

# Why India should be worried

New Delhi needs to closely monitor for links between North Korea and Pakistan given that the bond could adversely affect its security.

By Arun Vishwanathan and S Chandrashekar

North Korea is great at making news. Given that it is the only country to test nuclear weapons in this century, it does not have to try too hard. Just as the world was getting over the euphoria of ringing in the New Year, North Korea conducted its fourth nuclear test on January 6, 2016.

The nuclear test created an earthquake with a seismic magnitude of 4.85 on the Richter scale and was immediately detected by the seismic monitoring stations of the Preparatory Commission of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty Organisation's (CTBTO).

Pyongyang claimed that it had successfully tested a small H-bomb. If true, a successful test of a thermonuclear device signals a significant augmentation of the North Korean nuclear arsenal. A first cut analysis of the seismic data points to the likelihood that North Korea tested a fission device. A thermonuclear test will generally result in a much larger earthquake with magnitude measuring over 6.3 on the Richter scale.

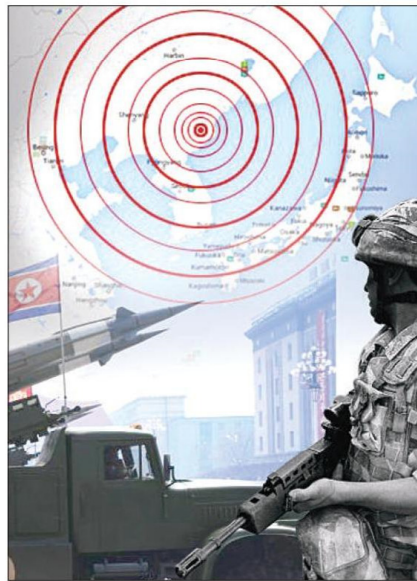
Definitive proof about the device tested will be available in the next few weeks following analysis of the fission products released by the nuclear test by the CTBTO's radionuclide monitoring stations located in South Korea, Japan, China and Russia. However, given the difficulty in detecting Xenon and Argon, it may not be easy to conclusively establish whether a thermonuclear device was actually tested.

North Korea is not in India's immediate neighbourhood. In a sense therefore the test does not pose an immediate danger to India. However, North Korea's missile and nuclear weapon proliferation record is worrisome to say the least. This concern arises from the strong historical links between North Korea and Pakistan in the areas of nuclear weapons and missiles.

Pyongyang is known to have transferred missile and nuclear technologies to Pakistan, Iran, Egypt, Libya and Syria. There is hard evidence to establish clear links between Pakistan and North Korea in the area of missiles. Analysis by Bengaluru's National Institute of Advanced

Studies (NIAS) of the liquid-fuelled North Korean Nodong missile and the Pakistan Ghauri missile clearly establishes that Ghauri is an exact copy of the Nodong missile.

In recent years, Pakistan has been actively pursuing the plutonium path for miniaturising its nuclear warheads for fitting them into various tactical missiles. However, since Islamabad tested only uranium fuelled weapons in 1998, its claims of miniaturising a nuclear warhead to fit on its Nasr battlefield missile lacks credibility.



Keeping these facts in mind, one way to interpret the North Korean tests is to view them as surrogate tests conducted by North Korea for Pakistan. By sharing its test data with Pakistan, it may be able to contribute in a significant way to the Pakistani miniaturisation programme for its battlefield nuclear weapons. This will also make Pakistani claims of a successful miniaturisation programme more credible to the international community and to India.

The North Korean nuclear programme is intrinsically linked to the continued survival of the Kim dynastic rule. As far as the timing of January 2016 nuclear test goes, domestic politics holds the key. The January nuclear test is in the run-up to the seventh Congress of the Worker's Party of Korea slated to be held in May 2016 and provides an opportunity to ruler Kim Jong-Un to strengthen his hold over the country's political and military leadership.

Repeated testing and analysis of the data gathered from the tests is crucial for carrying out improvements in any technology. With four nuclear tests, three of which were successful, North Korea will be in a much better position to begin miniaturisation of its nuclear

warheads. With a modification of the three-stage Unha-3 space launch vehicle into a long-range ballistic missile, North Korea will be able to fit a 1000 kg nuclear warhead on the missile.

## Warhead capacity

Analysis carried out by the Quo Vadis trajectory software developed at NIAS brings out the fact that such a missile can carry out a nuclear strike on Alaska and parts of northern Canada. Further reduction of the weight of the warhead to 800 kg will enable the missile to target parts of western United States including California.

International responses to the North Korean nuclear and missile programme have been weak and ineffective. The Obama administration has largely ignored developments in North-East Asia given its focus on the Iranian nuclear programme, American withdrawal from wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and more recently on the crises engulfing West Asia. This has left China with a more important role in defusing the crisis.

Beijing has historically looked at Pyongyang as a buffer state and as a lever to exercise its influence over the China-Korea-US trilateral relationship. China has been reluctant to support any strong sanctions by the United Nations Security Council because of its fears that such actions could hasten the collapse of the Kim regime and result in influx of millions of refugees across the North Korea-Chinese borders. The test however casts serious doubts on China's ability to control its recalcitrant neighbour. This weakening of its position may make China more amenable for stronger international action against North Korea.

The growing North Korean nuclear and missile capabilities have raised hackles in Seoul and Tokyo and could well result in an arms race in the Korean peninsula. In case North Korea develops the capability to target the American mainland in the next few years, South Korea and Japan will begin to have doubts about American extended deterrence in East Asia.

It is therefore crucial that the international community moves beyond its usual round of statements criticising the North Korea nuclear test and takes hard measures, beginning with strong economic sanctions, which could make Pyongyang come to the negotiating table. New Delhi needs to monitor the development closely for links between North Korea and Pakistan given that the relationship could adversely affect India's security.

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