

North Korea's rocket launch fails as world condemns action

Launch ends in failure and embarrassment for North Korea, breaking up only minutes after lift-off

Friday 13 April 2012 05.28 BST



South Korean television shows a graphic of North Korea's rocket launch. Photograph: Jung Yeon-Je/AFP/Getty Images

A much-heralded test of [North Korea's](#) rocket technology has ended in failure and embarrassment for the regime in Pyongyang less than two minutes after lift-off.

The Unha-3 rocket, which Washington claimed was cover for a ballistic missile test and drew condemnation from around the world, exploded into about 20 pieces fell into the Yellow Sea.

The North Koreans ignored eleventh-hour pleas from the US, [South Korea](#) and Japan not to go through with the launch, insisting its sole purpose was to put an earth observation satellite into orbit.

In a rare show of candour, an announcement broadcast by North Korean state TV acknowledged that the three-stage rocket had failed to enter orbit.

"Scientists, technicians and experts are now looking into the cause of the failure," the Korean central news agency said.

Soon after the launch, the White House said the North had violated UN security council resolutions banning it from developing long-range missile technology, adding that it risked

even greater isolation.

"Despite the failure of its attempted missile launch, North Korea's provocative action threatens regional security, violates international law and contravenes its own recent commitments," said White House spokesman Jay Carney.

"While this action is not surprising given North Korea's pattern of aggressive behaviour, any missile activity by North Korea is of concern to the international community."

Washington said it was suspending plans to deliver food aid, but Carney did not say if the launch would mean a permanent end to the deal, agreed in February, in which the North agreed to stop enriching uranium and developing ballistic missiles in exchange for 240,000 tonnes of US food aid.

President Obama has come under fire from Republicans presidential for his willingness to engage with the North's new leader, Kim Jong-un.

"Instead of approaching Pyongyang from a position of strength, President Obama sought to appease the regime with a food-aid deal that proved to be as naive as it was short-lived," the Republican presidential candidate, Mitt Romney, said.

He adding that the administration had "emboldened the North Korean regime and undermined the security of the [United States](#) and our allies".

Carney, however, said Obama had insisted that North Korea cease provocations, including missile launches and nuclear tests, as a condition for talks: "He has also insisted that North Korea live up to its own commitments, adhere to its international obligations and deal peacefully with its neighbours.

"North Korea is only further isolating itself by engaging in provocative acts, and is wasting its money on weapons and propaganda displays while the North Korean people go hungry."

The UK foreign secretary, William Hague, voiced "deep concern" over the launch, which he said was a clear violation of the UN ban, and called for a robust response from the international community.

However North Korea chose to describe the rocket's purpose, its clear technological shortcomings were the worst possible prelude to what are expected to be huge celebrations this Sunday to mark the centenary of the birth of the country's founder, Kim Il-sung.

It may have also ruled out any early return to negotiations over its nuclear program, said John Delury of Yonsei University in Seoul. "The big question is, does this completely derail the diplomacy and negotiation that were finally getting a little bit of steam as of early March?"

"It looks likely this will kill it all. The other question is what happens between the two Koreas. If diplomacy all falls apart and nothing's happening, then not only is the likelihood of another nuclear test high but the possibility of intra-Korean tension is high and of the South hitting back harder. That would be the really bad scenario for the months to come.

"After the shelling of Yeonpyeong in 2010 the hardliners here wanted to really send a battery to knock out military installations along the maritime border. You could see a much stronger

military response to any provocation or perceived provocation."

The sight of the South Korean navy ploughing the waters near the countries' maritime border off the Korean peninsula's west coast will only strengthen the view that this was an ambitious propaganda exercise gone embarrassingly wrong.

The satellite was supposed to have demonstrated North Korea's emergence as a developed state, despite evidence of widespread hunger and a crumbling economy.

A successful mission would have also strengthened the position of the country's new leader, Kim Jong-un, as doubts persist over his experience and ability four months after he succeeded his father, Kim Jong-il, who died of a heart attack last December.

"This launch was in part a propaganda effort. That effort clearly failed and will have ramifications internally," a US administration official told Reuters.

"This launch was also a chance for North Korea to showcase its military wares to prospective customers. The failure will make those customers think twice before buying anything."

The North American aerospace defence command, Norad, said it had tracked the missile after its launch at 7:39am local time. The first stage fell into the sea about 100 miles west of the South Korean capital, Seoul, and the remainder was believed to have broken up and landed in the sea. Norad said no debris had fallen on land or threatened populated areas.

Major General Shin Won-sik, a South Korean defence ministry official, said the rocket had exploded between one and two minutes after it was launched from a site in Tongchang-ri on the country's north-west coast.

A group of foreign journalists who were invited to view the rocket on its launch pad earlier this week were not permitted to watch the launch, even remotely.

At Kim Il-ung Square, the city's main plaza, residents were seen waiting to begin rehearsals for the Great Leader's anniversary celebrations, during which, despite today's rocket fiasco, officials are expected to declare North Korea a "strong and prosperous nation".

The failed launch raises the possibility of a new round of international sanctions against North Korea, which invited similar measures after a long-range missile launch and a second nuclear weapons test three years ago.

The UN security council is to hold an emergency meeting later Friday to discuss its response. The US secretary of state, Hillary Clinton, said security council members had agreed to coordinate any action against the North.

"Pyongyang has a clear choice," Clinton said in Washington on Thursday. "It can pursue peace and reap the benefits of closer ties with the international community, including the United States; or it can continue to face pressure and isolation."

All eyes are now on what North Korea might do next. Recent satellite images show it may be preparing to conduct a third nuclear test at a site where similar tests were carried out in 2006 and 2009.

The South Korean president, Lee Myung-bak, convened an emergency security meeting after

this morning's launch; his office said the government in Seoul would continue to closely monitor its neighbour's actions.

1 March 2012 Last updated at 04:42 GMT

Cautious welcome for North Korea nuclear freeze



The suspension comes two months after Kim Jong-un succeeded his father as North Korea's leader

North Korea's pledge to suspend uranium enrichment, as well as nuclear and long-range missile tests, has received a cautious international welcome.

A White House spokesman called it a "positive first step" towards denuclearising the Korean peninsula.

China's foreign ministry also welcomed the move, while Japan said it could "be seen as progress".

The deal followed talks between US and North Korean diplomats in Beijing last week.

The US has announced 240,000 tonnes of new food aid for Pyongyang in return for the freeze.

North Korea confirmed the suspension in a foreign ministry statement released in Pyongyang on Wednesday.

It said the move "aimed at building confidence for the improvement of relations" between the two countries, and said talks would continue.

Analysis



Adam Brookes BBC News, Washington

In Washington, the feeling among officials and analysts is that this is a useful but limited step

forward.

Having inspectors on the ground in North Korea will, they believe, be very useful, but the optimism is coloured by a sense that promises like these have bloomed and withered many times in the past.

For Mr Obama, the agreement reduces the chances of a serious North Korean nuclear crisis during his re-election year.

And what do the North Koreans get? They will receive shipments of "nutritional assistance" for a hungry population weeks before a politically important celebration - the anniversary of Kim Il-sung's birth.

One crucial area not addressed, we're told: uranium enrichment facilities which may exist outside Yongbyon. US analysts remain worried that North Korea possesses as yet undiscovered centrifuges.

In all, the agreement - if it sticks - may help the chances of a resumption of comprehensive denuclearisation talk.

The US State Department said Pyongyang had also agreed to allow UN inspectors to monitor its reactor in Yongbyon to verify compliance with the measures.

"These are concrete measures that we consider a positive first step toward complete and verifiable denuclearisation of the Korean peninsula in a peaceful manner," White House spokesman Jay Carney said.

"But obviously they need to be followed up by actions. So, we will pursue this policy area with that approach in mind," he added.

China welcomed "the improvement" in US-North Korea ties. "China is willing to work with relevant parties to continue to push forward the six-party talks process," Chinese foreign ministry spokesman Hong Lei said in a statement.

Japanese Foreign Minister Koichiro Gamba said the deal was an important step but warned "concrete action" was needed.

"Our goal remains unchanged: that all nuclear-related facilities will be stopped - that is the complete and verifiable denuclearisation of the Korean peninsula," he said.

South Korea said the deal reflected close co-operation between Washington and Seoul.

However analysts remain concerned over the possible existence of uranium enrichment facilities other than Yongbyon that have not yet been disclosed, however.

Food needed

The announcement comes two months after Kim Jong-un came to power following the death of his father, Kim Jong-il.

"North Korea's nuclear issue, a concern now for over 20 years, has long been a game of cat and mouse - or snakes and ladders."

Aidan Foster-Carter Korea analyst

- [Denuclearisation dance resumes](#)

Correspondents say it could pave the way for the resumption of six-party disarmament negotiations with Pyongyang, which broke down in 2009.

North Korea agreed in 2005 to give up its nuclear ambitions in return for aid and political concessions, as part of a six-nation dialogue process involving the two Koreas, the US, China, Russia and Japan.

But progress on the deal was stop-start, and talks became deadlocked in 2009.

Contact between the US and North Korea aimed at restarting the talks began in July 2011.

Last week's meeting between US and North Korean officials in Beijing was the third round of talks aimed at exploring how to bring North Korea back to the negotiating table.

The food aid will be intended for children and pregnant women, US officials said. North Korea has suffered persistent food shortages since a famine in the 1990s, and relies on foreign aid to feed its people.

The US has not sent food aid to North Korea since 2009.

29 February 2012 Last updated at 20:03 GMT

North Korea agrees to nuclear moratorium



The move comes only two months after the succession of Kim Jong-un as leader

North Korea has agreed to suspend uranium enrichment, as well as nuclear and long-range missile tests, following talks with the US.

The US State Department said Pyongyang had also agreed to allow UN inspectors to monitor its reactor in Yongbyon to verify compliance with the measures.

In return, the US is finalising 240,000 tonnes of food aid for the North.

The move comes two months after Kim Jong-un came to power following the death of his father, Kim Jong-il.

Correspondents say the move could pave the way for the resumption of six-party disarmament

negotiations with Pyongyang, which last broke down in 2009.

'First step'

"Both the DPRK [North Korea] and the US affirmed that it is in mutual interest to... push ahead with the denuclearisation through dialogue and negotiations"

Statement North Korean Foreign Ministry

- [The denuclearisation dance resumes](#)

US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said the US still had "profound concerns" over North Korea, but welcomed the move as a "first step".

"On the occasion of Kim Jong-il's death, I said that it is our hope that the new leadership will choose to guide their nation onto the path of peace by living up to its obligations.

"Today's announcement represents a modest first step in the right direction."

North Korea confirmed the move in a foreign ministry statement released in Pyongyang.

The statement, carried by the KCNA news agency, said the measures were "aimed at building confidence for the improvement of relations" between the two countries, and said talks would continue.

"Both the DPRK [North Korea] and the US affirmed that it is in mutual interest to ensure peace and stability on the Korean peninsula, improve the relations between the DPRK and the US, and push ahead with the denuclearisation through dialogue and negotiations," it said.

Analysis



Lucy Williamson BBC News, Seoul

This deal is the first major international act of the new North Korean leader. But how much the agreement bears his personal stamp is unclear.

The air in Seoul was thick with rumours at the end of last year, about a deal which offered concessions on North Korea's nuclear programme in return for American food aid.

That was just before the former leader, Kim Jong-il, died - and contacts were disrupted.

But whether this deal is his doing, or that of his young son and heir, the speed with which it happened following the transition is striking.

Some will read that as a sign of political softening by the regime; others as a sign of North Korea's increasingly desperate need for food aid.

Either way, if agreement is implemented (and many have failed), it will mark the first small step towards peace in more than three years.

Yukiya Amano, director general of the UN International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), said

the announcement was "an important step forward" and that inspectors stood ready to return to North Korea, Reuters reports.

Earlier, a senior US military official said the issue of food aid for North Korea was now linked to political progress - contradicting earlier policy.

The North has suffered persistent food shortages since a famine in the 1990s, and relies on foreign aid to feed its people.

North Korea agreed in 2005 to give up its nuclear ambitions in return for aid and political concessions, as part of a six-nation dialogue process involving the two Koreas, the US, China, Russia and Japan.

But progress on the deal was stop-start, and the agreement broke down in 2009.

Contact between the US and North Korea aimed at restarting the talks began in July 2011.

A meeting last week between US and North Korean officials in Beijing was the third round of talks aimed at exploring how to bring North Korea back to the negotiating table.