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North Korea Test-Fires Several Missiles

By THE NEW YORK TIMES
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[North Korea](#) test-fired several missiles in the early hours of Wednesday, July 5 (Tuesday afternoon Eastern time), apparently including the Taepodong-2, the long-range missile at the heart of diplomatic tensions with the United States and its allies, according to reports by Reuters, The Associated Press, CNN and other agencies, citing sources in Japan and Washington.

The long-range missile seems to have malfunctioned less than a minute into its flight, CNN and Reuters reported, citing American officials they did not name.

"Today's launches were done despite advance warning by the relevant countries," the top spokesman for the Japanese government, Shinzo Abe, told reporters early Wednesday in Tokyo, Reuters reported. "This is a grave problem in terms of peace and stability, not only of Japan but also of international society," Mr. Abe was quoted as saying. "We strongly protest against North Korea."

A White House spokeswoman said staff were urgently consulting on North Korea's move but had no comment yet. "We have absolutely nothing at this point," the White House spokeswoman, Dana Perino, told Reuters.

Reuters reported that a Japanese government official confirmed that North Korea conducted the missile test but did not elaborate. Besides the long-range missile, the test apparently included two or possibly three shorter-range Scud-type missiles, CNN reported, citing Defense Department sources it did not name. Some of the missiles reportedly fell into the Sea of Japan between the northern Japanese island of Hokkaido and the east coast of Russia.

North Korea shocked western and Japanese analysts in 1998 by firing a Taepodong-1 missile over Japan into the Pacific Ocean, revealing more advanced missile capabilities than the country was previously thought to possess.

The Taepodong-2 missile is thought to be potentially capable of reaching United States territory in Alaska, if North Korea perfects the technology. But that ability has never been demonstrated in a test. In late June, North Korea disavowed its self-imposed moratorium on long-range missile tests.

The Bush Administration and other governments have repeatedly warned North Korea that a test of the long-range missile would be seen as a provocation. The administration has been trying to pressure North Korea diplomatically to abandon its missile and nuclear-weapons ambitions, apparently to little avail so far.

North Korea is believed to possess enough plutonium to build several nuclear warheads. The country has claimed since 2005 to have built nuclear weapons.

North Korea has demanded bilateral talks with the United States, while the Bush Administration has offered to meet only in six-way talks involving Japan, China, Russia and South Korea as well.

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