



BBC World News

China - North Korea & BRICS Summit

Robert Lawrence Kuhn

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Host: North Korea's latest test took place just as China's president was about to welcome a handful of world leaders to a two-day summit in Xiamen. The leaders of the five BRICS countries: Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa as well as leaders of Egypt, Mexico, Tajikistan, Guinea, and Thailand are now in China attending the international conference. For his views on this, we're joined now by Robert Lawrence Kuhn, the author of *How China's Leaders Think* and he joins me now from Shanghai. Mr. Kuhn, thank you so much for joining us. Apart from free trade and the BRICS meeting, what do you think right now is on the mind of President Xi Jinping with this latest provocative move by North Korea?





RLK: First, we have to understand the setting. BRICS is very important to China because it emphasizes President Xi Jinping's approach to global governance and his view of China emerging in the world proactively to support world peace and prosperity and stability, and China's diplomatic initiatives through mutual cooperation. So for North Korea to detonate the nuclear weapon at this time is really, enormously, both rude and intrusive into one of China's most important events of the year. China sees BRICS as central for its vision of cooperation among emerging countries, multilateralism as opposed to unilateralism – all the diplomatic issues that China deals with. This time President Xi emphasized security; stressed global peace and stability; a common comprehensive cooperative and sustainable security arrangement, and so at this time for this test to occur is quite significant. There was talk in the Chinese press that if North Korea launches missiles that's one thing, but a nuclear weapon is something else. Now we have to see what happens.

Host: Upset by this nuclear test, could China's leaders crack down even more, impose more sanctions on Kim Jong Un and the North Koreans?





RLK: I wouldn't say 'could'; I would say 'definitely' they are upset. In fact, the entire relationship between China and North Korea is now a matter of debate among Chinese policy experts and even breaking into the media. That doesn't happen in China by accident - the whole North Korea relationship is definitely under stress and I would be surprised if China didn't do significantly more after this nuclear test. But you have to understand that the North Korean relationship with China is very complex. Most Westerners don't understand why. You have to go back into history. You have to look at what it would mean for China if the North Korean regime would collapse, so China is very sensitive. They're sensitive about five million refugees fleeing over the border. They're sensitive about American troops possibly going into North Korea if there's unification, THAAD missile being even closer to China - those are real fears. Moreover, North Korea has been a long-term ally (China respects long-term), a socialist country, a loss of face, a strategic bargaining chip in trade negotiations, a strategic distraction for the U.S. so the U.S. doesn't focus on other more sensitive issues like Taiwan. So there are many issues that make China not want to see the regime collapse, but certainly not cause the trouble it is.

Host: Thank you so much for your insight.

