

Sun Jan 8, 2017 | 9:12pm EST

## North Korea says can test-launch ICBM at any time: official news agency



FILE PHOTO: A new engine for an intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) is tested at a test site at Sohae Space Center in Cholsan County, North Pyongan province in North Korea in this undated photo released by North Korea's Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) on April 9, ... REUTERS/File Photo

North Korea declared on Sunday it could test-launch an intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) at any time from any location set by leader Kim Jong Un, saying a hostile U.S. policy was to blame for its arms development.

Kim said on Jan. 1 that his nuclear-capable country was close to test-launching an ICBM.

"The ICBM will be launched anytime and anywhere determined by the supreme headquarters of the DPRK," an unnamed Foreign Ministry spokesman was quoted as saying by the official KCNA news agency, using the acronym for the country's name.

The North is formally known as the Democratic People's Republic of Korea.

U.S. Defence Secretary Ash Carter said on Sunday that North Korea's nuclear weapons capabilities and ballistic missile defence programs constituted a "serious threat" to the United States and that it was prepared to shoot down a North Korean missile launch or test.

"We only would shoot them down ... if it was threatening, that is if it were coming toward our territory or the territory of our friends and allies," Carter said during an appearance on NBC's "Meet the Press" program.

The United States said on Jan. 5 that North Korea had demonstrated a "qualitative" improvement in its nuclear and missile capabilities after an unprecedented level of tests last year.

North Korea has been testing rocket engines and heat-shields for an ICBM while developing the technology to guide a missile after re-entry into the atmosphere following a liftoff, experts have said.

While Pyongyang is close to a test, it is likely to take some years to perfect the weapon, according to the experts.

Once fully developed, a North Korean ICBM could threaten the continental United States, which is around 9,000 km (5,500 miles) from the North. ICBMs have a minimum range of about 5,500 km (3,400 miles), but some are designed to travel 10,000 km (6,200 miles) or farther.

On Monday, South Korean defence ministry spokesman Moon Sang-gyun called North Korea's statement a "provocative announcement" and told a regular news briefing that Pyongyang would face stronger sanctions if it were to launch an ICBM. Unification Ministry spokesman Jeong Joon-hee said there were no signs of any launch preparations.

U.S. President-elect Donald Trump responded to Kim's comments on an ICBM test by declaring in a tweet last week: "It won't happen!"

Asked for comment on Sunday, the White House referred to Jan. 3 comments by White House press secretary Josh Earnest in which he said the U.S. military believed it could protect against the threat emanating from North Korea.

In that briefing, Earnest also touted the defensive measures the United States had taken to guard against the threat, such as anti-ballistic missile facilities that had been installed around the Pacific region and diplomatic pressure to discourage North Korea from pursuing its nuclear program.

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A U.S. State Department spokesman said last week that the United States did not believe that North Korea was capable of mounting a nuclear warhead on a ballistic missile.

North Korea has been under U.N. sanctions since 2006 over its nuclear and ballistic missile tests. The sanctions were tightened last month after Pyongyang conducted its fifth and largest nuclear test on Sept. 9.

"The U.S. is wholly to blame for pushing the DPRK to have developed ICBM as it has desperately resorted to anachronistic policy hostile toward the DPRK for decades to encroach upon its sovereignty and vital rights," KCNA quoted the spokesman as saying.

"Anyone who wants to deal with the DPRK would be well advised to secure a new way of thinking after having clear understanding of it," the spokesman said, according to KCNA.

(Reporting by Jack Kim and Ju-min Park; Additional reporting by Julia Harte in Washington; Editing by Angus MacSwan and Peter Cooney)

Tue Jan 3, 2017 | 9:36pm EST

**Trump's North Korea red line could come back to haunt him**



File Photo; North Korean leader Kim Jong Un (C) smiles as he guides a test fire of a new multiple launch rocket system in this undated photo released by North Korea's Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) in Pyongyang March 4, 2016. REUTERS/KCNA/File Photo

By [David Brunnstrom](#) and [Arshad Mohammed](#) | WASHINGTON

In three words of a tweet this week, U.S. President-elect Donald Trump vowed North Korea would never test an intercontinental ballistic missile.

"It won't happen!" Trump wrote after North Korean leader Kim Jong Un said on Sunday his nuclear-capable country was close to testing an ICBM of a kind that could someday hit the United States.

Preventing such a test is far easier said than done, and Trump gave no indication of how he might roll back North Korea's weapons programs after he takes office on Jan. 20, something successive U.S. administrations, both Democratic and Republican, have failed to do.

Former U.S. officials and other experts said the United States essentially had two options when it came to trying to curb North Korea's fast-expanding nuclear and missile programs - negotiate or take military action.

Neither path offers certain success and the military option is fraught with huge dangers, especially for Japan and South Korea, U.S. allies in close proximity to North Korea.

The Republican president-elect complained in a separate tweet that China, North Korea's neighbor and only ally, was not helping to contain Pyongyang - despite China's support for successive rounds of U.N. sanctions against Pyongyang.

While many critics, including within President Barack Obama's administration, agreed China could press North Korea harder, the State Department said it did not agree with Trump's assessment that China was not helping.

Experts said Trump's tough stance toward Beijing on issues from trade to Taiwan could prove counterproductive in securing greater Chinese cooperation.

James Acton, co-director of the Nuclear Policy Program at Washington's Carnegie Endowment for International Peace think tank, said that with his North Korea tweet, Trump had drawn a red line he could later be judged by, like Obama's 2012 warning to Syria over the use of chemical weapons.

"This was a foolhardy tweet for Trump to send given the enormous challenges of constraining North Korea's nuclear and missile programs. I think this could be something that comes back to haunt him."

### THREE OPTIONS

U.S. officials, who did not want to be identified, said that if ordered, the U.S. military had three options to respond to a North Korean missile test - a pre-emptive strike before it is launched, intercepting the missile in flight, or allowing a launch to take place unhindered.

One official, who did not wish to be named, said there were risks with pre-emptive action, including the possibility of striking the wrong target - or North Korean retaliation against regional allies.

Arms control expert Jeffrey Lewis questioned whether U.S. missile defenses could shoot down a test missile, absent a lucky shot, and said destroying North Korea's nuclear and missile programs would be a huge and risky undertaking.

Lewis, at the Middlebury Institute of International Studies in Monterey, California, said it would require "a large military campaign ... over a fairly substantial period of time."

He noted that North Korea's main nuclear and missile test sites were on different sides of the country and factories that supplied them were scattered over several provinces.

"There's a warren of tunnels under the nuclear site. And an ICBM can be launched from anywhere in the country because it's mobile. You might as well invade the country," Lewis said.

Republican U.S. Senator Cory Gardner, writing on [cnn.com](#), said he hoped Trump's administration would impose "secondary sanctions" on firms and entities that help North Korea's weapons programs, many of which were in China.

## 'PERIOD OF SERIOUS SANCTIONS'

While Trump has not detailed his policy approach to North Korea, an adviser to his transition team told Reuters he believed "a period of serious sanctions" had "to be a major part of any discussion on the options available here."

State Department spokesman John Kirby said on Tuesday the United States had not ruled out additional sanctions, but added: "Let's not get ahead of where we are."

Victor Cha, who was an aide to former Republican President George W. Bush, said he believed Trump was serious about not letting North Korea have nuclear-capable ICBMs that could threaten the U.S. mainland.

"How to stop this is of course difficult. It's a combination of diplomacy (to get a freeze), sanctions (Chinese ones and Treasury), moving more military assets to the region for extended deterrence, strike options, and integrated missile defense. That's what would be on my menu," he said.

Frank Jannuzi, a former State Department official who heads the Mansfield Foundation Asia dialogue forum, said Trump's vow could prove as hollow as Obama's pledge not to tolerate North Korea's nuclear and missile programs.

"I worry ... that it only emboldens the North, because they see it for what it is: empty talk," he said. "It lays down a red line. ... We don't seem prepared to back up."

He said North Korea had long defied U.S. and U.N. sanctions to pursue its nuclear and missile programs, and added: "One hundred and forty characters from Donald Trump aren't going to change that."

## North Korea 'close to testing long-range missiles'

- 1 January 2017
- From the section [Asia](#)

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Image copyright Reuters

Image caption Kim Jong-un has given a televised address to mark the start of 2017

North Korean leader Kim Jong-un has said the country is close to testing long-range missiles capable of carrying nuclear warheads.

The intercontinental ballistic missiles were in their "last stage" of development, Mr Kim claimed during his New Year's message.

Pyongyang has conducted two nuclear tests in the past year, including its biggest one to date.

This raised fears that North Korea has made significant nuclear advances.

But it has never successfully test-fired such a missile.

Reuters reported a senior US military official as saying that although North Korea appears able to put a miniaturised nuclear warhead on a missile, the missile re-entry technology necessary for longer range strikes is still a serious obstacle to its weapons development.

[How advanced is North Korea's nuclear programme?](#)

Mr Kim, who took control of the secretive state following his father's death in 2011, said in a televised speech: "Research and development of cutting edge arms equipment is actively progressing and ICBM (inter-continental ballistic missile) rocket test launch preparation is in its last stage."

He said the country was now a "military power of the East that cannot be touched by even the strongest enemy".

UN resolutions call for an end to the country's nuclear and missile tests.

## Two audiences: Steve Evans, South Korea correspondent:

Kim Jong-un was speaking to two audiences: one inside the country and one outside, particularly in the United States.

On both counts, it is in his interests to talk up the country's strength.

He did not say that he had achieved his ambition of having a warhead small enough to go on reliable and accurate intercontinental missiles - but he said success was near.

Outside experts reckon it might take less than five years. The North Korean diplomat who defected from the London embassy thinks it will happen by the end of 2017.

It's not clear what US President-elect Donald Trump might do about it. Military experts say the North Korean nuclear programme is too advanced and well-protected to destroy by force. The key facilities are hidden and dispersed.

When North Korea tested its nuclear bomb in September 2016, estimates varied on how strong it was.

South Korea's military said its yield was about 10 kilotonnes, enough to make it the North's "strongest nuclear test ever". Other experts say initial indications suggest 20 kilotonnes or more.

The bomb dropped by the US on Hiroshima in 1945 had a yield of about 15 kilotonnes.

The September test triggered widespread condemnation and further international sanctions against the country.

## North Korea's ground test of rocket engine is 'a success'

- 20 September 2016
- From the section [Asia](#)



Image copyright AFP  
Image caption Kim Jong-un reportedly supervised the ground test (File photo)

North Korea has carried out a "successful" ground test of a new rocket engine to launch satellites, state media says.

Kim Jong-un, the country's leader, asked scientists and engineers to make preparations for a satellite launch as soon as possible, KCNA reported.

It is the latest in a series of [missile-related tests this year](#).

Meanwhile, the US and China have agreed to step up co-operation at the UN to address the North's fifth nuclear test.

[The underground nuclear test](#), conducted earlier this month, is thought to be the country's most powerful yet.

North Korea regularly makes claims about the progress of its nuclear and missile programmes, but analysts say most of them are impossible to independently verify.

- [North Korea's missile programme](#)
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US and Chinese officials have started discussions on a possible UN sanctions resolution as a response, unnamed diplomats were quoted by the Reuters news agency as saying.

But Beijing has not said directly whether it will support tougher steps against Pyongyang, the agency added.



Image copyright Reuters

Image caption Chinese Premier Li Keqiang and US President Barack Obama met in New York on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly  
China is North Korea's main ally and trading partner, but has grown increasingly intolerant of its military actions and Kim Jong-un's aggressive rhetoric.

Its support for toughened sanctions is crucial if they are to have any impact, but Beijing has repeatedly said that such steps are not the ultimate answer for the issue.

## 'Successful test'

Kim Jong-un supervised the test at the country's Sohae satellite-launching site, KCNA reported.

That is where the country launched a rocket in February, [reportedly carrying a satellite](#).

The engine tested would give the country "sufficient carrier capability for launching various kinds of satellites, including Earth observation satellite at a world level", the report added.

Mr Kim, KCNA said, called for more rocket launches to turn the country into a "possessor of geostationary satellites in a couple of years to come."

This was seen by observers as an indication that Pyongyang might soon launch another long-range rocket.

The North insists its space programme is purely scientific in nature but the US, South Korea and even China say the rocket launches are aimed at developing inter-continental ballistic missiles.

UN Security Council resolutions ban the state from carrying out any nuclear or ballistic missile tests.

## North Korea nuclear test: South would reduce Pyongyang 'to ashes'

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Image caption

Tensions are high between South and North Korea

**South Korea has a plan to annihilate the North Korean capital if it shows any signs of mounting a nuclear attack, according to reports from Seoul.**

A military source told the Yonhap news agency every part of Pyongyang "will be completely destroyed by ballistic missiles and high-explosives shells".

Yonhap has close ties to South Korea's government and is publicly funded.

On Friday North Korea carried out what it said was its fifth, and largest, nuclear test.

The international community is considering its response.

The US says it is considering its own sanctions, in addition to any imposed by the UN Security Council, Japan and South Korea.

Pyongyang responded on Sunday by calling the threats of "meaningless sanctions... highly laughable".

**What to look for in North Korea's fifth nuclear test**

**Stages of an underground nuclear test**

**What did N Korea learn from its previous tests?**

**Could North Korea carry out a nuclear attack?**

The South Korean military official told Yonhap that Pyongyang districts thought to be hiding the North's leadership would be particularly targeted in any attack. The city, the source said, "will be reduced to ashes and removed from the map".

The BBC's Korea correspondent Steve Evans says the South is using the same bloodcurdling rhetoric that the North frequently uses about the South Korean government in Seoul.

He says there has been rising criticism within South Korea of the government as its attempts to isolate the North have failed to deter leader Kim Jong-un's nuclear ambitions.

News of South Korea's attack plan for the North is believed to have been revealed to parliament following Friday's nuclear test.



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Image caption

South Korea's military said the test appeared to be the North's biggest yet

Meanwhile, the US's special envoy for North Korea says Washington is considering taking unilateral action against Pyongyang.

"We will be working together very closely in the [UN] Security Council and beyond to come up with the strongest possible measure against North Korea's latest action," Sung Kim said.

"In addition to sanctions in the Security Council, both the US and Japan, together with [South Korea], we will be looking at unilateral measures."



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Source: USGS  
BBC

North Korea is banned by the UN from any tests of nuclear or missile technology and has been hit by five sets of UN sanctions since its first test in 2006. The North said Friday's test had been of a "nuclear warhead that has been standardised to be able to be mounted on strategic ballistic rockets". Estimates of the explosive yield of the latest blast have varied. South Korea's military said it was about 10 kilotonnes, enough to make it the North's "strongest nuclear test ever". Other experts say initial indications suggest 20 kilotonnes or more. The nuclear bomb dropped by the US on Hiroshima in 1945 had a yield of about 15 kilotonnes.

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## North Korea's 'biggest' nuclear test sparks global outrage

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**World leaders have reacted with anger after North Korea carried out its fifth and reportedly biggest nuclear test.**

The South accused the North's leader Kim Jong-un of "maniacal recklessness".

China "firmly opposed" the test, Japan "protested adamantly" and the US warned of "serious consequences".

Such tests are banned by the UN, but this is the second nuclear test this year, and Kim Jong-un's rhetoric has become increasingly aggressive.

The isolated communist nation has been hit by five sets of UN sanctions since its first test in 2006. Talks involving world and regional powers have failed to rein in the North's nuclear programme.

In its statement announcing the underground test, North Korea expressed anger at the "racket of threat and sanctions... kicked up by the US-led hostile forces" to deny a "sovereign state's exercise of the right to self-defence".

The test came on the country's National Day, which celebrates the founding of the current regime and which is often used as a show of military strength.

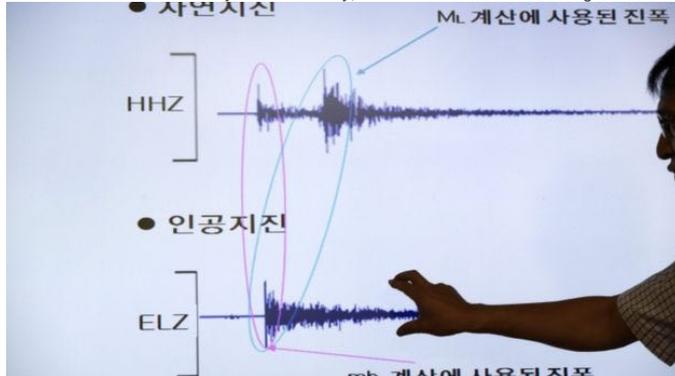


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EPA

Image caption

The test registered as a seismic event

Technically, the North said the test was aimed at further developing the miniaturisation of nuclear warheads so they could be mounted on ballistic missiles.

In its statement the North said it could now produce "at will, and as many as it wants, a variety of smaller, lighter and diversified nuclear warheads of higher strike power".

In recent months, the North has conducted a series of ballistic missile launches and has in the past often stated its aim of hitting US targets.

The North has previously made claims on "miniaturised" nuclear warheads but they have never been independently confirmed.

**What now? Analysis by Steve Evans, BBC News, Seoul**

What North Korea's opponents can actually do is problematic.

After the fourth test in January, China agreed to impose tougher UN sanctions. Further and even tougher sanctions are still possible, like blocking the export of fuel oil to North Korea.

That would be a drastic step which might halt the economy and cause serious suffering to ordinary people.

China's bottom line is that it does not want the collapse of the regime in Pyongyang if that leads to a chaotic power vacuum, possibly filled by the US and its allies.

North Korea has also been angered by a US and South Korean plan to install an **anti-missile defence system** in the South and by the allies' massive annual joint military exercises, which are still taking place.

The North's recent actions have sorely tested its only ally, China.

It condemned January's test and repeated that on Friday after the latest.

China's foreign ministry said it would lodge a diplomatic protest and urged North Korea to avoid further action that would worsen the situation.

Reaction from elsewhere was more strident:

**United States** - President Barack Obama will "ensure provocative actions from North Korea are met with serious consequences"

**Japan** - North Korea is an "outlaw nation in the neighbourhood"

**South Korea** - "Such provocation will further accelerate its path to self-destruction"

**Russia** - "We insist that the North Korean side stop its dangerous escapades and unconditionally implement all resolutions of the United Nations Security Council"

**The International Atomic Energy Agency** - a "deeply troubling and regrettable act" that is "in complete disregard of the repeated demands of the international community"

The latest test was announced on state TV hours after a 5.3 magnitude tremor was detected near the Punggye-ri underground nuclear site.

Estimates of the explosive yield of the latest blast have varied. South Korea's military said it was about 10 kilotonnes, enough to make it the North's "strongest nuclear test ever". Other experts say initial indications suggest 20 kilotonnes or more.

The bomb dropped by the US on Hiroshima in 1945 had a yield of about 15 kilotonnes.



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Source: USGS

BBC

## North Korea conducts 'fifth and biggest nuclear test'

- 9 minutes ago
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North Korea is believed to have carried out its fifth and largest ever test of a nuclear device, South Korean military officials say.

South Korean President Park Geun-hye called it an act of "self-destruction" which showed the "maniacal recklessness" of leader Kim Jong-un.

It was detected as a 5.3 magnitude quake close to the nuclear test site.

The North has not commented, but analysts fear this could be a sign of the rogue state's nuclear progress.

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Previous artificial earthquakes in the same area and of that magnitude have all been nuclear tests.

Ms Park, who is cutting short an overseas visit, said that with a fifth nuclear test "Kim Jong-un's regime will only earn more sanctions and isolation".

"Such provocation will further accelerate its path to self-destruction."

Image copyright AFP

Image caption Japan's meteorological agency said seismic activity was "different than in a normal quake"

In a statement carried by the Yonhap news agency, South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff said: "We estimate the North has carried out the biggest-ever test."

It said the yield was estimated to have been 10 kilotonnes, almost twice the power of its last test in January. At that time the North said it had successfully tested a hydrogen bomb, but many analysts cast doubt on that claim.

The US Geological Survey, which monitors global seismic activity, said earlier that a tremor had been detected in the Punggye-ri nuclear test site in the north-east.

It said it was caused by "an explosion" but could not say what type.

Recent satellite imagery has shown increased activity at the site, indicating a fifth test could be imminent.

Friday is also North Korea's National Day, which celebrates the founding of the current regime. The North often uses such events as an opportunity for a show of military strength.

Image copyright GeoEye

Image caption Punggye-ri, seen in an archive image, has been showing increasing signs of activity in recent months

Japan was swift to condemn the suspected test with Prime Minister Shinzo Abe saying it was closely co-ordinating with its allies.

"If North Korea has conducted a nuclear experiment, we absolutely cannot condone it. We must protest adamantly."

The US has said it is monitoring the reports.

## Missile tests and angry rhetoric

North Korea is banned by UN sanctions from any tests of nuclear or missile technology.

But in recent months it has conducted a series of ballistic missile launches and unleashed a rising tide of aggressive rhetoric, threatening nuclear attacks on its enemies.

The North has also been angered by a US and South Korean plan to install an anti-missile defence system in the South and by the allies' annual joint military exercises.

International sanctions were considerably toughened in response to its previous nuclear and missile tests, but had little impact on Pyongyang's determination to be a nuclear-armed state.

## Analysis: Steve Evans, BBC News, Seoul

If this test is confirmed, the big question is what might be done, given that sanctions were tightened after the fourth nuclear test and North Korea's launch of a satellite, which its opponents said was really a test of a missile.

China joined the condemnation but there are fault-lines in its relations with the US. China doesn't like the plans to deploy a US anti-missile defence system in South Korea. It is also angry at condemnation of its claim to disputed islands.

Increasingly, China and the United States are bumping up against each other in the region.