

Another North Korea missile fails after launch, say US and South

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North Korea test-fired a missile that failed immediately after launch early today, the US and South Korean militaries said, hours after the two countries agreed to step up efforts to counter the North's nuclear and missile threats.

The missile was believed to be an intermediate-range Musudan and was launched from the western city of Kusong, where the isolated state attempted but failed to launch the same type of missile on Saturday, the US Strategic Command and South Korea's Office of the Joint Chiefs of Staff said.

The launch came shortly after the United States and South Korea agreed in Washington to bolster military and diplomatic efforts to counter the North's nuclear and missile programmes, which it is pursuing in defiance of UN Security Council resolutions.

The failed missile launch was the eighth attempt in seven months by the North to launch a weapon with a design range of 3,000km that can be fired from road mobile launchers, the two militaries said.

"We strongly condemn the North's continued illegal acts of provocation," the South's Joint Chiefs of Staff said in a statement.

Japan condemned the launch and said it would make a formal protest to the North through its embassy in Beijing.

North Korea has been conducting activities related to its nuclear and missile programmes at an unprecedented pace this year in defiance of UN sanctions and diplomatic pressure and is believed to be making progress in its efforts to develop a nuclear missile.

In June, North Korea launched a Musudan missile that flew about 400km, more than half the distance to Japan, a flight that was considered a success by officials and experts in South Korea and the United States.

After yesterday's talks in Washington between US and South Korean foreign and defence ministers, the countries said they would set up a high-level group to leverage "the full breadth of national power - including diplomacy, information, military coordination, and economic elements" in the face of the North Korean threat.

Reclusive North Korea and the rich, democratic South are technically still at war because their 1950-53 conflict ended in a truce, not a peace treaty. The North regularly threatens to destroy the South and its main ally, the United States.

US Secretary of State John Kerry, speaking before the failed missile launch, said the United States would do "whatever is necessary" to defend itself, South Korea and other allies against North Korea.

Kerry and US Defence Secretary Ash Carter reaffirmed that any attack by North Korea would be defeated, and any use of nuclear weapons "met with an effective and overwhelming response," a joint statement said.

As part of the military effort, Kerry said the United States would deploy the Terminal High Altitude Area Defence anti-missile system to South Korea "as soon as possible".

China strongly opposes deployment of the US system, saying it would impinge on its own strategic deterrence.

South Korean Foreign Minister Yun Byung-se, also speaking in Washington before the failed launch, said North Korea was nearing the "final stage of nuclear weaponisation" and the allies would mobilise "all tools in the toolkit" to defend themselves.

A US aerospace expert, John Schilling, said this week in a report on the 38 North project that despite the failures, the pace of testing could enable the North to put the Musudan missile into operational service sometime next year.

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