THE NORTH KOREAN NUCLEAR CRISIS – NO END IN SIGHT

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These days North Korea is in the ‘spotlight’ for being the epicenter of the nuclear crisis—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 03rd 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 furry 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 countries\(^10\). This will, however, be possible if North Korea were to act in such a manner as to have the sanctions removed from itself.

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