

## N. Korea fires ballistic missile over Japan

Provocative move: A television news screen in Seoul shows file footage of a North Korean missile launch; soldiers from the Japan Air Self-Defence Force carry out a temporary deployment drill at the U.S.'s Yokota Air Base in Tokyo on Tuesday. AFP/JUNG YEON-JE

Nuclear-armed North Korea fired a ballistic missile over Japan on Tuesday in a major escalation that triggered global alarm and a furious response from the government in Tokyo.

Later, two U.S. officials said it was likely an intermediate-range ballistic missile (IRBM) and further analysis was under way to determine whether it was a success or failure. It appeared to be a KN-17, or Hwasong-12, according to initial data, they said.

A visibly unsettled Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe said it was an "unprecedented, serious and grave threat", while the UN Security Council called an emergency meeting at Tokyo and Washington's request.

### 2009 satellite launch

The last time a North Korean rocket overflew Japan was in 2009, when Pyongyang said it was a satellite launch. Washington, Seoul and Tokyo believed it was a clandestine test of an intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM). Pyongyang last month carried out two overt ICBM tests that appeared to bring much of the U.S. mainland within reach for the first time and heightened strains in the region.

At the time, U.S. President Donald Trump had issued an apocalyptic warning of raining "fire and fury" on the North, while Pyongyang threatened to fire a salvo of missiles towards the U.S. territory of Guam.

South Korea said the latest missile was launched from Sunan, near Pyongyang and flew around 2,700 km at a maximum altitude of around 550 km.

Guam is about 3,500 km from North Korea — although the missile was fired in an easterly direction and not towards the U.S. outpost, home to 1,60,000 people and host to major military facilities. Mr. Abe said the overflight was an "outrageous act" that "greatly damages regional peace and security". In a 40-minute telephone call with Mr. Trump, he said, the two allies had agreed to "further strengthen pressure against North Korea".

### Pyongyang defiant

However, North Korea was defiant.

"The U.S. should know that it can neither browbeat the DPRK with any economic sanctions and military threats and blackmail nor make the DPRK flinch from the road chosen by itself," North Korea's official *Rodong Sinmun* said, using the initials of the North's official name, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea.

Robert Wood, U.S. Permanent Representative to the Conference on Disarmament at the UN in Geneva labelled it "another provocation" that was "a big concern".

Russia, which also has ties to Pyongyang, said it was "extremely worried", hitting out at a "tendency towards escalation".

Any launch towards Guam would have to pass over Japan first and analysts said Tuesday's overflight presents a major challenge to both Tokyo and Washington.

Before 2009, the only time it had traversed Japanese airspace was in 1998, in what it also claimed it was a space launch. The U.S. said it was a Taepodong-1 missile.

Pyongyang says it needs nuclear weapons to protect itself against the U.S., and the firing comes during the annual Ulchi Freedom Guardian South Korean-U.S. joint military exercise, which the North always condemns as rehearsals for invasion.

### **'Halfway house option'**

Euan Graham, of the Lowy Institute in Australia, said that a launch towards Guam would have been a "red line" for Washington, and instead Pyongyang selected a "half-way-house option".

Japan has in the past vowed to shoot down North Korean missiles or rockets that threaten to hit its territory.

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