reuters*, 31 December 2023, sec. Asia Pacific, <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/north-korea-plans-launch-three-more-reconnaissance-satellites-2024-kcna-reports-2023-12-30/>.

³² Associated Press, 'North Korea Plans Moon Landing', 4 August 2016, sec. Space, <https://news.com.au/technology/science/space/north-korea-plans-moon-landing/news-story/23d8ea776a6b7d7add19bdabf9f3e957>.

³³ Simon Tisdall, 'Democracy's Super Bowl: 40 Elections That Will Shape Global Politics in 2024', *The Observer*, 17 December 2023, sec. World news,



Key elections – including that of the United States – are due to take place across the world, and the results of this are likely to indicate in what direction major powers are willing to negotiate with North Korea. Developments in this area are likely to be closely watched as a result – not least of all in Pyongyang.

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/dec/17/democracys-super-bowl-40-elections-that-will-shape-global-politics-in-2024>.



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