



North Korea Confirms Important Test to Build Spy Satellite

SINGAPORE — North Korea’s state media KCNA reported on December 19 that the hermit state has conducted an “important, final-phase” test for the construction of a spy satellite, which it hopes to complete by April 2023.

The communist state made this declaration after the South Korean and Japanese militaries reported the North’s launch of two intermediate-range ballistic missiles toward its east coast.

Pyongyang’s National Aerospace Development Administration (NADA) conducted the test at its Sohae satellite-launching station in the northwest to evaluate its capability for satellite imaging, data transmission, and ground-control systems, said KCNA.

A vehicle containing a mock satellite, which also had multiple cameras, image transmitters and receivers, a control device, and a storage battery, was fired at a “lofted angle” at 500 km.

“We confirmed important technical indicators such as camera-operating technology in the space environment, data processing and transmission ability of the communication devices, tracking and control accuracy of the ground control system,” a NADA spokesman reported in the KCNA dispatch.

The spokesman regarded the test as a “final gateway process of launching a reconnaissance satellite,” which will be completed by April.

KCNA also published two black-and-white, low-resolution images of the South Korean capital Seoul and nearby port city of Incheon, which it said were snapped during Sunday’s launch.

Last Friday, the North tested a high-thrust solid-fuel engine, which observers said would enable a swifter and more mobile launch of ballistic missiles. Friday’s test comes amid the North’s efforts to build a new strategic weapon and accelerate its nuclear and missile programs.

Pyongyang has conducted tests on satellite systems during various rocket launches, and leader Kim Jong-un has admitted that his country’s construction of a spy satellite is to offer real-time information on military actions by the United States and its allies.

South Korea’s presidential office slammed the North’s latest launch, cautioning that these continued provocations would only undermine the communist regime.

Earlier in December, South Korea’s foreign minister told his Chinese counterpart that the country expects China to proactively back South Korea’s attempts for dialogue with North Korea.



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Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi told his counterpart Park Jin in a video conference call that China will have a constructive role in the Korean peninsula issue, a ministry statement said.

During the call, Park voiced concerns about North Korea's actions, including a historic number of ballistic-missile launches this year, elaborating that the country must stop further provocations such as nuclear tests and engage in dialogue.

In November, South Korean President Yoon Suk-yeol in a Reuters interview called on China to persuade the North to stop its pursuit of nuclear and missile build-ups.

China, North Korea's closest ally, should fulfill its duties as a permanent member of the UN Security Council, Yoon said, warning that failing to do so would cause an increase of military assets in the region.

Also in November, Chinese President Xi Jinping told Kim that Beijing was willing to collaborate with Pyongyang for world peace, based on reports from KCNA.

In his message to Kim, Xi said Beijing was ready to work with the North for "peace, stability, development and prosperity of the region and the world."

Xi said he was willing to collaborate with Pyongyang as "changes in the world, times, and history are taking place in unprecedented ways," KCNA said, quoting from the message it received in response to congratulations from Kim after the Communist Party of China's congress in October secured a third term for Xi.

Washington has said it wants China, Pyongyang's most crucial ally and economic benefactor, to use its clout to restrict the actions of the North.

The United States also accused Beijing and Moscow of protecting Pyongyang from further punishment.

In May, China and Russia vetoed a U.S.-led campaign to increase sanctions on North Korea due to past missile launches. Pyongyang is already under various international sanctions over its nuclear and ballistic-missile programs, and China accounts for more than 90 percent of the North's bilateral trade.

Previously, North Korean Foreign Minister Choe Son Hui slammed a trilateral summit of the United States, South Korea, and Japan, during which the leaders lambasted Pyongyang's weapons tests and pledged greater security cooperation.

At the talks, U.S. President Joe Biden reaffirmed a pledge to defend the two Asian allies with a "full range of capabilities," including nuclear weapons.

Choe said the three countries' "war drills for aggression" failed to rein in the North, and would instead bring a "more serious, realistic and inevitable threat" upon themselves.

"The keener the US is on the 'bolstered offer of extended deterrence' to its allies and the more they intensify provocative and bluffing military activities ... the fiercer the DPRK's military counteraction will be," Choe said in a statement carried by the official KCNA news agency. The DPRK refers to initials of the official name of North Korea, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea.

"The US will be well aware that it is gambling, for which it will certainly regret," Choe added.

Also, the North has vowed "bold and decisive military steps" against Japan, and said Japan will learn with "a shuddering shiver" the ramifications of expanding its own military forces.

North Korea's foreign ministry recently published a statement and slammed Tokyo for trying to obtain



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“pre-emptive capability meant to launch strikes on other countries’ territories” and said its claim that it is building up its counterstrike capacity for self-defense was a lie.

“Japan’s foolish attempt to satiate its black-hearted greed — the building up of its military invasion capability with the pretext of a legitimate exercise of self-defense rights — cannot be justified and tolerated,” said North’s foreign ministry spokesperson, who was not identified by state media.

The North also rebuked the United States for “conniving and instigating Japan’s rearmament and reinvasion scheme,” adding that the United States had no right to oppose North Korea’s defenses.

“Japan is a war criminal state which inflicted untold misfortune and sufferings upon the Korean people in the past and has not yet honestly liquidated its past crimes,” the foreign ministry spokesperson said, continuing, “and it has been branded as an enemy state in the UN Charter. It will never be welcomed that such a country has openly revealed its dangerous scheme.”



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