

By Chris McGrath, Getty Images

N. Korea: Nuclear test was success

Nearby nations denounce action

From staff and wire reports

North Korea said today that it had successfully conducted its first nuclear weapons test, an underground explosion that, while unconfirmed, sent neighboring countries scrambling into emergency meetings.

No organization outside North Korea could independently confirm the test. "We are looking into it," White House spokeswoman Emily Lawrimore said.

The U.S. Geological Survey detected a magnitude-4.2 tremor late Sunday in the country's northeast region, about 240 miles from Pyongyang, the capital, according to the USGS website.

Cheong Wa Dae of South Korea's presidential office said that country's state intelligence agency also detected a tremor that did not appear to be natural.

"At this moment, President Roh Moo Hyun is holding an emergency meeting of the related ministers and, if this tremor is ultimately confirmed as a nuclear test, this meeting will turn into a National Security Council meeting," Roh's spokesman, Yoon Tae Young, said shortly after the announcement by the North.

South Korea's Defense Ministry raised the alert level for its military upon hearing the news. South Korean stocks plunged following the announcement.

North Korea's official state-run Korean Central News Agency called the test "a stirring time when all the people of the country are making a great leap forward in the building of a great, prosperous, powerful socialist nation."

"It marks a historic event as it greatly encouraged and pleased the . . . people that have wished to have powerful, self-reliant defense capability," it said.

The report of the test came as Japan's new prime minister, Shinzo Abe, was in China to discuss security issues — including what had been North Korea's announced intention to test a nuclear device. Japan said today that it would push for a tough resolution at the U.N. Security Council to force North Korea to end its nuclear program.

"If it is proven, it will be a grave threat to stability in northeast Asia, and we will file a strong protest," Chief Cabinet Secretary Yasuhisa Shiozaki said.

China said today that it firmly opposed North Korea's test, denounced it as "brazen" and demanded that the government in Pyongyang stop any action that would worsen the situation.

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North Korea "has ignored the widespread opposition of the international community," China's Foreign Ministry said on its website.

Several countries have been holding talks to get the North to end its nuclear ambitions. The United States, South Korea, Japan, Russia and China had been urging North Korea to return to the six-nation talks it abandoned a year ago. The Security Council last week urged North Korea not to carry out a test.

The country pulled out of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty in 2003 after U.S. officials accused it of a secret nuclear program, violating an earlier nuclear pact between Washington and Pyongyang.

► Japan, China meet in Beijing, 10A



By Ahn Young-Joon, AP

On alert: South Korean soldier at demilitarized zone.

October 9, 2006

N. Korea Reports 1st Nuclear Arms Test

By **DAVID E. SANGER**

WASHINGTON, Monday, Oct. 9 — North Korea said Sunday night that it had set off its first nuclear test, becoming the eighth country in history, and arguably the most unstable and most dangerous, to proclaim that it has joined the club of nuclear weapons states.

The test came just two days after the country was warned by the United Nations Security Council that the action could lead to severe consequences.

Nations across the world condemned the test today, and an emergency meeting of the Security Council was set to take up the issue this morning.

China, Pyongyang's closet supporter, called it a "flagrant and brazen" violation of international opinion and said it "firmly opposes" North Korea's conduct.

In Russia, which shares a short border with North Korea, officials reacted with dismay and condemnation. "Russia absolutely condemns North Korea's nuclear test," President Vladimir V. Putin said in televised remarks during a meeting with his senior government ministers.

Appearing with Mr. Putin, the defense minister, Sergei B. Ivanov, said that the Russian military had confirmed the test and estimated its force at somewhere between 5 and 15 kilotons much larger than estimates from South Korea.

Pyongyang's official Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) confirmed the explosion, declaring that the test was a "historic event." It said there was no leak or danger from its test.

"The nuclear test was conducted with indigenous wisdom and technology 100 percent," the news agency said, according to Reuters. The announcement

"It marks a historic event as it greatly encouraged and pleased the KPA (Korean People's Army) and people that have wished to have powerful self-reliant defence capability."

American officials cautioned that they had not yet received any confirmation that the test had

occurred. The United States Geological Survey said it had detected a tremor of 4.2 magnitude on the Korean Peninsula.

Senior Bush administration officials said that they had little reason to doubt the announcement, and warned that the test would usher in a new era of confrontation with the isolated and unpredictable country run by President Kim Jong-il.

What form that confrontation would take was not yet clear. Last week, the administration's special envoy for North Korea issued a stern warning to Pyongyang not to go ahead with its threatened test, saying "We are not going to live with a nuclear North Korea."

Early Monday morning, even before the test was confirmed, Bush administration officials were holding conference calls to discuss ways to further cut off a country that is already subject to sanctions, and hard-liners said the moment had arrived for neighboring countries, especially China and Russia, to cut off the trade and oil supplies that have been Mr. Kim's lifeline.

In South Korea, the country that fought a bloody war with the North for three years and has lived with an uneasy truce and failed efforts at reconciliation for more than half a century, officials said they believed that an explosion occurred around 10:36 p.m. New York time — 11:36 a.m. Monday in Korea.

They identified the source of the explosion as North Hamgyong Province, roughly the area where American spy satellites have been focused for several years on a variety of suspected underground test sites.

That was less than an hour after North Korean officials had called their counterparts in China and warned them that a test was just minutes away. The Chinese, who have been North Korea's main ally for 60 years but have grown increasingly frustrated by the its defiance of Beijing, sent an emergency alert to Washington through the United States Embassy in Beijing. Within minutes, President Bush was notified, shortly after 10 p.m., by his national security adviser, Stephen Hadley, that a test was imminent.

North Korea's decision to conduct the test demonstrated what the world has suspected for years: the country has joined India, Pakistan and Israel as one of the world's "undeclared" nuclear powers. India and Pakistan conducted tests in 1998; Israel has never acknowledged conducting a test or possessing a weapon. But by actually setting off a weapon, if that is proven, the North has chosen to end years of carefully crafted and diplomatically useful ambiguity about its abilities.

The North's decision to set off a nuclear device could profoundly change the politics of Asia.

The test occurred only a week after Japan installed a new, more nationalistic prime minister, Shinzo Abe, and just as the country was renewing a debate about whether its ban on possessing nuclear weapons — deeply felt in a country that saw two of its cities incinerated in 1945 — still makes strategic sense.

And it shook the peninsula just as Mr. Abe was arriving in South Korea for the first time as prime minister, in an effort to repair a badly strained relationship, having just visited with Chinese leaders in Beijing. It places his untested administration in the midst of one of the region's biggest security crises in years, and one whose outcome will be watched closely in Iran and other states suspected of attempting to follow the path that North Korea has taken.

Now, Tokyo and Washington are expected to put even more pressure on the South Korean government to terminate its "sunshine policy" of trade, tourism and openings to the North — a policy that has been the source of enormous tension between Seoul and Washington since Mr. Bush took office.

The explosion was the product of nearly four decades of work by North Korea, one of the world's poorest and most isolated countries. The nation of 23 million people appears constantly fearful that its far richer, more powerful neighbors — and particularly the United States — will try to unseat its leadership. The country's founder, Kim Il-sung, who died in 1994, emerged from the Korean War determined to equal the power of the United States, and acutely aware that Gen. Douglas MacArthur had requested nuclear weapons to use against his country.

But it took decades to put together the technology, and only in the past few years has the North appeared to have made a political decision to speed forward. "I think they just had their military plan to demonstrate that no one could mess with them, and they weren't going to be deterred, not even by the Chinese," a senior American official who deals with the North said late Sunday evening. "In the end, there was just no stopping them."

But the explosion was also the product of more than two decades of diplomatic failure, spread over at least three presidencies. American spy satellites saw the North building a good-size nuclear reactor in the early 1980's, and by the early 1990's the C.I.A. estimated that the country could have one or two nuclear weapons. But a series of diplomatic efforts to "freeze" the nuclear program — including a 1994 accord signed with the Clinton administration — ultimately broke down, amid distrust and recriminations on both sides.

Three years ago, just as President Bush was sending American troops toward Iraq, the North

threw out the few remaining weapons inspectors living at their nuclear complex in Yongbyon, and moved 8,000 nuclear fuel rods they had kept under lock and key. Those rods contained enough plutonium, experts said, to produce five or six nuclear weapons, though it is unclear how many the North now stockpiles.]

For years, some diplomats assumed that the North was using that ambiguity to trade away its nuclear capability, for recognition, security guarantees, aid and trade with the West. But in the end, the country's reclusive leader, Kim Jong-il, who inherited the mantle of leadership from his father, still called the "Great Leader," appears to have concluded that the surest way of getting what he seeks is to demonstrate that he has the capability to strike back if attacked.

Assessing the nature of that ability is difficult. If the test occurred as the North claimed, [it is unclear whether it was an actual bomb or a more primitive device. Some experts cautioned that it could try to fake an explosion, setting off conventional explosives; the only way to know for sure will be if American "sniffer" planes, patrolling the North Korean coast, pick up evidence of nuclear byproducts in the air.]

Even then, it is not clear that the North could fabricate that bomb into a weapon that could fit atop its missiles, one of the country's few significant exports.] ?

But the big fear about North Korea, American officials have long said, has less to do with its ability to lash out than it does with its proclivity to proliferate. The country has sold its missiles and other weapons to Iran, Syria and Pakistan; at various moments in the six-party talks that have gone on for the past few years, North Korean representatives have threatened to sell nuclear weapons. But in a statement issued last week, announcing that it intends to set off a test, the country said it would not sell its nuclear products.

The fear of proliferation prompted President Bush to declare in 2003 that the United States would never "tolerate" a nuclear-armed North Korea. He has never defined what he means by "tolerate," and on Sunday night Tony Snow, Mr. Bush's press secretary, said that, assuming the report of the test is accurate, the United States would now go to the United Nations to determine "what our next steps should be in response to this very serious step."

Nuclear testing is often considered a necessary step to proving a weapon's reliability as well as the most forceful way for a nation to declare its status as a nuclear power.

"Once they do that, it's serious," said Harold M. Agnew, a former director of the Los Alamos weapons laboratory, which designed most of the nation's nuclear arms. "Otherwise, the North Koreans are just jerking us around."

Networks of seismometers that detect faint trembles in the earth and track distant rumbles are the best way to spot an underground nuclear test.

The big challenge is to distinguish the signatures of earthquakes from those of nuclear blasts. Typically, the shock waves from nuclear explosions begin with a sharp spike as earth and rock are compressed violently. The signal then tends to become fuzzier as surface rumblings and shudders and after shocks create seismologic mayhem.

With earthquakes, it is usually the opposite. A gentle jostling suddenly becomes much bigger and more violent.

Most of the world's seismic networks that look for nuclear blasts are designed to detect explosions as small as one kiloton, or equal to 1,000 tons of high explosives. On instruments for detecting earthquakes, such a blast would measure a magnitude of about 4, like a small tremor.

Philip E. Coyle III, a former head of weapons testing at the Pentagon and former director of nuclear testing for the Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory, a weapons-design center in California, said the North Koreans could learn much from a nuclear test even if it was small by world standards or less than an unqualified success.

"It would not be totally surprising if it was a fizzle and they said it was a success because they learned something," he said. "We did that sometimes. We had a missile defense test not so long ago that failed, but the Pentagon said it was a success because they learned something, which I agree with. Failures can teach you a lot."

William J. Broad and John O'Neil contributed reporting from New York, Thom Shanker from Washington and Steven Lee Myers from Moscow.

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November 16, 2006

U.S. Seeks Action by North Korea Before New Talks

By HELENE COOPER

HANOI, Nov. 16 — The United States is working with China and other Asian allies to pressure North Korea to take a visible step toward dismantling its nuclear program before launching into the next round of long-running but inconclusive nuclear talks, American officials said today.

Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice said that while she is hopeful that the talks—begun back in 2003 with numerous interruptions since—will restart in December, it would be pointless to return to the bargaining table without a show of good faith from both sides.

Speaking to reporters in Hanoi today after a breakfast meeting with some of her counterparts here for the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation meeting, Ms. Rice refused to expand on what exactly those steps should be, saying she didn't want to negotiate in the press. But American officials said that such a step could include the dismantling of one of the North's many nuclear facilities and the readmission of international inspectors.

U.S. officials said they would like to see the dismantling begin with a facility like North Korea's five-megawatt reactor, which is continuing to produce nuclear fuel, or its plutonium reprocessing center, where spent reactor fuel can be turned into material for weapons.

"I do think that after setting off a nuclear test, the North Koreans need to do something to show they're committed to denuclearization that goes beyond words and just saying that they're committed to denuclearization," Ms. Rice said, "because after having set off a nuclear test, I think there's some skepticism about that."

But that's been the rub of the disarmament talks, which have dragged on inconclusively for three years, and the chances for rolling back Pyongyang's now-proven nuclear capability remain uncertain. Two weeks ago, China announced the six-nation talks would reconvene shortly after a hiatus of more than a year, and U.S. officials said at the time that they would take place in November or December.

But Kim Jong-il, the North Korean leader, has participated in many rounds of talks over the past several years even as he accelerated his pursuit of nuclear weapons. Some analysts suspect that he agreed to restart talks now to forestall tough enforcement of sanctions which were put in place after Pyongyang's nuclear test, and to persuade China and South Korea to ease his government's growing economic woes.

In fact, earlier this week, South Korea said it would not join a United States-led effort to intercept North Korean ships suspected of carrying unconventional weapons or related cargo. Even after the nuclear test, Seoul has continued to hew to its policy of avoiding confrontation with the North.

In Hanoi, when asked if Seoul's announcement was undermining U.S. American efforts to pressure

Pyongyang to disarm, Ms. Rice refused to publicly criticize South Korea. "Their context is different," she said, adding that "I don't have any doubt that they are committed and know they have to stay committed."

Privately, U.S. officials have expressed frustration with South Korea, and say they are well aware of growing skepticism about whether the talks will succeed. "The issue is, we really need this next round to be successful," one senior U.S. official said. "We can't emerge saying we set up a working group."

Ms. Rice acknowledged that the United States will have to give a little to get a little. "There are principles on both sides: On de-nuclearization, and on movement toward the easing of tensions in economic and other relations, so I think obviously people will want to look at both," she said.

It remains unclear how far the United States will go to get North Korea to take a first step towards dismantlement. Last year, America hobbled North Korea's international financial transactions when it imposed financial penalties on a Macao bank. The Bush administration accused the Macao bank, Banco Delta Asia, of helping North Korea to launder money from drug smuggling and other illicit activities and to pass counterfeit \$100 bills manufactured by the North Korean government. In September 2005, the Treasury Department ordered United States banks to sever relations with the bank, a move that had broad ripple effects, curtailing North Korean access to the international banking system and further isolating the government in Pyongyang.

America's top North Korea negotiator, Assistant Secretary of State Christopher Hill, said that he agreed to discuss the financial crackdown as part of the nuclear talks -- perhaps in a special working group that would convene at the same time as the main negotiations -- but that he had made no promises.

Two weeks ago, the Treasury Dept. reiterated its stance on Banco Delta Asia, a move which could limit Mr. Hill's room to maneuver.

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November 16, 2006

Bush, in Asia, Makes Appeal on N. Korea

By DAVID E. SANGER

SINGAPORE, Nov. 16 — President Bush opened a five-day tour of Asia today with an appeal to Asian nations to keep up pressure on North Korea to abandon its nuclear weapons program, and to enforce United Nations sanctions against the country.

Speaking at the National University of Singapore, Mr. Bush warned Pyongyang against aiding other nations, particularly in the Middle East, in their pursuit of nuclear weapons, vowing unspecified "consequences" if North Korea was ever caught shipping nuclear technology or weaponry abroad.

"The transfer of nuclear weapons or material by North Korea to states or non-state entities would be considered a grave threat to the United States and we would hold North Korea fully accountable for the consequences of such action," Mr. Bush said. "For the sake of peace, it is vital that the nations of this region send a message to North Korea that the proliferation of nuclear technology to hostile regimes or terrorist networks will not be tolerated."

Mr. Bush made no direct mention of Iran, but that was clearly one country he had in mind. Other senior administration officials have said in recent months that they are looking for evidence that North Korea is seeking to expand its dealings with Iran beyond the sale of missile technology. In a recent interview, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice said that she had seen no such evidence.

The president also sought to reassure Asian allies and trading partners that the United States was not on the retreat, at a time when China is rapidly expanding its influence throughout the region.

"In this new century, America will remain engaged in Asia because our interests depend on the expansion of freedom and opportunity in this region," Mr. Bush said.

"We hear voices calling for us to retreat from the world and close our doors to these opportunities. These are the old temptations of isolationism and protectionism and America must reject them."

Mr. Bush appeared to be addressing members of his own Republican Party who helped kill a deal this year under which DP World, a Dubai company, would have gained control over several U.S. port terminal operations. Many Republicans have also expressed reservations about U.S. free trade agreements, even as the Bush administration has been pushing to revive stalled global trade talks.

Mr. Bush arrived here this morning in one of Asia's most prosperous corners, spending the day sightseeing and meeting with local leaders, including Singapore's prime minister, Lee Hsien Loong. The president's visit is seen as a test of whether the Republican Party's defeat last week has diminished his influence as he presses other nations on Iran, North Korea and global free trade.

Stopping Wednesday in Moscow for refueling, Mr. Bush and his wife, Laura, had a 90-minute visit with President Vladimir V. Putin, which the White House described as largely social.

But it included some exchanges on efforts to get Russia to join a resolution imposing U.N. sanctions on Iran for its continued defiance regarding its nuclear program.

On the way here, Mr. Bush's national security adviser, Stephen Hadley, acknowledged that the two countries were still well apart on such sanctions.

"The issue is just what should be in the resolution," Mr. Hadley said after talking to his counterpart, Igor Ivanoff, in Moscow. "It's a little bit like sausage making - it's not pretty, and a lot of it spills out into the public. But I think the international community has held together on this issue, and I think we will again."

Russia has deep economic ties to Iran's nuclear power program — it is the supplier of nuclear reactors now under construction — and it has been the most reluctant to impose sanctions, saying they would undercut efforts to reach a negotiated settlement. Bush administration officials make little secret of their frustration that the year is coming to a close and Iran is continuing to enrich uranium.

Asked about seeking Iran's help with ending violence in Iraq while pressing the nuclear issue, Mr. Hadley said the administration had no intention of letting up the pressure to win Iran's help. "There's not a tradeoff between the two," he said. "Iran ought to have an interest in having a unified and stable Iraq."

In Moscow, the Kremlin's spokesman, Dmitry Peskov, described the meeting of the presidents and their wives as brief but "very positive." He said that among the subjects they took up was an agreement, already announced, for Russia to enter the World Trade Organization.

When Bush arrives Friday in Hanoi, the Vietnamese capital, for an annual Asian summit meeting, he will face a more difficult trade issue: Congress balked at final passage of normal trade relations with Vietnam.

Mr. Bush had intended to bring news of the approval with him, but Mr. Hadley said that instead, he would tell Hanoi that he believed the problems in Congress — some with Bush's own Republican allies — would soon be resolved.

In Hanoi, Bush is also likely to have a testy encounter with President Roh Moo-hyun of South Korea. Mr. Roh has been critical of what he has called a one-sided American approach to North Korea, and earlier this week, he announced only weak sanctions against North Korea in response to its nuclear test on Oct. 9.

So far South Korea has declined to take part directly in the U.S.-led effort to detect and seize illicit weapons shipments. Many North Korean ships pass through South Korean waters. U.S. officials say that Mr. Roh, in a visit to Washington before the nuclear test, had indicated that if North Korea detonated a nuclear test, it would "change everything" in relations between North and South.

One of Bush's senior national security aides, speaking in Washington before the president left, but declining to talk on the record about the friction between Washington and Seoul, said, "It seems to have changed almost nothing."

Steven Lee Myers contributed reporting from Moscow.