

# What is North Korea's Nuclear Strategy?



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# 3 Types of Nuclear Strategies

...according to Vipin Narang

1. Catalytic
    - Bring patron closer to nuclear-supplying client by
  2. Asymmetric Escalation
    - Nuclear first-use as way of de-escalation or political benefit
  3. Assured Retaliation
    - Deploy nuclear weapons to ensure ability to launch return strikes
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# North Korea's Nuclear Strategies...

## What Others Believe

### **Peacetime Strategy:** Asymmetric Escalation

- First-use strategy, if North Korea sees China as possible patron

### **Wartime Strategy:** Catalytic

- Scaring China to intervene on North Korea's behalf and join their side

## Opposing Arguments

- Track record of military posturing and lack of credible evidence
- Subvert goal of regime survival
- History of foreign policy independence from China
- Self-reliance ethos means unlikely to use strategy of dependence on China
- Strained relationship with China
- Security commitment is unreliable

# North Korea's Nuclear Strategies...

## What The Author Believes

### **Peacetime Strategy:** Assured Retaliation

- Return strikes against them

### **Wartime Strategy:** Asymmetric Escalation

- Use nuclear weapons to end conflict

## Reasoning

- During wartime, less restraint needed
- “Use or lose” incentive if regime change seems imminent
- End problem quickly—don't have capacity for sustained military campaign

# The US and North Korea

What should the US prepare for if North Korea adopts an **asymmetric escalation nuclear strategy**?

- Contingency plans
  - Scenario-based analyses with limited scope & objective
  - Factor in the likely trajectory of North Korea's nuclear/missile programs
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# Realistic Threat

- Currently, doesn't alter the situation in the region
- In early phases of testing (still several years of tests required)
- Question of submarine capability
- Gaining time to build up nuclear deterrent
- People want to believe the worst/extreme because North Korea is one of the few "closed places"



- Isn't joking about building up deterrent to protect itself
- With border close to Seoul, any action against North Korea would likely lead to Seoul's destruction
- Information from North Korea may come from people with an interest in shaping it
- Inherent unpredictability allows to manipulate other countries