



Center for Nonproliferation Studies
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North Korea Conducts Nuclear Test¹

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On October 9, 2006, North Korea's Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) announced that the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) "successfully conducted an underground nuclear test...at a stirring time when all the people of the country are making a great leap forward in the building of a great prosperous powerful socialist nation."

According to the statement, no radioactive fallout was vented from the test, and North Korean scientists and engineers constructed the device and conducted the test without foreign assistance. The report also claimed the test would contribute to the peace and security on the Korean peninsula and the region.² Pak Kil-yŏn, the DPRK's representative to the United Nations, said he was "proud of the successful nuclear test and the UN Security Council should congratulate North Korean scientists and researchers rather than waste its time adopting vicious, useless and harsh resolution."³

Technical Assessments of the Test

There have been conflicting reports regarding the location of the test and the yield of the blast. The Korea Institute of Geoscience and Mineral Resources in South Korea reported a seismic event at 10:35 AM Korea time with a magnitude of 3.58 on the Richter scale.

According to the institute, the explosion was located in the vicinity of Musudan-ri, North

¹ This report was produced by the East Asia Nonproliferation Program with support from the Korea Foundation.

² "DPRK Successfully Conducts Underground Nuclear Test," Korean Central News Agency (KCNA), October 9, 2006, <http://www.kcna.co.jp>; "Chihahaeksilhŏm sŏnggong [Underground nuclear test successful]," KCNA, October 9, 2006, <http://www.kcna.co.jp>. A Korean version of the statement is also available at "Puk 'haeksilhŏm' palpyo chungangt'ongsin podo[North's 'Nuclear Test' Announcement; Central News Agency Report]," *Chosun Ilbo*, October 9, 2006, <http://nk.chosun.com>.

³ "Pak Kil-yŏn 'anbirido pukhaeksilhŏm sŏnggong ch'ukha haeya' [Pak Kil-yŏn, 'the security council also has to congratulate the successful nuclear test]," Yonhap News Agency, October 10, 2006, <http://www.yonhapnews.co.kr>.

Hamgyŏng Province and was equivalent to 400-500 tons of TNT, with an upper bound of 800 tons. However, the institute was unable to determine whether the blast was a result of a conventional or nuclear explosion.⁴ South Korea's Ministry of Science and Technology later revised the magnitude to 3.9⁵ and the National Intelligence Service claimed the test was conducted at Sangp'yŏng-ri, North Hamgyŏng Province, about 15 km from the municipality of Kimch'aek (40.81°N, 129.01°E).⁶ The U.S. Geological Survey assessed the magnitude as 4.2, but so far Russian Defense Minister Sergei Ivanov is the only significant authority to insist the event was definitely a nuclear explosion. According to Ivanov, the yield was equivalent to between 5,000 and 15,000 tons of TNT.⁷

The Japan Meteorological Agency (JMA) reported on October 9th that it detected a tremor in northeastern North Korea, an area where earthquakes rarely occur.⁸ The JMA estimated the seismic event occurred at about 10:35 AM local time at 41.2°N and 129.2°E with a magnitude of 4.9. However, the JMA was unable to determine whether the tremor was caused by a nuclear or conventional explosion and the agency said it would take several days to analyze the data.⁹

The Institute of Seismology and Volcanology at Japan's Kyushu University reported the event occurred at 40.4°N and 129.8°E with a magnitude of 4.4. Kyushu University Professor Takeshi Matsushima concluded that the event was artificial because the institute was unable to detect significant S-waves, which are produced by natural earthquakes.¹⁰ In

⁴ Mun Chŏng-sŏn and Kim Sang-hyŏn, "Chijiljawŏn'yŏn, 'puk chijinp'a in'gongjijin hwaksil' [Korea Institute of Geoscience & Mineral Resources 'North's tremor definitely artificial]," *Taedŏk Net*, October 9, 2006, <http://www.hellodd.com>.

⁵ "Kwagibu 'pukhaeksilhŏm chindogyumo 3.9 ro sanghyang' [MOST 'magnitude of North's nuclear test revised upward to 3.9]," *Chosun Ilbo*, October 10, 2006, <http://nk.chosun.com>.

⁶ Kim Nam-kwŏn and Yi Sŏng-u, "Kukchŏng'wŏn 'P'unggye-ri husok haeksilhŏm kanŏngsŏng chusi' [NIS 'watching for follow up nuclear tests in P'unggye-ri]," Yonhap News Agency, October 9, 2006, <http://www.yonhapnews.co.kr>.

⁷ Anthony Faiola, Glenn Kessler and Dafna Linzer, "N. Korea Claims Nuclear Test," *Washington Post*, October 9, 2006, <http://www.washingtonpost.com>.

⁸ Japan Meteorological Agency, Press Release, October 9, 2006, "Kita Chosen Kanren no Jishin Hakei Bunseki Kekka [Analysis of Seismic Waves about North Korea]," <http://www.jma.go.jp/jma/index.html>.

⁹ "Kaku Bakuhatu 'Hiroshima Gata no Subun no 1'...Todai Jishinken ga Bunseki [Nuclear Explosion 'Less Than One Fifth of Hiroshima-type Nuclear Bomb'...Analyzed by Earthquake Research Institute of the University of Tokyo]," *Yomiuri Shimbun*, October 9, 2006, <http://www.yomiuri.co.jp>.

¹⁰ "2006 Nen 10 Gatsu 9 Nichi ni Kansoku Sareta Kita Chosen wo Shingen to suru Hakei ni Tsuite [Analysis about Seismic Waves Occurred in North Korea Area Observed on October 9, 2006]," Institute of Seismology and Volcanology, Kyushu University, Press Release, October 9, 2006, <http://www.sevo.kyushu-u.ac.jp>; See

terms of yield, Japanese specialists estimated the blast to be small. Tokyo University Professor of Seismology Katsuyuki Abe estimated the yield to be between 0.5 and 3.0 kilotons of TNT, and Professor Matsushima estimated the yield to be equivalent to 250 tons TNT.¹¹

Reactions from Major Actors

The United States

The U.S. government reacted quickly to North Korea's claim that it had successfully tested a nuclear device. According to news reports, Chinese authorities warned their U.S. counterparts of the impending nuclear test shortly before it occurred; China had reportedly been given notice by North Korea about 20 minutes before the test.¹² While cautioning that U.S. authorities were still confirming the validity of North Korea's claim, U.S. President George W. Bush told reporters early Monday, October 9, that Pyongyang's move "constituted a threat to international peace and security" and called it a "provocative act." Bush continued that North Korea had once again "defied the will of the international community, and the international community will respond." Pointing to one of the U.S. government's key concerns about the DPRK's nuclear program, Bush stated that the "transfer of nuclear weapons or materials by North Korea to states or non-state entities would be considered a grave threat to the United States."¹³

Media reports have indicated that U.S. officials are discussing further economic sanctions against Pyongyang, with more voices calling on North Korea's neighbors (China, Russia and South Korea) to cut off all economic assistance.¹⁴ The use of force appears to be off the table, as most experts agree that military action would be an impractical way of dealing

also "Seismic Wave from N. Korea's Nuclear Test Observed in Japan," *Mainichi Shimbun*, October 9, 2006, <http://mdn.mainichi-msn.co.jp/index.html>.

¹¹ "Kaku Bakuhatu 'Hiroshima Gata no Subun no 1' ... Todai Jishinken ga Bunseki [Nuclear Explosion 'Less Than One Fifth of Hiroshima-type Nuclear Bomb' ... Analyzed by Earthquake Research Institute of the University of Tokyo]," *Yomiuri Shimbun*, October 9, 2006, <http://www.yomiuri.co.jp>.

¹² Anthony Faiola, Glenn Kessler and Dafna Linzer, "N. Korea Claims Nuclear Test," *Washington Post*, October 9, 2006, <http://www.washingtonpost.com>.

¹³ "President Bush's Statement on North Korea Nuclear Test," White House, Office of the Press Secretary, October 9, 2006, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2006/10/20061009.html>.

¹⁴ David E. Sanger, "North Koreans Say They Tested Nuclear Device," *New York Times*, October 9, 2006, <http://www.nytimes.com>.

with North Korea's nuclear brinkmanship. However, the U.S. government will likely increase naval patrols in the waters near North Korea and could interdict North Korean ships under the auspices of the Proliferation Security Initiative.¹⁵

Speaking after the initial October 9th meeting of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), John Bolton, U.S. Ambassador to the UN, noted that North Korea had defied the will of the UNSC, which on October 6, 2006 unanimously called on Pyongyang not to undertake its threatened nuclear test.¹⁶ According to Bolton's statement, the United States was seeking sanctions under Chapter 7 of the UN Charter that would go beyond those of UNSC Resolution 1695.¹⁷ Bolton also said that the UNSC had shown significant unanimity on the draft proposal that the U.S. delegation had circulated in response to the North Korean test.¹⁸ Press reports indicate that the draft proposal builds upon the earlier UN sanctions against North Korea, including: the barring of trade in WMD-related materials; inspections of all cargo going in and out of North Korea; banning of financial transactions used to support nuclear proliferation; and a ban on the import of luxury items.¹⁹

China

China's Foreign Ministry has issued its strongest rebuke in years, calling North Korea's action defiance of the international community and a "brazen" act that Beijing strongly condemns. Meanwhile, Beijing warned Pyongyang to restrain itself from actions that could further escalate the situation, and urged the DPRK to return to the Six-Party Talks.²⁰ This

¹⁵ For an analysis of this issue, see Guy Dinmore, "Bush Has Limited Options in Dealing with N Korea," *Financial Times* (online edition), October 9, 2006, <http://www.ft.com>.

¹⁶ The DPRK Foreign Ministry issued a "clarification statement" on October 3, 2006 that announced Pyongyang's intention to conduct a nuclear test. See "DPRK Foreign Ministry Clarifies Stand on New Measure to Bolster War Deterrent," Korean Central News Agency, October 3, 2006, <http://www.kcna.co.jp>.

¹⁷ On July 15, 2006, the UNSC passed Resolution 1695 in response to North Korean missile tests. The resolution bars UN member states from participating in missile-related transactions with North Korea. For the full text of the resolution, see "Security Council Condemns Democratic People's Republic of Korea's Missile Launches, Unanimously Adopting Resolution 1695 (2006)," United Nations Security Council Department of Public Information, News and Media Division, New York, July 15, 2006, <http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2006/sc8778.doc.htm>.

¹⁸ See MSNBC video, "Bolton on N Korea," available at *Washington Post* online, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/10/08/AR2006100801169.html>; Chapter 7 of the UN Charter allows for action by member states to prevent activities that threaten to peace and security.

¹⁹ "N Korea 'Nuclear Test' Condemned," BBC News, October 9, 2006, <http://news.bbc.co.uk>.

²⁰ "Statement of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China," Ministry of Foreign Affairs, People's Republic of China, October 9, 2006. <http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/default.htm>.

swift response clearly showed Beijing's frustration with its unappreciative ally and its anger at North Korea's nuclear brinkmanship that could have long-term implications for the region, including a potential nuclear arms race. During consultations at the UNSC after the October 3rd DPRK Foreign Ministry's announcement that revealed Pyongyang's intention to conduct a nuclear test, Chinese officials emphasized the need for a diplomatic solution. At the same time, China's ambassador to the United Nations Wang Guangya warned Pyongyang that any test would bring about serious consequences.²¹ Press reports at the time quoted prominent Chinese Korea specialists as saying the Six-Party Talks were dead and that China should reevaluate its approach to North Korea.²²

Since October 2002 when the current nuclear crisis began, China has tried to facilitate dialogue and discussions aimed at defusing tensions and finding an eventual solution to the standoff. Beijing has sought to pursue a two-pronged approach of keeping the peninsula nuclear free while, at the same time, not causing instability in Northeast Asia. For these reasons, China has painstakingly nurtured and promoted the Six-Party Talks while providing energy and food to North Korea.

Pyongyang has repaid Beijing's good offices, patience, and generous assistance with actions that have been detrimental to Chinese interests. Pyongyang openly defied Beijing's advice and embarrassed China by going ahead with the missile tests in July 2006. What Beijing does next will be determined by three interrelated factors: how the test affects the international nuclear nonproliferation regime and other potential copycats; how the test affects regional developments, especially the likelihood that Japan, South Korea and Taiwan will follow suit with their own nuclear aspirations; and how the test affects the volatile security situation and China's national interests.

South Korea

South Korean President Roh Moo-hyun convened an emergency meeting of the ROK National Security Council immediately following North Korea's suspected nuclear test.

²¹ Associated Press, "Lips and teeth: North Korea-China Ties Strained by Nuclear Test Vow," October 8, 2006, <http://www.iht.com>.

²² Chris Buckley, "N. Korea Might Lose Its Only Ally," *Arizona Daily Star*, October 8, 2006.

The South Korean government subsequently condemned the nuclear test as “intolerable” and “a grave threat” to the Korean peninsula and Northeast Asia. The official statement released by the Presidential Office denounced the North Korean test for having defied the September 2005 “Statement of Principles”; UNSCR 1695; and the “Joint Declaration on the Denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula” signed with South Korea in 1991.²³

Even prior to the October 9th test, the opposition Grand National Party (GNP or “Hannaradang”) has been very critical of President Roh’s reaction to North Korean brinkmanship, such as Pyongyang’s July 2006 missile tests and the North Korean Foreign Ministry’s October 3rd statement.²⁴ The GNP pointed to the North Korean nuclear test as a clear indication that Roh’s policy of peace and prosperity towards Pyongyang had failed. The GNP leadership also argued that Roh was completely responsible for the policy failure and that he should apologize and create stronger policies for dealing with North Korea.²⁵ Furthermore, GNP lawmakers have called for the closure of the Mount Kūmgang tourism project and Kaesōng Industrial Complex in North Korea. GNP Spokesman Kang Chae-sōp has also called for the resignation of Roh’s unification and national security advisors.²⁶

Japan

On October 9th, while on an official visit to Seoul, Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe strongly criticized the nuclear test, noting that it would push Northeast Asia into “a new,

²³ “Pukhan haeksilhōm, tanhoi taech’ōhal kōt [A North Korean nuclear test will be met with firm resolution],” Ch’ōngwadae [Office of the President], October 9, 2006, http://www.president.go.kr/cwd/kr/archive/archive_view.php?meta_id=hotis_2&id=3156aefd2417c3bf3d9bcd67; “Statement of the Government of the Republic of Korea on the North Korean Nuclear Test,” Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, October 9, 2006, http://www.mofat.go.kr/me/me_a002/me_b004/1211900_971.html.

²⁴ For details on the GNP reaction to North Korea’s July 2006 missile exercise, see Daniel A. Pinkston, “North Korea Missile Exercise Has Political Impacts for South Korea,” *WMD Insights*, September 2006, http://www.wmdinsights.com/18/18_EA2_NKMissile.htm.

²⁵ “Pukhan’ūi haeksilhōm tobal’e taehayō kangnyōkhago tanhohage taech’ō hara! [Respond to North Korea’s nuclear provocation with strength and firmness!], Hanaradang kukhoewōn iltong [Concerned GNP National Assembly Members], October 9, 2006, <http://www.hannara.or.kr>.

²⁶ “Pukhan’ūn haeksilhōm kidorūl chūkkak chungdanhago, No Mu-hyōn chōnggwōn’ūn taebukchōngch’aeg’ūl chōnmyōn chaegōmt’ohara! [Immediately stop North Korea’s scheme for a nuclear test, and completely reassess the North Korean policy of the Roh Mu-hyōn government!], Hannaradang taep’yoch’oegowiwōn Kang Chae-sōp [Kang Chae-sōp, senior representative of the GNP], October 4, 2006, <http://www.hannara.or.kr>.

dangerous nuclear age.”²⁷ Abe subsequently ordered his government to prepare for additional economic sanctions, hasten talks for a new UNSC resolution, and promote increased defense cooperation with the United States as a deterrent against the North Korean threat.²⁸ On the same day, Japan’s Chief Cabinet Secretary Yasuhisa Shiozaki noted that the nuclear test was a “serious threat,” a provocation against the NPT regime, and a violation of a number of international agreements and resolutions, including the 2002 Pyongyang Declaration (which aimed to normalize relations between Pyongyang and Tokyo), the September 2005 Joint Statement from the Six-Party Talks, UNSC resolution 1695, and the October 7, 2006, Presidential statement of the UNSC.²⁹

The North Korean nuclear test will likely encourage the Japanese government to implement tougher measures against North Korea, and anger appears to be growing widely, even among more pacifist groups. Japan’s legislature, the Diet, is drafting a multi-party statement severely criticizing North Korea.³⁰ A number of Japan’s political parties have already expressed strong criticism of the nuclear test. Ruling coalition partners, the Liberal Democratic Party and the New Komeito Party, have expressed concern over the test and set up a task force to deal with the issue.³¹ The Democratic Party, Japan’s main opposition party, called for a cancellation of the 2002 Pyongyang Declaration in response to North Korea’s belligerent activities.³² Most notably, the Japanese Communist Party and the Social Democratic Party—two parties with pacifist platforms—have made strong

²⁷ “Abe Warns of ‘Dangerous Nuclear Age,’” *Mainichi Shimbun*, October 9, 2006, <http://mdn.mainichi-msn.co.jp/index.html>.

²⁸ “Seifu ga Tsuikateki Keizai Seisai Hatsudo wo Kento, Kaku Jikken Jisshi de [The Government Considering to Implement Additional Economic Sanctions Due to Conducting a Nuclear Test],” *Yomiuri Shimbun*, October 9, 2006, <http://www.yomiuri.co.jp>.

²⁹ “Kita Chosen ni yoru Chika Kaku Jikken Jisshi ni Taisuru Naikaku Kanbo Chokan Seimei [Statement of Chief Cabinet Secretary about North Korea’s Announcement of Underground Nuclear Test],” Prime Minister of Japan and His Cabinet, Press Release, October 9, 2006, <http://www.kantei.go.jp/index.html>.

³⁰ “Kita Chosen no Kaku Jikken Hinan no Kokka Ketsugi he Yoyato Chosei [Parties Are Coordinating Their Opinions to Adopt a Resolution Which Condemns North Korea’s Nuclear Test],” *Asahi Shimbun*, October 9, 2006, <http://www.asahi.com>.

³¹ Liberal Democratic Party, Press Release, October 9, 2006, “Kita Chosen no Kaku Jikken Jisshi Happyo ni Yoto ga Kogi Seimei wo Happyo, Sohkyu ni Kokkai Ketsugi wo Kento—Nakagawa Kanjicho ga Seimei [Expressing Statement to Protest North Korea’s Announcement about Nuclear Test, Considering to Adopt Resolution at the Diet Immediately—Secretary-General Nakagawa Stated],” <http://www.jimin.jp>.

³² “Kita Chosen no Chika Kaku Jikken no Danko ha Danjite Yonin Dekinai [North Korea’s Nuclear Test Is By No Means Acceptable],” Democratic Party of Japan, Press Release, October 9, 2006, <http://www.dpj.or.jp>.

statements in protest of the nuclear test.³³ The Mayors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki—the only two cities to have ever suffered nuclear attacks—also expressed strong resentments against North Korea. The Mayor of Hiroshima, Tadatoshi Akiba, called for increased efforts towards nuclear disarmament and the Mayor of Nagasaki, Iccho Ito, criticized the nuclear test as a threat to world peace.³⁴

Russian Federation

The Russian reaction to the declared North Korean test was swift and unequivocal. On October 9th, President Vladimir Putin announced: “Without question, Russia condemns the test conducted by the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea,” noting that it was “not about Korea itself, but about the enormous damage to the process of nonproliferation of weapons of mass destruction in the world.”³⁵ On the same day, Mikhail Kamynin, official representative of the Foreign Ministry, also condemned the test “regardless of the reasons that motivated it,” clearly implying that North Korea’s claim about “the threat to that country from the United States” could not be construed as a justification for a nuclear explosion. “Such a step,” said Kamynin, “could only lead to a worsening of problems that exist on the Korean Peninsula, is fraught with a threat to peace, security and stability in the region, and could undermine the nuclear nonproliferation regime.”³⁶

The publicly available text of Vladimir Putin’s remarks contained only an expression of hope that North Korea would “return at the negotiating table.” The Foreign Ministry statement went further and provided more details of the Russia position. It demanded the “DPRK to undertake steps, without delay, to return the NPT regime and to renew the six-

³³ “Kita Chosen no Kaku Jikken Kyoko ni Kogi suhu [Protesting Against North Korea’s Nuclear Test],” Japanese Communist Party, Press Release, October 9, 2006, <http://www.jcp.or.jp>; “Kita Chosen no Kaku Jikken Jisshi wo Hinan suru (Danwa) [Criticizing North Korea’s Nuclear Test],” Social Democratic Party, Press Release, October 9, 2006, <http://www5.sdp.or.jp>.

³⁴ “Abe, Bush Vow To Take ‘Decisive Action’ Against North Korea,” *Mainichi Shimbun*, October 9, 2006, <http://mdn.mainichi-msn.co.jp/index.html>; “‘Danjite Yurusarenai’ Hiroshima ShiCho ga Kogi Danwa [‘Never Acceptable’ Mayor of Hiroshima Stated Condemnation],” *Yomiuri Shimbun*, October 9, 2006, <http://www.yomiuri.co.jp/>.

³⁵ “Vladimir Putin Provel Soveshchanie s Chlenami Pravitalstva” [Vladimir Putin Has Held a Meeting with Cabinet Members], October 9, 2006, <http://www.kremlin.ru>; “Moskva Osyzhdaet Yadernoe Ispytanie” [Moscow Condemns the Nuclear Test], Strana.Ru information service, October 9, 2006, <http://www.strana.ru/>.

³⁶ A Statement by the Official Representative of the Foreign Ministry of Russia M.L. Kamynin, Document 1738-09-10-2006, October 9, 2006, http://www.mid.ru/brp_4.nsf/0/E0229388B4881F34C3257202002F2AA1.

party negotiations.” The same message was conveyed to the North Korean ambassador in Moscow. At the same time the Foreign Ministry asked “all states concerned to maintain restraint and patience in the current difficult situation.”³⁷

Conclusion

Although the technical assessment of North Korea’s nuclear test is still incomplete, the DPRK Foreign Ministry’s statement declaring Pyongyang’s intention to test on October 3rd and the test announcement on October 9th have brought sweeping international condemnation. Some analysts believe the test failed to achieve the desired yield and thus can be described a failure. Others argue the test was a conventional explosion and not a nuclear test at all. Conclusive results of diagnostic tests should be available within days, but considering the potential risks in bluffing about nuclear capabilities, North Korean claims should be assumed to be true until conclusively proven false.

Even if North Korea’s test were revealed to be non-nuclear, Pyongyang’s provocative acts still pose a serious threat to international security and the nuclear nonproliferation regime. Reports have indicated activity at another suspected nuclear test site and North Korea could conduct another test at anytime. If North Korea is able to continue the development of its nuclear arsenal with impunity, this will surely influence the motivations of other states, particularly in the Middle East and Northeast Asia. The failure to curb North Korea’s nuclear ambitions could trigger a nuclear arms race and ultimately the collapse of the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT).

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³⁷ “On a Meeting between Deputy Foreign Minister of Russia A.Yu. Alekseev and the DPRK Ambassador to Moscow Kim Jen Czhe,” Document 1740-09-10-2006, October 9, 2006, http://www.mid.ru/brp_4.nsf/0/5AB8C01F4BB6DA3DC32572020033ECA7.