Fact Sheet: Fourth North Korean Nuclear Weapons Test

The Facts:

- On January 5, the state media of North Korea announced that Pyongyang carried out its first underground test of a hydrogen bomb.
- This was North Korea's fourth nuclear weapons test and the first test since 2013.
- Experts are skeptical of North Korea's claim that it detonated a hydrogen bomb. The test created an artificial earthquake of magnitude 5.1, comparable to the 2013 test. Hydrogen bombs, on the other hand, can produce explosions hundreds and thousands of times larger.

The North Korea Nuclear Threat:

- While North Korea's latest test has been met with skepticism, it is not insignificant. Every nuclear test can provide the critical data necessary to advance a nuclear program.
- The status of North Korea's nuclear arsenal is uncertain, though some analysts estimate it is comprised of between 10 and 20 weapons.
- North Korea has not yet tested an intercontinental ballistic missile capable of reaching the United States.
- North Korea has not yet demonstrated the ability to shrink a nuclear warhead to fit atop a ballistic missile and has yet to create a reliable, accurate delivery system, or a warhead that can handle the stresses of flight.

How to Reduce the Threat:

- Time is not on our side. The current strategy of sanctions and harsh rhetoric has 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 though sanctions.
- 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 reconsidering the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, which would outlaw nuclear testing by signatories and preserve the extensive monitoring network of sensors used to detect tests.