

# G-8 powers warn North Korea over missile tests

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26 June 1999

The Group of Eight (G-8) major powers turned up the pressure on North Korea last Sunday with a sharp warning in their final communiqué that they were “deeply concerned” over the country’s missile flight tests and alleged missile proliferation. The statement said the group would “examine further individual and collective means of addressing the problem” and enforcing its Missile Technology Control Regime.

The G-8 statement, coming in the wake of three days of talks on the outcome of the NATO bombardment of Yugoslavia, highlights the potential for North Korea to be targetted as a “rogue state”; for its leader Kim Il Jung to be vilified in the international media as the Milosevic of North East Asia; and for the Korean peninsula to become the next arena for US-led military build-up, provocation and aggression.

Japanese Prime Minister Keizo Obuchi, who pushed for the warning to be included in the G-8 communiqué, told reporters: “The central issue of this summit was Kosovo, but if there are any other regions of the world for global security and world peace,” one is the Korean peninsula.

The threat comes amid speculation in Washington and Tokyo about new missile tests by Pyongyang. High-level talks between the two Koreas in Beijing have stalled in the aftermath of a naval clash in the Yellow Sea that led to the sinking of a North Korean craft on June 15.

South Korea’s Foreign Minister Hong Soon Young reported last Saturday that South Korea, the US and Japan were in intensive discussions over a possible test-firing by North Korea of its Taepodong 2 ballistic missile, said to have a range of up to 6,000 kilometres. Hong, who was relying on information from the US State Department, said he did not see such a test as imminent.

Going one step further, Japanese newspapers recently claimed that North Korea was in the process of developing an even more advanced missile, the Taepodong 3, with a range of more than 8,000 kilometres.

Evidence of North Korean preparations for missile testing is scanty. A *New York Times* article last Friday cited “American intelligence agencies” who claimed to have aerial photographs revealing North Korea was refurbishing its launch pad. On the basis of the photos, the agency officials concluded that the country was “most likely to test its longer-range ballistic missile, the Taepodong 2”. Once deployed, they said, it would be able to hit Alaska or Hawaii.

This alarm follows the launching last August of a Taepodong 1 missile that passed over Japan before landing in the Pacific. Pyongyang claimed at the time that the missile had been used to launch a satellite into orbit—a claim that Washington was finally compelled to acknowledge as correct. “We have concluded that North Korea did attempt to orbit a very small satellite,” US State Department spokesman James Rubin stated on September 14.

This has not prevented the Clinton administration from pressing ahead with demands for North Korea to halt its ballistic missile development program and to end its current sales of missiles. Earlier this month US presidential envoy William Perry visited North Korea to pressure the Pyongyang regime into giving up its weapons programs in return for the lifting of the 45-year US economic and diplomatic blockade of the country. Perry is reported to have told North Korean officials that the US and Japan would not tolerate another missile launch.

Earlier in the year, the Clinton administration demanded access to a large underground excavation at the remote mountainous site of Kumchangri, which had been spotted by US surveillance satellites, claiming that the North Koreans could be reestablishing a nuclear weapons program there in breach of a 1994 agreement with the US.

The only reason that the G-8 communiqué referred to “missiles” and not “nuclear weapons” was that a US team of visiting inspectors and scientific experts found no

evidence of any preparations for the construction of a nuclear reactor in the tunnel. These findings were reported to North Korean officials this week during talks in Beijing by US Special Envoy on Korean Affairs Charles Kartman. Nevertheless, State Department spokesman James Rubin said the US still had its “suspicions” about the tunnel complex.

Vice-ministerial talks between the North and the South, the first in 14 months, lasted for 90 minutes in Beijing on Tuesday morning but broke up after the North Korean delegation criticised South Korea for the battle in which a North Korean torpedo boat was sunk and about 30 of its sailors killed. The North Korean media has demanded an apology.

Both sides blame the other for initiating the firing. At issue is control over lucrative crab fishing areas south of the so-called Northern Limit Line (NLL)—a sea border arbitrarily set by the UN Command following the end of the Korean War in 1953 and never agreed to by North Korea. South Korea responded to the dispatch of North Korean fishing vessels into the disputed area by building up a flotilla of warships and ramming the North Korean vessels.

The US heightened tensions further by dispatching its own warships and warplanes to “monitor” the situation. Late last week the Aegis-class cruiser Vincennes and the guided-missile destroyer Mobile Bay were headed towards the region along with four EA-6 electronic warfare aircraft. Two nuclear-powered submarines, the Kamehameha and the Buffalo, were at a Korean naval base, and the nuclear aircraft carrier Constellation was reportedly heading for North East Asia.

Both the US and South Korean governments are under pressure to adopt an even more aggressive stance. Republican Congressman Benjamim Gilman, chairman of the House International Relations Committee, last week used reports of a possible North Korea missile test to launch a frothing attack on the policies of the Clinton administration.

“What has the Administration done to stop the deployment and proliferation of these missiles? When will North Korea be able to combine its ballistic missile program with its nuclear weapons effort to create a ‘balance of terror’ in the Pacific? When will the long-range ballistic missile find its way to the arsenals of other rogue states?” he said.

“Perhaps the greatest tragedy is that the White House has continued to pursue a misguided policy of appeasement towards North Korea—despite congressional

opposition—and will have failed to prevent the development of this serious threat to our nation and our allies.” Gilman is sponsoring a bill in the US Congress aimed at preventing the dispatch of any US aid to North Korea unless Pyongyang agrees to dismantle of its weapons programs.

Gilman's wild statements ignore the most salient facts: that North Korea is a tiny country of some 20 million people; its economy is in tatters after the collapse of support from the former Soviet Union; and a succession of floods and droughts have led to widespread famine. The US and other major powers have focussed attention on North Korea not because it constitutes a military threat, but because the Korean peninsula is a key strategic area, bordering China, Russia and Japan.

South Korean President Kim Dae Jung responded this week to critics of his so-called Sunshine Policy of opening up economic relations with North Korea by insisting that his government has maintaining a tough military policy towards Pyongyang. In an interview with the *Washington Post* newspaper, Kim commented: “Sunshine is not a naïve policy, and our combat readiness is very powerful.” He said that “our clear victory” in the naval clash “demonstrated that we are not naïve in dealing with the north”.

Kim Dae Jung is due to visit Washington next week for discussions with the US administration and Clinton's special envoy William Perry is preparing to bring down a report on US relations with North Korea. Whatever the outcome of talks between North Korea and South Korea, due to resume in Beijing today, political tensions on the peninsula are certain to remain high.



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