

Articles on the US-North Korea crisis (III) - Missile test over Japan, 'tipping point'

Wednesday 30 August 2017, by [Al Jazeera](#), [McCURRY Justin](#), [SHARMAN Jon](#) (Date first published: 30 August 2017).

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China: Korean tensions at 'tipping point'

Beijing urges US, South Korea to halt military exercises, as White House considers 'all options' after missile launch.

China has warned that tensions on the Korean Peninsula have reached a "tipping point" after North Korea fired a ballistic missile over Japan, a move Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe described as "unprecedented" and a "grave threat" to his country's security.

Hua Chunying, spokeswoman for the Chinese foreign ministry, urged all sides on Tuesday to avoid provocations, repeating Beijing's call for Pyongyang to suspend missile tests while proposing that the United States and South Korea halt ongoing joint military exercises.

The situation is "now at a tipping point approaching a crisis. At the same time there is an opportunity to reopen peace talks", Hua told reporters in Beijing.

"We hope relevant parties can consider how we can de-escalate the situation on the peninsula and realise peace and stability on the peninsula," she added.

Hua said "time has proven that pressure and sanctions cannot solve the root of the problem", and that the only way to solve the standoff is by addressing legitimate security concerns through dialogue.

North Korea: US-South Korea military drills 'escalate tensions'

In the early hours of Tuesday, North Korea fired a mid-range ballistic missile designed to carry a nuclear payload that flew over US ally Japan and splashed into the northern Pacific Ocean.

Following the latest incident, US President Donald Trump issued a statement saying "all options are on the table", as his ambassador to the United Nations, Nikki Haley, warned "something serious has

to happen” to stop North Korea from making more provocations.

But North Korea appeared to remain defiant, with its ambassador to the UN in Geneva saying that his country will not “flinch an inch” on the road to building a nuclear force as long as “US hostile policies and nuclear threats continue”.

Ambassador Han Tae Song told a session of the Conference on Disarmament that his country “has every reason to respond with tough countermeasures”.

While making no direct reference to Tuesday’s missile test, Han repeated Pyongyang’s criticism of the joint US and South Korean military exercises, calling it “a fanatic act of adding fuel to flame”.

‘Mixed signals’

Following the launch of the missile, Trump held a 40-minute phone call with Japan’s Abe to discuss what action to take in response.

In a statement, Abe said “Japan’s and the US positions are totally at one”, adding that the two leaders were in “total agreement” that an emergency meeting was needed at the UN Security Council to step up pressures on North Korea.

South Korea holds drills to prepare for potential attack by North

Abe also said that Trump “expressed his strong commitment to defending Japan, saying he was 100 percent with Japan as an ally”.

Al Jazeera’s Kimberly Halkett, reporting from Washington, DC, said that while the Trump administration continues to “talk tough” on North Korea, it has also been sending mixed signals in recent weeks.

She cited a statement from Steve Bannon, a former top White House aide, who told The American Prospect magazine that “there is no military solution” to the Korean crisis.

In advance of an emergency UN Security Council meeting on Tuesday, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres also issued a statement condemning North Korea’s missile launch and called on Pyongyang to comply with its international obligations.

“The launch undermines regional security and stability and efforts to create space for dialogue,” a spokeswoman for Guterres said in a statement.

Al Jazeera and news agencies

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<http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/08/china-korean-tensions-tipping-point-170829134342171.html>

North Korea’s Kim Jong-un says missile launch a prelude to ‘containing Guam’

UN security council unanimously condemns launch and demands Pyongyang halt its

ballistic missile and nuclear weapons programmes.

North Korean leader, Kim Jong-un, has warned that Tuesday's missile launch over Japan was a "meaningful prelude to containing" the US Pacific territory of Guam, adding that his regime would conduct more ballistic missile tests.

North Korea confirmed the test hours before the UN security council unanimously condemned the launch and repeated demands that Pyongyang halt its ballistic missile and nuclear weapons programmes.

The 15-member council described North Korea's actions as "outrageous" and called for the full implementation of tough sanctions agreed less than a month ago. But it did not recommend fresh measures against the regime, and said it remained committed to a peaceful solution to the nuclear crisis on the Korean peninsula.

"The security council stresses that these DPRK actions are not just a threat to the region, but to all UN member states," it said, referring to the North by its official title the Democratic People's Republic of Korea.

The statement went on to express "grave concern that the DPRK is, by conducting such a launch over Japan as well as its recent actions and public statements, deliberately undermining regional peace and stability".

The emergency meeting was called after a North Korean intermediate-range missile designed to carry a nuclear payload flew over northern Japan on Tuesday morning.

The missile, believed to be a relatively untested Hwasong-12, is the same type Kim has recently threatened to use against Guam, a key US military base located about 3,000km (1,860 miles) southeast of North Korea.

North Korea's state KCNA news agency said Kim had "personally guided" the missile, which came in response to military drills involving tens of thousands of troops from South Korea and the US.

Pyongyang regards the annual Ulchi Freedom Guardian exercises, which end on Thursday, as a dress rehearsal for an invasion and often responds with a display of its own increasing military might.

"The current ballistic rocket launching drill like a real war is the first step of the military operation of the Korean People's army in the Pacific and a meaningful prelude to containing Guam," KCNA quoted Kim as saying.

Tuesday's launch triggered warning sirens in towns across northern Japan, sending some residents underground but leaving many unsure of how to protect themselves.

North Korea had twice before sent rockets over Japan, in 1998 and 2009, but the regime claimed those were carrying communications satellites.

On Wednesday, the regime was explicit in referring to the launch as involving a missile, which South Korean experts said travelled 2,700 km before landing in the Pacific ocean east of the northern Japanese island of Hokkaido.

"The drill had no impact on the security of neighbouring countries," KCNA insisted, adding that Kim expressed "great satisfaction" over the launch.

The agency quoted Kim as saying that there would be “more ballistic rocket launches” in the Pacific, adding that the regime would monitor Washington’s response “before deciding on its future actions”.

Some analysts have suggested that Pyongyang appeared to have sent the missile over Japan having concluded that targeting areas closer to Guam would cross a “red line” and invite a more robust response from the White House.

The launch had historical as well as diplomatic significance, coming on the 107th anniversary of the Japan-Korea treaty of 1910, which marked the start of 35 years of Japanese colonial rule of the Korean peninsula.

In ordering the launch on Tuesday, Kim had communicated the anger many Koreans still felt towards Japan, with his “bold plan to make the cruel Japanese islanders insensible on bloody August 29”.

The North’s official Rodong Sinmun newspaper, said the test should remind Washington that “it can neither browbeat [North Korea] with any economic sanctions or military threats and blackmail, nor make [it] flinch from the road it has chosen for itself”.

Weeks after he threatened to counter North Korean provocations with “fire and fury”, Donald Trump offered a more measured response to Tuesday’s missile launch.

“Threatening and destabilising actions only increase the North Korean regime’s isolation in the region and among all nations of the world,” Trump said in a statement. “All options are on the table.”

The US ambassador to the UN, Nikki Haley warned that “enough is enough” and that tough action had to be taken in response to North Korea’s most recent provocation.

The US has reportedly proposed that the UN security council adopt a statement condemning the ballistic launch and demanding that “all states to strictly, fully, and expeditiously implement” UN sanctions against the regime.

The draft statement, however, does not include fresh punitive measures. Seven previous rounds of UN sanctions have done little to slow North Korea’s nuclear and weapons programmes.

Justin McCurry in Tokyo and agencies

* The Guardian. Wednesday 30 August 2017 02.44 BST:

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/aug/30/north-koreas-kim-jong-un-says-missile-launch-a-prelude-to-containing-guam>

North Korea defends right to fire missiles and warns US of ‘catastrophic consequences’ of conflict

Washington driving the Korean peninsula ‘towards an extreme level of explosion’ by deploying its strategic assets, claims envoy.

Theresa May demands further North Korean sanctions to halt Pyongyang’s

North Korea's envoy to the UN has warned the US to expect "catastrophic consequences" if the current war of words continues to escalate, as the country defended its right to carry out Tuesday's missile test.

A short-range ballistic missile flew over Hokkaido, one of Japan's main island territories, before splashing down in the Pacific. The "reckless" launch was condemned by Tokyo as an "unprecedented, serious and grave threat" to the region.

The North's ambassador in Geneva, Han Tae-song, told the UN's disarmament forum: "My country has every reason to respond with tough counter-measures as an exercise of its right to self-defence."

China urges US and South Korea not to provoke Pyongyang

"The US should be fully responsible for the catastrophic consequences it will entail."

Washington was driving the Korean peninsula "towards an extreme level of explosion" by deploying its strategic assets there, he claimed.

And Rodong Sinmun, North Korea's official newspaper, said: "The US 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."

The White House retorted that Pyongyang had "signalled its contempt for its neighbours, for all members for the United Nations, and for minimum standards of acceptable international behaviour".

Regarding its response, "all options are on the table," the administration said.

Pyongyang's 13th missile test this year came amid joint US and South Korean war games, and following the South's own missile tests last week.

Hours afterwards, the South Korean military conducted a bombing test at a firing range near its border with the North to show its "strong capability to punish" the Kim regime in the case of outright hostilities.

The missile was thought to have been a Hwasong-12, with a maximum range of 4,500km (2,800 miles), as shown in the below infographic, produced for The Independent by statistics agency Statista.

US President Donald Trump suggested last week that Kim Jong-un "is starting to respect us" following a series of tough statements he had made—promising "fire and fury like the world has never seen" and declaring the US military "locked and loaded".

His harsh rhetoric prompted similar from Pyongyang and did not appear to deter the regime, which only days ago launched three short-range missiles into the Sea of Japan.

On Tuesday morning China, North Korea's sole major ally, urged restraint on all sides and called for diplomatic talks. Beijing said sanctions and other pressure could not solve the problem of North Korea's pursuit of nuclear weapons.

Mr Trump, his Secretary of State Rex Tillerson, and South Korean President Moon Jae-in have all previously signalled their desire for talks with the North.

Russia said it wanted the North to show restraint and avoid any new provocative actions, while

calling on the US and its allies to refrain from any military escalation. Foreign minister Sergei Lavrov added that Pyongyang “must respect” United Nations resolutions meant to ban it from launching missiles.

Bruce Klingner, a former CIA deputy division chief for Korea, told CNN there was still room for a tougher use of sanctions.

He said: “Recently we’ve had the UN imposing stronger sanctions against North Korea, moving from really targeted financial measures directed at specific violators, towards broader economic sanctions, such as we saw with Iran that led to the Iran nuclear deal.” The UN recently banned the export of many of North Korea’s key resources, including coal. The next step may be banning the export of oil to North Korea.”

A US congressman visiting Seoul said Washington was now pressuring North Korea to abandon its nuclear ambitions by shutting down the impoverished country’s access to hard currency, the lifeblood of its expensive weapons program.

The goal is to offer international banks that do business with Pyongyang a choice between bankruptcy and freezing North Korean accounts, Ed Royce, the Republican chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, said.

Jon Sharman

* The Independent Online. 29 August 2017 12:51 BST:

<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/asia/north-korea-missiles-fire-japan-us-warn-un-conflict-se lf-defence-nuclear-war-catastrophic-a7917771.html>

Pyongyang ‘has signalled its contempt for its neighbours,’ US President says

Donald Trump has issued his first statement in response to an unprecedented North Korea missile test over one of Japan’s main islands, warning it that “all options are on the table” for a US response.

“The world has received North Korea’s latest message loud and clear. This regime has signalled its contempt for its neighbours, for all members of the United Nations, and for minimum standards of acceptable international behaviour,” Mr Trump said, in a statement issued by the White House.

“Threatening and destabilising actions only increase the North Korean regime’s isolation in the region and among all nations of the world.”

Hokkaido region on Tuesday, prompting air-raid sirens and mobile phone alerts for citizens. The projectile, thought to be a Hwasong-12, is designed to carry a nuclear payload and is shown below in an infographic, created for The Independent by statistics agency Statista.

Japan’s Prime Minister, Shinzo Abe, called it an “unprecedented, serious and grave threat” to the region. He and Mr Trump spoke by phone for some 40 minutes on Tuesday morning, and were in “total agreement” they would push the UN Security Council to exert more pressure on Pyongyang, he added.

Han Tae-song, the North's ambassador to the UN in Geneva, defended his country's right to test missiles and warned the US of "catastrophic consequences" should it continue the war of words that has simmered in recent months.

Washington was driving the Korean peninsula "towards an extreme level of explosion" by deploying its strategic assets there, he added.

The US has been holding joint war games with South Korea, which also tested its own missiles last week. Hours after Pyongyang's launch, its 13th so far this year, the South Korean military carried out a test bombing at a firing range near its border with North Korea.

Mr Trump has previously warned North Korea it faces "fire and fury like the world has never seen" if it continues to menace the US and allied countries. The American military is "locked and loaded," he said earlier this month.

He and Kim Jong-un have slung fierce rhetoric back and forth for several months, with Mr Kim recently threatening a strike on the US Pacific territory of Guam. The island is home to 160,000 people and a substantial military base.

On Tuesday morning China, North Korea's sole major ally, urged restraint on all sides and called for diplomatic talks. Beijing said sanctions and other pressure could not solve the problem of North Korea's pursuit of nuclear weapons.

Mr Trump, his Secretary of State Rex Tillerson, and South Korean President Moon Jae-in have all previously signalled their desire for talks with the North.

Russia said it wanted the North to show restraint and avoid any new provocative actions, while calling on the US and its allies to refrain from any military escalation.

Antonio Guterres, the UN Secretary General, condemned North Korea's actions. He said: "The launch undermines regional security and stability and efforts to create space for dialogue."

Last week Mr Trump appeared to suggest his tough stance against North Korea's provocations was paying off.

He told supporters at a campaign style rally in Phoenix, Arizona: "I respect the fact that [Mr Kim] is starting to respect us. And maybe—probably not, but maybe—something positive can come about."

But just days later, Pyongyang launched three short-range missiles into the Sea of Japan.

Mr Tillerson called that launch a "provocative act" but said the US would "continue our peaceful pressure campaign ... working with allies, working with China as well to see if we can bring the regime in Pyongyang to the negotiating table".

A US congressman visiting Seoul said Washington was now pressuring North Korea to abandon its nuclear ambitions by shutting down the impoverished country's access to hard currency, the lifeblood of its expensive weapons program.

The goal is to offer international banks that do business with Pyongyang a choice between bankruptcy and freezing North Korean accounts, Ed Royce, the Republican chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, said.

Bruce Klingner, a former CIA deputy division chief for Korea, told CNN there was still room for a

tougher use of sanctions.

He said: "Recently we've had the UN imposing stronger sanctions against North Korea, moving from really targeted financial measures directed at specific violators, towards broader economic sanctions, such as we saw with Iran that led to the Iran nuclear deal." The UN recently banned the export of many of North Korea's key resources, including coal. The next step may be banning the export of oil to North Korea. "John Nilsson-Wright, a senior research fellow at Chatham House's Asia programme, told The Independent diplomatic talks would "probably not" take place in the short term, and added: "I think it is in Pyongyang's interest to keep testing." Continued tests signalled the regime's "autonomy" as well as providing propaganda and technical benefits, he said, while finally gaining a credible long-range arsenal would provide Mr Kim leverage to focus on economic growth—potentially using it as a bargaining chip to weaken sanctions.

A sixth nuclear test is "a question of 'when', rather than 'whether'", he said. "Kim seems to have taken the measure of Trump and decided his bluster is that—bluster."

But he added: "I don't think it's ever too late to lay out to North Korea what they would stand to gain politically, diplomatically and economically if they started to behave like a more reasonable international actor." There will need to be talks. Trump should find ways, I think, of trying to expand the options for that sort of dialogue, while at the same time being careful not to overpromise what he can do in the military field. "It may mean" talks about talks", discussion, alongside the US' regional allies, of a peace treaty, and an eventual reduction in the number of US conventional armed forces stationed in the area.

The potential for a liaison mission and the dispatch of a high-level envoy like former President Bill Clinton to Pyongyang should also be explored, Dr Nilsson-Wright said.

Jon Sharman

* The Independent Online. 29 August 2017 15:53 BST:

<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/asia/donald-trump-north-korea-nuclear-war-missiles-latest-white-house-statement-kim-jong-un-a7917996.html>

China blames US and South Korea for provoking Pyongyang

Sanctions and other pressure not the answer, Beijing says as it urges talks.

China has warned the US and South Korea not to provoke North Korea and called for restraint from all sides after Pyongyang fired a missile that flew over Japan and landed in waters off the northern region of Hokkaido.

Foreign ministry spokeswoman Hua Chunying made the comment at a daily news briefing.

North Korea's latest missile test came amid joint US-South Korea war games, and Seoul immediately followed it with a test bombing at a firing range near its border with the North.

North Korea typically reacts with anger to such drills, often testing weapons and threatening Seoul

and Washington in its state-controlled media.

But animosity is higher than usual following threats by US President Donald Trump to unleash “fire and fury like the world has never seen”, and Pyongyang’s threat to bomb the American Pacific territory of Guam. South Korea has also released footage of its own missile tests, which it said were conducted last week.

Mr Trump has traded fierce rhetoric with North Korea’s young dictator, Kim Jong-un, for months, as the pace of the regime’s missile testing has increased. He declared earlier this month that “military solutions are now fully in place, locked and loaded”.

China’s foreign ministry said it opposed North Korea going against UN resolutions to launch missiles, but added that sanctions and pressure could not solve the issue. It called for the United States and North Korea to open talks.

Mr Trump has tried to pressure China, Pyongyang’s sole major ally, into doing more to restrain the Kim regime.

And Australian Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull said: “China has to ratchet up the pressure. They have condemned these missiles tests like everyone else but with unique leverage comes unique responsibility.”

China has said it will implement the latest economic sanctions voted for by the UN Security Council, however. The council is due to meet later on Tuesday in response to the latest launch.

Mr Trump, his Secretary of State Rex Tillerson and South Korea’s President, Moon Jae-in, have all signalled their willingness to hold diplomatic talks with the North to try to halt its nuclear weapons programme.

A US congressman visiting Seoul said Washington is now pressuring North Korea to abandon its nuclear ambitions by shutting down the impoverished country’s access to hard currency, the lifeblood of its expensive weapons program.

The goal is to offer international banks that do business with Pyongyang a choice between bankruptcy and freezing North Korean accounts, Ed Royce, the Republican chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, said.

Tuesday’s launch came only days after Pyongyang test-fired three short-range ballistic missiles into the Sea of Japan. It brought the total number of tests this year to 13, with analysts predicting the North could possess a viable long-range nuclear missile by the end of Mr Trump’s first term as President.

Mr Trump had previously suggested his tough approach might be working.

He told supporters at a campaign style rally in Phoenix, Arizona, last week: “I respect the fact that [Mr Kim] is starting to respect us. And maybe—probably not, but maybe—something positive can come about.”

Jon Sharman

Additional reporting by agencies

* The Independent Online. 29 August 2017 13:09 BST:

North Korean missile test over Japan seen as 'big-time escalation'

The Pentagon confirmed Monday evening that North Korea test-fired a missile that traveled over the territory of Japan — the latest in a string of provocative moves as the reclusive regime seeks to advance its nuclear weapons program.

"We can confirm that the missile launched by North Korea flew over Japan," the Pentagon said in a brief statement following news reports from the region that residents in northern Japan were awakened in the middle of the night to warnings before the missile splashed into the sea.

The test comes after a heated exchange of threats earlier this month between North Korean dictator Kim Jong Un and President Donald Trump after the United Nations approved a series of new punitive measures, including additional economic sanctions targeting Pyongyang.

Trump said that North Korea would suffer "fire and fury" if it continued to threaten U.S. interests — a statement that many perceived to be signaling a willingness to use nuclear weapons. In turn, North Korea threatened to fire a salvo of missiles into the waters off Guam, a U.S. territory that houses military facilities in the region.

In recent days, however, talk of diplomacy has lowered the temperature.

Sen. Lindsey Graham a South Carolina Republican on the Armed Services Committee, called the new test "a big-time escalation of conflict." He also said that "clearly North Korean sanctions are not working the way we had hoped."

He called on the Trump administration to "forcefully respond."

The Pentagon did not immediately reveal additional details about the latest missile test and says it is still analyzing the launch. But its statement added that "North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD) determined the missile launch from North Korea did not pose a threat to North America." "We are working closely with Pacific Command, Strategic Command and NORAD and will provide an update as soon as possible."

The test drew immediate condemnation from experts.

"North Korea once again proved to the international community that it will not stop testing advanced ballistic missiles — no matter the perceived pressure or tough talk from the Trump administration," said Harry Kazianis, director of defense studies at the Center for the National Interest, a nonpartisan foreign policy think tank established by former President Richard Nixon.

He called the move a "reckless provocation."

"The danger of such a test is obvious," he added. "If a North Korean missile were to accidentally land in Japan and kill scores of innocent civilians, Tokyo and its treaty ally, the United States, would be hard-pressed not to respond — most likely militarily. In such an event, North Korea would likely

respond in kind with force, setting off a chain of events that could put all of Northeast Asia on the path to war.”

In a series of tweets, Jeffrey Lewis, director of the East Asia Nonproliferation Program at the Middlebury Institute of International Studies Monterey, said that “early reports indicate that North Korea flew a Hwasong-12 [intermediate-range ballistic missile] over Japan.” Why is anyone surprised? In June, North Korea warned “even if what we launch flies over Japan, Japan cannot say anything, even if it has hundreds of mouths.”

There was no immediate comment from the White House.

BRYAN BENDER

* 08/28/2017 06:45 PM EDT Updated 08/28/2017 10:40 PM EDT:

<http://www.politico.com/story/2017/08/28/pentagon-north-korea-missile-test-242111>

Trump and Abe vow to increase pressure after North Korea fires missile over Japan

Leaders agreed to call for an emergency meeting of the UN security council to discuss the launch.

Donald Trump and Shinzo Abe have vowed to increase pressure on North Korea after the regime launched a missile over Japan on Tuesday morning.

The Japanese prime minister denounced the launch as an “unprecedented and grave threat” to the country’s security. In a 40-minute phone call with the US president they agreed to call for an emergency meeting of the UN security council to discuss the situation.

Officials in South Korea said the missile may have flown further than any other tested by North Korea. The test, one of the most provocative ever from the reclusive state, sent a clear message to Washington just weeks after Kim Jong-un threatened to target the US Pacific territory of Guam with similar intermediate-range missiles.

It also demonstrated the regime’s willingness to raise the diplomatic stakes by sending a missile directly over Japanese territory. Pyongyang has tested more powerful intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBM) this year, but Tuesday’s launch followed a much flatter trajectory than those tests.

Trump said the US was “100% with Japan” and repeated his strong commitment to the defence of Japan, Abe said shortly after the call.

“The outrageous act of firing a missile over our country is an unprecedented, serious and grave threat and greatly damages regional peace and security,” Abe told reporters in Tokyo, adding that his government had protested to Pyongyang via the Japanese embassy in Beijing.

The missile was the third fired by North Korea to have passed over Japanese territory. The first was in 1998 and the second in 2009, although Pyongyang claims they were satellites.

Abe said Japan would “strongly call for increased pressure on North Korea in cooperation with the international community” via the security council.

The missile, thought to be a new intermediate-range Hwasong-12, flew over Hokkaido and landed in the Pacific about 733 miles (1,180km) east of the northern Japanese island, South Korean and Japanese officials said.

The Hwasong-12 is the same type of missile North Korea recently threatened to launch towards Guam.

China called for restraint and warned that the situation on the Korean peninsula had reached “a tipping point approaching a crisis”.

Foreign ministry spokeswoman Hua Chunying told a daily press briefing in Beijing: “Think hard about it, who do you think should take the blame, if China is urging all parties to calm down while one party holds constant military exercises ... and the other is constantly launching missiles?”

Japan’s J-Alert warning system advised people across a large area of northern Japan to seek shelter. Japan’s self-defence forces did not attempt to shoot down the missile and there were no reports of damage from falling debris.

The public broadcaster NHK said the missile had been launched from a site near the North Korean capital, Pyongyang and passed over a sparsely populated area of Hokkaido just after 6am local time (10pm Monday British summer time). It broke into three parts and landed in the sea.

Seoul’s joint chiefs of staff (JCS) said the missile travelled about 2,700km and reached a maximum height of 550km.

The JCS said it was analysing the launch with the US and that South Korea’s military had strengthened its monitoring and preparation in case of further actions from North Korea.

Abe said his government was trying to establish the details of the launch and was doing everything possible to ensure the safety of the Japanese people.

Tuesday’s launch may have been a show of defiance towards military drills involving US and South Korean troops as well as a smaller number of personnel from other countries.

The drills have coincided with a dramatic rise in tensions on the Korean peninsula after North Korea’s test launch of two ICBMs and its threat to target seas off the coast of the Guam.

Seoul and Washington say their drills are an opportunity for the allies to improve their defensive capabilities but Pyongyang routinely denounces them as a dress rehearsal for war against North Korea.

On Tuesday North Korea’s ambassador to the UN said the joint exercises were driving the Korean peninsula towards “an extreme level of explosion”.

“Now that the US has openly declared its hostile intention towards the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea, by waging aggressive joint military exercises despite repeated warnings ... my country has every reason to respond with tough counter-measures as an exercise of its right to self defence,” Han Tae Song told the UN conference on disarmament, which is taking place in Geneva.

At the UN conference, multiple envoys, including those from the US, European Union, Japan and

Australia took the floor to blast North Korea. "My hope is that North Korea ends this provocative behaviour," US ambassador Robert Wood said.

The latest launch came three days after the North fired what were assessed as three short-range ballistic missiles into the sea and a month after its second test flight of an ICBM that analysts say could theoretically reach the US mainland.

Tuesday's missile landed nowhere near Guam, which is about 2,500km south of Tokyo, but it covered enough distance to suggest that North Korea could follow up on its threat to the US territory.

South Korea said it was launched from Sunan, the location of Pyongyang's international airport, raising the possibility that a runway was used as the launchpad.

Several towns in Japan have held evacuation drills this year in anticipation of a North Korean attack and there has been a steep rise in sales of individual nuclear shelters.

After North Korea threatened to fire a volley of missiles towards Guam earlier this month, Japan deployed Patriot missile defence systems in areas along the missiles' anticipated route. Japan also has an Aegis destroyer stationed in the Sea of Japan.

North Korea first fired a missile over Japanese territory in 1998, triggering widespread condemnation and attempts by Japan's government to improve its missile defence systems.

Japan has in the past vowed to shoot down North Korean missiles or rockets that threaten to hit its territory. In 2009 a North Korean rocket passed over Japanese territory without incident, leading to an immediate denunciation by Japan.

At the time North Korea said it was launching a telecommunications satellite but Washington, Seoul and Tokyo believed Pyongyang was testing an ICBM.

Justin McCurry in Tokyo

Wang Zhen in Beijing and agencies contributed to this report

* The Guardian. Tuesday 29 August 2017 12.21 BST First published on Monday 28 August 2017 22.40 BST:

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/aug/28/north-korea-fires-missile-japan>

'Missile passing': Japan wakes to ominous warning about North Korean launch

Sirens blared out, trains stopped and residents took cover as missile fired by North Korea soared over Japanese territory for two minutes.

It was the early morning wake-up call millions of people in northern Japan had been warned about for months but which most had hoped would never arrive.

The first inkling that their fears had been realised came with a government text just after 6am local time informing them that four minutes earlier, North Korea had fired a missile that was soon

expected to pass through the skies over Japan's northern regions.

The short distance between the two countries means people were given less than 10 minutes to follow official instructions to take cover, either in scarce underground shelters or in sturdy buildings. The reason, the text message said: "Ballistic missile launch."

Moments later, the public broadcaster NHK and other TV networks broke off from regular programming to give live coverage of sites beneath the flight path and missile defence batteries ready to shoot down the missile if it was deemed a threat to public safety.

Sirens blared out in towns close to the missile's path as it soared over Japanese territory for two minutes before crashing into the Pacific.

"Missile passing. Missile passing," warned an official text message sent to people across the north of Japan.

And then the danger – which was most likely to have come from a mid-flight malfunction – had passed, the only concern now the possibility that debris from what is believed to be a Hwasong-12 intermediate-range missile was hurtling towards Earth.

"A short time ago, a missile apparently passed above this area. If you find suspicious objects, please don't go near them and immediately call police or firefighters. Please take cover in secure buildings or underground."

North Korea's launch towards Japan – a key US ally and the Korean peninsula's former colonial ruler – marked a huge escalation by Pyongyang amid tensions over its weapons ambitions.

Experts have said that North Korea sent the missile over Japan as a warning to the US but, perhaps fearing serious reprisals, stopped well short of carrying out its recent threat to target waters off the US Pacific territory of Guam.

For the first time since the diplomatic temperature on the Korean peninsula soared earlier this summer, Japanese citizens found themselves worryingly close to the frontline of Pyongyang's ballistic brinkmanship.

Morning commuters in Hokkaido, Japan's northernmost prefecture, were greeted by warning signs at train stations. Many rail services were brought to a halt, although flights in the region were reportedly unaffected.

At one metro station in Sapporo, a city of nearly 2 million, passengers were warned there would be delays. "All lines are experiencing disruption," said one sign. "Reason: Ballistic missile launch."

Some commuters followed the government's emergency advice to the letter. "Some passengers came down to take cover in a couple of subway stations," a Sapporo subway spokesman said.

'What can you do? Hide? But where?'

Ai Onodera, a Hokkaido resident, switched on the TV as soon as she was awoken by the text alert and immediately called her husband, who was away on a business trip. "I was terrified that I wouldn't see him again," she said.

Others had little choice but to carry on with their usual schedule.

They included the crews aboard 15 fishing vessels that had already left port off southern Hokkaido in an area beneath the missile's path.

"I was surprised that it went above our area. This has never happened before," Hiroyuki Iwafune, an official at the local fishery co-op, said. "I was worried. Everyone felt the same. But what can you do? Hide? But where?"

"We called those who were at sea. But then they said: 'Even with this [warning], what are we supposed to do?'"

Others still on land were similarly dismissive about their chances of seeking refuge in such a short space of time.

"The alert told me to evacuate, but I couldn't think of any building that could withstand missiles inside the town. I didn't know where to go," Ichiro Kondo, a fisherman from Erimo, on the east coast of Hokkaido, told Kyodo news.

In the end, the official response brought more disruption to the daily lives of Hokkaido residents than the missile itself.

Local police received dozens of emergency calls, many from people asking where they should flee to, Kyodo added, while more than 40 schools on the island and other parts of north-east Japan cancelled or postponed classes.

In Tokyo, more than 700km (435 miles) south of the missile's flight path, some train services were temporarily halted, even though the area had not been subject to the emergency alert.

"Currently, a North Korean missile is flying above Japan," announcements at stations in the capital that run bullet train services said, minutes after the launch.

"It is very dangerous. Please take cover at the waiting areas or inside the trains."

At a US military base in Tokyo, Japan deployed a Patriot Advanced Capability-3 (PAC-3) missile defence system as part of a previously scheduled drill.

"Practising this kind of drill allows us to maintain our fast response system in the event of a ballistic missile launch and to strengthen the force of persuasion, not only by our country but also by the US-Japan alliance," Hiroaki Maehara, the commander of Japan's air self-defence forces, told a press briefing.

Fourteen minutes after it was launched from a site near Pyongyang, the missile fell without incident into the Pacific, 1,180km east of Cape Erimo in Hokkaido.

Andrew Kaz, a 24-year-old American working as an assistant language teacher in the eastern Hokkaido city of Kushiro, said he was worried about how Japan and the US might respond to the launch.

"I know this happened before but I feel small and rudderless," he said. "Everything seems like business as usual, but you can tell people are shaken up."

Justin McCurry in Tokyo and agencies

* The Guardian. Tuesday 29 August 2017 06.02 BST Last modified on Wednesday 30 August 2017

01.45 BST:

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/aug/29/missile-passing-japan-wakes-to-ominous-warning-about-north-korean-launch>
