

North Korea announces nuclear weapon testing

Contributed by Matt Belliveau & Anna Dolianitis, Massachusetts Daily Collegian (U. Massachusetts)

(U-WIRE) AMHERST, Mass. - North Korea sent shock waves across the world Monday after announcing that it had set off an atomic explosion underground.

North Korea's declaration of nuclear power thrusts the secretive communist state into the elite club of nuclear-armed nations and, in turn, strikes fear into many American citizens, including the students at the University of Massachusetts.

The United States, Japan, China and Britain unanimously voiced their intense criticism of North Korea's actions, with President Bush saying the reported test poses a threat to global peace and security and "deserves an immediate response" from the United Nations Security Council, which met to discuss the crisis.

Bush said he had called the leaders of South Korea, China, Russia and Japan, and all had reaffirmed a commitment to a non-nuclear Korean peninsula.

The reported test came one day after the ninth anniversary of reclusive North Korean leader Kim Jong Il's accession to power.

Members of the 15-nation Security Council were unanimous in denouncing the claim amid worldwide concern that it could seriously destabilize the region, with even North Korean ally China saying it strongly opposed to the move.

The Security Council had warned the impoverished and isolated nation just two days earlier not to go through with a test, and U.S. Ambassador John Bolton told the Associated Press that Washington will seek UN sanctions to curb North Korea's import and export of material for weapons of mass destruction, as well as its illicit financial activities.

UMass junior Stefanie Colish thinks North Korea's actions are a sign of U.S. faults in foreign policy.

"I'm worried, because I think it shows that America's foreign policy hasn't worked or their dealings have not worked in North Korea," said Colish. "I'd be more worried if I found out that North Korea had the ability to launch their nuclear weapon."

Bolton and key U.S. allies, including Britain and France, said they would seek a resolution under Chapter 7 of the UN Charter that would seek punishing measures, going beyond the limited sanctions in a measure adopted by the council in July after North Korea conducted seven missile tests.

"I think it would be very interesting to see how the United Nations and international community react, because military strategy will not work in the situation obviously because they have a nuclear weapon now," said Colish.

The Bush administration has repeatedly said it has no plans to invade North Korea and military action appears unlikely. But the United States proposed stringent UN sanctions on Monday, including a trade ban on military and luxury items, the power to inspect all cargo entering or leaving the country, and freezing assets connected with Pyongyang's weapons programs, according to a copy of the draft obtained by The Associated Press.

North Korea's UN ambassador Pak Gil Yon said the Security Council should congratulate his country instead of passing "useless" resolutions or statements.

AP Television News footage showed North Koreans going about their daily business with no signs of heightened alert by security forces in Pyongyang on Monday, hours after their government said it performed a nuclear weapons test.

Bush told the media the United States was still attempting to confirm that a nuclear test had actually taken place. Still, he said, "such a claim itself constitutes a threat to international peace and security."

China, the North's closest ally and its main source of food, expressed its "resolute opposition" to the reported test and urged the North to return to six-party nuclear disarmament talks. It said the North "defied the universal opposition of international society and flagrantly conducted the nuclear test."

"It will be interesting to see how China reacts to North Korea having nuclear weapons," said UMass sophomore Dennis Scott. "I think China will definitely be leading the way in the strategy to prevent North Korea from becoming a really big nuclear power."

Reports about the size of the explosion were conflicting. Russia said the blast was a nuclear explosion, but the reaction of world governments reflected little doubt that they were treating the announcement as fact.

"We have no doubts that it [the test] was nuclear," Russian Defense Minister Sergei Ivanov said.

The U.S. Geological Survey said it recorded a magnitude 4.2 seismic event in northeastern North Korea. Asian neighbors also said they registered a seismic event, and an official of South Korea's monitoring center said the magnitude 3.6 tremor wasn't a natural occurrence.

Although North Korea has long claimed it had the capability to produce a bomb, the test would be the first manifest proof that it had done so. A nuclear-armed North Korea would dramatically alter the strategic balance of power in the Pacific region and would undermine already fraying global anti-proliferation efforts.

The North has refused for a year to attend six-party international talks aimed at persuading it to disarm, calling for the United States to drop sanctions it has imposed to it for alleged counterfeiting and money laundering.

Some American's fear North Korea's action may be the start of another full-blown war.

"I feel like testing nuclear weapons was not a good idea at all," said Scott. "The United States should attempt to enter talks with North Korea, along with the other countries in the area. If nothing happens with that, I think there is a potential for war and I fear there will be rebound effects that may exist in the Middle East, like Iran, where the potential for nuclear weapons exists.

"If this happens, then everyone is screwed, because these leaders are ridiculously crazy and there will be destruction and war. If the United States is involved then there will be a draft, and I'm not looking forward to this happening," added Scott.