

Briefing: North Korean missile tests

Overview and discussion of recent missile tests in the Sea of Japan/East Sea

November 2022

Analysis: North Korea's ongoing missile tests

North Korea test fired 23 missiles on 2 November into the sea off its coast – the most fired in a single day on record – and has conducted more than 60 tests this year to date. All the missiles have so far landed outside shipping zones and there have been no reports of a commercial vessel being hit, or that the tests have disrupted shipping. But North Korea's failure to provide navigational warnings is cause for concern.

Current situation:

On 2 November 2022, North Korea test fired 23 short-range ballistic missiles (SRBMs) into the sea off its coast – the most fired in a single day on record. One of the SRBMs was launched in the direction of South Korea's Ulleung Island in the Sea of Japan/East Sea, triggering an air raid alert. That same missile landed 26 kilometres south of the Northern Limit Line (NLL) – the disputed maritime border between North and South Korea that dates from the 1953 Armistice that ended the conflict between the two countries.

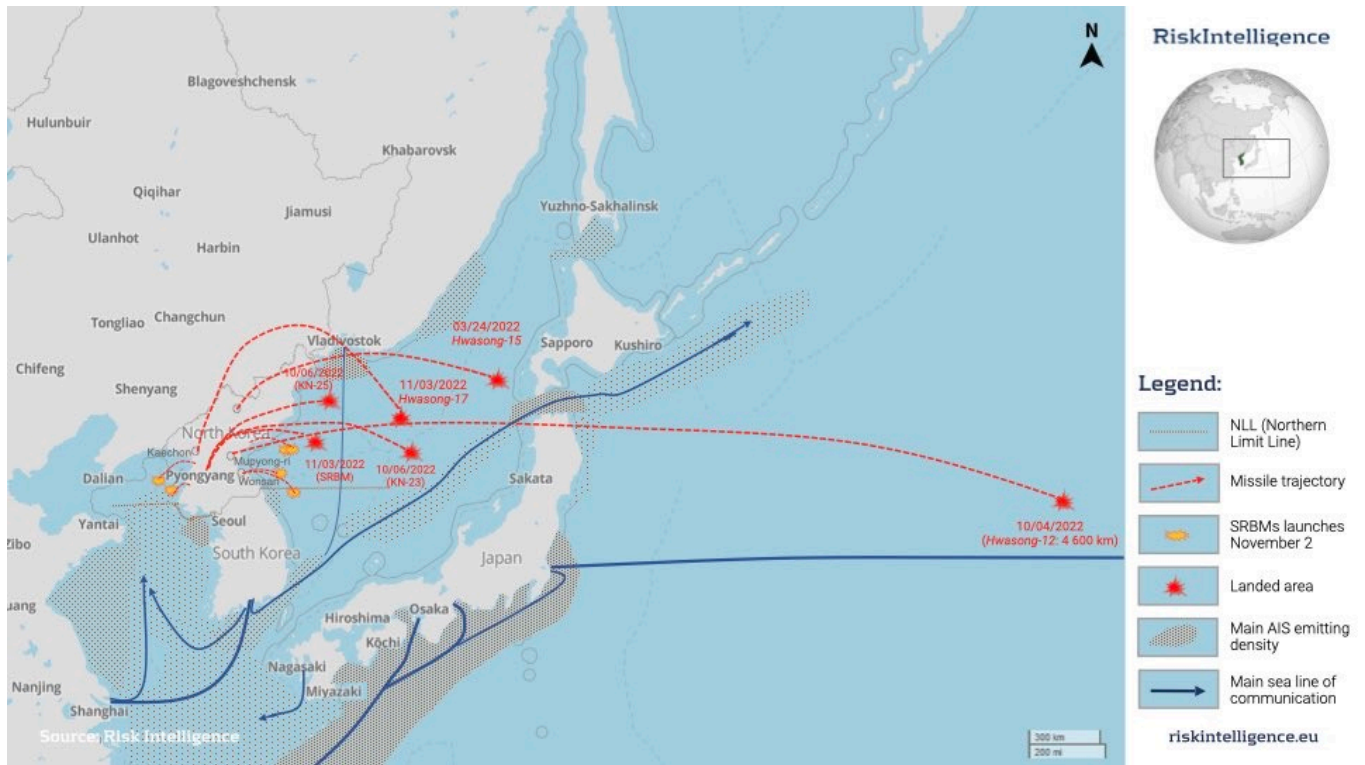
North Korea has been conducting missile tests since 1984, after establishing its first Tonghae Satellite Launching Ground. However, in 2014, North Korea changed its missile testing patterns dramatically, launching missiles more frequently and from various new locations. North Korea has conducted more than sixty missile tests this year as compared to eight in all of 2021. Most of the missiles are launched towards the Sea of Japan/East Sea, with the exception of an intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) reaching as far as Guam. A test of the *Hwasong-12* missile overflew Japan on 4 October – refer to the map below.

For years, the United States and the international community have tried to negotiate an end to North Korea's nuclear and missile development and its export of ballistic missile technology. North Korea withdrew from the nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT) in 2003, which requires non-nuclear weapon

states to forswear the development and acquisition of nuclear weapons. Six-Party Talks (the US, two Koreas, China, Japan, and Russia) were initiated subsequently but broke down in 2009 following disagreements.

North Korea has repeatedly responded belligerently to US and South Korean military exercises when there is no ongoing diplomacy taking place among the parties concerned. It was reported that the recent missile tests were designed to simulate showering the South with tactical nuclear weapons as a warning after large-scale navy drills by South Korean and US forces. The tests simulated striking military command facilities, main ports, and airports in the South. North Korea has constantly released statements and maps that make clear that these launches are exercises targeting US forces in South Korea and Japan, both of which house critical US military bases and tens of thousands of US troops.

To date, all the missiles have landed outside shipping zones and there have been no reports of a commercial vessel being hit or that the tests have disrupted shipping. As the United States and South Korea seek to enhance extended deterrence through their joint military exercises, North Korea's multiple missile tests, combined with artillery firing or warplanes exercises, will likely become a new normal. There have been other diplomatic initiatives, such as the US/North Korea Agreed



Map showing approximate location of select North Korean missile tests in 2022 and main shipping routes/locations. (Source: Risk Intelligence)

Framework and meetings in 2019, but there have been no breakthroughs to prevent further missile tests from taking place.

It is a legal requirement to advise the IMO of any missile tests taking place in maritime areas but North Korea has not always been compliant with this requirement. In November 2016 the IMO's Maritime Safety Committee issued circular

MSC.1/Circ.1551 "having received a report on numerous missile launches without any proper navigational warnings by the Democratic People's Republic of Korea" and "expressed its grave concern over those operations, which pose a serious threat to maritime safety." It is likely that North Korea will continue to conduct missile tests without meeting the IMO notification requirement.

Risk Intelligence, Nov 2022.

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