



North Korea's Thermonuclear test and India's stand

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1 What is a Thermonuclear Test?

- A thermonuclear bomb – colloquially known as a hydrogen bomb – is essentially a two-stage explosion: one a nuclear fission reaction, the other a nuclear fusion reaction.
- What is the difference between fission and fusion?
 - In nuclear fission, the nucleus of an atom splits to produce two smaller elements, often releasing free subatomic particles and energy.
 - In nuclear fusion, two or more atomic nuclei come together and combine. In the process, some of their mass is converted into large amounts of energy. Fusion is the reaction that powers the sun.
- The initial explosion in a thermonuclear bomb is the fission reaction – think, a conventional nuclear bomb – that emits x-rays that cause the secondary explosion, triggered by the fusion of tritium and deuterium (two hydrogen isotopes). These two isotopes naturally repel each other, but the x-rays weaken this repellent force, causing the pair to fuse together. It is the fusion of these two isotopes that triggers the enormous energy release that makes thermonuclear explosions so destructive.

2 Present International deterrence and their effectiveness?

- The United Nations Security Council has adopted four major resolutions since 2006 that impose and strengthen sanctions on North Korea for continuing to develop its nuclear weapons program and call on Pyongyang to dismantle its nuclear program “in a complete, verifiable, and irreversible manner” and refrain from ballistic missile tests.
- North Korea is prohibited from such launches under previous UN Security Council Resolutions because the technology in a satellite launch vehicle has potential dual use applications to ballistic missile development.
- The Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) with its 183 signatories and 163 ratifications is one of the most widely supported arms-control treaties. This near universal support is due to the treaty’s non-discriminatory nature, where everyone has the same obligation never to conduct a nuclear explosion. The international condemnation of North Korea as the only country that has conducted nuclear tests in this millennium is a vivid illustration.
- After each of the North Korean nuclear tests, all CTBT State Signatories received the same high-quality information about the location, magnitude, depth and time of the event within hours of detection by the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty Organisation’s (CTBTO) system of monitoring stations.
- The January 6, 2016 ‘thermonuclear’ test by the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK) is the fourth in the series of nuclear tests beginning in 2006 in that reclusive country’s consistent quest to attain credible deterrence against the United States of America.

3 Global Reaction

- The UN Security Council condemned the nuclear test, declared that it is a ‘clear violation’ of its previous resolutions, and pledged to pursue new sanctions against North Korea.
- USA, South Korea and Japan have “agreed to work together to forge a united and strong international response to North Korea’s reckless behaviour.”
- Cheong Wa Dae, the South Korean President’s ‘Blue House’, exhorted the international community that it “must make sure that North Korea pays the corresponding price” for the nuclear test.
- In an angry reaction, Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe said that the test was “a serious threat to (Japan’s) security and absolutely cannot be tolerated.” He assured the Diet that Japan would deal with the situation firmly in co-operation with the UN Security Council which could include strengthening of the anti-missile defence systems protecting Japan from a North Korean attack.
- India’s official spokesman said on the day of the test that “(it is) a matter of deep concern that DPRK has again acted in violation of its international commitments.... Our concern about proliferation links between North East Asia and our neighbourhood are well known.”

North Korea – Addressing the proliferation related concerns, a DPRK official statement on 15 January assured that North Korea will not provide anyone with its nuclear weapons, transfer related technology or use its bombs ‘recklessly’. The statement added that the country will arm itself with the ability to attack and retaliate with nuclear bombs and the US should “get used to North Korea as a nuclear armed state.”

China’s Reaction

- Reacting to the nuclear test, Secretary of State John Kerry had urged China to end its “business as usual” approach towards North Korea. But China washed its hands off the problem, with its spokesperson Hua Chunying observing that “China is not the cause and crux of the Korean nuclear issue, nor is it the key to resolving the problem.”
- Nevertheless, the fact remains that only China is in a position to apply some credible pressure on North Korea since 88 per cent of North Korea’s foreign trade is with China.
- According to the South Koreans, China has been applying the existing UN sanctions against North Korea faithfully and the export of about 900 dual-use items has been prohibited to that country.
- In the midst of heightened rhetoric, on January 11, 2016, China called for “all relevant parties” to exercise restraint, referring to the flight of a nuclear capable US B-52 Bomber over South Korea and South Korea’s resumption of anti-Pyongyang loudspeaker broadcasts.
- China is comfortable with strategic ambiguity about the nuclear status of North Korea. But the insistence of an open declaration by the North of its Nuclear Weapon Power status would disrupt its strategic calculations in the region as the response from Japan could upset the regional power equation.

On January 13, in her New Year address to the nation, South Korean President Park Geun Hye sought to pressure China to join the efforts for UN Security Council action imposing harsher sanctions against North Korea. She said, “Unless its strong will is translated into actual necessary steps, we cannot prevent (North Korea’s) fifth and sixth nuclear tests, and cannot secure genuine peace and stability on the peninsula. I am sure China is well aware of this.” Seoul expects China to do more to denuclearise North Korea particularly in view of the rapidly warming ROK-China relations.

4 Way Forward

- Analysing the events of the past one year, it would be fair to conclude that North Korean leader Kim Jong Un has firm control over all the levers of power in North Korea, including the military.
- The peninsula would continue to be divided as neither side is keen on unification despite their public protestations in favour of reuniting the long-divided country.
- The paramount objective of the DPRK leadership continues to be the survival of the regime and its politico-economic system, and it is unlikely to allow tensions with South Korea or the United States to come to a point that would lead to hostilities.
- A strong international pressure by the allied countries like China is needed to control such rogue activities of North Korea. North Korea as a country needs more citizen friendly and progressive society. Any further hamper to the North Korea might create a civil war scenarios where large amount of refugees will flood China.

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