

SWEDEN-DEMOCRATIC PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF KOREA DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS

Sweden is frequently referred to as the "**bridge to the West**" of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK, commonly referred to as North Korea) due to its **long-standing and reliable diplomatic presence in Pyongyang**. Sweden was the first Western country to open an embassy in the DPRK in 1975, and it is still one of the few European nations with a presence there. Using its historical neutrality and stable engagement with Pyongyang, **Sweden has taken on the crucial duty of promoting the interests of several countries involved in the security dynamics on the Korean Peninsula**, particularly the United States of America (USA) and the Republic of Korea (ROK, commonly referred to as South Korea).

BEFORE 1950

Before the 1950s, Sweden and the Korean Peninsula had shared nearly 200 years of informal contact. This includes exchanges between the two royal families and the discovery by then-Swedish Crown prince Gustav Adolf of the Seobongchong Gold Crown.



The Seobongchong Gold Crown

THE KOREAN WAR 1950-1953

On the appeal of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) on June 25, 1950, Sweden sent a medical mission to the port city Busan, comprising a field hospital. At least 69 documented DPRK soldiers received treatment from the Swedish medical mission.

NEUTRAL NATIONS SUPERVISORY COMMISSION

The Neutral Nations Supervisory Commission (NNSC) was one of the provisions included in the Armistice Agreement to oversee the agreement's execution and monitor the cease-fire. Sweden was selected to be one of the four nations in the Commission.



The first NNSC meeting 1 August 1953
Sources: nns-c-korea.org

RECOGNITION 1973

Sweden recognized the Democratic People's Republic of Korea on April 6, 1973, becoming **the first Western European country to do so**. It took Stockholm 16 years longer to recognize the DPRK, due in part to perceived external pressure from Washington and Seoul, which had a tough stance on third-party contacts with Pyongyang in the 1960s, as well as concerns about whether diplomatic recognition would negatively influence Sweden's NNSC mission.

DPRK EMBASSY IN STOCKHOLM 1974

Leading up to the DPRK opening its embassy in Sweden, Pyongyang first established in 1970 an information bureau in Stockholm which hosted cultural exhibitions. This office operated as a forerunner to a permanent embassy and was part of a **larger campaign to establish diplomatic legitimacy and economic access in Western Europe**. The information bureau operated for three years until it was upgraded to a full embassy in 1974, following the Swedish recognition and the establishment of diplomatic relations in 1973.

SWEDISH EMBASSY IN PYONGYANG 1975

The Swedish government established its own embassy in Pyongyang in February 1975. Erik Cornell, a Swedish diplomat, launched the embassy and served as its first charge d'affaires from 1975 until 1977. During his diplomatic assignment, he was tasked with, among other things, monitoring the **1974 Sweden-DPRK trade agreement**, in which Pyongyang had purchased mining equipment, industrial supplies, and **1,000 Volvo 144 sedans** from Swedish companies. Pyongyang has never paid Sweden the roughly USD 73 million, that the trade deal was worth at the time.



Volvo 144 sedans

SWEDEN AS PROTECTING POWER & DIPLOMATIC EFFORTS

Sweden has established itself as a reliable partner of the DPRK via ongoing engagement and constructive communication. Sweden's commitment has benefited other nations, particularly the U.S., by providing a key "window" into one of the world's most isolated countries. Furthermore, **Sweden as the protecting power of the U.S. has facilitated high-level dialogues between Washington and Pyongyang**, as well as ensured the release of several American citizens.

PROTECTING POWER

Sweden **officially became the United States' protecting power in the DPRK in 1995**, partly to provide a diplomatic "foothold" amid a period of intensified engagement. This occurred during the 1990s, when the U.S. was engaged in **intense negotiations over Pyongyang's nuclear program**. Due to the lack of formal diplomatic relations or embassy in Pyongyang, **the U.S. requested Sweden's aid in serving as a U.S. representative to help coordinate communication** and handle practical issues on the ground. **These negotiations later resulted in the 1994 Agreed Framework**. Today, Sweden also serves as a protecting power for Australia and Canada, and continues to serve as a communication bridge, relaying messages, proposals, and diplomatic efforts while reducing the risk of miscommunication and misunderstanding between the DPRK and the Western world.

SWEDEN AS PROTECTING POWER OF THE U.S.

1990s



2009



2018



2023

The U.S. government authorizes the Swedish Embassy in Pyongyang to handle consular issues for U.S. citizens

Sweden played an important intermediary role in the release of two American journalists detained in the DPRK

High-level diplomatic discussions took place in Stockholm, and were a crucial prelude to the 2018 Kim-Trump Summit

Swedish diplomats facilitated the negotiations that led to Private Travis King' release from the DPRK in September 2023

HIGH-LEVEL TALKS IN STOCKHOLM

- **March 15–18, 2018: Ri Yong-ho Visit Stockholm**

High-level diplomatic discussions took place in Stockholm, and were a crucial prelude to the historic summit between DPRK leader Kim Jong Un and U.S. President Donald Trump.

- **January 18–21, 2019: Trilateral Working-Level Talks**

In order to complete the "substance" of the second U.S.-DPRK summit, trilateral negotiations were a crucial "Track 1.5" diplomatic endeavor. Coordination for the Hanoi Summit was discussed.

- **October 4–5, 2019: U.S.-DPRK Negotiations after Hanoi Summit Collapse**

The talks were scheduled for two days but effectively collapsed after just 8.5 hours, due to disagreements regarding sanctions relief, security guarantees and the dismantlement of DPRK's nuclear sites. The collapse of the talks marked the end of working-level nuclear diplomacy between the Trump administration and Pyongyang in 2019.