

by Bruce Klingner

On July 4 Pyongyang launched seven Scud missiles in a rebuff to international diplomatic efforts to deter North Korea from developing a missile delivery capability for nuclear weapons. North Korea's blatant defiance of yet another UN resolution demonstrates the critical necessity for the U.S. and its allies to have robust missile defense systems—even as America does all it can both multilaterally and unilaterally to squeeze Pyongyang into abandoning its programs. Washington and Tokyo have deployed an effective, though still limited missile defense system, while Seoul has yet to upgrade its rudimentary defenses.

Fireworks on the Fourth

The barrage of Scud short-range ballistic missiles were an unambiguous violation of UN Resolution 1874, passed in response to North Korea's May 25 nuclear test. The resolution "demands that [North Korea] not conduct any further nuclear test or any launch using ballistic missile technology [and] decides that the DPRK shall suspend all activities related to its ballistic missile program."

The Scud missiles, which flew 300 miles prior to landing in the East Sea (Sea of Japan), come in addition to the July 2 launches of four anti-ship missiles with a 60-mile range. The latter missile launches were not technically a violation of the UN resolution since they were not ballistic missiles. Instead, they were likely a show of North Korean tactical military prowess in support of its escalating threats of renewed naval confrontation with South Korea over a disputed maritime border on the west coast.

Pyongyang's refusal to abandon its provocative behavior is a stark demonstration of the looming North Korean long-range ballistic missile threat. As far back as 2001 a National Intelligence Estimate by the U.S. intelligence community assessed a two-stage Taepo Dong 2 "could deliver a several-hundred-kilogram payload up to 10,000 km—sufficient to strike Alaska, Hawaii, and parts of the continental United States." The report projected that including a third stage could increase the range to 15,000 km, which would allow the missile to reach all of North America with a payload sufficiently large to accommodate a nuclear warhead.[1] North Korean capabilities have only improved in the interim.

An Insufficient Response

Despite North Korea's continuing development of its missile prowess, the Obama Administration recently proposed cutting \$1.4 billion from U.S. missile defense systems. These cuts include:

* Capping the number of fielded ground-based interceptors for countering long-range missiles at 30 rather than 44;

- * Terminating a multi-kill vehicle program for defeating countermeasures in the midcourse stage of flight;
- * Eliminating a kinetic energy interceptor program for intercepting ballistic missiles in the boost-phase stage of flight;
- * Curtailing the airborne laser aircraft program; and
- * Eliminating funding for the space test bed for missile defense.[2]

In coming days Pyongyang may conduct additional test launches of No Dong medium-range ballistic missiles, which can target all of Japan, or the Taepo Dong 2. On July 4, 2006, North Korea launched six Scud and No Dong missiles as well as a Taepo Dong 2 missile. Current expectations for longer-range missile activity were heightened by reports in May that a long-range missile transporter was observed at two North Korean launch facilities, similar to preparations prior to Pyongyang's April 5, 2009, launch of a Taepo Dong-2 missile which flew 2,500 miles.

However, on July 1, 2009, U.S. intelligence sources were quoted as stating that there were no indications of an impending long-range missile launch. Even after a Taepo Dong missile is placed on the launch stand, it usually takes several days to fuel and prepare it. Such a launch may take place later in July—rather than on the July 4 anniversary of the 2006 launches or the July 8 anniversary of the 2004 death of North Korean leader Kim Il-sung.

Eliminate UN Loopholes

The Obama Administration should recognize North Korea's continued missile development and refusal to abide by international agreements as a clear signal for the need to reverse its proposed cuts to missile defense programs. In addition, the Obama Administration should use North Korea's latest provocation to press China and Russia for agreement to a follow-on UN accord that eliminates the loopholes of UN Resolution 1874. That resolution included stronger language than its predecessors but Beijing and Moscow gutted proposed provisions that would have enabled nations to actually implement it.

The feckless pursuit of the North Korean trawler Kang Nam, suspected of transporting military contraband, shows the wisdom of including in the resolution reference to Chapter 7, Article 42 of the UN Charter regarding the use military means to enforce the will of the Security Council. The inability of the heavily-armed guided missile destroyer USS John McCain to deter the tubby unarmed North Korean freighter was a modern day manifestation of Jonathan Swift's Gulliver subdued by the Lilliputians.

Additional Measures

Because China and Russia will remain resistant to effective UN resolutions, Washington should implement a comprehensive program to independently impose U.S. sanctions on any company, bank, or government agency complicit in North Korean proliferation, particularly those in Iran,

Syria, Burma, and China. Washington should also lead a multilateral initiative calling upon other nations to similarly target North Korean and foreign proliferators, as well as those engaged in North Korean illegal activities, such as currency counterfeiting and drug smuggling.

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