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North Korea 'plans to conduct nuclear test'

North says it plans to carry out third nuclear test, two days after UN condemned its rocket launch

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North Korea has said it planned to carry out a third nuclear test and more rocket launches aimed at its "arch-enemy" the US, two days after the UN **condemned** its rocket launch.

"We are not disguising the fact that the various satellites and long-range rockets that we will fire and the high-level nuclear test we will carry out are targeted at the United States," North Korea's National Defence Commission said on Thursday.

In a statement carried by state news agency KCNA, the National Defence Commission in Pyongyang threatened to wage a "full-fledged confrontation" against the US for what it called continued hostility.

The declaration follows the UN Security Council's condemnation of North Korea on Tuesday and expanded sanctions against the regime for launching a rocket in December.

North Korea said the launch was a peaceful satellite mission, but the US and others say it was actually a test of long-range missile technology.

Pyongyang is believed by South Korea and other observers to be "technically ready" for a third nuclear test, and the decision to go ahead rests with Kim Jong-un, the supreme leader.

Kim had authorised the previous rocket launch in defiance of UN sanctions last month.

North Korea's sole major ally China urged "all relevant parties" to show restraint .

"All relevant parties should refrain from action that might escalate the situation in the region," foreign ministry spokesman Hong Lei told reporters in Beijing.

US response

"Whether North Korea tests or not is up to North Korea," Glyn Davies, the top US envoy for North Korean diplomacy, said in the South Korean capital of Seoul.

"We hope they don't do it. We call on them not to do it," Davies said.

"This is not a moment to increase tensions on the Korean peninsula."

The North was banned from developing missile and nuclear technology under sanctions dating from its 2006 and 2009 nuclear tests.

There is fear that Pyongyang, whose only major diplomatic ally, China, endorsed the latest UN resolution, could undertake a third nuclear test, using highly enriched uranium for the first time, opening a second path to a bomb.

Its previous tests have been viewed as limited successes and used plutonium, of which the North has limited stocks.

North Korea gave no time-frame for the coming test, and often employs harsh rhetoric in response to UN and US actions.

Its long-range rockets are not seen as capable of reaching the United States mainland and it is not believed to have the technology to mount a nuclear warhead on a long-range missile.

"The UNSC resolution masterminded by the US has brought its hostile policy towards the Democratic Peoples Republic of Korea to its most dangerous stage," the commission was quoted as saying.

Al Jazeera's Harry Fawcett reporting from Busan in South Korea, said that the two key things to come out of the statement from Pyongyang, the rhetoric against the US and the confirmation of a third nuclear test, has ignited talks of a "potential round of bilateral sanctions involve the US and South Korea targeting North Korea".

He added that Park Geun-hye, South Korea president-elect wanted more engagement with North Korea because of the widespread humanitarian suffering and has said that aid should not be ruled out.

"But this kind of rhetoric and certainly a third nuclear test will make that more difficult in the first months of her presidency," said Fawcett.