



Written by [Warren Mass](#) on June 21, 2017

U.S. Satellites Detect Activity at N. Korean Nuclear Test Site; U.S. Seeks China's Help

A report published by CNN on June 20 cited statements from two unnamed U.S. officials who told the network that U.S. spy satellites have detected new activity at North Korea's underground nuclear test site for the first time in several weeks. The officials told CNN that if a sixth nuclear test by North Korea were to occur, it would be evident that the ongoing pressure that China is attempting to exert on North Korea has not been effective.



In a June 20 tweet, made in apparent response to the death of Otto Warmbier, a U.S. student who died after being imprisoned for 17 months in North Korea, President Trump said, "While I greatly appreciate the efforts of President Xi & China to help with North Korea, it has not worked out. At least I know China tried!"

White House press secretary Sean Spicer said following Trump's tweet on June 20 that the United States had seen "positive movement on China over the past five months of this administration, and we'll continue to work with them and others to put the appropriate pressure on North Korea to change this behavior and this regime."

U.S. officials told CNN that they would not be able to say for at least a year whether Chinese pressure on North Korea is helping to rein in the country's nuclear and missile programs.

A June 21 report in Britain's *Telegraph* noted that senior officials from China and the United States would meet that day to discuss North Korea's military ambitions, amid concern that the communist state is preparing for a sixth nuclear test.

During a meeting being held in Washington, the United States is seeking to increase pressure on Beijing to help rein in the Pyongyang regime. North Korea's missile and nuclear weapons programs are likely to head the agenda.

However, reported the *Telegraph*, China is also intent on broadening the agenda of the discussions and will try to gain concessions on a number of contentious issues. Among these are the deployment of U.S. missiles in South Korea and the U.S. relationship with Taiwan, which China regards as its own territory.

The *Telegraph* report also quoted Paul Haenle, who served on the National Security Council under former presidents Bush and Obama, and is now the director of the Carnegie-Tsinghua Centre for Global Policy in Beijing.

Haenle said the talks are "unlikely" to result in any change in China's approach to Pyongyang.

"Beijing remains constrained by historical legacies, longstanding interests, and deep-seated mistrust of US intentions on the Korean Peninsula," said Haenle, adding that he feared a "whiplash" in US-China relations when Trump realized that he would be forced to go it alone on North Korea.

Haenle said: "In order to make Xi pay the price for inaction and consolidate his own position



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domestically, Trump may follow through on campaign promises to implement harsher trade and economic measures, increase pressure in the South China Sea or perhaps even announce a long-rumored arms deal with Taiwan.”

Despite Haenle’s rather pessimistic outlook that the June 21 talks will influence Beijing to be more helpful with North Korea, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Geng Shuang said during a June 21 daily news briefing that China is making unrelenting efforts on the North Korean nuclear issue, reported Reuters.

In its report on the U.S. discovery that North Korea is preparing for another nuclear test, CNN said: “The officials [who reported the findings] said it is not yet clear if the activity indicates a sixth nuclear test is imminent.”

“But [they] noted there is concern that North Korea could set off a test during Wednesday’s visit to Washington by top Chinese diplomats and military officials.”

North Korea’s nuclear weapons and ballistic missile programs have increasingly raised concerns among neighboring countries, especially South Korea and Japan. As the range of the communist state’s missiles increases, and the rogue state eventually develops nuclear warheads to be carried by them, they will become a potent threat. North Korea’s official KCNA news agency announced on May 14 that it had fired a new ballistic missile named Hwasong-12 that reached an altitude of 1,312 miles and covered a lateral distance of 489 miles.

A May 15 Reuters report cited statements from missile experts who noted that the missile’s altitude indicated that it was launched at a high trajectory, which would limit the lateral distance that it traveled. However, noted the experts, if it were to be launched at a standard trajectory, it would have a range of at least 2,500 miles.

Dr. John Schilling — an aerospace engineer specializing in missile and spacecraft propulsion and mission analysis — observed that North Korea’s test of the Hwasong-12 “represents a level of performance never before seen from a North Korean missile.” Schilling’s analysis continued:

The missile would have flown a distance of some 4500 kilometers [2,796 miles] if launched on a maximum trajectory. It appears to have not only demonstrated an intermediate-range ballistic missile (IRBM) that might enable them to reliably strike the U.S. base at Guam, but more importantly, may represent a substantial advance to developing an intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM).

If North Korea managed to top an ICBM with a nuclear warhead, it would present the same kind of threat that the old Soviet Union made during the Cold War.

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