

North Korea's Taepodong 2 and the End of the Missile Moratorium

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A good part of June was filled with reports, speculation, and plenty of opinions about North Korea's missile program and the question of whether or not Pyongyang would test a Taepodong 2. Those that were most concerned about a possible North Korea long-range missile test believe it represents Pyongyang's ultimate desire to have a weapon of mass destruction and the means to deliver it at a great distance. Part of Pyongyang's thinking may be driven by its belief that a combination of weapon and delivery system would be a strong deterrent against the United States. Along with concerns about Pyongyang's intent is an equally strong concern about the potential proliferation dangers of a flight-tested ICBM.

In response to reports about North Korea's preparation to test fire a Taepodong 2, the international community has been fairly unanimous in its call for Pyongyang not to launch a long-range missile. UN Secretary General Kofi Annan called for a halt to test preparations and a halt to the escalation of tensions, saying, "I hope that the leaders of North Korea will listen to and hear what the world is saying. We are all worried." President Bush and Secretary of State Rice likewise warned North Korea not to launch a missile. Japan's Prime Minister and Foreign Minister warned that it would consider imposing economic sanctions in the event of a launch. South Korea's Foreign Minister Ban Ki-moon and China's Foreign Minister Li Zhaoxing met in Beijing and jointly called on North Korea to halt preparations for a test. The ROK Unification Minister declared, "The government has made it clear that a missile launch would have an impact on the South's assistance to the North." Despite the unanimity among the international community on the need for North Korea to reverse the course that it appeared headed toward, Pyongyang test fired the Taepodong-2 on July 4th shortly after the U.S. launched the Space Shuttle. According to initial reports, the Taepodong-2 failed after less than a minute into flight. North Korea also launched five Scud and Nodong shorter range missiles around the time of the Taepodong-2 launched. A seventh missile was reported fired on July 5th.

As *Korea Insight* goes to press, the United States was dispatching Assistant Secretary of State Christ Hill to Asia for consultations, Japan was contemplating sanctions and the United Nations Security Council was set to discuss the missile developments. Pyongyang's decision to launch the Taepodong-2 indicates that it considered the most likely consequences it would face, weighed its options, and chose not to back down in the face of a concerted international call to do so. Analysts will have to decide whether Pyongyang was fully determined to move its missile program forward regardless of the consequences, or if, lacking a face-saving way out of the situation, it regarded being seen as "giving in" to international pressure worse than the actual consequences of launching a missile.

Missile Moratorium Primer

It's worth a few minutes to review the facts surrounding the North Korea's missile program and the missile moratorium to which it voluntarily agreed in 1999.

On August 31, 1998 North Korea fired a multi-stage Taepodong I missile in an attempt to orbit a small communications satellite. The satellite, however, failed to achieve orbit. That fact did not deter Pyongyang from issuing stamps and commemorative coins depicting "Artificial Earth Satellite Kwangmyongsong 1 (98.8.31)" orbiting above the Korean Peninsula.

At the time of the launch, U.S. negotiators, led by Ambassador Charles Kartman, were meeting with a North Korean delegation led by current Six Party Talks Head of Delegation, Vice Minister Kim Gye Gwan, in New York City. Kartman interrupted his presentation of U.S. concerns about reports of a possible secret underground nuclear facility that would be in violation of the 1994 Agreed Framework to warn Vice Minister Kim that a launch of a long-range missile would be met by U.S. and international community condemnation. Without appropriate international warnings of an impending missile launch, Pyongyang fired the Taepodong 1 over Japan the following day.

The Japanese immediately cut off funding for the Korean Peninsula Energy Development Organization (KEDO), which was charged with implementing the terms of the 1994 Agreed Framework. In an effort to walk

back the North Korean missile program as much as possible until a final resolution could be found and to get the Agreed Framework back on track, Kartman engaged in a series of negotiations with his North Korean counterpart.

Missile moratorium negotiations concluded in Berlin in September 1999. On June 17, 1999 the United States announced its intention to remove certain sanctions that had been imposed against North Korea as part of the Trading with the Enemy Act of 1950. One week later, on June 24, 1999, Pyongyang responded, "In response to the U.S. demand, the DPRK will have high-level talks with the U.S. for the settlement of pending issues as an immediate task. It will not launch a missile while the talks are under way with a view to creating an atmosphere more favorable for the talks." In late October 2000, former Secretary of State Madeleine Albright went to Pyongyang to meet with DPRK leader Kim Jong-il in an attempt to assess whether it would be prudent for President Bill Clinton to travel to North Korea. Albright also attempted to determine what a final missile deal between Clinton and Kim might look like. Kim was unwilling to discuss a missile deal in detail with Albright, insisting that he reserve that issue for a future discussion with Clinton. In a final attempt to seek clarity on the missile issue, Albright arranged for a meeting between Assistant Secretary of State for Non-Proliferation Bob Einhorn and a North Korean counterpart to occur in Kuala Lumpur the first week of November 2000. The North Korean negotiator was unwilling and unauthorized to discuss a subject that Kim Jong-il had reserved for himself.

In May 2001, Swedish Prime Minister Persson, heading a European Union delegation, met with Kim Jong-il and reportedly was told by the North Korean leader that Pyongyang would not conduct any ballistic missile tests for the next two years while waiting to see if the Bush administration was interested in better relations.

On September 17, 2002 Japanese Prime Minister Koizumi Junichiro and DPRK leader Kim Jong-il issued what is called the DPRK-Japan Pyongyang Declaration. In it "the DPRK side expressed its will to extend its moratorium on missile tests beyond 2003 in the spirit of the declaration."

On March 2, 2005 the DPRK Ministry of Foreign Affairs issued a Memorandum attacking President Bush for what it called his failure in his state of the union address to mention six-party talks and the peaceful resolution to the nuclear issue and for calling North Korea an "outpost of tyranny." The Memorandum specifically proclaimed, "We are also not bound to any international treaty or law as far as the missile issue is concerned. In September 1999, the period of the previous U.S. administration, we announced the moratorium on the missile launch while dialogue was under way but the DPRK-U.S. dialogue was totally suspended when the Bush administration took office in 2001. Accordingly, we are not bound to the moratorium on the missile launch at present."