



ISSSP Perspective

NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF ADVANCED STUDIES (NIAS)

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RECENT DEVELOPMENTS IN THE KOREAN PENINSULA ISSUES, CONCERNS AND IMPLICATIONS

Report of ISSSP Perspective discussion held on 19 July 2017

North Korea's increasingly belligerent posture along with a major increase in the pace at which it is testing advanced missiles and nuclear weapons pose a new set of challenges to the countries of the Asia Pacific Region. The International Strategic and Security Studies programme (ISSSP) of the National Institute of Advanced Studies (NIAS), organised a discussion meeting to take stock of these developments and their implications for regional security. The discussion titled "Developments in the Korean Peninsula: Issues, Concerns and Implications" took place on July 19 2017.

Two brief presentations were made by Prof. S. Chandrasekhar (Visiting Professor in the ISSSP) and Ambassador (Retd) N. Ravi, (Senior Fellow at the Centre for Public Policy (CPP) at the Indian Institute of Management Bangalore (IIMB)).

Prof Chandrasekhar: Though North Korea's nuclear weapon and missile testing programmes have evoked global concerns there is very little that the international community can do about it. An increasingly hostile relationship between the US and China that is rooted in the geography and history of the region will ensure that North Korea will continue to develop its nuclear and missile arsenal. It is only a matter of time before North Korea is in a position to threaten the US with nuclear tipped ICBMs.



China's Anti Access Area Denial (A2AD) strategy that involves the integrated and combined use of space, nuclear and conventional weapons is aimed at preventing US intervention in the Asia Pacific region. North Korea will continue to remain integral to this larger Chinese strategy given its vulnerabilities with respect to Taiwan and threats from a number of US allies in the Asia Pacific Region.



It will therefore not be willing to push North Korea beyond a point even though it might not like a neighbour armed with nuclear weapons and missiles.

The DPRK has significantly improved its missile capability in terms of range and numbers. The Hwasong 12 missile with a range of 4400 km can reach all of Japan and the US base in Guam. The Hwasong 14 is an Inter-Continental Ballistic Missile (ICBM) with a range of over 6200 Km. It can reach parts of Alaska with a nuclear warhead. North Korea will soon be able to target the US mainland with a nuclear weapon.

North Korea has also conducted five nuclear tests. The last test with a reported yield of 25 to 30 KT could well have been a boosted fission test. It is therefore well on its way to miniaturizing its nuclear warhead.

The launching of two remote sensing satellites into a difficult to reach sun synchronous orbit shows North Korea's improved mastery over space and launch technologies. Its emergent nuclear and space capabilities along with conventional weapons provide it with a range of options that could further complicate the already complex geopolitical situation in the region. Short of active US intervention or strong action by China, both of which are unlikely, North Korea will continue on its chosen path of confrontation with the US. This will suit China as well.

Since North Korean missiles are largely based on indigenous developments it will be difficult to stop via the sanction route at least in the short run. One can look at a future integration of North Korea's space, nuclear and conventional weapons capabilities to further exacerbate the tensions in the region. One issue of special concern to India relates to North Korea's possible sharing of its nuclear weapons test data with Pakistan to help them miniaturize their warheads for tactical use.

Amb (Retd) N. Ravi: A series of missile test carried out by the DPRK in the first half of 2017 has pushed the region into the brink of a war – like situation. DPRK's 4th of July missile test that coincided with the US Independence Day once again brought the region into global focus. The political situation in the DPRK however, has not received much attention in the global media. The recent series of missile tests only indicate that Kim Jong-Un is trying to consolidate his position as the Supreme Commander with his regime probably facing major internal challenges from looming economic and political uncertainties. The DPRK has been facing a severe agrarian crisis since a famine in 1999. As a consequence, the DPRK is dependent upon UN food aid to feed its large population. Ironically, despite UN sanctions the DPRK has continued its effort to develop nuclear weapons and long range missiles.



Ambassador Ravi also briefly discussed the Chinese position with regard to the DPRK's missile test and fears in China if the Kim regime in DPRK ceased to exist. The question of a unified Korea with American troops in the Korean peninsula, close to the Chinese border would be a major concern for Chinese policy makers.

Ambassador Ravi also expressed concerns over the DPRK-Pakistan nuclear and missile nexus that has the blessings of China. Continued Chinese support to this will seriously undermine the security and stability of the South Asian region.

Both speakers agreed that DPRK's missile and nuclear programmes remain a major challenge to international and regional security. The growing US China rivalry will make sure that the current standoff in the Korean peninsula will not be resolved in the near future. North Korea under Kim Jong-Un will continue to exploit the current situation in the region to consolidate the regime's political power.

Major Takeaways

1. Based on current developments one would expect to see the test launch of another ICBM by North Korea to demonstrate to the US and the world its ability to target the continental US.
2. North Korea's emerging capabilities in space, missile and nuclear technologies will provide it with more options to flex its muscles and threaten its adversaries.
3. Short of military intervention, which is not very probable, there appears to be no major threat to the survival of the regime and its continuing demonstrations of military power in the Asia Pacific Region.

The report was prepared by Dr. Prakash P with the inputs from Ms. Nasima Khatoon, Ms. Mirunalini Deshpande and Ms. Riffath Kazi of ISSSP, NIAS.

