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'Flames and Ashes': Pyongyang Orders More Nuclear Tests

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Pyongyang claims to have miniaturized nuclear warhead capabilities, placing the world in North Korea's crosshairs, but security analysts remain skeptical on how far the Kim regime has come.



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Amid rising tensions on the Korean peninsula, North Korean leader Kim Jong-Un ordered a fresh spate of nuclear tests, the country's state media said Friday. The tests come days after South Korean and US forces began large-scale joint exercises simulating a full invasion of the country, which Pyongyang swiftly denounced.

Since the US-South Korean drills began Monday, Pyongyang has escalated its rhetoric, issuing daily warnings of a nuclear strike that would turn Seoul and Washington into "flames and ashes."

The situation on the Korean peninsula has become increasingly alarming following photographs of Kim Jong-Un posing in front of what state media described as a miniaturized nuclear warhead.

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Prior to the emergence of the photo, Western analysts speculated that North Korea lacked the capacity to miniaturize a warhead to equip it to an intercontinental ballistic missile. Although Kim said the weapon requires further testing, the world watches with great concern. Still, experts remain divided on how far the North has advanced in shrinking warheads to create strike capability extending to the US mainland.

North Korea's official KCNA news agency reported Kim ordered "more nuclear explosion tests to estimate the destructive capacity of the newly produced nuclear warheads." KCNA further reported that Thursday's launch of two short-range ballistic missiles into the East Sea off of Japan was part of a nuclear strike test.

Kim has decried US-South Korean drills as "saber-rattling" and warned of an imminent nuclear attack if "even a single tree or blade of grass" on North Korean territory is harmed. "I will issue a prompt order to launch attack with all military strike means," Kim announced.

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Tensions on the Korean peninsula first began to rise in January when the Pyongyang regime initiated a fourth nuclear test followed closely by a long-range rocket launch. South Korea and the United States responded by scaling up war games, which Pyongyang calls dress rehearsals for a full-scale invasion.

The US-South Korean drills include a “decapitation strike” scenario, in which the North Korean leadership and command structure is eliminated at the start of any conflict.

This measure has pushed the world closer to the precipice of nuclear annihilation, as Kim's regime has called for self-defense countermeasures to “adopt a more preemptive and offensive mode.”

Weeks ago the UN Security Council stepped in with an unprecedented set of sanctions against Pyongyang to curtail North Korea's capabilities in light of the country's latest nuclear test, rocket launch, and espoused desire to annihilate their neighbors to the South and to strike the US mainland.

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In a statement, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, a South Korean statesman himself, called on the Kim regime to avoid “any further destabilizing acts” and defending the draconian sanctions as a necessary deterrent in the interest of global security.

Russia similarly has called on Pyongyang to dial down the rhetoric, with Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov calling Kim’s destabilizing behavior “irresponsible.”

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