

United Nations Security Council Resolution 2087 and North Korea's Response

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Forty two days after North Korea's launching of Unha-3 rocket on December 12, 2012, the United Nations (UN) Security Council imposed a new sanction on North Korea. On January 22, 2013, the member states of the UN Security Council unanimously passed Resolution 2087 on North Korea's satellite launch. Resolution 2087 reinforces Resolution 1718 and Resolution 1874, passed by the UN Security Council in 2006 and 2009 respectively. Moreover, Resolution 2087 reveals the concerns of the international community regarding North Korea's nuclear program and development of ballistic missiles. Resolution 2087 enables the UN to regulate North Korea's export of any items related to weaponizing, even if it is not on the embargo list, i.e., 'catch-all.' Moreover, the resolution includes terms such as 'bulk cash,' which always been used by North Korea to cope with sanctions imposed by the international community. Above things considered, it can be said that Resolution 2087 shows determination of the international community to inhibit North Korea's nuclear and missile weapons development.

The UN Security Council Resolution 2087 and Sanctions against North Korea

The UN Security Council Resolution 2087 stipulates that North Korea's rocket launch by means of ballistic missiles technology is a violation of Resolutions 1718 and 1874. Resolution 2087 also demands that the North put a stop to all activities related to its ballistic missiles program. Further, it demands the North to: terminate all its nuclear weapons and

nuclear weapons programs so that it is verifiable and irreversible; immediately halt all activities related to the nuclear tests; and abandon any nuclear tests or attempts to use ballistic missile technology. The resolution tightens existing sanctions imposed against the North by Resolutions 1718 and 1874. Moreover, six institutions (i.e., North Korean Committee of Space Technology, Dong Bang bank, and etc) and four individuals (i.e., Baek Chang Ho, the head Spacecraft Control Center, and Jang Myung Jin, the director of the satellite launch site at the Western Sea) were added on the sanctions list. The resolution states that the UN Security Council will impose travel restrictions, as well as assets-freeze for the institutions and individuals mentioned above. The UN Security Council not only pointed out that North Korea's development of nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles is a clear violation of existing resolutions, but also showed its determination to promote peace and stability and denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula through measures such as resumption of the six-party talks and implementation of 9.19 Joint Statement. Lastly, the UN Security Council warned the North that it could take 'significant action' against North Korea's future provocations, making it clear that the resolution involves not just strengthening of the existing sanctions, but also taking preventive measures against North Korea's future nuclear provocations.

With regard to the UN Security Council resolution, South Korea urged North Korea to "abide by the resolution in all aspects by abandoning all nuclear weapons and related programs as well as halting all activities related to its ballistic missile program." As such position of South Korea shows, the Resolution 2087 can be understood as an extension of existing sanctions system against the North, i.e., regulation of export of any items related to weaponeering, expansion of surveillance on North Korea's financial institutions, and inspections of any suspicious ships on the open waters. In particular, the fact that the director of the long-range rocket launch and institutions related to the rocket launch were added on the sanctions list, shows that the international community's strong response against North Korea's possible development of inter-continental ballistic missiles (ICBM).

North Korea's Response and its Strategic Goals

North Korea's foreign ministry issued a statement (January 23) that strongly condemns the recent resolution passed by the UN Security Council. The ministry also warned that "North Korea will take all possible physical responses such as expansion of military capabilities, including the nuclear deterrence," implying that a third nuclear test is imminent. Moreover, the statement explicitly mentions that "the six-party talks and implementation of 9. 19 Joint Statement is ruled out due to the increasingly hostile United States policy towards the North and that the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula is no longer an option." In addition, the North stated that "although talks to ensure the peace and stability of the region may take place, any talks related to the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula is ruled out."

The North Korean National Defense Commission also released a statement (January 24), warning the international community that, "We do not hide that a variety of satellites and long-range rockets which will be launched by the DPRK one after another and a high-level nuclear test will be targeted against the

U.S., the sworn enemy of the Korean people.” The statement clearly shows that North Korea perceives the UN Security Resolution as being a result of US’s hostility towards North Korea rather than a sanction against the North by the international community. The Jopyongtong (The Committee for the Peaceful Reunification of the Fatherland) also released a statement (January 25) that warns “North Korea will use all its possible physical capabilities” as a response to South Korea’s participation in the UN Security Council resolution.

North Korea’s response and strategy to the UN Security Council sanction can be analyzed in the following two ways. First, North Korea’s mentioning of ‘physical response’ or ‘a nuclear test of higher level’ can be analyzed as follows. After its failed rocket launch in April 2012, the success of Unha-3 rocket launch is being used for propaganda within North Korea to strengthen Kim Jong-un’s internal standing. Kim Jong-un is facing a dilemma between pursuing a ‘military first policy’ and an ‘economy first policy’; he needs to maintain and advance the military first policy in order to fulfill his father’s dying wishes, however, he needs to adopt economy first policy in order to improve North Korea’s dire living conditions. Under such circumstances, it will not be easy for North Korea to give up its nuclear and missile card as it may help in strengthening national unity. In other words, North Korea’s launching of Unha-3 rocket last December showed Kim Jung-un’s dilemma between strengthening the North Korean regime and improving economic conditions. Further, it showed that the pursuit of economic reform is pushed back on the priority list when it comes to the issue of strengthening Kim Jung-un’s internal standing. Thus, if North Korea’s physical response to the resolution involves a third nuclear test, it could be considered as a result of a combination of North Korea’s domestic politics and nuclear weapons technology, including miniaturized and lighter nuclear device. North Korea has already launched an ICBM and conducted a nuclear test after satellite launching. In particular, North Korea has indicated the possibility of using highly enriched uranium in its future nuclear tests by revealing uranium enrichment facility, November 2010.

Second, North Korea’s response to the resolution could be considered as a strategy to put an end to the denuclearization talks and to promote talks on establishing a peace regime on the Korean Peninsula. North Korea has claimed itself the nuclear power status since its second nuclear test in 2009. Such strategic intention of North Korea becomes more evident when North Korea’s response is analyzed through the framework of North Korea’s negotiations with the U.S. North Korea argues that, as a nuclear power, it is pursuing nuclear reduction talks, not denuclearization talks. Also, given the fact that members of the six-party talks, the neighboring states of Korean Peninsula, are focused on the goal of ‘denuclearization,’ it could be said that North Korea’s reaction to the recent resolution is closely related to the discourse that it has been promoting since 2009 – the establishment of peace regime on the Korean Peninsula. In this regard, it can be said that by emphasizing that it is willing to talk about the peace and stability of the Korean Peninsula, but not denuclearization, North Korea is trying to emphasize its perspective that the current armistice agreement needs to be replaced by a peace treaty. This becomes more evident when one looks at the fact that the above-mentioned statements released by North Korea’s foreign ministry and North Korean National Defense Commission ruled out the possibility of conducting talks on denuclearization and explicitly targeted the U.S.

The possibility of North Korea's third nuclear test and policy coordination of neighboring countries

On January 23, 2013, Xi Jinping, the General Secretary of the Communist Party of China met South Korean special envoys to China and stated China's position on the nuclear issue: "Denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula and the non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction are prerequisite requirements for peace and stability of the Korean Peninsula". It is unlikely that North Korea will announce any fundamental change in its stance on the third nuclear test, despite such position of China's senior leader. Rather, North Korea asserted that and "even the great countries have lost their mind," regarding China and Russia, in addition to its denunciation of U.S. and South Korea. For North Korea the timing of the third nuclear test is the subject of discussion, not the test itself in the midst of North Korea's repeated missile and nuclear tests and the tightening of the sanctions by the international community. The Unha-3 rocket launch last December and the recent Resolution 2087 created a favorable environment for the North Korean leaders to accomplish its strategic goal. Currently, the neighboring countries of North Korea, such as South Korea, China, and the U.S. will not want any unwarranted tension or crisis as they are all in the midst of leadership transition. Glyn Davies, the special representative for United States policy toward North Korea, warned that North Korea's additional provocation, including the nuclear test, will isolate the North Korean regime to a greater extent. Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Hong Lei also urged North Korea to act with prudence at a regular briefing on January 23.

However, if North Korea continues to pursue brinkmanship diplomacy despite the hopes and expectations of its neighboring states, the Northeast Asian security environment will deteriorate. The South Korean government should take the initiative in inter-Korean relations and pursue policy coordination with the neighboring states. Moreover, the South Korean government needs to respond promptly to its changing security environment. Most importantly, South Korea needs to take a proactive stance and persuade North Korea through multiple channels that it has more to lose than to gain from another nuclear test. North Korea has made explicit that it will only respond to talks related to 'the peace and stability of Korean Peninsula' and not 'denuclearization'. The international community needs to understand North Korea's strategic intentions. Further, it needs to find gaps and flaws in North Korea's strategy and utilize it to strengthen policy coordination among the relevant states so that it can put a stop to the North Korean threat. © KINU 2013

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