

North Korea Does It Again

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North Korea in an act of complete defiance to the international community's concern, tested a missile (which they insist to be a satellite) on 13 April 2012. The North Korean state media confirmed the failure of the test. According to *Fox News*, the rocket broke apart between 90 seconds and 2 minutes after launching and fell into the Yellow Sea.

This launch was scheduled to mark the centenary of the birth of its leader Kim Il-Sung. The international community is speculative about the expectation of a nuclear test. As per its past record, North Korean missile launches have been followed by nuclear tests. According to media reports, "North Korea has enough plutonium to make six to eight bombs. In addition to this it tested bombs in October 2006 and May 2009, after a few months of the missile tests".

The major difference this time was that North Korea had invited more than 200 international media personnel to report the preparations and launch of the missile. An act which is a total deviation from the past. However the failure will prove to be quite an embarrassing and humiliating experience for the new leader, Kim Jong-Un. What is interesting is that the media present within North Korea were reportedly the last to know about the launch. As per reports on *CNN*, Stan Grant CNN reporter stated that "We're still very much in a black hole here" and "We just don't know anything".

The international reactions have been in tune with expectations. As per *Fox News*, the White House released a statement condemning the launch, stating that, "Despite the failure of its attempted missile launch, North Korea's provocative action threatens regional security, violates international law and contravenes its own recent commitments". The United States had agreed to provide food aid to North Korea only weeks before it declared its desire to launch the missile. The United States has threatened to withdraw the offer, according to *LA Times*. It needs to be seen how the Obama administration will react after this. South Korea and Japan are pushing for harder and stricter measures. According to media reports New Zealand's Foreign Affairs Minister, has also condemned this action.

As has been reported in *LA Times*, North Korea had apparently worked in alliance with Iran and Pakistan in building this technology. It also states that North Korea might have purchased some parts from China.

However, one of the most interesting developments has been that there has been no reaction from Beijing even after hours of the launch. Beijing has kept quiet and has neither supported nor disapproved of the action. China has been supportive of its neighbour having always tacitly supported most of its actions. The primary factor behind this has been that Beijing has been very concerned about failure of the North

Korean regime. It has worked towards keeping the regime in place and maintaining North Korea's domestic stability.

Such actions have a major impact on the regional security dynamics as well. Both Japan and South Korea are closer to United States. If they perceive that Beijing is supporting North Korean actions this might lead to calls for greater presence of the United States, a development which will make Beijing highly uncomfortable, especially because of its concerns with Taiwan.

In spite of strong international opposition why did North Korea decide to go ahead with this launch? The country is already facing increased sanctions and is generally treated as an 'outcast' in the international community. However, defying the world community has become the pattern for North Korea. Can this be regarded as another example where sanctions and other United Nations measures prove to be futile? Has the absence of oil and other resources made North Korea not 'highly' important for countries like the United States? Or is the North Korean regime so isolated that it is not concerned about the international reaction but only concerned about gaining legitimacy domestically?

The only answer, which appears to be probable, is that the new leadership might have decided to undertake this action in order to establish its position. The tacit support that Beijing extends to it can also be a very important factor behind these actions.

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