

The Virgin Islands Consortium

North Korea Says It Has 'Successfully' Tested A Hydrogen Bomb

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North Korea on Sunday carried out its sixth nuclear bomb test, which experts say was the isolated country's most powerful yet. The regime said the test was that of a hydrogen bomb that could be mounted on an intercontinental ballistic missile.

North Korea called the test a "complete success," an announcement that came only hours after the country's supreme leader, Kim Jong-un, said Pyongyang had manufactured the hydrogen bomb. The test represented a bold show of defiance for the North, and came after multiple threats of action from U.S. President Donald Trump.

And the test was the first by North Korea to outperform the nuclear bombs dropped on Japanese cities Hiroshima and Nagasaki during World War II. Yet, analysts remain skeptical that the North had actually built a hydrogen bomb, which can pack more than 1,000 times the destructive power of an ordinary nuclear weapon. Sunday's bomb test was "five to six times" as powerful as North Korea's last nuclear test, a year ago, said Lee Mi-sun, a senior analyst at the South Korean Meteorological Administration.

That's not to say it was not powerful, though: It yielded 60 to 80 kilotons, and was most likely a "boosted" atomic bomb, in which a small amount of thermonuclear fuel produced a slightly higher explosive yield but fell well short of a true hydrogen bomb, according to Kim Dong-yub, a defense analyst at the Institute for Far Eastern Studies at Kyungnam University in Seoul (via The New York Times).

The nuclear bomb test, which was detected at 12:36 p.m., had a tremor magnitude of 6.3, according to the United States Geological Survey. A similar result was detected by China, which also registered a second, less powerful tremor of magnitude 4.6. The South Korean Defense Ministry's estimate was 5.7.

"The size of the seismic signal of the recent test suggests a significantly higher explosive yield than the fifth test," Mr. Albright said, via The Times. "Getting this high of a yield would likely require thermonuclear material in the device." But he said he was "skeptical that this design has been miniaturized to fit reliably on a ballistic missile."

Ross Feingold, a Taiwan-based Asia political analyst, told Al Jazeera News that the development of North Korean weapons has been advancing steadily.

"There has clearly been a pace of technological improvement over a period of time, whether it is with nuclear bombs themselves or with the missile delivery technology," he said. "The North Koreans ... probably have better technological capability than a lot of the analysts had given them credit for in the past. And more significantly, they do learn from mistakes."

According to the BBC, South Korean President Moon Jae-in said North Korea's sixth nuclear test should be met with the "strongest possible" response, including new United Nations Security Council sanctions to "completely isolate" the country. China, North Korea's only major ally, condemned the test.

North Korea "has ignored the international community's widespread opposition, again carrying out a nuclear test. China's government expresses resolute opposition and strong condemnation toward this," the foreign ministry said in a statement.

Japan's Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga said sanctions against North Korea should include restrictions on the trade of oil products.

Russia meanwhile said the test defied international law and urged all sides involved to hold talks, saying this was the only way to resolve the Korean peninsula's problems.

The head of the International Atomic Energy Agency, the global nuclear watchdog, described the test as "an extremely regrettable act".

Yukiya Amano added: "This new test, which follows the two tests last year and is the sixth since 2006, is in complete disregard of the repeated demands of the international community."

Feature Image: North Korea released a photo Sunday of what it said was a hydrogen bomb that could be fitted onto a missile. (Korean Central News Agency)

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