

US denounces North Korea's attempted satellite launch

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North Korea conducted a launch of a military reconnaissance satellite early Wednesday morning, though the satellite failed to reach orbit. The launch drew hypocritical condemnations from the United States and South Korea. The allies will undoubtedly exploit the event to further ramp up militarization in the region, which is ultimately aimed at preparing for war with China.

The rocket, known as Chollima-1, carrying the satellite took off from Tongchang-ri on North Korea's northwest coast at 6:29 a.m., according to the South Korean military, and traveled southward over the Yellow Sea. The rocket flew far west of South Korea's western border island of Baengnyeong and therefore did not represent a danger to the country.

Pyongyang stated on Tuesday that the satellite, called Malligyong-1, would be crucial for national defense. Ri Pyong-chol, vice chairman of the Central Military Commission of the North's ruling Workers' Party of Korea, said that it would be "indispensable to tracking, monitoring, discriminating, controlling, and coping with in advance in real time the dangerous military acts of the US and its vassal forces," a reference to US allies like South Korea.

However, North Korea's state-run media outlet, Korean Central News Agency (KCNA), confirmed on Wednesday that the launch had been a failure. The second stage of the rocket reportedly failed to start properly, resulting in a crash in the Yellow Sea along with the reconnaissance satellite. Kim Yo-jong, the sister of North Korean leader Kim Jong-un, said Thursday that another satellite would be launched in the "near future."

The attempt to place a satellite in orbit was by no means unexpected. Pyongyang notified the International Maritime Organization as well as Japan of

its plans beforehand, providing a window of May 31 and June 11. It also came shortly after South Korea conducted its own satellite launch on May 25, firing its rocket called Nuri, which carried a payload of eight satellites.

Pyongyang's announcement of its plans drew condemnations from Washington and its allies which claimed the launch violated UN Security Council resolutions as the technology involved was similar to that of long-range ballistic missiles. Prior to Wednesday, North Korea most recently fired a Hwasong-18 intercontinental ballistic missile on April 13.

Following Wednesday's rocket flight, Washington led a chorus of condemnations. The spokesman for the US National Security Council, Adam Hodge, declared, "The United States strongly condemns the Democratic People's Republic of Korea for its launch using ballistic missile technology, which is a brazen violation of multiple UN Security Council resolutions, raises tensions, and risks destabilizing the security situation in the region and beyond."

South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff stated, "While elevating its vigilance posture, our military, in close cooperation with the United States, is maintaining a full readiness posture."

Hodge went on to claim that "the door has not closed on diplomacy" with Pyongyang. In reality, however, Washington demands that North Korea entirely abandon its weapons' programs without anything in return from the US, let alone the security guarantees Pyongyang has long demanded. These include a peace treaty to formally conclude the Korean War, which ended with only an armistice 70 years ago this July.

The Biden administration has shown no serious interest in easing tensions on the Korean Peninsula as it

ramps up its confrontation with China across the region. It is exploiting the supposed threat by North Korea to deepen its trilateral military collaboration with Japan and Tokyo. This includes building a ballistic missile system capable of spying on and striking deep into China.

During the previous Trump administration, Washington and Pyongyang agreed to a moratorium on North Korea's long-range missile launches and nuclear tests, in return for a suspension of large-scale joint US-South Korean military exercises. The Kim Jong-un regime abided by the agreement, believing it lead to meaningful negotiations. However, this did not take place. Instead, the US continued to threaten the North behind the scenes, content to allow the situation to fester so long as the weapon tests had stopped.

The Biden administration continued this policy, prompting North Korea to resume long-range missile tests in 2022 in a desperate attempt to bring the US back to the bargaining table and end its isolation. Already cut off from most of the world through US-led sanctions, Pyongyang has also faced growing economic problems as a result of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

Instead, Washington, alongside an increasingly and openly militarist Seoul under President Yoon Suk-yeol, has provocatively resumed large-scale war games with South Korea. As a result Pyongyang has been conducting more and more missile launches.

Seoul's increased militarization has not been limited to the Yoon administration. When previous South Korean President Moon Jae-in met Biden in May 2021, the two agreed to scrap range limits on Seoul's ballistic missiles, which had been capped at 800 kilometers.

The situation on the Korean Peninsula is therefore very volatile, with even an accident or miscalculation leading to conflict. Highlighting this, the Seoul city government sent an alert to people's phones Wednesday morning calling for them to prepare to evacuate the city or take shelter. The message, sent at 6:41 a.m. read, "Warning issued in the Seoul area today at 6:32. Citizens should prepare to evacuate, and children and the elderly should be evacuated first."

Shortly after 7 a.m., the alert was retracted and declared "erroneous." However, questions remain: Why was the alert sent? What are the possibilities of a similar "mistake" being sent to US or South Korean

troops? How would soldiers respond in that situation?

Erroneous or not, sending such a message serves a very definite purpose. Seoul is home to some 10 million people. While the government and its allies in Washington and Tokyo have done everything possible to vilify North Korea, widespread support for war does not exist. Stoking fears that the heavily populated city is in danger only assists the Yoon government's efforts to create a political climate for furthering its war preparations.



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