

US flies nuke bombers over S Korea
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The US military today flew two nuclear-capable supersonic bombers over South Korea in a show of force following North Korea's recent nuclear test, reports China's *Xinhua* news agency.

Two B-1B Lancers, which can carry nuclear weapons, flew over the Osan Air Base in Pyeongtaek, some 70km south of capital Seoul, at about 10am local time (0100GMT).

The one was flanked by four South Korean F-15K fighter jets, while the other was joined by four US F-16 fighter planes before returning to the base.

The high-speed bombers made a sortie from the US air base in Guam. US Forces Korea (USFK) said in an emailed statement that the flyover highlights the close cooperation between US and South Korean military forces that keep them ready to respond at any time to threats to stability and security.

The flights are a day later than scheduled. The US reportedly planned to send the bombers to South Korea on Monday, but it was delayed due to unfavourable weather conditions.

The US allegedly forward-deployed several B-1Bs to Andersen base in Guam in early August from Ellsworth air base in South Dakota to replace B-52 strategic bombers.

Three B-2 stealth bombers also arrived in Guam last month from Whiteman base in Missouri. It was the first time that the US strategic bomber trio was mobilised together in the Pacific region.

North Korea had denounced the forward-deployment of US nuclear-capable bombers, saying it was an evidence to show the US intention of pre-emptive nuclear strikes against Pyongyang.

The flight of B-1Bs over South Korean territory near the inter- Korean border came just four days North Korea announced its successful explosion test of nuclear warhead that can be mounted on ballistic missiles.

South Korea's military estimated the fifth nuclear test was the most powerful as it produced an explosive yield of 10 kilotonnes bigger than six kilotonnes generated in the previous test.

Following the Jan 6 nuclear detonation, the fourth from North Korea, the US military staged an armed protest by flying a B-52 strategic bomber over the Osan Air Base.

In early 2013, the US flew nuclear-capable B-2s, B-52s and F-22 fighter jets close to the inter-Korean border. In February of the year, Pyongyang carried out its third atomic device test.

"Today's demonstration provides just one example of the full range of military capabilities in the deep resources of this strong alliance to provide and strengthen extended deterrence," said Gen Vincent K Brooks, USFK commander, indicating further mobilisation of US strategic assets on the Korean peninsula.

The US deployment of its nuclear-capable bomber trio in the Pacific escalates the already heightened tensions in the region, which is one of the world's most-armed powder kegs.

The B-1B, which went into operation in the 1980s, is known to be capable of carrying as heavy as 61 tonnes of weapons, including 24 nuclear bombs as well as 24 joint direct attack munitions (JDAM), 84 conventional bombs, 24 air-to-surface missiles and eight cruise missiles.

The supersonic bomber can fly at a maximum speed of Mach 2, faster than B-2's Mach 0.9 and B-52's 957 kilometres per hour. It can travel as far as 12,000km without refuelling.

The B-2 stealth bomber, which began to be deployed in the 1990s, can be armed with the maximum of 22-tonne weapons, including 16 nuclear bombs and air-launched cruise missiles. It can travel 12,000km without refuelling.

The B-52 bomber can travel as far as 16,000km without refueling, carrying as heavy as 31 tonnes of weapons including nuclear bombs and "bunker buster" missiles that can destroy underground facilities.

- *Bernama*

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