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Defiant N Korea launches rocket



North Korea has defied international warnings and gone ahead with a controversial rocket launch.

State media said a satellite had been put into orbit and was transmitting data and revolutionary songs.

But there has been no independent confirmation so far. The US, Japan and South Korea suspect the launch was a cover for a long-range missile test.

They strongly condemned the launch. The US president told Pyongyang to "refrain from further provocative actions".

See satellite images of North Korea's launch pad

"North Korea broke the rules once more by testing a rocket that could be used for a long-range missile," Mr Obama told a crowd in the Czech capital, Prague. "This provocation underscores the need for action - not just this afternoon at the UN Security Council, but in our determination to prevent the spread of these weapons."

Japan called the move "extremely regrettable", while South Korea said it constituted a clear breach of a United Nations resolution.

UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon said North Korea's actions were not conducive to regional stability, as did the European Union. China and Russia both called on all sides to act with restraint.

The UN Security Council has approved a Japanese request for an emergency session later in the day in New York.

Washington, Tokyo and Seoul regard the launch as a clear violation of Security Council resolution 1718 adopted in October 2006, which bans North Korea from carrying out ballistic missile activity.

No intercept

North Korea announced several weeks ago that it planned to send what it called

an "experimental communications satellite" into space from the Musudan-ri launch site in the north-east.

The three-stage rocket blasted off just before midday local time, within a pre-announced launch window.

[North Korea's missile programme](#)

[Reaction to North Korea launch](#)



It flew over Japan towards the Pacific, with two booster stages dropping into the ocean to the east and west of Japan, Tokyo said.

Japan said it had not tried to intercept the rocket. It had indicated it would do so if the rocket threatened its territory.

North Korea says the launch is part of what it calls peaceful space development.

"Our scientists and engineers have succeeded in sending satellite 'Kwangmyongsong-2' into orbit by way of carrier rocket 'Unha-2'," state news agency KCNA reported.

It added that it was transmitting data and the "Song of General Kim Il-sung" and "Song of General Kim Jong-il" - references to the late founder of North Korea and his son, the current leader.

In a previous satellite launch attempt in 1998, North Korea said it was sending up a device that would orbit the world transmitting revolutionary melodies.

It claimed this was also successful but the launch is believed to have been a failure as no trace of the satellite was ever found.

Earlier on Sunday, an unidentified South Korean official told Yonhap news agency that the rocket did appear to be carrying a satellite.

If confirmed, North Korea will see this as a major propaganda victory, says the BBC's John Sudworth in Seoul.

US within range?

But of more concern to Pyongyang's neighbours is the potential military use of the launch vehicle, our correspondent says.

They believe the real aim of the launch was to test long-range missile technology; specifically the Taepodong-2.

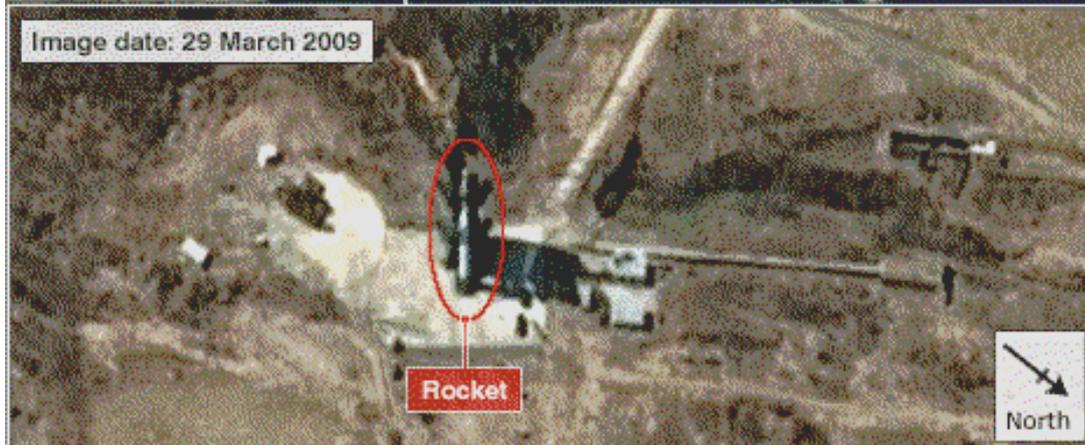
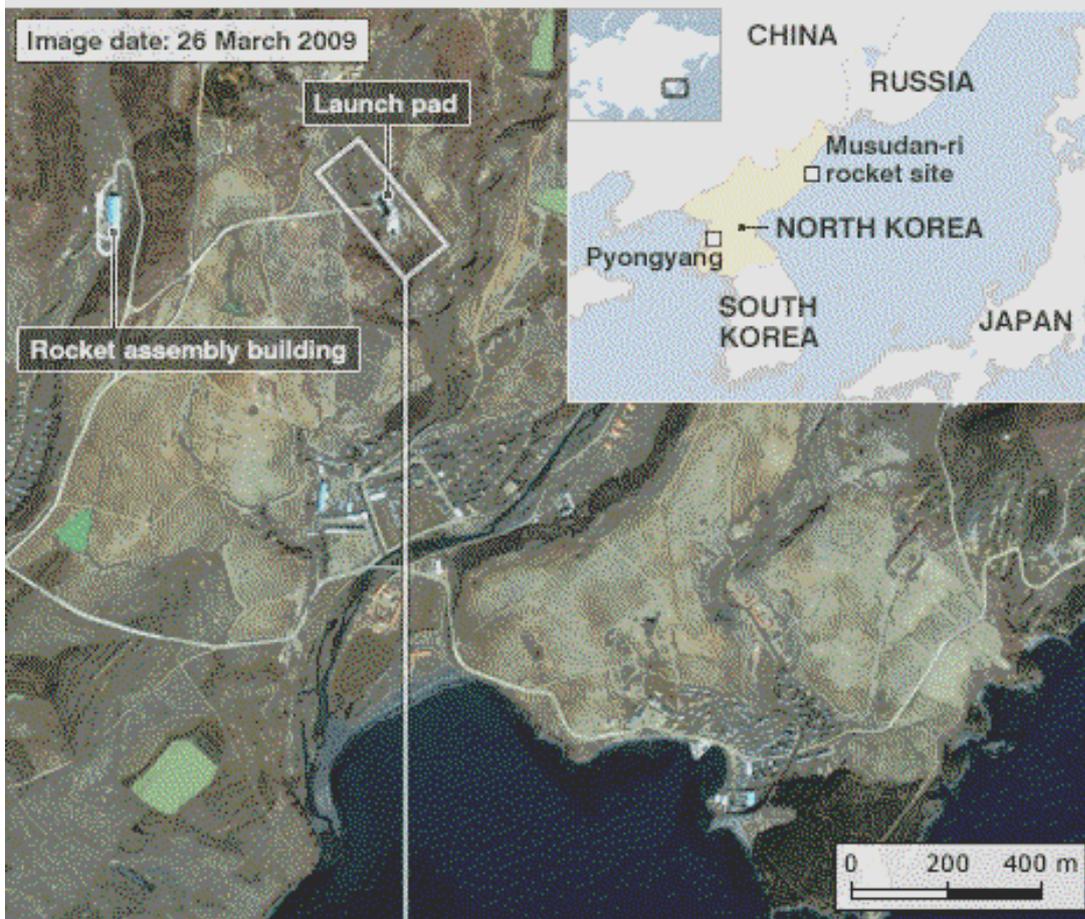
They believe it could put parts of the US within the communist nation's military reach.

North Korea first tested a Taepodong-2 in July 2006. It failed less than a minute after lift-off.

Three months later, Pyongyang carried out a nuclear test.

International talks involving the US, South Korea, Japan, Russia and China on an aid-for-nuclear disarmament deal are currently stalled.

ROCKET LAUNCH SITE IN MUSUDAN-RI, NORTH KOREA



Digital Globe/Isis

15 April 2009 08:41 UK

Tensions high in North Korea row



Image grab of North Korean TV showing apparent rocket launch

Pyongyang said criticism of its launch was an "unbearable insult"

International tensions have remained high after North Korea said it was expelling UN nuclear inspectors and resuming work on its nuclear programme.

The US has condemned Pyongyang's "provocative threats", saying they were "a step in the wrong direction".

Washington has joined China, Russia, Japan and other countries in urging Pyongyang to return to negotiations.

The row follows North Korea's launch of a long-range rocket on 5 April, which critics say was a missile test.

By contrast, the mood was festive in Pyongyang on Wednesday as the communist nation celebrated the Day of the Sun - the anniversary of the birth of founding President Kim Il-sung.

State media called for unshakeable loyalty to his son, the current ruler Kim Jong-il, and credited the launch as a "historic victory".

North Korea has said it wants to develop its space programme by 2012, which will mark 100 years since Kim Il-sung's birth. It said the launch was a step towards that goal.

Interceptions mulled

Pyongyang's move has been criticised by all the other members of the six party talks - the US, China, Russia, South Korea and Japan.

But the North insists it put a communications satellite into orbit, and reacted angrily to Monday's statement from the UN Security Council condemning the launch.

It said the criticism was an "unbearable insult" which debased the North Korean people.

N Korea must end nuclear 'threats'

North Korea's foreign ministry said it was quitting the long-running six party talks on its nuclear programmes and would "not be bound by any agreement reached at the talks".

The ministry also said it was taking steps to reactivate its partially-dismantled Yongbyon nuclear facility.

The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) said it had been instructed to remove seals and equipment from the Yongbyon reactor and that its monitors had been ordered to leave North Korea.

Analysts say South Korea may soon announce that it is signing up to the controversial US-led Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI) in response.

Membership of the PSI would allow South Korea to intercept any ships heading for the North which are believed to be carrying weapons or other items covered by existing sanctions.

The White House has called on North Korea "to cease its provocative threats and to respect the will of the international community and to honour its international commitments and obligations".

Spokesman Robert Gibbs defended the UN statement, and said withdrawing from negotiations was "a serious step in the wrong direction" for North Korea.

US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton has described North Korea's reaction as "an unnecessary response to the legitimate statement put out of concern by the Security Council".

China and Russia - the North's neighbours and closest allies - have already urged North Korea to reconsider its decision, with Beijing calling for "calm and restraint".

Japan, whose territory the rocket flew over, said returning to the talks was the best option for North Korea.

"Based on close co-operation with all countries involved, starting with the US, we want to demonstrate progress in the six party talks," said Chief Cabinet Secretary Takeo Kawamura.

Limited options

IAEA inspectors went to North Korea following a landmark deal in February, under which it agreed to end its nuclear ambitions in return for aid and political incentives.

NUCLEAR CRISIS

Feb 2007 - North Korea agrees to close its main nuclear reactor in exchange for fuel aid

June 2007 - North Korea shuts its main Yongbyon reactor

June 2008 - North Korea makes its long-awaited declaration of nuclear assets

Oct 2008 - The US removes North Korea from its list of countries which sponsor terrorism

Dec 2008 - Pyongyang slows work to dismantle its nuclear programme after a US decision to suspend energy aid

Jan 2009 - The North says it is scrapping all military and political deals with the South, accusing it of "hostile intent"

5 April 2009 - Pyongyang launches a rocket carrying what it says is a communications satellite

14 April 2009 - After criticism of the launch from the UN Security Council, North Korea vows to walk out of six-party talks

N Korea a problem for Obama

Timeline: North Korea

It had carried out a nuclear test in October 2006.

Some progress was made - last year North Korea partially disabled its Yongbyon reactor and handed over what it said was a complete declaration of its nuclear activities.

In return, the US removed North Korea from the list of countries it says sponsors terrorism.

But talks have stalled in recent months, as Washington and Pyongyang accused each other of failing to meet obligations.

Analysts say the action from North Korea appears to be an attempt to test the Obama administration and to force it to make fresh concessions.

The BBC's Kim Ghattas in Washington says that beyond condemning Pyongyang's actions, Washington's options are limited.

North Korea's neighbours, such as Beijing, are more concerned with maintaining its stability while the US wants to ensure Pyongyang remains at the negotiating table.