

# American B-1 bombers send menacing warning to North Korea

**Our reporter**  
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The US Air Force flew two B-1 strategic bombers over South Korea yesterday in a threatening warning to North Korea after its fifth nuclear test last Friday. The fly-past at South Korea's Osan Air Base was also designed to send a message to Beijing to ramp up pressure on its North Korean ally to comply with US demands.

The supersonic B-1 bombers were flanked by four US F-16 fighter jets and four South Korean F-15 warplanes. The B-1 bombers flew from Guam, where they are based as part of the US Pacific Command's Continuous Bomber Presence. The heavy bombers, which can carry a payload of 37.5 tonnes, were part of a squadron that conducted more than 630 raids over Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan in the first six months of 2015.

The US has carried out provocative fly-overs in the past. Following North Korea's fourth nuclear test in January, the Pentagon dispatched a B-52 bomber, accompanied by two South Korean and two US fighter aircraft, over South Korea on a "deterrence patrol."

General Vincent Brooks, commander of US Forces in Korea, denounced North Korea's "blatant disregard" for its international obligations and warned that the American military would "continue to enhance military readiness to take actions as directed to deter North Korea." He specifically referred to the stationing of a Terminal High Altitude Air Defence (THAAD) anti-ballistic missile system in South Korea, nominally targeted against North Korea but also part of US preparations for war against China.

Speaking to reporters, South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff chairman Lee Sun-jin was even more bellicose. "As we warned multiple times, if North Korea continues its aggressive behaviour and develops nuclear weapons, it will meet retaliatory actions that will shake

the very foundation of the regime's existence," he warned.

South Korea's defence ministry claimed on Monday that North Korea was preparing for another nuclear test. "Assessment by South Korean and US intelligence is that the North is always ready for an additional nuclear test in the Punggye-ri area," a spokesman said.

Following last Friday's test, US Defence Secretary Ashton Carter reportedly told his South Korean counterpart the US was prepared to use "all aspects of our extended deterrent capabilities, including conventional capabilities, missile defence and the nuclear umbrella." In other words, the Pentagon has the green light to use nuclear weapons in a conflict with North Korea.

Carter blamed China for not doing more to force North Korea to abandon its nuclear and missile programs. "It's China's responsibility," he said. "China has and shares an important responsibility for this development and has an important responsibility to reverse it."

Washington has mounted a concerted campaign to pressure China to choke off vital supplies, particularly of oil, to force North Korea to its knees or precipitate a collapse of the fragile regime. While Beijing agreed to a new round of punitive sanctions after North Korea's fourth nuclear test, it fears that Washington could use a political crisis in Pyongyang to oust the regime and unify the Korean Peninsula under the South Korean government, a formal US ally.

Chinese foreign ministry spokesperson Hua Chunying lashed out on Monday, declaring that Carter was being "unnecessarily modest" for thrusting responsibility for handling North Korea solely on China. "The cause and crux of the Korean nuclear issue rests with the US rather than China," she said, calling

for dialogue, not “unilateral action based on one’s self-interest.” Hua warned that unilateral action would only “aggravate tension” and “complicate the issue.”

Beijing has condemned North Korea’s nuclear tests, well aware that Washington has exploited them to justify its military build-up in North East Asia, including the deployment of anti-missile systems and the Pentagon’s most sophisticated warplanes and warships. This is part of the broader US “pivot” aimed at maintaining American dominance in the Asia Pacific through all means—diplomatic, economic and military.

The Obama administration has shunned China’s attempts to forge a deal on North Korea’s nuclear programs via six-party talks involving the two Koreas, the US, China, Russia and Japan. An agreement reached in 2007 for North Korea to shut down its nuclear programs was effectively sabotaged in 2008 when the Bush administration demanded additional verification procedures. Obama always insisted that North Korea agree to give up its nuclear arsenal as the precondition for any new talks.

In remarks to *New York Times* commentator Joel Wit, reported yesterday, a North Korean official declared: “It’s easier for us to build nuclear weapons than to be involved with you for decades, only to have agreements turn into useless scraps of paper.”

The 2007 deal was not the only one to have been broken by Washington. In 1994, the Clinton administration pulled back from the brink of war with North Korea and signed an Agreed Framework under which North Korea shut down its nuclear facilities in return for supplies of fuel, along with the promise of two power reactors and eventual diplomatic recognition.

Clinton never kept the US side of the bargain and in 2001 President George W. Bush quickly wrecked the deal. In 2002, Bush branded North Korea as part of an “axis of evil” with Iran and Iraq, implicitly threatening Pyongyang with military attack.

North Korea’s nuclear tests, however, do nothing to defend the North Korean people. They play into the hands of the US and its allies by handing them a pretext for an expansion of military forces in North East Asia. The fly-over by two US B-1 bombers is not simply a theatrical show of force, but a warning that Washington is prepared to use its massive military superiority against any perceived threat to its hegemony in Asia,

either from North Korea or China.



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