

# US-backed UN statement condemns North Korean missile test

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An emergency session of the UN Security Council, convened earlier this week at the behest of the US, Japan and South Korea, condemned North Korea's test launch of an intermediate-range ballistic missile on Sunday. The solid-fuel missile, named the Pukguksong-2, flew an estimated 500 kilometres before splashing down in the Sea of Japan.

The UN statement declared that North Korea violated a series of Security Council resolutions banning nuclear and missile tests and imposing ever-harsher sanctions on the country. It warned of "further significant steps" if Pyongyang did not halt its testing and called on all UN members "to redouble their efforts" to implement existing sanctions.

US President Donald Trump backed Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe who, at a joint press conference last weekend, condemned the launch as "absolutely intolerable." At a media conference on Monday, Trump said North Korea was a "big, big problem" and his administration would deal with it "very strongly."

The US ambassador to the UN, Nikki Haley, called on UN Security Council members "to use every available resource to make it clear to the North Korean regime—and its enablers—that these launches are unacceptable. It is time to hold North Korea accountable—not only with our words, but with our actions."

The reference to North Korea's "enablers" is directed especially at China, which is an ally of North Korea and by far its largest trading partner. This effectively puts Beijing on notice that Washington will demand the imposition of far harsher Chinese measures to force Pyongyang to its knees. Since the beginning of the year, Trump has twice lambasted China for not bringing North Korea to heel.

North Korea is already among the most isolated

countries in the world, having been subject to a US diplomatic and economic embargo since the end of the Korean War in 1953. Following each of its five nuclear tests, the UN Security Council, supported by China, has ratcheted up economic sanctions that have already taken their toll. The latest, imposed in November, limited North Korea's annual export of coal—its largest export item—and also banned the export of zinc, nickel, silver and copper.

North Korea's ambassador to Switzerland, Han Tae Song, on Tuesday defended the missile test, declaring it was necessary for "building up self-defence capabilities" and to "protect national sovereignty and the safety of the people against direct threats by hostile forces." He said North Korea rejected the UN resolutions and sanctions, and condemned the massive annual joint US-South Korean military exercises due to start next month.

However, North Korea's expanding nuclear and missile arsenal does nothing to protect its people, and in fact, heightens the danger of a devastating conflict, providing the US with a pretext for its military build-up in North East Asia, aimed against China in particular. Moreover, Pyongyang's bellicose threats against South Korea, Japan and the United States drive divisions into the international working class—the only social force able to halt the accelerating drive to war.

The Pentagon is already exploiting the latest missile test to hype up the danger posed by Pyongyang. Media spokesman Jeff Davis said North Korea's missiles represented "a clear, grave threat to our national security," claiming that the new solid fuel rocket could be launched at short notice and would be harder to detect.

In reality, as US Defence Secretary James Mattis warned earlier this month, any attempt by North Korea

to use a nuclear-armed missile would be met with an “effective and overwhelming response.” The huge US nuclear arsenal is capable of obliterating the Pyongyang regime, along with its military and economic infrastructure, in a matter of hours.

Moreover, there is a growing chorus of hawkish figures calling for pre-emptive military action against North Korea. Last week, US Forces Korea commander General Vincent Brooks suggested that the Pentagon had to boost its ability to destroy North Korean missiles before they were fired. “Defence is not enough,” he said. “If you are not also able to kill the archers, we will never be able to catch enough arrows.”

Such comments are raising concerns in South Korea, which faces the possibility of retaliation by North Korea. Reporting on Brooks’ remarks, the *Chosen Ilbo* warned: “In the past, the prospect of pre-emptive strikes had been mentioned by US analysts on a theoretical basis, but now they are being touted as viable options by government officials and lawmakers.”

Threats of pre-emptive military action against Pyongyang, and calls for a regime-change strategy, are part of an intensifying debate in US strategic circles over North Korea. The Trump administration itself is reportedly engaged in a review of US policy toward Pyongyang. Those opposed to aggressive military measures against North Korea warn of the disastrous consequences.

A lengthy essay in the latest issue of the *Foreign Affairs* magazine, entitled “Trump and North Korea,” calls for the White House to enter negotiations and strike a deal with North Korea. “Military action could lead to the destruction of Seoul (which sits within range of North Korean artillery) and expose US forces in Guam, Japan and South Korea to devastating retaliation, potentially triggering a catastrophic war in one of the world’s most populous and prosperous regions,” it warned.

Given the erratic character of Trump’s foreign policy statements, nothing can be ruled out. He did in fact suggest last year that he could sit down for a discussion with North Korean leader Kim Jong-un over a hamburger. Everything, however, mitigates against such an eventuality: Trump’s own belligerent and militaristic statements, including toward Iran where a deal was struck to limit that country’s nuclear and

missile programs, and his appointment of generals and politicians to top security posts in his administration who are known for their hawkish views.

Furthermore, the main target of Washington’s aggressive military expansion in the Asia Pacific, which began under the Obama administration’s “pivot to Asia,” is not North Korea, but China. The placement of the sophisticated Terminal High Altitude Area Defence (THAAD) system in South Korea, along with associated radar sites in Japan, is part of the Pentagon’s preparation for fighting a nuclear war with China.

Far from seeking to ease tensions with China, Trump has foreshadowed actions, including trade war measures against Beijing and a further military expansion in Asia, that only heighten the danger of war. In that context, like previous administrations, the present White House will exploit the confrontational stand-off with North Korea as a means of intensifying the pressure on China, further exacerbating the risks of conflict.



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