

North Korea conducts satellite launch as US-instigated tensions rise in Indo-Pacific

Ben McGrath**23 November 2023**

North Korea conducted what it claimed to be a successful launch of a military reconnaissance satellite late Tuesday night. It was Pyongyang's third attempt following two failures in May and August of this year. The US and its allies immediately seized on the launch to continue ramping up tensions in the region, ultimately aimed at provoking war with China.

According to the Korean Central News Agency (KCNA), North Korea's state media outlet: "The carrier rocket Chollima-1 flew normally along the preset flight track and accurately put the reconnaissance satellite Malligyong-1 on its orbit at 22:54:13, 705s after the launch." The report stated Pyongyang will conduct additional launches in the near future.

The launch took place earlier than expected, with Pyongyang having previously alerted Japan that it would carry it out between Wednesday and December 1. The rocket took off from Tongchang-ri in North Pyongan Province, along the west coast, and travelled south through international airspace, passing west of South Korea's Baengnyeong Island in the Yellow Sea. The South Korean military confirmed that the satellite had entered orbit.

The US, Japan, and South Korea condemned the launch, labelling it a cover for testing ballistic missile technology. Washington's National Security Council spokeswoman Adrienne Watson stated the launch "is a brazen violation of multiple UN Security Council resolutions, raises tensions, and risks destabilizing the security situation in the region and beyond."

Such statements are entirely hypocritical. While Washington demands North Korea adhere to UN resolutions and sanctions, the US is carrying out accelerating preparations for war in the Indo-Pacific region against China, including the formation of a de facto trilateral military alliance with South Korea and

Japan. At the same time, the US is waging war against Russia in Ukraine and fully backs Israel as it carries out a genocide against the oppressed Palestinian people in Gaza.

Pyongyang had previously agreed to a moratorium on long-range missile and nuclear tests following talks with the previous Trump administration in 2018, which attempted to pressure the Kim Jong-un regime to distance itself from China. Washington, however, offered nothing in return while continually goading and provoking the North. Facing economic isolation, Pyongyang gradually resumed missile tests in an attempt to pressure Washington back to the bargaining table.

The Biden administration has exploited North Korea's missile tests as a pretext to build a system of military alliances in the region while provocatively holding major military exercises on Beijing's doorstep on a regular basis. Pyongyang, by contrast, last conducted a missile firing on September 13.

In addition, Russia is now being accused of providing aid to North Korea's rocket program. Backed by Washington and the Western media, which presents unsubstantiated allegations as established facts, South Korean officials are promoting the possibility that North Korea and Russia cooperated to carry out the launch. Pyongyang and Moscow have denied such collaboration.

Even if true, North Korea is an impoverished country devastated by the 1950-1953 Korean War and crippling US-led economic sanctions. Pyongyang's missile and rocket tests pale in comparison to the destructive capabilities the US and its allies have threatened to unleash. Washington now regularly dispatches nuclear-capable strategic assets to the Korean Peninsula under the pretext of defending against North Korea.

As recently as Tuesday, the USS *Carl* carrier arrived at Busan, making it the third such visit by a massive US carrier to South Korea this year. Yesterday, South Korea's Defense Minister Sin Won-sik announced that Seoul and Washington plan to conduct bilateral as well as trilateral military drills with Tokyo, involving the *Carl Vinson*. The drills are likely to take place Saturday and Sunday respectively.

The US military does not confirm or deny whether strategic assets such as aircraft carriers are carrying nuclear weapons. However, for all intents and purposes, Washington has returned nuclear weapons to the Korean Peninsula, creating a situation in which Pyongyang and Beijing must assume their presence. This only heightens the risk of a catastrophic conflict erupting in the region.

The dispatching of the *Carl Vinson* to the region is highly provocative. Shortly after Israel's genocidal assault on Gaza began in October, Washington deployed the aircraft carrier to the Indo-Pacific, joining the USS *Ronald Reagan*, which is based at Yokosuka, Japan. As it plans for a wider war with Iran, the Biden administration is no doubt aware that such a conflict could pull in China and is making the preparations for what would become World War III.

The US, South, and Japan also announced recently that they would expand the frequency and scale of their military drills beginning in January as well as agreeing to increased intelligence sharing in real-time. US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin travelled to Seoul last week for discussions with Defense Minister Sin and Japanese Defense Minister Minoru Kihara, who attended remotely from Tokyo.

These military exercises will likely take place even closer to North Korea's borders. South Korean President Yoon Suk-yeol led a meeting of his administration's National Security Council (NSC) late Tuesday in the United Kingdom where he is on a state visit. The NSC announced Seoul would resume intelligence activities around the Demilitarized Zone separating the North and South. These reconnaissance operations supposedly halted following a 2018 agreement between Seoul and Pyongyang that established a buffer zone along land and sea borders to reduce tensions.

For months, the right-wing Yoon administration has been looking for an excuse to annul the agreement

while pinning blame on ~~Pyongyang~~ for doing so. Since coming to office in May 2022, Yoon has fully backed US war plans against China, supported provocations against North Korea and called for increased nuclear cooperation with Washington.

During a summit in April, Biden and Yoon agreed to establish a Nuclear Consultative Group (NCG), which is meant to give Seoul more say in the planning and use of US nuclear weapons. The NCG is modelled after a similar group in NATO that decides nuclear policy.

The chief responsibility for the sharply escalating tensions in the region and the danger of war rests with the US and its allies including South Korea and Japan.



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