

Up in arms: nuclear weapons and north korea

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Nuclear weapons are not merely explosive devices that release an enormous amount of energy through the fusion or fission of atomic nuclei, but the issue of producing and researching it involves a more complex threat. Originally developed for use in World War II (1939-45), these nuclear weapons are among modern warfare's most lethal and destructive weapons. These could decimate cities in seconds and the destruction would advance throughout many years as people affected by it will suffer various diseases. Thus, the issue of nuclear weapons indeed encompass strategic, political and cultural dimensions as these are instruments that pose a global threat.

Around the world, there exists a growing clamor that it is not enough merely to reduce the number of nuclear weapons in the world. People call for the total elimination of nuclear weapons. Members of the peace movement have long opposed nuclear weapons on the moral grounds that they have the potential to destroy mankind. For that obvious reason, nuclear arms should not be manufactured, tested or used, and those remaining should be destroyed. Surprisingly, calls for the complete abolition of nuclear arms have come from different quarters, even from a group of former high-ranking military officers.

Just recently, North Korea had been embroiled in this controversy when it insisted that they would never dismantle its nuclear program, while the United States maintained a "hostile" policy toward the country this year.

If we look into its history, nuclear weapons and Korea have been entwined for more than 50 years. During the Korean War (1950-1953), the United States threatened several times to use nuclear weapons. This is the reason

why the U. S. military forces remained in South Korea (the Republic of Korea). The United States began deploying several types of nuclear weapons to the South in January 1958, a time of extensive worldwide U. S. nuclear deployments. Initially, four different kinds of nuclear weapons were introduced with U. S. Army forces in South Korea: the Honest John surface-to-surface missile, the massive 280-millimeter gun, the 8-inch artillery shell, and atomic demolition munitions (ADMs) (Mack, 1994).

However, North Korea is widely believed to have produced and separated enough plutonium for a small number of nuclear warheads. Most or all of the plutonium came from the 5-MWe reactor at Yongbyon, which went critical on August 14, 1985, and became operational the following January. The U. S. intelligence community believes that during a 70-day shutdown in 1989, North Korea secretly removed fuel from the reactor and separated the plutonium. Estimates vary as to how much plutonium was obtained.

The State Department believes about 6-8 kilograms; the CIA and Defense Intelligence Agency say 8-9 kilograms, an estimate consistent with the careful analysis of the Institute for Science and International Security. South Korean, Japanese, and Russian analysts have made much higher estimates, ranging up to 24 kilograms (Albright and Higgins, 2002).

What is incredible with this issue is that North Korea never admitted it possessed nuclear weapons, but it appears likely that it does. NBC Nightly News reported in 1993 that reprocessed plutonium had already been converted from a liquid form to metal, and several U. S. officials concluded that Pyongyang had made it into a bomb.

In November 2002, the CIA went further than its previous estimates, stating, “ The United States has been concerned about North Korea's desire for nuclear weapons and has assessed since the early 1990s that the North has one or possibly two weapons using plutonium it produced prior to 1992” (Norris, Kristensen and Handler, March/April 2003).

By August 2005, the issue of nuclear proliferation on the Korean peninsula continued to dominate the political landscape. Talks between North Korea and the United States had met with little success, with no narrowing of the gap between those two countries on North Korea’s peaceful use of nuclear energy.

The United States continued to insist that all of North Korea’s nuclear facilities had to be dismantled while North Koreans insisted that they had the right to conduct peaceful nuclear activities. Indeed, North Korean chief delegate Kim Kye-gwan rhetorically asked, “ We are not a defeated nation in war, and we have committed no crime, so why should we not be able to conduct peaceful nuclear activities?” (BBC News, 5 August 2006).

With this, several countries warned North Korea that launching a missile would yield undesirable results. Notably, Japanese Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi advised North Korea against test-firing the missile saying, “ Japan has been urging North Korea to stop the attempt to launch a missile. We are making efforts to urge North Korea to act rationally and with self-restraint”. He went on to warn, “ If it does not listen to us and fires a missile, we have to consult with the United States and take stern measures “.

Moreover, the United States Department of State reacted to the launch of the North Korea's missile Taepodon-2 as a "provocative" and attention-seeking act. White House press secretary, Tony Snow, said that President George W. Bush was consulting with Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, National Security Adviser Stephen Hadley and Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld on the matter. Secretary Rice called on North Korea to return to the multilateral discussion table (Associated Press, 19 June 2006).

For its part, North Korea confirmed that it had test-fired a series of missiles and that further missile tests would be launched. North Korean officials also warned that they would react strongly to punitive pressures from the international community. Furthermore, North Korea defiantly defended its right to launch the missiles, saying that it was a matter of national sovereignty. That said, geopolitical analysts observed that North Korea's latest moves may have been made for strategic reasons rather than simply as an act of national sovereignty. With the seemingly stubborn stance of North Korea, the United Nations Security Council unanimously approved Resolution 1718 on October 14, 2006.

The resolution called for the inspections on cargo going to and from North Korea to search for weapons, a ban on the sale or transfer of materials related to North Korea's unconventional weapons program, and a freeze on the transfer of funds connected with North Korea's nuclear and ballistic missile programs (The Economist 21 October 2006). Absent from Resolution 1718 was the Chapter Seven [of the United Nations charter] provision, which would enforce the sanctions via military force. Even though the resolution was approved by the United Nations Security Council and welcomed by the <https://assignbuster.com/up-in-arms-nuclear-weapons-and-north-korea/>

international community, total agreement on the matter of North Korea remained distant (Arms Control Today Magazine, November 2006).

With these turn of events, we could clearly point out how nuclear weapons became a strategic instrument of North Korea to defy the will of the international community. North Korea is flexing its military capabilities by showing off its nuclear weapons. This underscored the need for the nations to begin disarming as soon as possible. North Korea may have felt an ominous threat that they decided they must acquire nuclear weapons in order to “ catch up” to and achieve equal status with a military giant like the United States.

However, their intentions were not well-received by their neighbours because North Korea became a “ threat” itself when it decided to push with their nuclear missile tests. Moreover, the international community is frowning upon the real intentions of these “ tests”, whether North Korea is just out to protect itself or is it a tactical plan to scare off their neighbours by virtually stating “ Don’t mess up with us, or else...” Thus, these strategic moves by North Korea effectively served to further isolate the country and confirm its pariah status within the international community.

As we all know, the effect of nuclear weapons is not limited to political and social relations. According to Frey (2003), it is undeniable that nuclear weapons cause destruction in a number of different ways. They create temperatures upon explosion that are, at least initially, millions of degrees hot. Some of their first effects are heat effects, and materials are often incinerated on contact.

The heat from the blast also causes rapid expansion of air, resulting in very high winds that can blow over buildings and other structures. A weapon blast also releases high levels of radiation, such as neutrons, x-rays, and gamma rays. Humans and other animals close to the centre of the blast suffer illness and death from radiation exposure. The set of symptoms associated with such exposure is known as radiation sickness. Many individuals who survive radiation sickness eventually develop cancer and their offspring frequently suffer genetic damage. Finally, a weapon's blast releases huge amounts of radioactive materials. Some of these materials settle out of the atmosphere almost immediately, creating widespread contamination. Others remain in the atmosphere for weeks or months, resulting in long-term radioactive fallout.

In the final analysis, the impending danger of the nuclear testing that North Korea is undertaking could be an ominous phenomenon for all of us. As the scenarios above have explained, nuclear weapons encompass strategic, political and cultural dimensions of whether these harmful military arsenals need to be maintained. Experts have already cited that the continued production of nuclear weapons must be halted soon or civilization itself will be imperilled.

On the contrary, some military experts disagree, arguing that the existence of sophisticated nuclear weapons is a deterrent to nuclear war, even urging that nations should be ready to use nuclear weapons first, if necessary. In studying the complex issue of nuclear weapons, people should take a closer look at the extent of the nuclear danger facing the world today and debate the best methods for enhancing nuclear security. A “ win-win” solution

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should be drafted so that the greater good of humanity comes in first, before any strategic or political agenda of any organization or nation.

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