The North Korea Connundrum

Why in news?

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The North Korea conducted its sixth nuclear test recently.

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What is the history of Nuclear crises in Korea?

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- The current one is the third nuclear crisis on the Korean peninsula.
- **First Crisis -** Post-Cold War, U.S. and USSR withdrew naval and tactical nuclear weapons globally, including the ones in Korea.
- But the U.S-South Korea military exercises were restarted.
- Subsequently in 1993 with North Korea threatening to withdraw from the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT).
- The crisis was averted by direct talks with the U.S. leading to an Agreed Framework in 1994.
- Under which North Korea suspended its decision to withdraw from the NPT, agreed to freeze its nuclear activities.
- The Clinton administration pledged to provide nuclear power reactors also provided more than $800 million of food aid.
- **Second Crisis -** The Bush administration in 2002 declared North Korea part of the 'axis of evil' & annulled the 1994 Framework.
- North Korea reacted by formally quitting the NPT in 2003.
- China and Russia initiated the Six-Party Talks in 2003 which the U.S. later joined under pressure.

- However, when the U.S. imposed new sanctions a few months later and North Korea responded with its first nuclear test in 2006.
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What are the stats of the North Korea’s weapons program?

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- **The Bomb –** The current bomb is estimated to be six times bigger than the Hiroshima bomb.
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- Measuring 6.3 on the Richter scale, the recent test indicates an explosive yield of approximately 120 kilotons.
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- The North Koreans described it as a successful hydrogen bomb.
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- **Missile Program -** 4 nuclear tests & more than 80 missile tests have already been conducted under the current leadership.
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- U.S. intillegence have estimated that North Korea has succeeded in producing a mini-warhead that could be mated with its missiles.
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- **ICBM -** In July 2017, Hwasong-14 was tested, which is an intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM).
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- It reached a height of 2,800km and travelled a distance of 933km bringing mainland America within range.
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What is the position of the key countries?

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- U.N. Security Council has met regularly to condemn North Korean missile tests and tighten sanctions.
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- **USA -** The U.S. policy under Mr. Trump has been ‘maximum pressure on North Korea’ through China.
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- Threats & counter threats have been exchanged frequently in recent times.
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- Recently US blamed China for increasing trade with North Korea, therby diluting the sanctions in place.
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- While US has assured a strong military retaliation if things worsen, it has also pragmatically stressed that it doesn't seek regime change or the accelerated reunification of the Koreas.
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- **China and Russia -** They too have been highly critical of North Korea's missile and nuclear tests.
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- They voice that if the U.S. and South Korea were to suspend their joint military exercises, North Korea would open up for a dialogue.
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Why North Korea is strengthening its aresenal?

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- Kim Jong-un, looks convinced that he needs a nuclear deterrent for regime survival.
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- He clearly desires regime recognition & easing of sanctions.
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- He might also be to use this to dilute U.S – South Korea ties in an effort to unify the peninsula.
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- China too has half hearted in its efforts towards a denuclearised Korean peninsula as it fears that it would eventually lead to a regime collapse in the North & the creation of re-unificated Korea that is allied to USA.
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How can this be resolved?

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- North Korea might agree to a temporary halt in testing as a means to start a dialogue but will not accept any restriction on capabilities in return for mere verbal assurances.
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- All the key powers involved should take up confidence building measures to

chalk out a clear agenda.
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- Mutual recognition will have to precede reunification and for this, the two Koreas need to begin a dialogue.
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- For now, the objectives of ‘denuclearisation’ has to be set aside and North Korea’s nuclear capability will have to be recognized.
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Source: The Hindu

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