North Korea says it's not backing down on nuclear development in 2018

By Ralph Ellis and Mayra Cuevas, CNN

Updated 0415 GMT (1215 HKT) December 30, 2017

(CNN) North Korea will remain committed to the country's nuclear development in 2018, according to a report released Saturday by state-run news agency KCNA.

"Do not expect any change in its policy," the report read.
"Its entity as an invincible power can neither be undermined nor be stamped out. The DPRK, as a responsible nuclear weapons state, will lead the trend of history to the only road of independence and justice, weathering all tempests on this planet," the report continued, referring to North Korea's official name, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea.

The report, titled "No Force Can Prevail over Independence and Justice," provided a timeline of the country's alleged 2017 nuclear weapon achievements, mostly focused on possible US engagement.
North Korea will "continue bolstering the capabilities for self-defense and preemptive attack with the nuclear force as the pivot as long as the US and its vassal forces persist in nuclear threat," the report said.
North Korea boasted about its new capability to strike "the heart of the US" and its new "status" as a "world-class nuclear power." It said it will "deal with the US's most ferocious declaration of war with fire surely and definitely."

Throughout 2017, North Korea has conducted a series of ballistic missile tests, despite constant criticism from the West and trade sanctions.
The most provocative moment came November 29 when North Korea said it successfully tested a new type of intercontinental ballistic missile, topped with a "super-large heavy warhead," which was capable of striking the US mainland.
This missile flew higher and farther than any other previous tests and came came after a break of almost two months in testing.
The UN Security Council responded by adopting a new set of severe US-drafted sanctionsdesigned to further strangle North Korea's energy supplies and tighten restrictions on smuggling and the use of North Korean workers overseas.
North Korea called those sanctions "an act of war" and said the United States and other nations that supported the strict measures will pay a heavy price.
Russia even volunteered to act as a mediator between the United States and North Korea.

U.S. sanctions North Korean missile experts, Russia offers to mediate

David Brunnstrom, Denis Pinchuk
7 MIN READ

WASHINGTON/MOSCOW (Reuters) - The United States announced sanctions on two of North Korea's most prominent officials behind its ballistic missile program on Tuesday, while Russia reiterated an offer to mediate to ease tension between Washington and Pyongyang.

FILE PHOTO: People watch a television broadcast of a news report on North Korea firing what appeared to be an intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) that landed close to Japan, in Seoul, South Korea, November 29, 2017. REUTERS/Kim Hong-Ji

The new U.S. steps were the latest in a campaign aimed at forcing North Korea - which has defied years of multilateral and bilateral sanctions - to abandon a weapons program aimed at developing nuclear-tipped missiles capable of hitting the United States.

”Treasury is targeting leaders of North Korea’s ballistic missile programs, as part of our maximum pressure campaign to isolate (North Korea) and achieve a fully denuclearized Korean Peninsula,” Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin said in a statement.

The move followed new United Nations sanctions announced last Friday in response to North Korea’s Nov. 29 test of an ICBM that Pyongyang said put all of the U.S. mainland within range of its nuclear weapons. Those sanctions sought to further limit North Korea’s access to refined petroleum products and crude oil and its earnings from workers abroad.

North Korea declared the U.N. steps to be an act of war and tantamount to a complete economic blockade.

The standoff between the United States and North Korea has raised fears of a new conflict on the Korean peninsula, which has remained in a technical state of war since the 1950-53 Korean War ended in an armistice, not a peace treaty.

The United States has said that all options, including military ones, are on the table in dealing with North Korea. It says it prefers a diplomatic solution, but that North Korea has given no indication it is willing to discuss denuclearization.

LEADING EXPERTS

The U.S. Treasury named the targeted officials as Kim Jong Sik and Ri Pyong Chol. It said Kim was reportedly a major figure in North Korea’s efforts to switch its missile program from liquid to solid fuel, while Ri was reported to be a key official in its intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) development.

The largely symbolic steps block any property or interests the two might have within U.S. jurisdiction and prohibit any dealings by U.S. citizens with them.

With their ruling Workers Party, military and scientific credentials, the men are two of three top experts considered indispensable to North Korea’s rapidly developing weapons programs.

Photographs and television footage show that the men are clearly among North Korean leader Kim Jong Un’s favorites. Their behavior with him is sharply at variance with the obsequiousness of other senior aides, most of whom bow and hold their hands over their mouths when speaking to the young leader.

Ri is one of the most prominent aides, and likely represents the Workers Party on the missile program, experts say.

Born in 1948, Ri was partly educated in Russia and promoted when Kim Jong Un started to rise through the ranks in the late 2000s.

Ri has visited China once and Russia twice. He met China’s defense minister in 2008 as the air force commander and accompanied Kim Jong Il on a visit to a Russian fighter jet factory in 2011, according to state media.

Kim Jong Sik is a prominent rocket scientist who rose after playing a role in North Korea’s first successful launch of a rocket in 2012.

He started his career as a civilian aeronautics technician, but now wears the uniform of a military general at the Munitions Industry Department, according to experts and the South Korean government.

Many other details, including his age, are not known.

KREMLIN OFFER

On Tuesday, the Kremlin, which has long called for the United States and North Korea to negotiate, said it was ready to act as a mediator if the two sides were willing for it to play such a role.

“Russia’s readiness to clear the way for de-escalation is obvious,” Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters.

Asked to comment on the offer, a spokesman for the U.S. State Department, Justin Higgins, said the United States “has the ability to communicate with North Korea through a variety of diplomatic channels”, and added:

“We want the North Korean regime to understand that there is a different path that it can choose, however it is up to North Korea to change course and return to credible negotiations.”

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, who made a similar offer on Monday, told U.S. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson in a phone call on Tuesday that “Washington’s aggressive rhetoric” and beefing up of its military presence in the region had heightened tension and was unacceptable, his ministry said.

Lavrov underscored the need for “the fastest move to the negotiating process from the language of sanctions”, it said.

Another U.S. State Department spokesman, Michael Cavey, said Washington remained open to talks, but the onus was on North Korea “to take sincere and meaningful actions toward denuclearization and refrain from further provocations.”

South Korea’s Unification Ministry forecast on Tuesday that North Korea would look to open negotiations with the United States next year while continuing to seek recognition as a de facto nuclear power.

The United States has stressed the need for all countries, especially Russia, and China - North Korea’s main trading partner - to fully implement sanctions, including by cutting off oil supplies.

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According to Chinese customs data, China exported no oil products to North Korea in November, apparently going above and beyond U.N. sanctions imposed earlier in the year.

China also imported no North Korean iron ore, coal or lead in November, the second full month of those trade sanctions, the data showed.

China has not disclosed its crude exports to North Korea for several years, but industry sources say it still supplies about 520,000 tonnes, or 3.8 million barrels, a year to the country via an aging pipeline.

North Korea also sources some of its oil from Russia.

Trade between North Korea and China has slowed through the year, particularly after China banned coal purchases in February.

Chinese exports of corn to North Korea in November also slumped, down 82 percent from a year earlier to 100 tonnes, the lowest since January. Exports of rice plunged 64 percent to 672 tonnes, the lowest since March.

Reporting by Denis Pinchuk and Vladimir Soldatkin in Moscow; Additional reporting by Susan Heavey in Washington; Writing by Polina Ivanova; Editing by Alistair Bell and James Dalgleish

North Korea: New UN sanctions an act of war
4 hours ago

Media caption
North Korea says the latest missile is capable of reaching Washington DC

North Korea has described the latest UN sanctions imposed on the country as an "act of war".
A foreign ministry statement said the measures were tantamount to a total economic blockade, the official KCNA news agency reported.
It added that strengthening North Korea's deterrence was the only way to frustrate the US.
The UN Security Council imposed the new sanctions on Friday in response to Pyongyang's ballistic missile tests.
The US-drafted resolution - unanimously backed by all 15 Security Council members - includes measures to slash North Korea's petrol imports by up to 90%.
North Korea is already subject to a raft of sanctions from the US, the UN and the EU.

What did the North Korean statement say?

Characteristically bellicose, it described the latest UN sanctions "as a violent breach of our republic's sovereignty and an act of war that destroys the peace and stability of the Korean peninsula and a wide region.
"The United States, completely terrified at our accomplishment of the great historic cause of completing the state nuclear force, is getting more and more frenzied in the moves to impose the harshest-ever sanctions and pressure on our country.
"We will further consolidate our self-defensive nuclear deterrence aimed at fundamentally eradicating the US nuclear threats, blackmail and hostile moves by establishing the practical balance of force with the US.

UN adopts tough new sanctions on North Korea

By Nicole Gaouette and Elizabeth Joseph, CNN

Updated 2317 GMT (0717 HKT) December 22, 2017

STORY HIGHLIGHTS

- Haley: North Korea is "this most tragic example of evil in the modern world"
- She said sanctions cut exports of gasoline, diesel, other refined products

(CNN) The UN Security Council unanimously adopted a new set of draconian US-drafted sanctions on North Korea that will further strangle its energy supplies and tighten restrictions on smuggling and the use of North Korean workers overseas.

Nikki Haley, the US ambassador to the UN, claimed that the new sanctions, levied in response to Pyongyang's November 29 ballistic missile test, went even further than sanctions passed in September that, at the time, were called the toughest yet.

"Today, we cut deeper," Haley said. She said the UN had repeatedly offered Pyongyang a choice and repeatedly, in its continued missile tests, the regime had "chosen the path of isolation."

Hailing the unity of the Security Council vote and referring to leader Kim Jong Un, Haley said that, "we will continue to match the Kim regime's choice of aggressive action with actions of international sanctions." North Korea, she said, is "this most tragic example of evil in the modern world."
President Donald Trump chimed in with a tweet noting the vote. "The United Nations Security Council just voted 15-0 in favor of additional Sanctions on North Korea. The World wants Peace, not Death!" he said.

Donald J. Trump
✔
@realDonaldTrump

The United Nations Security Council just voted 15-0 in favor of additional Sanctions on North Korea. The World wants Peace, not Death!

9:47 AM - Dec 23, 2017

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Resolution 2397 cuts exports of gasoline, diesel and other refined oil products by a total of 89%, Haley said.

The resolution also bans exports of industrial equipment, machinery, transportation vehicles and industrial metals to North Korea. It requires countries using North Korean laborers to send them back home no later than 24 months from the adoption of the resolution.

The resolution also requires countries to stop ships from illegally providing oil to North Korea through ship-to-ship transfers and prohibits them from smuggling North Korean coal and other prohibited commodities by sea.

Kelly Magsamen, a former deputy assistant secretary of defense for Asian and Pacific security affairs, said the resolution represented another sign of international unity, but added a caution. While the restrictions on oil "will have an effect on the North Korean economy," Magsamen said, "whether that produces the North Koreans at the negotiating table I think is an open question."

McMaster, Tillerson keep up pressure on North Korea

The UN levied sanctions against North Korea in August and September. The US took unilateral steps against the country in July, August, September, October and November. And Secretary of State Rex Tillerson has orchestrated a "peaceful pressure" campaign aimed at slowly cutting off Pyongyang's diplomatic ties and financial resources, to force it to come to the negotiating table.

Against that backdrop, Trump has issued a steady stream of belligerent rhetoric, including a threat to "totally destroy" North Korea, raising fears of a military confrontation.

"At the end of the day, we are either going to have a negotiated outcome, or some sort of scenario where either the US decides to use force, or we are in a containment and deterrent scenario," said Magsamen, a CNN security analyst now with the Center for American Progress.

"Before it is too late"

Other countries at the Security Council meeting appealed for a greater effort to ease tensions and find a way to negotiate.

French Ambassador to the UN François Delattre said his country "welcomes the resumption of discussions, and the sooner the better," adding that "we are still awaiting clear-cut signs from the regime."

The representative from Uruguay called for negotiations "before it is too late." South Korea's ambassador stressed that, "sanctions are not an end in themselves, but an effective means to bring North Korea back on the track" for a peaceful diplomatic solution. "I sincerely hope the DPRK will take this message seriously," Cho Tae-yul said, adding his hope that North Korea will "abandon the delusional idea of pursuing security" through nuclear weapons.

Some countries took apparent digs at the US. China called for an "immediate end" to what it characterized as overheated rhetoric, a call that could reference Trump just as easily as it does Kim. And China once again pushed its proposal that North Korea stop its missile tests in exchange for a US and South Korean agreement to stop all large-scale military exercises in the region.

Russia's ambassador to the UN complained that the US had rushed the resolution through with several last-minute amendments and about the measures on North Korean workers. Russia officially has some 40,000 North Korean workers, and possibly more, many of whom work in construction and send significant amounts of money home.

The resolution's requirement of a 24-month period for North Korean workers to return home "is the minimum acceptable period necessary to deal with the logistical aspects of the issue," the Russian ambassador said, before adding one last criticism of the resolution.

"Unfortunately, our call to preclude a further escalation of tensions, to revise the policy of mutual intimidation, was not heeded," he said.

CNN's Tim Lister and Dugald McConnell contributed to this report

US making plans for 'bloody nose' military attack on North Korea

22 Dec, 2017 5:00am
3 minutes to read

America is drawing up plans for a "bloody nose" military attack on North Korea to stop its nuclear weapons programme, the

Daily Telegraph understands.

The White House has "dramatically" stepped up preparation for a military solution in recent months amid fears diplomacy is not working, well-placed sources said.

One option is destroying a launch site before it is used by the regime for a new missile test. Stockpiles of weapons could also be targeted.

The hope is that military force would show Kim Jong Un that America is "serious" about stopping further nuclear development and trigger negotiations.

Three sources — two former US officials familiar with current thinking and a third figure in the Administration — confirmed military options were being worked up.

"The Pentagon is trying to find options that would allow them to punch the North Koreans in the nose, get their attention and show that we're serious," said one former US security official briefed on policy.

President Donald Trump's decision to bomb a Syrian government airfield earlier this year to defend America's "red line" on chemical weapons use is seen as a blueprint.

Details have emerged after this newspaper talked to around a dozen current and former officials in America and Britain about policy towards North Korea.

North Korean leader Kim Jong Un inspects an intercontinental ballistic missile test. Photo / AP

The conversations show that the Trump Administration is more willing to consider military options to end the conflict than widely assumed. Senior British diplomats fear America has already begun a "step by step" military build-up in the region that could escalate.

While Trump has always said a "military option" is on the table, the Administration's focus has been on building economic and diplomatic pressure. But Kim's refusal to negotiate has left senior White House figures disillusioned with diplomacy and increasingly considering military avenues.

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One British source who attended a briefing with H.R. McMaster, the National Security Adviser, and other officials left feeling alarmed. "The Americans said deterrence doesn't work against North Korea and negotiation doesn't work. Those who heard them left with the impression that military action is very much an option they were considering seriously."

Military personnel gather at Kim Il Sung Square, Dec. 1, 2017. Photo / AP

Kori Schake, a former director of defence strategy at the White House's National Security Council, said military action is a real possibility.

"The White House very strongly believes that either North Korea will agree to give up its nuclear weapons or we will launch a preventative attack to destroy them. I would put the odds of them actually carrying that out at three in 10. Other policy experts say it is four in 10."

There are major uncertainties about how Kim would react if provoked and the regime has missiles that could strike Japan and South Korea.

Experts also say there is a split in the US Administration with Trump and McMaster more willing to consider military action than Rex Tillerson, the Secretary of State, and Jim Mattis, the Defence Secretary.

Kim Jong Un 'executes' another official over

North Korea missile launch delay

20 Dec, 2017 6:04am
3 minutes to read

An expert explains what will happen within minutes of a potential missile launch.
Daily Mail

Kim Jong Un has executed a second official in just five days over a launch delay at North Korea's test missile site.

The unnamed executive allegedly took responsibility for setbacks at the Punggye-ri nuclear base, which led to the date of a rocket launch being pushed back.

Five days ago, a high-ranking official once described as the "second most powerful man in North Korea" disappeared from public life, sparking speculation he may have been executed by death squads.

A Hwasong-15 intercontinental ballistic missile, at an undisclosed location in North Korea. Photo / AP

It is understood the most recent victim was the director of Bureau 131 - a man in charge of building and running the nuclear base.

Reports in the Japanese paper *Asahi Shimbun* suggest the director has been at the helm since it was formed.

The suspected execution was handed down over a delay to Pyongyang's sixth missile test and the subsequent collapse of tunnels, which killed 200 workers.

A source told the paper: "It seems he took the blame as the prolonged mining of the nuclear facility pushed back the test date to September when it was initially set for spring."

Last month, Seoul warned that one more North Korean nuclear detonation could destroy its mountain test site and trigger a radiation leak.

South Korea says any future nuclear test by Kim Jong Un risks collapsing the location set aside for launching missiles.

Seoul detected several earthquakes near the hermit nation's nuclear test site in the country's northeast after its sixth and most powerful bomb explosion in September.

The unnamed executive allegedly took responsibility for setbacks at the Punggye-ri nuclear base (pictured) which led to the date of a rocket launch being pushed back. Photo / 39 North

Experts say the quakes suggest the area is now too unstable to conduct more tests there.

US experts issued a similar warning, stating a second nuclear test site in North Korea's northwest could cave in but that it won't be abandoned.

Five of Pyongyang's recent tests have been carried out under Mt Mantap at the Punggye-ri military base in the northwest of North Korea.

But now the base is said to be suffering from "Tired Mountain Syndrome" after three small earthquakes occurred nearby after the blasts.

Last week, speculation was rife of the execution of General Hwang Pyong-so, who was once the most senior military official in the hermit state as a Vice-Marshall after the supreme leader.

It came days after Kim Jong Un visited the significant Mt Paektu, a sign that suggested he was planning to execute a top official.

Such visits to the mystical mountain often precede important decisions by North Korean leaders.

Pyong So was reported to have been expelled from the party for "taking bribes" and has not been seen since October.

His deputy Kim Wong Hong is said to have been banished to a prison camp.

The speculation comes days after Kim Jong-un visited the significant Mt. Paektu on Friday, a sign that suggested he was planning to execute a top official.

The South Korean *JoongAng Ilbo* reported: "If Hwang was indeed kicked out of the Workers' Party, it would practically mean

the end of his political career, and possibly his life, though it is unknown whether or not he is still alive."

"Kim visited the mountain and ordered the site managers to construct hospitable accommodations on the mountain for visitors," the state-run KCNA reported.

In November 2013, the despot visited the mountain with his aides a month before he executed top officials including Jang Song Thaek, his uncle and political guardian.

Kim visited the mountain again in April 2015, before executing Hyon Yong Chol, a former defence chief.

He had also made a pilgrimage after North Korea's fifth nuclear test in September 2016.

Pictures show Kim wandering around on the snow-capped mountain with hardly a bead of sweat and wearing spotless and shiny shoes.

What are the chances Trump will attack North Korea?

16 Dec, 2017 3:07pm
4 minutes to read

Sen. Lindsey Graham boldly predicted that President Donald Trump would take the country to war with North Korea if Kim Jong-un makes additional provocations.

Graham told The Atlantic in an interview that appeared on the magazine's website Thursday that another nuclear test would be the final straw.

"I would say there's a three in 10 chance we use the military option," Graham said. Upping the odds in the case of a seventh test, he replied, "I would say 70 percent."

A foe-turned-friend of the president's, Graham has been spending more and more time with Trump. The Republican senator was in Palm Beach golfing with Trump last weekend, reports Daily Mail.

He's also been to see Trump at the White House this month.

As such, he said he has insight into Trump's mindset on North Korea.

"It comes up all the time," he told The Atlantic.

Graham told the publication "we're not to the tipping point yet" with North Korea. "If they test another [nuclear] weapon, then all bets are off."

"War with North Korea is an all-out war against the regime," he said. "There is no surgical strike option. Their program is too redundant, it's too hardened, and you gotta assume the worst, not the best. So if you ever use the military option, it's not to just neutralize their nuclear facilities—you gotta be willing to take the regime completely down."

A defense hawk who sits on the Senate's Budget, Appropriations and Armed Services Committees, Graham has been working with Trump on a long-term spending deal that would fund a mutually desired military build-up.

Sen. Lindsey Graham boldly predicted that President Donald Trump would take the country to war with North Korea if Kim Jong-un makes additional provocations. Photo / AP

Trump has asked for more subs, soldiers and military aircraft, as well as the removal of an inhibiting budgetary control cap.

"We need our military. It's got to be perfecto," Trump on Tuesday said.

Bringing up North Korea, Trump said in his remarks at bill signing that pertained to Pentagon spending: 'It approves missile defense capabilities as we continue our campaign to create maximum pressure on the vile dictatorship in North Korea.

"We're working very diligently on that — building up forces. We'll see how it all turns out.

"It's a very bad situation — a situation that should have been handled long ago by other administrations," he stated.

Graham, a South Carolina Republican who faced off against Trump in the GOP primary last year, has been warning that 'time is running out' with respect to North Korea, which has continued with its ballistic missile and nuclear tests in the face of heavy international sanctions.

"I don't know how to say it any more direct: If nothing changes, Trump's gonna have to use the military option, because time is running out," Graham told The Atlantic in the interview that dropped this week.

Defense Secretary James Mattis on Friday said that North Korea isn't an imminent threat to the U.S.

North Korean leader Kim Jong Un. Photo / AP

"It has not yet shown to be a capable threat against us right now," Mattis said in response to a reporter.

Mattis said that forensic analysis is still being done on a Nov. 29 missile test.

The Trump administration has said it would be willing to engage in diplomatic talks with Kim's government under the right conditions.

Graham told The Atlantic that he believed the U.S. government should entertain a conversation 'without a whole lot of preconditions.'

"I'm not taking anything off the table to avoid a war," he said. "When they write the history of the times, I don't want them to say, 'Hey, Lindsey Graham wouldn't even talk to the guy.'"

The Trump administration has said that it is not seeking regime change in North Korea. Graham told the Atlantic that might be unavoidable.

North Korea may have to become a protectorate of China in order to protect the United States from the threat of nuclear annihilation, he indicated.

Contemplating the options, Graham said, "I am literally willing to put hundreds of thousands of people at risk, knowing that millions and millions of people will be at risk if we don't. And that's why this whole exercise sucks so much.

"I get, like, zero joy out of having this choice for President Trump."

White House reins in Tillerson's offer to start North Korea talks

By Zachary Cohen and Brian Todd, CNN

Updated 0509 GMT (1309 HKT) December 14, 2017

STORY HIGHLIGHTS

- Tillerson's offer to "sit down ... face to face" seemed to signal a shift in policy
- Some US ex-officials have raised doubts over whether he's on the same page as White House

Washington (CNN) The White House and State Department both stated Wednesday that the US is not ready to begin talks with North Korea, a day after Secretary of State Rex Tillerson had suggested the two sides could start negotiating without preconditions.

Tillerson's offer Tuesday to "sit down and see each other face to face" seemed to signal a shift in State Department policy, but US officials have since emphasized that North Korea has not yet demonstrated it is serious about talks or changing its behavior.

"We are open to the possibility of dialogue with North Korea, with the aim of denuclearizing the Korean peninsula. But North Korea must first refrain from any further provocations and take sincere and meaningful actions toward denuclearization," a National Security Council spokesperson told CNN.
"As the secretary of state has said, this must include -- but is not limited to -- no further nuclear or missile tests," the spokesperson said, adding, "Given North Korea's most recent missile test, clearly now is not the time."

Tillerson says US won't set preconditions for North Korea talks

Tillerson's specific reference to "no preconditions" has raised questions as to whether a rift exists within the Trump administration over possible negotiations with Pyongyang.
"We've said from the diplomatic side, we're ready to talk anytime North Korea would like to talk," Tillerson said at the Atlantic Council in Washington on Tuesday, in what seemed to amount to a direct public invitation for North Korea to put aside an escalating cycle of tests and taunts to engage in diplomacy.
"We are ready to have the first meeting without precondition," Tillerson said. "Let's just meet, and we can talk about the weather if you want. Talk about whether it's going to be a square table or a round table, if that's what you are excited about. But can we at least sit down and see each other face to face, and then we can begin to lay out a map, a road map of what we might be willing to work towards."
The remarks are some of the most concrete issued by Tillerson on what talks with North Korea might look like.

A dangerous choice looms for Trump on North Korea

"I think Tillerson is saying, we are prepared to talk, we are not putting any conditions," said Ambassador Joseph DeTrani, former US special envoy to North Korea.
"But when we sit at the table, please don't launch missiles, don't have nuclear tests and maybe we can see what you want, you can put your requirements

on the table and then you could listen to us," he added.

Some former US officials have raised doubts over whether Tillerson and the White House are on the same page.

"It is somewhere between confusing and worrisome," according to Evan Medeiros, a former National Security Council senior director for Asia.

"The State Department and White House should be in lockstep when it comes to issues like negotiating with North Korea," he added. "So if the White House is not backing up Tillerson, it suggests that Tillerson himself is trying to push the White House in the direction of just getting talks started, and perhaps Tillerson doesn't fully appreciate all the downside risks associated with talks without any kind of presteps or preconditions."

Rex Tillerson's end of year verdict: diplomacy's a 'hard job'

Tillerson has routinely appeared at odds with President Donald Trump over potential talks with Pyongyang. Earlier this year, Trump tweeted that Tillerson was "wasting his time" negotiating with North Korea.

When asked about Tillerson's Tuesday comments, the White House said, "The President's views on North Korea have not changed."

"North Korea is acting in an unsafe way not only toward Japan, China and South Korea, but the entire world. North Korea's actions are not good for anyone and certainly not good for North Korea," Sarah Sanders, the White House press secretary, said in an email Tuesday evening.

Both the White House and State Department said Wednesday that the administration remains united in its policy on North Korea and that any negotiations must wait until the regime shows it is willing to meet "international norms" that make talks possible.

"The policy has not changed -- I just want to be very clear on that," State Department spokeswoman Heather Nauert said Wednesday.

Presumed North Korean ghost ship washes ashore in northern Japan

"We remain open to dialogue when North Korea is willing to conduct a credible dialogue on the peaceful denuclearization of the Korean peninsula," she added. "We are not seeing any evidence that they are ready to sit down and have those kinds of conversations right now."

"When somebody is shooting off ballistic missiles, when someone is conducting advanced nuclear tests, they're not showing any kind of interest or seriousness in wanting to talk," Nauert said. "At some point, we would like to do that, but our policy has not change."

But key questions remain, according to Kingston Reif, the director for disarmament and threat reduction policy at the Arms Control Association.

"Does Tillerson speak for the administration? And what would we be willing to put on the table in return for sustaining a testing freeze and more comprehensive talks?"

North Korea sanctions could hurt millions as winter bites, UN says

US National Security Adviser H.R. McMaster, one of Trump's most trusted foreign policy aides, said Tuesday that the global community must "make the most out of what might be our last best chance" to avoid military action, echoing comments he previously made that "time is running out."

Those comments may be more indicative of the administration's actual policy on North Korea, as Tillerson is believed to have been marginalized in the policy-making process. Reports surfaced last month that the Trump administration was considering replacing Tillerson with CIA Director Mike Pompeo, though the White House pushed back when asked about the rumors.

"You need both sides to be credible in the good cop-bad cop routine for it to work. There are too many doubts about the weight and credibility of Tillerson," said Vipin Narang, an associate professor of political science at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology who's a member of MIT's Security Studies Program. "McMaster has the ear of the President and is much more credible."

US ready for talks with North Korea 'without preconditions', Tillerson says

Secretary of state's remarks appear to mark shift in state department policy, which had previously required proof North Korea was giving up nuclear arsenal

Rex Tillerson at the Atlantic Council in Washington DC Tuesday. Photograph: Jonathan Ernst/Reuters

Julian Borger in Washington

Tuesday 12 December 2017 22.28 GMT
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Rex Tillerson has said that the US is ready to begin exploratory talks with North Korea “without preconditions”, but only after a “period of quiet” without new nuclear or missile tests.

The secretary of state’s remarks appeared to mark a shift in state department policy, which had previously required Pyongyang to show it was “serious” about giving up its nuclear arsenal before contacts could start. And the language was a long way from repeated comments by Donald Trump that such contacts are a “waste of time”.

Tillerson also revealed that the US had been talking to China about what each country would do in the event of a conflict or regime collapse in North Korea, saying that the Trump administration had given Beijing assurances that US troops would pull back to the 38th parallel, which divides North and South Korea, and that the only US concern would be to secure the regime’s nuclear weapons.

China building network of refugee camps along border with North Korea

Earlier this week it emerged that China is building a network of refugee camps along its 880-mile (1,416km) border with North Korea, in preparation for a potential exodus that could be unleashed by conflict or the collapse of Kim Jong-un’s regime.

Speaking at the Atlantic Council thinktank in Washington, Tillerson made it explicit that the message to Pyongyang had changed and that the North Korean regime did not have to commit to full disarmament before direct diplomacy could take off.

“We are ready to talk anytime North Korea would like to talk. We are ready to have the first meeting without preconditions. Let’s just meet,” Tillerson said. “And then we can begin to lay out a roadmap … It’s not realistic to say we are only going to talk if you come to the table ready to give up your program. They have too much invested in it.

“Let’s just meet and let’s talk about the weather,” the secretary of state said. “If you want … and talk about whether it’s going to be a square table or a round table if that’s what you’re excited about.”

However, he then laid down one condition and said there should be a “period of quiet” in which such preliminary talks could take place. He portrayed it as a practical consideration.

“It’s going to be tough to talk if in the middle of our talks you decide to test another device,” he said. “We need a period of quiet.”

Kim Jong-un should be prosecuted for crimes against humanity, say jurists

Tillerson’s comments came as Kim Jong-un vowed to make North Korea the “world’s strongest nuclear power”.

Kim told workers behind the recent test of a new missile that his country “will victoriously advance and leap as the strongest nuclear power and military power in the world”, in a ceremony on Tuesday, according to the state news agency, KCNA.

Daryl Kimball, the head of the Washington-based Arms Control Association, said that the US would have to carry out confidence-building measures for meaningful talks to start.

“Secretary Tillerson’s proposal for direct talks with North Korea without preconditions is overdue and welcome,” Kimball said. “However, in order to get to such talks going, the US side as well as North Korea must demonstrate more restraint. For North Korea, that means a halt to all nuclear and ballistic missile tests, and for the United States, refraining from military maneuvers and overflights that appear to be practice runs for an attack on the North.

“If such restraint is not forthcoming, we can expect a further escalation of tensions and a growing risk of a catastrophic war,” he added.

Informal talks between US and North Korean diplomats have taken place since Trump took office in January but they have been cut since Pyongyang tested a powerful thermonuclear warhead in early September.

Tillerson has previously seemed at odds with Trump over talks with Pyongyang: earlier this year, shortly after the secretary of state said the US was attempting to find a way to resolve tensions between the two countries, Trump tweeted that his top diplomat should “save his energy” as “we’ll do what has to be done!”

“I told Rex Tillerson, our wonderful Secretary of State, that he is wasting his time trying to negotiate with Little Rocket Man … Save your energy Rex, we’ll do what has to be done!” the president tweeted.

On Tuesday, the secretary of state made clear that full North Korean nuclear disarmament would be the ultimate goal of substantive negotiations. He argued that containment was not an option, as an impoverished North Korea would seek to earn money by selling its nuclear weapons on the black market.

Tillerson said that US officials had had conversations with their Chinese counterparts about how to ensure those weapons did not end up in “undesirable hands”. China had rebuffed similar approaches from the Obama administration rather than give the impression Beijing was prepared to contemplate a North Korean collapse.

“The US has been trying for years to talk to China about conflict scenarios without success. This is an encouraging sign that these talks have made progress,” said Adam Mount, an expert on North Korea at the Federation of American Scientists.

“The Chinese are using coordination with the US to signal to Pyongyang that it is considering the prospect that North Korea could collapse, and that it should moderate its behaviour and shouldn’t step out of line.”

North Korea: US urges all nations to cut ties

31 minutes ago

Image copyright
KCNA
Image caption
North Korea's leader Kim Jong-un called the launch a "breakthrough"

The US has urged all nations to cut diplomatic and trade ties with North Korea after the country's latest ballistic missile test.
Speaking at the UN Security Council, US envoy Nikki Haley said President Trump had asked his Chinese counterpart to cut off oil supplies to Pyongyang.
She said the US did not seek conflict but that North Korea's regime would be "utterly destroyed" if war broke out.
The warning came after Pyongyang tested its first missile in two months.
North Korea said the missile fired on Wednesday, which it said reached an altitude of about 4,475km (2,780 miles) - more than 10 times the height of the International Space Station - carried a warhead capable of re-entering the Earth's atmosphere.

Image copyright
GETTY IMAGES
Image caption
The launch of the Hwasong-15 missile, said to be capable of reaching all parts of the US

The claim was not proven and experts have cast doubt on the country's ability to master such technology.
However, North Korea's leader Kim Jong-un called the launch "impeccable" and a "breakthrough".

What damage could North Korea do?
North Korea between deterrent and escalation
Can the world live with a nuclear North Korea?
North Korea's missile programme

The test - one of several this year - has been condemned by the international community and the UN Security Council called an emergency meeting.
Ms Haley warned that "continued acts of aggression" were only serving to further destabilise the region.

Media caption
Members of the public watched on as the launch was announced in Pyongyang

Russia's UN ambassador Vassily Nebenzia said North Korea should stop its missile and nuclear tests but also called on Washington to cancel military exercises with South Korea planned for December as it would "inflame an already explosive situation".

China also suggested the North should stop the tests in return for a halt to US military exercises - a proposal Washington has rejected in the past.

Cutting the oil lifeline

"We need China to do more," Ms Haley said on Wednesday. "President Trump called President Xi this morning and told him that we've come to the point where China must cut off the oil for North Korea.

"We know the main driver of its nuclear production is oil," she said. "The major supplier of that oil is China."

China is a historic ally and North Korea's most important trading partner and Pyongyang is thought to be dependent on China for much of its oil supplies.

Earlier on Wednesday, the White House said that Mr Trump spoke to Xi Jinping by telephone, urging him to "use all available levers to convince North Korea to end its provocations and return to the path of denuclearisation".

Skip Twitter post by @realDonaldTrump

Donald J. Trump
✔
@realDonaldTrump

Just spoke to President XI JINPING of China concerning the provocative actions of North Korea. Additional major sanctions will be imposed on North Korea today. This situation will be handled!

3:40 AM - Nov 30, 2017

14,34314,343 Replies
18,91918,919 Retweets
88,07588,075 likes

Twitter Ads info and privacy

Report

End of Twitter post by @realDonaldTrump

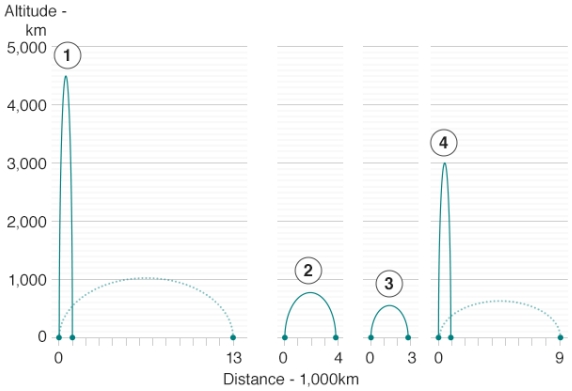
Speaking in Missouri, the US leader derided Mr Kim, describing him as a "sick puppy" and "little rocket man".

Mr Xi responded by telling Mr Trump it was Beijing's "unswerving goal to maintain peace and stability in north-east Asia and denuclearise the Korean peninsula", Chinese news agency Xinhua reported.

Experts say the height reached by the inter-continental ballistic missile (ICBM) indicates Washington could be within range, although North Korea is yet to prove it has reached its aim of miniaturising a nuclear warhead.

Why height matters

Missiles launched to high altitude could travel further on a lower trajectory



1. 28 Nov - **Hwasong 15:** 4,500km alt, 1,000km distance. *Potential range: 13,000km.*
2. 15 Sep - **Hwasong 12:** 770km alt, 3,700 distance travelled.
3. 29 Aug - **Hwasong 12:** 550km alt, 2,700km distance travelled.
4. 28 Jul - **Hwasong-14:** 3,000km alt, 900km distance travelled. *Potential range: 10,000 km*

Source: CSIS, James Martin Center for Non-proliferation Studies / NTI BBC

The Hwasong-15 missile, described as North Korea's "most powerful", was launched in darkness early on Wednesday. It landed in Japanese waters but flew higher than any other missile the North had previously tested.

Approximate path of North Korean missile

Source: Joint Chiefs of Staff (South Korea) BBC

'An opportunity wasted' - Chinese media

Chinese state media are blaming the US relisting of North Korea as a state sponsor of terrorism for its latest missile test.

An editorial in the Global Times said US policy on North Korea had "been nothing but an abysmal failure" in wrongly assuming that it could force Pyongyang to abandon its weapons programme by applying more pressure on the country.

The newspaper warned that China would "not support a new round of Trump administration pressure tactics" but also reminded North Korea that the international community would never accept it as a nuclear-armed state.

"Washington has placed China in a precarious situation by asking for more than what was originally expected by the UN Security Council regarding the previous round of North Korea sanctions. China has always carried out UN security measures," the editorial said.

The English-language China Daily said: "A golden opportunity to build concerted momentum to encourage Pyongyang to engage in talks has been so casually wasted by the Trump administration's recent action of renaming Pyongyang a sponsor of state terrorism, which may have prompted Pyongyang's latest missile launch."

North Korea says new missile can re-enter atmosphere

30 minutes ago

Media caption
Members of the public watched on as the launch was announced in Pyongyang.

North Korea has said the missile it tested overnight held a warhead capable of re-entering the earth's atmosphere.

The claim was not proven and experts have cast doubt on the country's ability to master such technology.

Kim Jong-un called the launch "impeccable" and a "breakthrough". It was the first test from Pyongyang in more than two months, after a flurry earlier this year.

It has been condemned by the international community.

US President Donald Trump spoke to China's President Xi Jinping by telephone, the White House said, urging him to "use all available levers to convince North Korea to end its provocations and return to the path of denuclearisation".

Skip Twitter post by @realDonaldTrump

Donald J. Trump
✔
@realDonaldTrump

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12,00912,009 Retweets
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Report

End of Twitter post by @realDonaldTrump

Mr Xi responded by telling Mr Trump it was Beijing's "unswerving goal to maintain peace and stability in north-east Asia and denuclearise the Korean peninsula," Chinese news agency Xinhua reported.

China is North Korea's biggest ally and most important trading partner, and the two share a land border.

Experts say the height reached by the inter-continental ballistic missile (ICBM) indicates Washington could be within range, although North Korea is yet to prove it has reached its aim of miniaturising a nuclear warhead.

- **What damage could North Korea do?**
- **Are missiles a risk to planes?**
- **Can the world live with a nuclear North Korea?**
- **North Korea's missile programme**

White House spokeswoman Sarah Sanders said the US would put more sanctions on North Korea "very shortly".

What happened?

The Hwasong-15 missile, described as North Korea's "most powerful", was launched in darkness early on Wednesday.

It landed in Japanese waters but flew higher than any other missile the North had previously tested.

The test, which defied international sanctions imposed over the North's weapons programme, drew swift international condemnation.

South Korea responded by launching one of its own ballistic missiles in a live-fire drill.

Image copyright
EPA
Image caption
South Korea launched a Hyunmoo-2 missile in response on Wednesday

Where did the missile go?

Pyongyang says the missile reached an altitude of 4,475km (2,780 miles) and flew 950km in 53 minutes. That is close to independent estimates made by South Korea's military. The projectile, fired at a steep incline, did not fly over Japan as some have done in the past, and landed about 250km short of its northern coast, according to Japanese officials.

Approximate path of North Korean missile

What do we know about the new missile?

North Korea has **previously said** that its projectiles can hit the US but this marks the first time it says it can do it with this new type of missile, which appears to be an upgraded version of previous models.

More about the Hwasong-15 missile

North Korea says this ICBM is its most powerful yet and completes the country's "rocket weaponry system development set".

Image copyright
AFP/ GETTY IMAGES
Image caption
The previous model, the Hwasong-14, was launched in July

There is speculation that the rocket was fuelled horizontally, before being placed on the launch pad, the New York Times reports.

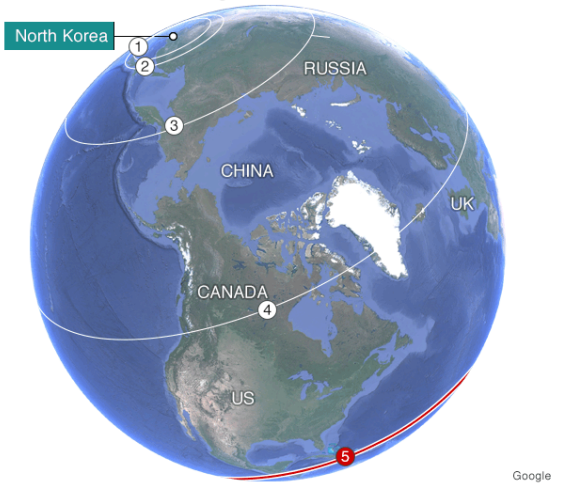
Such a development would make the North's missiles a harder target to hit in a pre-emptive attack by the US.

How far is this new missile likely to be able to go?

An analysis by **the US-based Union of Concerned Scientists concludes that** the Hwasong-15 could have travelled more than 13,000km on a standard trajectory, thus reaching "any part of the continental United States".

But it seems likely, the analysis adds, that the missile had a very light mock warhead, meaning it might lack the power to carry a nuclear payload, which is much heavier, over that distance.

North Korean missile range estimates



Tested/operational

① Hwasong: 1,000km ② Nodong: 1,300km ③ Musudan: 3,500km

④ Hwasong-14: 8,000km ⑤ Hwasong-15: 13,000km

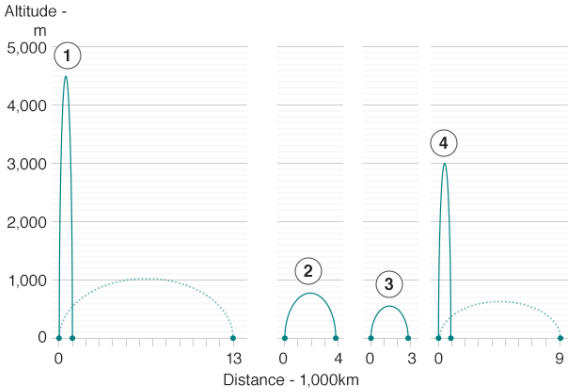
All ranges estimates and may or may not be achievable with a warhead

Source: James Martin Center for Nonproliferation Studies / NTI / Union of Concerned Scientists

BBC

Why height matters

Missiles launched to high altitude could travel further on a lower trajectory



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3,000km alt, 900km distance travelled. *Potential range: 10,000 km*

Source: CSIS, James Martin Center for Non-proliferation Studies / NTI

BBC

How have other countries reacted?

Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe called the launch an intolerable, violent act

The Kremlin described the test as a "provocation"

The UK's Foreign and Commonwealth Office summoned the North Korea ambassador to a meeting to "make clear to him our condemnation" and "urge the regime to abandon its illegal pursuit of nuclear and ballistic missiles and return to dialogue".

South Korean President Moon Jae-in accused the North of "reckless" behaviour but added that there was no choice but to keep applying sanctions

US defence secretary James Mattis said the missile launch had gone "higher, frankly, than any previous shots they have taken", and said North Korea posed a worldwide threat.

UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres said the launch had violated sanctions and shown "complete disregard for the united view of the international community"

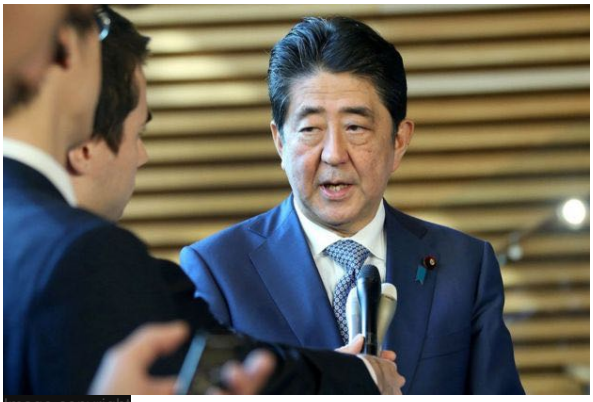


Image copyright
AFP
Image caption
Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe said such launches were intolerable

China urges neighbour against "tensions"

Analysis by Kerry Allen, China specialist, BBC Monitoring

China has officially condemned North Korea's latest missile launch, with foreign ministry Geng Shuang saying: "We strongly urge the DPRK against actions that exacerbate tensions along the peninsula."

State media are strongly signalling that the latest launch is owing to increased frictions caused by the militancy of the US and Japan.

Official broadcaster CCTV and leading foreign affairs paper Global Times highlighted Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's comment in a press conference today that Japan "will never yield to any provocation" and "will exert maximum pressure".

What sanctions are there on North Korea?

The United Nations first imposed sanctions in 2006 after North Korea conducted its first nuclear test, aiming to stop future nuclear tests and launching ballistic missiles.

Sanctions, which were ramped up in 2016, now include:

- An arms embargo
- An asset freeze of North Koreans involved in the weapons programme
- A ban on the export of coal, textiles and seafood
- Restriction on supplies of crude oil
- A cap on countries hosting North Korean labourers

The EU has introduced its own sanctions targeting people and entities tied to the North Korean weapons programme. President Trump added to existing US measures by cutting off the American financial system from foreign businesses doing trade with North Korea. The wave of UN sanctions in August amounted to $1bn (£746m) worth of income, cutting off one third of export revenues, says the US state department.

But so far, sanctions have not stopped North Korea from doing more nuclear and missile tests. A UN Security Council report earlier this year noted that North Korea uses a range of sophisticated techniques, including cloaking foreign financial transactions, to avoid enforcement.

North Korea says new missile puts all of US in striking range

22 minutes ago

Image copyright
REUTERS
Image caption
North Korea has repeatedly tested missiles this year, including this launch in July

North Korea says it has successfully tested a new type of intercontinental ballistic missile that can reach the whole of the continental United States.

State television claimed that Pyongyang had now achieved its mission of becoming a nuclear state.

The Hwasong-15 missile, which it said was its "most powerful", was launched in darkness early on Wednesday.

It landed in Japanese waters but flew higher than any other missile the North has previously tested.

What damage could North Korea do?
Are missiles a risk to planes?
Can the world live with a nuclear North Korea?
North Korea's missile programme

What exactly is North Korea claiming?

State news agency KCNA said that the missile reached an altitude of 4,475km (2,780 miles) and flew 950km in 53 minutes.

The projectile, fired at a steep incline, did not fly over Japan as some have done in the past, and landed about 250km short of its northern coast, according to Japanese officials.

KCNA added that North Korean leader Kim Jong-un, who personally signed off on the launch, "declared with pride that now we have finally realised the great historic cause of completing the state nuclear force, the cause of building a rocket power".

The report said that "as a responsible nuclear power and a peace-loving state", North Korea would "make every possible effort to serve the noble purpose of defending peace and stability of the world".

It said its weapons, meant as a defence against "the US imperialists' nuclear blackmail policy", would "not pose any threat to any country" as long as North Korean interests were not infringed upon.

"This is our solemn declaration."

Media caption
How would war with North Korea unfold?

Could its missile really reach the US?

An analysis by **the US-based Union of Concerned Scientists found that** the missile could have travelled more than 13,000km if it was on a standard trajectory, thus reaching "any part of the continental United States".

But it added it seemed likely that the missile had a very light mock warhead - which meant that it could be incapable of carrying a nuclear payload, which is much heavier, for that distance.

North Korea however claims that the Hwasong-15 could reach mainland US carrying a "super-large heavy warhead".

How is the world reacting?

The test has prompted swift international condemnation. The UN Security Council is due to convene an emergency session to discuss the latest test.

The launch is just the latest in a series of weapons tests that have raised tensions to unprecedented levels. Pyongyang last launched a ballistic missile in September, the same month it conducted its sixth nuclear test.

North Korea has continued to develop its nuclear and missile programme despite this global condemnation and sanctions.

Prior to North Korea's statement, **US defence secretary James Mattis said** the missile launch "went higher, frankly, than any previous shots they have taken", and said North Korea poses a worldwide threat.

Media caption
North Korea missile 'higher' than previous tests, says US Defence Secretary Mattis

US President Donald Trump was briefed while the missile was still in the air, the White House said. Afterwards he said: "We will take care of it."

Japan and South Korea have condemned the test, with the South launching its own missile test in response.

North Korea’s latest missile launch appears to put U.S. capital in range

By Anna Fifield November 28 at 5:40 PM

TOKYO — North Korea launched what appears to be another intercontinental ballistic missile, the Pentagon said

Tuesday, with experts calculating that the U.S. capital is now technically within Kim Jong Un's reach.

The launch, the first in more than two months, is a sign that the North Korean leader is pressing ahead with his nation's stated goal of being able to strike the United States' mainland and is not caving in to the Trump administration's warnings. The missile logged a longer flight time than any of its predecessors.

"We will take care of it," President Trump told reporters at the White House after the launch. He called it a "situation we will handle."

Trump has repeatedly said that military options are on the table for dealing with North Korea, suggesting that time has run out for a diplomatic solution to the nuclear problem.

A growing chorus of voices in Washington is calling for serious consideration of military action against North Korea, although this is strongly opposed by South Korea, where the Seoul metropolitan region — home to 25 million people — is within the range of North Korean artillery.

And Secretary of State Rex Tillerson said Tuesday that "diplomatic options remain viable and open, for now." He added: "The United States remains committed to finding a peaceful path to denuclearization and to ending belligerent actions by North Korea."

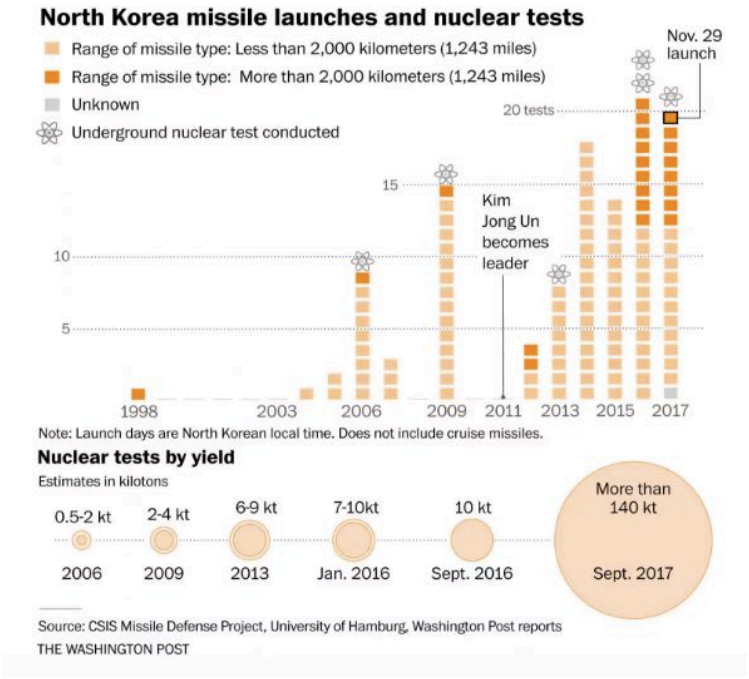
The missile, which launched early Wednesday local time, traveled some 620 miles and reached a height of about 2,800 miles before landing off the coast of Japan and flew for a total of 54 minutes. This suggested that it had been fired almost straight up — on a lofted trajectory similar to North Korea's two previous intercontinental ballistic missile tests.

The Pentagon said that the projectile did indeed appear to be an intercontinental ballistic missile, or ICBM. The latest missile "went higher, frankly, than any previous shot they've taken," Defense Secretary Jim Mattis said. He described the launch as part of an effort to build missiles "that can threaten everywhere in the world."

[North Korea's latest missile launch suggests weapons testing lull was seasonal, rather than strategic]

If it had flown on a standard trajectory designed to maximize its reach, this missile would have a range of more than 8,100 miles, said David Wright, co-director of the global security program at the Union of Concerned Scientists.

"This is significantly longer than North Korea's previous long-range tests, which flew on lofted trajectories for 37 minutes and 47 minutes," Wright said. "Such a missile would have more than enough range to reach Washington, D.C." The U.S. capital is 6,850 miles from Pyongyang. The previous long-range test, in July, could have flown 6,500 miles if not on a lofted trajectory, experts said.



Although it may be cold comfort, it is still unlikely that North Korea is capable of delivering a nuclear warhead to the U.S. mainland.

Scientists do not know the weight of the payload the missile carried, but given the increase in range, it seems likely that it carried a very light mock warhead, Wright said. "If true, that means it would not be capable of carrying a nuclear warhead to this long distance, since such a warhead would be much heavier," he said in a blog post.

But the North Koreans still appear to be in the testing stage, rather than the operational one, said Markus Schiller, a German aerospace engineer who specializes in missiles.

"If they are serious about their missile program, they have to launch from time to time, and at different times of the day and in different weather," he said.

Schiller said that North Korea still has a way to go with its missile program. "Perhaps they can hit Washington, D.C., with this, but they can't fight a war with it," he said.

[North Korea fires another missile, its latest step toward putting the U.S. within reach]

The missile was launched just before 3 a.m. local time Wednesday from the western part of North Korea.

Japan's Defense Ministry said that it landed in waters inside Japan's exclusive economic zone, off the coast of Aomori Prefecture. The coast guard told ships to watch for falling debris, and the Japanese government condemned the launch.

South Korea's military conducted a "precision strike" missile launch exercise in response, the South's Joint Chiefs of Staff said.

The South Korean and Japanese governments both convened emergency national security council meetings, and Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe said such launches "cannot be tolerated."

Although it was the first North Korean missile launch in more than two months, there had been signs that the North

was making preparations. The Japanese government had detected radio signals suggesting that North Korea might be preparing for a ballistic missile launch, Kyodo News reported Monday, citing government sources.

Pyongyang has been working to fit a nuclear warhead to a missile capable of reaching the U.S. mainland, a weapon it says it needs to protect itself from a "hostile" Washington. It has made rapid progress this year, firing two intercontinental ballistic missiles in July, the second of which was technically capable of reaching as far as Denver or Chicago, or possibly even New York.

A senior South Korean official said Tuesday that North Korea could announce next year that it has completed its nuclear weapons program.

"North Korea has been developing its nuclear weapons at a faster-than-expected pace. We cannot rule out the possibility that North Korea could announce its completion of a nuclear force within one year," Cho Myoung-gyon, the unification minister, who is in charge of the South's relations with the North, told foreign reporters in Seoul.

[Kim Jong Un's North Korea: Life inside the totalitarian state]

Kim Jong Un opened 2017 with a New Year's address announcing that North Korea had "entered the final stage of preparation for the test launch of intercontinental ballistic missile."

After its most recent missile launch, an intermediate-range missile that flew over the northern Japanese island of Hokkaido on Sept. 15 , North Korea said it was seeking military "equilibrium" with the United States as a way to stop American leaders from talking about military options for dealing with Pyongyang.

That was the second launch over Japan in less than three weeks and came less than two weeks after North Korea exploded what was widely believed to be a hydrogen bomb.

But despite an increase in tensions over the past two months, including a U.S. Navy three-carrier strike group conducting military exercises in the sea between Japan and the Korean Peninsula, 74 days had passed without any missile launches by the North.

That was the longest pause all year, according to Shea Cotton, a research associate at the James Martin Center for Nonproliferation Studies in Monterey, Calif. The pause had raised hopes that North Korea might be showing interest in returning to talks about its nuclear program.

In a speech to the Council on Foreign Relations late last month, Joseph Yun, the State Department's special representative for North Korea policy, said that if North Korea went 60 days without testing a missile or a nuclear weapon, it could be a sign that Pyongyang was open to dialogue.

North Korea latest missile launch a global threat - US

44 minutes ago

Media caption
North Korea missile 'higher' than previous tests, says US Defence Secretary Mattis

North Korea has fired its highest-ever intercontinental ballistic missile and poses a worldwide threat, US Secretary of Defence James Mattis has said.

Earlier the Pentagon said the missile had flown for about 1,000km (620 miles) before falling into the Sea of Japan.

The launch, early on Wednesday, is the latest in a series that have raised international tensions.

North Korea's last ballistic missile launch was in September and came days after its sixth nuclear test.

Mr Mattis was speaking at the White House as he briefed President Donald Trump and senior officials on the missile launch.

"It went higher, frankly, than any previous shots they have taken," he said, adding that the North was building "ballistic missiles that threaten everywhere in the world".

South Korean news agency Yonhap said that the missile was launched from Pyongsong, in South Pyongan province.

- **What damage could North Korea do?**
- **Are missiles a risk to planes?**
- **Can the world live with a nuclear North Korea?**
- **North Korea's missile programme**

Japanese government officials said the missile travelled for about 50 minutes but did not fly over Japan, as some have done in the past.

President Trump was briefed while the missile was still in the air, the White House said. Afterwards he said: "We will take care of it."

A problem without a solution

Jonathan Marcus, BBC Defence and Diplomatic Correspondent

This missile test, the first for some two months, suggests that the lull in firings was not due to North Korea being cowed by Mr Trump's rhetoric or even by Chinese pressure.

Experts have indeed pointed to similar seasonal slowdowns in testing in the past.

President Trump, responding to the test, says that his administration will handle it. But handle it how ? The US has called for an urgent meeting of the UN Security Council. And Secretary of State Rex Tillerson has spoken of stepping up the pressure on Pyongyang.

But North Korea is already one of the most isolated and heavily sanctioned states in the world. There are few new levers to pull.

North Korea is seemingly a problem without a solution and its nuclear and missile programmes are now, once again, back at the top of the Trump administration's security agenda.

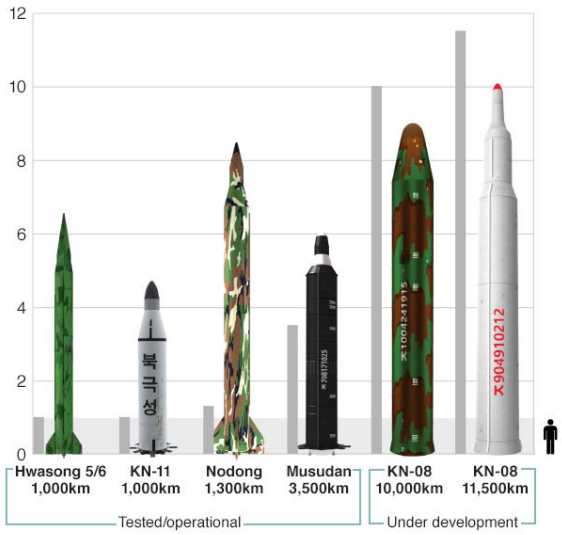
South Korea's military said it had responded with a missile exercise of its own.

Condemnation of the launch was swift:

- The Japanese government said they would "never accept North Korea's continuous provocative behaviour" and PM Shinzo Abe called for an emergency meeting of the UN Security Council
- South Korean President Moon Jae-in urged the international community to continue applying sanctions against Pyongyang
- The EU called the launch a "further unacceptable violation" of North Korea's international obligations
- Britain's ambassador to the UN called it "a reckless act"

What missiles does North Korea have?

Maximum range in km (000's)



Source: James Martin Center for Nonproliferation Studies / NTI

BBC

The North is thought to be focusing efforts on building long-range missiles with the potential of reaching the mainland continental US.

Officials in Pyongyang said the first of the longer-range missiles it tested in July could hit "any part of the world", but the US military called it an intermediate-range missile instead.

Its last nuclear test reportedly involved a miniaturised hydrogen bomb that could be loaded onto a long-range missile, raising tensions with the US even further.

Last week, President Trump announced that the **US was re-designating North Korea a state sponsor of terrorism** because of its missile and nuclear programme.

The US imposed fresh sanctions against Pyongyang. The measures targeted North Korean shipping operations and Chinese companies that traded with the North.

Major North Korean missile tests in 2017

North Korea has carried out numerous missile tests this year. Some of these exploded shortly after launch, but others travelled for hundreds of miles before landing in the sea. Here are some of the major tests reported so far:

12 February - A medium-range ballistic missile launched from Banghyon air base near the west coast. It flew east towards the Sea of Japan for about 500km.

4 April - A medium-range ballistic missile fired from the eastern port of Sinpo into the Sea of Japan. South Korea's defence ministry said the missile flew about 60km.

4 July - Pyongyang claimed to have successfully tested an intercontinental ballistic missile for the first time. Officials said it reached an altitude of 2,802km and flew for 39 minutes.

29 August - North Korea fired what is thought to be its first nuclear-weapon capable ballistic missile over Japan. It was launched from near Pyongyang and reached a height of about 550km.

15 September - A ballistic missile was fired across Japan for the second time and landed in the sea off Hokkaido. It reached an altitude of about 770km and travelled 3,700km.