



THE NORTH KOREAN NUCLEAR CRISIS – NO END IN SIGHT

Hina Pandey
Associate Fellow, CAPS

Keywords: North Korea, Nuclear Weapons, Nuclear crisis, Engaging Pyongyang, Nuclear Proliferation

These days North Korea is in the 'spotlight' for being the epicenter of the nuclear crisis- that almost had the whole world apprehending about a possible 'war on the Korean Peninsula'.¹ The recent crisis owes its origin to the sixth nuclear test that was conducted by the Jong Un regime on 03th September 2017 –which is claimed to be a hydrogen bomb. It is noteworthy that this test was reported as one of the most powerful nuclear tests by the country with a possible 100-kiloton yield. Korea's leadership views this as a response to the US-South Korea annual joint military exercises conducted early this year. In fact, in the last two months, tensions have escalated between the US and North Korea to an extent that the war of words has transcended from "Pyongyang would be met with *fire and fury like never before...*"², to send the B2 bombers, on the American side. Similarly, on the other end of the spectrum, North Korea too, has been conducting evacuation drills and blackout exercises.³

It is essential at this stage that, the crisis must be resolved, especially in the wake of ineffective sanctions and repeated failure of talks; however there are only limited roles that countries may play. The United States' idea of engaging the country is becoming increasingly military. Furthermore, the US has ruled out any possibility of direct negotiations. It is well established that the diplomatic option would be most preferred as all the other big powers still prefer a diplomatic solution. Though Russia views the situation with great concern, it however, is unlikely to be an American ally on this matter and in fact sympathizes with the view that, "nuclear weapons and the WMDs are the only means of protection from the US."⁴ The Chinese role has been explored before. While the US emphasizes China's role in resolving the crisis, it must be recognised that some of the Chinese companies have been reported to be involved in export of sensitive material to North Korea including , ' items being an integral part of

the hydrogen bomb test conducted by Pyongyang'.⁵ While the EU is willing to play a constructive role, its ability to use the back channels with North Korea is reduced to only medium-ranking foreign ministry officials attending the meetings.⁶ Most importantly it is not certain if North Korea would view EU's role as a spokesperson for American interests.

It is rather surprising to note as to how countries that desire to resolve the crisis have failed to take note that an innovative solution is required. The country has been advancing its nuclear weapons capability for regime survival despite being internationally isolated. No confidence building measures including inducements in exchange of freezes have worked in case of North Korea, yet many in the US argue that compelling the country to "make a stark choice between regime survival and nuclear weapons is the best way forward"⁷.

As far as India is concerned, the country has categorically criticised Pyongyang's nuclear tests and exhorted the country to live up to its non-proliferation commitments. In recent times too, India had stated that it "deplored"⁸ the latest nuclear test that was said to have given North Korea the thermonuclear capability. It had called upon North Korea to refrain from such action.

However, India has refused to close its embassy in North Korea and conveyed to the US that "some level of diplomatic presence was necessary to keep open channels of

communication"⁹. In-fact to this statement the US too had indicated the Indian office might have some value to the US as a conduit for communications. It may be noted that India actually shares a practical relationship with North Korea. While it does not support its nuclear ambitions, it has provided humanitarian help in the form of medical and food supplies. In recent years, the bilateral relations have been steady. When the DPRK Foreign Minister visited India two years ago (2015), he expressed a desire to have a greater economic exchange between the two countries¹⁰ This will, however, be possible if North Korea were to act in such a manner as to have the sanctions removed from itself.

(Disclaimer: The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the position of the Centre for Air Power Studies [CAPS])

Notes

¹ "North Korea Nuclear Crisis: Kim Jong-Un 'Begging For War" , *BBC News*, September 05, 2017, Available at <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-41155506>, Accessed on October 30, 2017

² "Trump Vows To Unleash 'Fire And Fury" , *BBC*, August 08, 2017, Available at <http://www.bbc.com/news/av/40857783/trump-north-korea-threats-will-be-met-with-fire-and-fury>, Accessed on October 30, 2017 and James Griffiths and Brad Lendon (2017), "US Warns Of N Korean 'Provocations' As It Sends Bombers, Carriers To Region, "Available at <http://www.kabc.com/2017/10/30/us-warns-of-n-korean-provocations-as-it-sends-bombers-carriers-to-region/>

³ North Korea Reportedly Conducting Nuclear War Safety Drills, *Fox News*, October 29, 2017, Available at <http://nypost.com/2017/10/29/north-korea-reportedly-conducting-nuclear-war-safety-drills/>, Accessed on October 30, 2017

⁴ Zack Beauchamp, (2017) "Here's Vladimir Putin's Weirdly On-Point Analysis of North Korea", Available at <https://www.vox.com/world/2017/9/8/16276122/north-korea-putin-trump-comments>, Accessed on 30 October 2017.

⁵ Prabha Rao, (2017) "How North Korea was Armed", *IDSA Issue Brief*, October 30, 2017, Available at https://idsa.in/issuebrief/how-north-korea-was-armed_prao_301017, Accessed on October 30, 2017

⁶ Robin Emott, (9 October 2017), "EU's Diplomatic Back Channel In Pyongyang Goes Cold", *Reuters*, October 03, 2017, Available at <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-northkorea-missiles-eu/eus-diplomatic-back-channel-in-pyongyang-goes-cold-idUSKCN1C81SM>, Accessed on 31 October 2017.

⁷ Wendy Sherman And Evans Revere, "How To Stop Kim Jong Un", *Time*, <http://time.com/north-korea-opinion/>, Accessed on 31 October 2017,

⁸ AninditaSanyal, (2017), "After North Korea's Big Nuclear Test, A Sharp Response From India", *NDTV*, September 04, 2017, Available at <https://www.ndtv.com/india-news/india-says-it-deplores-the-nuclear-test-conducted-by-north-korea-1745533>, Accessed on 30 October, 2017.

⁹ Could India-North Korea ties be of value to US? Secretary of State Rex Tillerson answers, *Times of India*, October 27, 2017, <http://indiatoday.intoday.in/story/india-north-korea-ties-us-rex-tillerson-sushma-swaraj-conduit-for-communications/1/1076479.html>, Accessed on October 30, 2017

¹⁰ Indo-North Korea Ties, Lok Sabha, Q No.1617 Indo-North Korea Ties, Available at <http://www.mea.gov.in/lok-sabha.htm?dtl/26134/q+no1617+indonorth+korea+ties>, Accessed on 31 October 2017.