



Written by [Angeline Tan](#) on December 18, 2022

North Korea Claims It Tested “High-thrust Solid-fuel Motor” at Satellite Launch Site

SINGAPORE — North Korea has tested a “high-thrust solid-fuel motor,” state media claimed on December 16, as the communist hermit state aims to manufacture a new strategic weapon and accelerate its nuclear and missile programs.

Leader Kim Jong-un oversaw the test that was done on December 15 at North Korea’s Sohae Satellite Launching Ground, according to the official KCNA news agency.

The static firing test showcased the motor’s reliability and stability, offering a “guarantee for the development of another new-type strategic weapon system,” KCNA elaborated.



AP Images

North Korean missile launch viewed on television in South Korea

Analysts say the test seems targeted at building a new solid-fuel intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) owing to the thrust of the engine, which the North claimed was “the first of its kind” in the country.

North Korea has been developing more solid-fuel missiles, which are more stable and can be launched without any warning or preparation time.

“Compared to liquid-propellant weapons, solid-fuel missiles are more mobile, quicker to launch, and easier to conceal and use during a conflict,” said Dr. Leif-Eric Easley, a professor of international studies at Ewha University in Seoul. “Once deployed, the technology would make North Korea’s nuclear forces more versatile, survivable, and dangerous.”

Dr. Lim Eul-chul, a professor of North Korean studies at Kyungnam University in South Korea, said the latest test indicates North Korea’s drive to develop more powerful ICBMs and submarine-launched ballistic missiles (SLBMs).

“We cannot rule out the possibility of the North test-firing an ICBM with a new solid fuel rocket next year.”

Developing a solid-fuel ICBM formed part of the North’s five military tasks listed out at its key party meeting in 2021.

After supervising the test, Kim announced that “another important problem in carrying out the five priority tasks” was successfully addressed, and expressed “expectation that another new-type strategic weapon would be made in the shortest span of time,” KCNA said.

KCNA published a photo showcasing Kim smiling with a cigarette in one hand with a large smoke cloud in the background.

North Korea has conducted an unprecedented number of missile tests in 2022, including an



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intercontinental ballistic missile that can target the U.S. mainland, amid international bans and sanctions. On December 18, North Korea fired off at least two suspected ballistic missiles toward waters off its east coast, escalating regional friction.

The missiles were fired off between 11:13 a.m. and 12:05 p.m. local time from the Tongchang county area, South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff said.

Japanese government officials said there were at least two missiles launched, and both seemingly landed outside of its exclusive economic zone.

The missiles flew to an altitude of 550 km (341 miles) and covered a range of 250 km (155 miles), based on reports from the Japanese Defense Ministry.

Japanese Vice Defense Minister Toshiro Ino said there had been no news of damage from the missiles thus far.

According to a new report by the U.S.-based Center for International and Strategic Studies (CSIS), commercial satellite imagery depicts the building of what seems to be a horizontal engine test stand, characterizing it as the "first of its kind" at the Sohae station that would enhance the facility's capabilities.

"We are concerned about North Korea's media report, and are monitoring its activities," an official at South Korea's unification ministry handling inter-Korea affairs admitted.

This latest test comes amid discussions between International Atomic Energy Agency chief Rafael Grossi and South Korean officials during which Grossi pledged an all-out effort to halt North Korea's nuclear ambitions.

During his meeting with Grossi, South Korean President Yoon Suk-yeol voiced his worries over North Korea's "race" to develop its nuclear and missile program, urging the UN agency to discourage Pyongyang from more provocations.

The North has completed preparations for a potential nuclear test, which would be the first since 2017, based on reports from U.S. and South Korean officials.

Meanwhile, U.S. Forces Korea (USFK) unveiled a space forces unit on December 14 as both countries increase efforts to better address North Korea's developing nuclear and missile launches.

The USFK, spearheaded by Lieutenant Colonel Joshua McCullion, is the second overseas space component of the U.S. Space Force and is charged with observing, ascertaining, and tracking incoming missiles, as well as enhancing the military's overall space capability.

USFK commander General Paul LaCamera said the unit would boost the U.S. ability to facilitate peace and security on the Korean peninsula and in Northeast Asia.

"The US military is faster, better connected, more informed, precise and legal because of space," General LaCamera remarked at a ceremony at Osan Air Base in the South Korean city of Pyeongtaek.

Moreover, South Korea's air force also established its own space unit to boost its space power and operation capability together with the U.S. Space Force.

U.S. officials have also voiced worries over increasing security activity in space by major rival China's advancement of hypersonic weapons and Russia's test of anti-satellite technology last year.

The communist regime in Beijing, an ally of North Korea, has cautioned Seoul against joining a U.S.-led



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global missile shield, and lambasted the Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) U.S. missile defense system placed in South Korea. In response, Seoul's Defense Ministry said the establishment of the U.S. space component had no links with South Korea's involvement in existing missile-defense programs.

An estimated 28,500 U.S. troops are based in South Korea under a mutual defense treaty made after the Korean War ended in an armistice, not a peace treaty.

The U.S. Indo-Pacific Command and Central Command established their space units in November in Hawaii and Florida.

This year's total of more than 65 ballistic missiles launched is the highest number in Kim's decade in power and a breach of UN resolutions that ban such launches.



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