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North Korea Missile Announcement Undermines Diplomatic Outreach

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North Korea announced that it would launch a satellite in mid-April, a provocative move that jeopardizes a recent diplomatic agreement with the United States. Despite Pyongyang's attempts to portray the launch as a peaceful civilian satellite program, it would be an unequivocal violation of U.N. resolutions 1718 and 1874, which preclude any North Korean "ballistic missile activity."

The Obama Administration denounced North Korea's announcement as "highly provocative" and "in direct violation of U.N. Security Council Resolutions" and said that it "poses a threat to regional security and would also be inconsistent with North Korea's recent undertaking to refrain from long-range missile launches."¹

A North Korean launch would also break Pyongyang's February 29 bilateral agreement with the

United States to a "moratorium on nuclear tests and long-range missile launches." By doing so, it would postpone if not derail the Obama Administration's recent attempts to offer 240,000 tons of nutritional assistance and diplomatic benefits as inducement for Pyongyang to resume its denuclearization commitments and refrain from provocative behavior.

A North Korean missile launch would prevent near-term bilateral diplomatic meetings, lest it be interpreted as Washington condoning Pyongyang's violation of U.N. resolutions. North Korea's actions threaten to turn the February 29 Leap Day Agreement, as it has been dubbed, into one more reminiscent of Bill Murray's movie *Groundhog Day* in which negotiators are doomed to repeating the same agreement over and over again.

Continuation of North Korean Missile Development. The North Korean launch vehicle would be a Taepo Dong 2 missile that Pyongyang is developing as an intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM). The U.S. intelligence community has estimated that by 2015, North Korea will be able to threaten the entire United States with a nuclear warhead carried on a Taepo Dong 2 missile.

North Korea previously tested Taepo Dong 1 and 2 missiles in 1998, 2006, and 2009—tests that the regime also claimed to be satellite launches. Those claims were rejected by the U.N. Security Council, which imposed additional sanctions on Pyongyang for violating U.N. resolutions. In 2009, the North Korean missile traveled 2,500 miles down range despite a failure of the third state to separate.

Consistent with Regime Tactics. Although ostensibly to commemorate the 100th anniversary on April 15 of the birth of North Korea's first leader, Kim Il-sung, a North Korean missile launch would serve several other objectives. It would signal that—despite the death of Kim Jong-il—North Korea was not weak nor subject to coercion during forthcoming negotiations with the United States.

The launch would also support the ongoing leadership transition to Kim Jong-un by highlighting his personal strength and abilities. Since Kim Jong-il's death in December, North Korean official media have credited Jong-un with directing North Korea's 2009 nuclear test—which "frightened" the country's enemies²—and the Taepo Dong 2 missile launch. A documentary film

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released in January 2012 showed Kim Jong-un with Kim Jong-il in the missile launch center and declared, “It was [Kim Jong-un] who counterattacked the enemy’s tactic of threatening to intercept an earth satellite [Taepo Dong-2 missile].” The film quoted Jong-un as stating, “If the enemy intercepts, I made the determination to actually start a war.”³

There is also the potential for another North Korean nuclear test in coming months. In 2009, Pyongyang used the U.N. condemnation of its missile launch to justify its nuclear test one month later. North Korea may be eager to demonstrate its capability to develop uranium-based nuclear weapons to augment its existing arsenal of an estimated six to eight plutonium-based nuclear weapons. In late 2010, North Korea revealed a previously covert uranium enrichment facility to a visiting U.S. scientist who was stunned by the scope and sophistication of 2,000 uranium centrifuges.

Steps for the U.S.—With or Without a Missile Launch.

Washington’s efforts to augment existing sanctions with diplomatic outreach will need to be put on hold if North Korea launches a missile next month. The U.S. will also need to take steps to counter the ever-increasing threat of North Korean ballistic missiles.

If North Korea launches a missile, the U.S. should:

- Suspend plans to ship 240,000 tons of nutritional assistance to

North Korea as delineated in the February 29 agreement.

- Submit a new U.N. Security Council resolution requiring more extensive sanctions on North Korea for yet another U.N. resolution. The new U.N. resolution should invoke Chapter VII, Article 42 of the U.N. Charter, which allows for enforcement by military means. This would enable naval ships to intercept and board North Korean ships suspected of transporting precluded nuclear, missile, and conventional arms, components, or technology. To date, China has insisted that U.N. resolutions adopt the weaker Article 41 provisions.
- Demand that all U.N. member nations fully implement existing U.N. resolution requirements to prevent North Korea’s procurement and export of missile-related and WMD-related items and technology and freeze the financial assets of any involved North Korean or foreign person, company, or government entity. Any violating government, business, bank, or individual should be subject to sanctions.

Even without a missile launch, the U.S. should:

- Continue missile defense development and deployment and call on South Korea to deploy a multi-layered missile defense system that is

interoperable with a U.S. regional missile network. Although the Lee Myung-bak government has indicated greater interest in such a system than previous liberal governments, Seoul has yet to make necessary decisions to begin implementation. South Korea is threatened by 700 North Korean SCUD missiles.

- Approve Seoul’s request to extend the permissible limits on its missile development beyond the current 300-kilometer range restriction.
- Encourage Japan to maintain its missile defense efforts. Previous North Korean missile launches spurred Tokyo to accelerate its missile defense plans. More recently, however, the Democratic Party of Japan–led government has expressed greater skepticism of missile defense than previous administrations. Japan is currently in range of 300 North Korean No Dong missiles.
- Continue and augment joint military exercises with South Korea and Japan to enhance alliance deterrent and defensive capabilities.

Staying Prepared. North Korea has a proclivity for taking provocative actions precisely when Washington and its allies have begun diplomatic attempts at engagement. Secret negotiations in

1. Statement by Victoria Nuland, Spokesperson, U.S. Department of State, “North Korean Announcement of Missile Launch,” March 16, 2012, at <http://translations.state.gov/st/english/texttrans/2012/03/201203162197.html#axzz1pJWZKj00> (March 16, 2012).

2. Associated Press, “North Korea credits new leader Kim Jong Un with past nuclear testing,” January 20, 2012, at http://www.cbsnews.com/8301-501712_162-57362559/north-korea-credits-new-leader-kim-jong-un-with-past-nuclear-testing/ (March 16, 2012).

3. “N. Korea marks new leader’s birthday in low-key fashion,” *Donga Ilbo*, January 9, 2012, at <http://english.donga.com/srv/service.php3?biid=2012010999098> (March 16, 2012).

March 2010 to prepare for resuming the Six-Party Talks were undermined by Pyongyang's attack on a South Korean naval vessel later that month. Secret inter-Korean talks in November 2010, including South Korean offers of food aid, did not prevent North Korea from shelling a South Korean island weeks later.

While a combination of punitive measures and diplomacy may provide a path for achieving North Korean denuclearization,

Pyongyang's repeated violations, attacks, and abhorrent behavior have destroyed attempts at engagement. Washington and its allies must therefore take all necessary measures to guard against nuclear, missile, and conventional force attacks by North Korea.

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