

Topic: Déjà vu on the Peninsula

No country has more influence over the rogue state of North Korea than **China**, which provides it with food, fuel and access to vital trade routes. Yet when North Korea conducted its **fifth and most powerful nuclear weapons test** on 9<sup>th</sup> Sep 2016, underscoring once again the failure of international efforts to halt the nuclear program — Beijing's response amounted to pap. In a statement, the Chinese foreign ministry expressed "**strong opposition**" to the test and reaffirmed its commitment to **denuclearizing the Korean Peninsula**. The foreign minister urged North Korea to "stop escalating" its provocative behavior and abide by **United Nations resolutions that forbid nuclear tests**.

Although China six months ago gave critical support for the toughest nuclear-related economic sanctions ever imposed on North Korea by the United Nations Security Council, recent reports from the border region show that trade continues and may even be booming because China has left open big loopholes. Researchers have found that the North's ability to procure components for its weapons program has actually improved. Beijing has long resisted severe sanctions, fearing they could lead to the collapse of the North and to a unified Korean Peninsula dominated by South Korea, an American ally. Some experts have suggested that **Kim Jong-un, North Korea's leader**, conducted the test because he had no reason to fear Chinese retaliation.

**So now China's ambivalence has led to this crisis:** North Korea has enough fissile material for perhaps as many as **21 nuclear bombs** and, after a flurry of missile tests, is approaching the day when it can produce a **warhead small enough to fit on a missile and threaten the United States** as well as **American allies** in the region. With each advance of the North's nuclear capability, the solution to the threat gets harder and more elusive. For a long time, it was widely assumed that North Korea pursued nuclear weapons to ensure its survival as a state. Now, some experts suspect that **Mr. Kim is preparing to fight and win a limited nuclear war**. It was because of this growing threat that the **United States and South Korea agreed recently to deploy an American-made advanced missile defense system in South Korea to protect against a North Korean attack**. That decision, which has angered China, makes it harder for Americans and the Chinese to cooperate on North Korea.

President Obama called for vigorous implementation of existing sanctions and the imposition of new ones. It's hard to be optimistic. **Success** will depend on **China's cooperation in cutting off** trade to the North. That is unlikely, even though it should be obvious to Beijing that allowing North Korea's nuclear program to continue is a **real threat to China** and its interests in the region. The United States has its own options, like working with allies to block shipping in and out of North Korea or cutting off access to banks, but such steps would pose their own risks. Beyond sanctions, any lasting solution will almost certainly require some kind of negotiations, though Republicans in Congress are certain to resist such a move. The Kim government issued a statement in July that some viewed as an overture for starting talks. Most experts say the only realistic goal at this point is **a halt to the North's nuclear and missile testing**, not an abandonment of the entire program. Since far too little has been done to contain North Korea's nuclear ambitions in the past decade, this accelerating threat will require the urgent attention of Mr. Obama's successor.

Topic  
Introduction

**World leaders also condemned the test**, saying it was a clear violation of UN Security Council resolutions. The Security Council met and "strongly condemned" the test as "**a clear threat to international peace and security.**" U.S. President Barack Obama warned North Korea that it will face "**consequences to its unlawful and dangerous actions.**" Obama said he spoke to the leaders of South Korea and Japan by phone, and that they agreed to "take additional significant steps, including new sanctions." "To be clear, the United States does not and never will, accept North Korea as a nuclear state," Obama said in a statement. The blast, detected about 9 a.m. local time (8:30 p.m. ET) in the area of North Korea's **Punggye-ri** underground test site, is estimated to have had the **explosive power of 10 kilotons**, almost **twice as large as the most recent test in January**, said Kim Nam-wook of South Korea's Meteorological Administration. The test comes on North Korea's national day, and six months after it claimed it had miniaturized nuclear warheads to fit on ballistic missiles. At the same time, South Korea is negotiating an expected deployment of a US missile defense system -- a plan that Pyongyang has decried as provocative. **South Korean President Park Geun-hye** called Kim Jong Un's regime "**fanatically reckless.**" "The only thing that (the) Kim Jong Un regime can gain from the nuclear tests is stronger sanctions from the international community and its isolation. Such provocation will eventually hasten its path to self-destruction," she said in a statement. **Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe** told reporters that it was "**absolutely unacceptable**" if North Korea had conducted another nuclear test.

### **Earlier tests and sanctions**

North Korea announced that it conducted its fifth nuclear test. Here's a look at each of its attempts to join the nuclear weapons club:

**Oct. 9, 2006:** After years of saying it could do so, North Korea **became the ninth country** to test a nuclear weapon. Like all its tests, it took place in underground tunnels in a remote, mountainous region. Experts estimated the plutonium explosion measured **less than 1 kiloton**, or approximately one-tenth the size of the atomic bomb the U.S. dropped on Hiroshima in 1945. Although the test was described by international monitors as a "**fizzle,**" it prompted the United Nations Security Council to impose economic sanctions on North Korea.

**May 25, 2009:** Its second nuclear test took place when President Obama was in office for just four months. The test was immediately hailed by North Korea's state news agency as a "new higher level in terms of its explosive power and technology of its control." Its estimated explosive yield was **2 to 8 kilotons**. A month earlier, the communist nation launched a satellite into space that many viewed as an attempt to demonstrate it would soon be capable of striking the U.S. with a long-range missile. The U.N. Security Council responded by imposing fresh sanctions that banned all weapons exports from North Korea and all imports apart from small arms.

**Feb. 13, 2013:** For the first time, North Korea alleged that it conducted a successful nuclear test using a **uranium-enriched device**. Although never confirmed, it marked a potentially dangerous new development for its nuclear ambitions because it meant scientists may have learned how to miniaturize bombs that could be placed atop long-range missiles. The use of uranium would also allow North Korea to stockpile bombs, not possible with plutonium because of its limited supply. **The Security Council, which had banned satellite launches in December 2012**, added a fourth resolution that expanded rights to inspect cargo ships and further restricted North Korea's financial transactions.

**Jan. 6, 2016:** North Korea announced it had successfully tested **its first hydrogen bomb**, a much more powerful device. But the U.S. and other governments have doubted that claim. Experts aren't sure whether the device was miniaturized. The ability to detonate a hydrogen bomb is a great concern because they unleash massive amounts of energy by using nuclear fusion. An H-bomb uses an **atomic (fission) bomb** as a trigger. Sanctions were expanded to include individual diplomats, companies and institutions. The U.N. Security Council also banned countries from supplying aviation fuel and other bomb-producing natural resources to North Korea. The sanctions were bolstered by support from China, North Korea's economic lifeline.

**Sept. 9, 2016:** North Korea's fifth test reflected its determination to be a nuclear-armed country despite ever tougher sanctions. North Korea said the latest test is of a nuclear warhead designed to be mounted on ballistic missiles. That claim was not immediately verified as accurate. It drew a strong rebuke from ally China, which said it would protest the test with North Korea's ambassador in Beijing. **The U.S. called the test “yet another flagrant violation” of sanctions resolutions as well as a “serious provocation.”**

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