



North Korea's Fifth Nuclear Weapons Test

The Facts

- At 9:00am local time (8:30pm EST) on Friday, September 9, the U.S. Geological Survey [reported](#) seismic activity of 5.3 magnitude strength originating in North Korea. This is North Korea's largest test to date.
- North Korean state media announced that the country had conducted a "nuclear explosion test."
- This is North Korea's fifth nuclear test and its second this year (the [previous one](#) occurred on Jan. 5).
- According to a Washington Post [report](#), North Korea has claimed that the test represents significant advancement toward the creation of "smaller, lighter, and more diversified nuclear warheads of higher strike power."

The North Korea Nuclear Threat

- While the extent of North Korea's nuclear weapons program remains veiled in secrecy, each nuclear and missile test demonstrate progress towards the country's ultimate goal of developing a miniaturized nuclear weapon capable of being delivered by ballistic missile.
- After previously testing [three weapons](#) over the span of a decade, North Korea has now tested two weapons within a year.
- North Korea's nuclear arsenal is likely composed of [10-16 nuclear weapons](#), though exact numbers are uncertain.
- North Korea has not yet successfully tested an intercontinental ballistic missile capable of reaching the United States, but has [successfully tested](#) intermediate-range missiles capable of striking the U.S. territory of Guam.

International Implications

United States

- U.S. President Obama [condemned](#) North Korea's tests and reaffirmed the deployment of a Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) battery, a missile defense system, to the Republic of Korea.

Asia

- Leaders of China, the Republic of Korea, and Japan have all [condemned](#) the nuclear test.
- This test further [threatens](#) the strategic balance in Asia. As North Korea's nuclear provocations continue, the United States seeks to increase defensive measures for its allies in the region, such as the deployment of THAAD to South Korea. China has expressed [concerns](#) about the THAAD deployment, arguing that it upsets regional strategic stability.

International Community

- Republic of Korea President Park Geun-Hye, U.S. President Obama and Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe committed to working with the UN Security Council and upholding the principles of the 2005 Six-Party Talks.
- As yet, no official proposals to resume the Six-Party Talks have been reported.
- The U.N Security Council is in the process of [discussing](#) increased sanctions.

How to Reduce the Threat

- Time is not on our side. Sanctions and harsh rhetoric alone have failed to influence North Korea's calculus. North Korea will continue to develop its nuclear capabilities until they produce a credible nuclear deterrent, emboldening its bad behavior.
- The United States and China should coordinate efforts to increase pressure on North Korea, particularly through targeted sanctions on North Korean shell companies.
- However, sanctions alone will not halt North Korea's progress. The United States should join China in calling to restart the Six Party Talks between the Koreas, China, Japan, Russia, and the United States, which have stalled since 2008.
- The talks should be restarted with the initial purpose of establishing a freeze on North Korea's ballistic missile and nuclear testing. The diplomatic process can then work to set terms for denuclearizing the Korean Peninsula.
- These talks have stalled in part because the United States has demanded that North Korea agree to its denuclearization pledges from 2005 in advance of the talks. While the purpose of the talks should remain denuclearization, the United States should remove its preconditions and allow the diplomatic process to begin.
- Congress should reinforce its nuclear non-proliferation tools by strengthening the Missile Technology Control Regime, fully funding its own Defense Nuclear Non-proliferation programs, and reconsider a Senate motion to ratify the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT), which would outlaw nuclear testing by signatories and preserve the extensive monitoring network of sensors used to detect tests.