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North Korea Fires at Least One Missile Off Coast

Launch is the country's ninth since July 25



President Trump met with North Korean leader Kim Jong Un at the demilitarized zone separating the two Koreas in June.

PHOTO: KEVIN LAMARQUE/REUTERS

By Timothy W. Martin

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SEOUL—North Korea fired at least one ballistic missile off the country's east coast, officials in Japan and South Korea said, with the U.S. describing the launch as a provocation.

The early Wednesday test launch took place a day after Washington and Pyongyang said nuclear talks would resume this week after a long hiatus.

Japan's government initially said the launch featured two missiles that splashed into the waters between South Korea and Japan. But Tokyo's defense minister later said it could have been a single missile that broke midflight or split apart in stages.

"We call on the DPRK to refrain from provocations," State Department spokeswoman Morgan Ortagus said Wednesday, calling on North Korea to "remain engaged in substantive and sustained negotiations."

Pyongyang said Tuesday that it would restart nuclear talks with the U.S. on Friday. The process has been stalled since February, when a summit in Vietnam ended without a deal.

The first projectile landed around 7:17 a.m. local time, with a second coming 10 minutes later, a Japanese government spokesman said.

The weapon launch, the North's ninth since July 25, happened near the Wonsan region of the North's Kangwon province, according to South Korea's military, which detected just a single ballistic missile.

The missile traveled about 280 miles and soared to an altitude of 565 miles, the South Korean military said. The missile flew much higher than any of Pyongyang's other tests this year, suggesting the Wednesday launch involved a new type of weapon.

At an impromptu meeting June 30, President Trump and North Korean leader Kim Jong Un agreed to restart official working-level talks. But shortly after, North Korea became incensed over U.S. public comments and a joint military exercise planned by Seoul and Washington. The North then conducted nearly a dozen weapons tests and dispatched fiery messages via state media.

The Kim regime last test fired a weapon about three weeks ago—a launch that came hours after the North signaled it was willing to come back to the negotiating table.

In a state-media report, the North later praised Mr. Trump's removal of national security adviser John Bolton, calling him a "nasty troublemaker." Mr. Bolton had championed a strategy that sought disarmament before sanctions relief, which upset the Kim regime.

In Washington, a senior administration official said the U.S. is aware of the reports of a North Korean launch and that it would continue to monitor the situation.

The North's latest weapons test came roughly 13 hours after the Kim regime said it would resume working-level talks with the U.S. on Saturday after a preliminary meeting on Friday. The State Department earlier Tuesday confirmed the coming meetings.

Nuclear talks have remained gridlocked since the two sides failed to strike a deal in February at a nuclear summit in Vietnam. The abrupt breakdown revealed deep divides over how, and when, the Kim regime would relinquish its nuclear program in return for economic-sanctions relief.

Pyongyang's most-recent launch is a provocation with a message for Washington ahead of the resumption of working-level negotiations, said Leif-Eric Easley, a professor at Ewha University in Seoul. "The timing of North Korea's tests is a statement that it is not being pressured into talks but intends to negotiate from a position of strength," Mr. Easley said.

Japan said one of the missiles appeared to land in the country's exclusive economic zone, an area extending about 200 miles off its coast. It was the first North Korean weapon to splash into the zone since 2017. The other missile landed outside the zone, a Japanese government spokesman said.

Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe said North Korea had launched two ballistic missiles in violation of a United Nations ban and that he would call a meeting of Japan's National Security Council. "We will coordinate closely with the U.S. and other nations," Mr. Abe told reporters.

—Dasl Yoon in Seoul, Courtney McBride in Washington, Alastair Gale in Tokyo and Jessica Donati in Rome contributed to this article.

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