



# PERSPECTIVES

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## North Korea Did It Again

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**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:** North Korean adventurism only adds to Israel's proliferation concerns. North Korea's fourth nuclear test, the P5+1 agreement to lift Iranian sanctions, and the billions of dollars' worth in deals between Tehran and Asian and European companies, together constitute a significant challenge. In addition, Jerusalem faces a difficult task of being the watchdog that monitors Iran's adherence to the nuclear deal. One of the biggest concerns is that Iran will not openly breach the P5+1 agreement, but rather cooperate with North Korea on a "Back Door" plan towards the bomb, with North Korea surreptitiously doing the dirty work and developing a nuclear bomb for Iran. For this reason, Israel has a strong interest in the further imposition of ever-tighter sanctions on North Korea, as well as the tightening of intelligence surveillance on Iran-North Korea nuclear cooperation.

On January 6, 2016, North Korea held its fourth nuclear test, proclaiming it as Pyongyang's first hydrogen (H) bomb. Intelligence communities and scientists in South Korea and the US have raised doubts concerning North Korea's capabilities to develop and test the H-bomb. By doing so, South Korea and the US question Pyongyang's credibility and in turn, minimize the importance of the fourth nuclear test.

It is important not to rule out the possibility that North Korea has developed the H-Bomb technology but has yet to test it. Nevertheless, even if it was just a "regular" nuclear test, it raises many concerns that should be heeded by North Korea's neighboring states, the US, and even Israel, especially after the lifting of Iranian sanctions.

North Korea's fourth nuclear test challenges states in its region while it simultaneously opens windows of opportunities for cooperation between Japan-South Korea-US-China. However, these countries can only excel in cooperation if they overcome their regional differences and disagreements over bilateral and multilateral issues.

It is evident that the nuclear test challenges Japan, South Korea, the US, and China, as they were unable to deter the DPRK for the fourth time. They are concerned that Kim Jung-un is willing to take calculated risks, even when these risks come at a dangerously high price. The biggest concern is that Kim Jung-un will feel invincible and tempted to pursue North Korea's brinkmanship policy, leading the region into an undesired conflict.

Nevertheless, North Korea's nuclear test might lead to changes within the region that Kim Jung-un did not quite anticipate. The first one is the legitimization of Japan's new defense policy. The North Korean nuclear test will allow Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe to justify his new defense policy and minimize Asian criticism on said policy. The second is the potential cooperation between Beijing-Seoul-Tokyo-Washington on North Korean sanctions. Although the four states disagree on many issues, such as the Senkaku Islands, Spratly Islands, etc., they understand that without agreeing on sanctions on the DPRK, Kim Jung-un will not be deterred. Cooperation between China-South Korea-Japan-US will depend on their willingness to move forward regardless of their disagreements on other issues.

The North Korean nuclear test is not the only potential threat to the region and Israel. Their submarine-launched ballistic missile (KN-11) tests in May 2015 and failed test in November 2015 indicates that Pyongyang is developing its second strike capability. The KN-11 missiles will allow North Korea to upgrade its deterrence against the US forces and pose a threat to US soil. Once Pyongyang overcomes the technical failures of the November 2015 test, it will sell the KN-11 to other states, such as Iran, which will allow Tehran to improve its deterrence against the Gulf states, Israel, and the US.

As mentioned in the latter, an additional North Korean threat is the minimization of the nuclear bomb. Although North Korea tested four nuclear bombs, they lack the technical ability to mount the bombs onto long-range missiles. Pyongyang has repeatedly stated that North Korea has indeed developed this technology, but foreign experts doubt these statements. However, once Pyongyang develops this technology, it will allow North Korea to threaten US forces and its allies with nuclear missiles.

What can Japan, South Korea, US, Russia, China, and even Israel do?

Sanctions: Pyongyang needs to understand that continuing this *modus operandi* is unacceptable. Otherwise, other states might consider following the North Korean model. The problem is convincing the UNSC to collectively agree and apply severe sanctions, regardless if Pyongyang defines them as acts of war. One could expect that the UNSC will pursue relatively limited sanctions, in which case, Seoul, Tokyo, and Washington should impose additional bilateral sanctions on North Korea. Limited sanctions will send a message to Pyongyang and Tehran that the costs of breaching the nuclear norms are not that high. In this case, Israel should try to convince Washington that without increasing the sanctions on North Korea, Iran will breach the P5+1 agreement sooner than President Obama estimated.

Ballistic Missile Defense (BMD): Seoul and Tokyo should consider upgrading their BMD capabilities. The BMD systems will allow South Korea and Japan to gain an extra defense shield should North Korea miscalculate a nuclear missile test. Also, Israel could offer to sell the Iron Dome to Seoul and Tokyo.

Blocking Exports: The sanctions on North Korea will further Pyongyang's interests in exporting its military equipment to the Middle East to increase revenues. As a preventative method, Washington and its allies should expand the Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI) to strengthen the inspection on North Korean military export. Additionally, Israel should tighten its relations with intelligence agencies in Asia and the US to monitor and prevent all shipments to Iran, Syria, and Hezbollah. For Israel, North Korean adventurism only adds to Israel's proliferation concerns. North Korea's fourth nuclear test, the P5+1 agreement to lift Iranian sanctions, and the billions of dollars' worth in deals between Tehran and Asian and European companies, together constitute a significant challenge. In addition, Jerusalem faces a difficult task of being the watchdog that monitors Iran's adherence to the nuclear deal. One of the biggest concerns is that Iran will not openly breach the P5+1 agreement, but rather cooperate with North Korea on a "Back Door" plan towards the bomb, with North Korea surreptitiously doing the dirty work and developing a nuclear bomb for Iran. For this reason, Israel has a strong interest in the further imposition of ever-tighter sanctions on North Korea, as well as the tightening of intelligence surveillance on Iran-North Korea nuclear cooperation.

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