

The Evolution of North Korea's Missile Tests

The dictatorial country of North Korea has had a long and controversial history with its turbulent usage of nuclear weaponry. Just within the past year, North Korea made its first successful test of an intercontinental ballistic missile, and Kim Jong-un threatened a nuclear strike on “the heart of the U.S.” due to America’s threats to remove him as supreme leader. Most recently, the country carried out its sixth test of a nuclear weapon, causing a 6.3 magnitude seismic event. These disastrous events have been stirring up anxiety and anticipation countrywide in America; people are wondering what President Trump will do next in an effort to keep America safe from North Korea’s deadly missiles.

In 1984, North Korea carried out its first known missile tests. At least six Scud-B missiles were launched at Tonghae Satellite Launching Ground. Scud-B missiles have a range of about 300 kilometers and a payload of at least 500 kilograms. Since 1984, the country has carried out over 150 missile and nuclear tests. Initially, due to challenges testing long-range missiles in a country that is too small to run test flights within its own border, North Korea's only option was to launch these flights over its neighbours. Recently, North Korea has started launching longer-range missiles almost vertically in what is known as a "lofted trajectory," allowing missiles to land closer to the location from which they were launched, but still travel a great distance overall. There has been a rise in new missile technology as of late due to the reign of Kim Jong-un, North Korea’s supreme leader, who has seen over half of all missile and nuclear tests conducted by the country despite having only been in office since 2011.

After his father’s death in December 2011, Kim Jong-un was named head of the party, state and army in North Korea. Since taking his father’s place, the notorious supreme leader has

vowed to focus on educational, agricultural and economic reforms. Despite these hopeful promises, neighboring countries and citizens claim that human rights violations have continued within the borders of North Korea. Dozens of officials have been executed by the state under Mr. Kim. Conditions in the country have been so grave for the citizens of North Korea that in July 2016, the administration of then-President Barack Obama placed sanctions on Kim for human rights abuses. Additionally, under his rule, the development of the nation's nuclear and missile programmes has made increasingly rapid strides; In the six years since Kim Jong Un assumed power, the supreme leader has tested eighty-four missiles. The missiles themselves have also significantly increased in distance over the past few years. This alarming push for the construction of advanced nuclear weaponry has placed immense fear and urgency in the minds of many world leaders across the globe, including President of the United States, Donald Trump.

In July, North Korea test-fired two intercontinental ballistic missiles which were thought to be capable of reaching western parts of the United States. When asked if he had urgent concerns surrounding North Korea's recently successfully tested intercontinental ballistic missile, San Lorenzo Valley High School Government and World History teacher Eric Kahl said, "Yes, I'm scared they could use it against us eventually." With so many having the same feelings of fear and desperation, Trump had to quickly begin thinking of possible solutions to his country's concerns and North Korea's violent threats. He suggested terminating the Korea-U.S. Trade Agreement. "I think it's horrible timing to be hurting one of our allies right now," said Kahl. Trump criticized the People's Republic of China for not doing anything to rein in North Korea, despite there being no clear, definite, or easy way for Xi Jinping and China to have any effect on Kim Jong-un and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea's usage of nuclear

weaponry. “I think North Korea’s gonna do whatever they want and disregard China,” said Kahl. Since quite early in Trump’s reign as President of the United States, he has shown more readiness for war with North Korea than any President before him.

What comes next for the increasingly tense relationship between The United States of America and the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea is a mystery. Perhaps war is in the near future. Perhaps President Trump and Kim Jong-un will come to a sort of agreement and improve their relations. Until further drastic actions are taken, leaders and citizens of countries around the globe will continue to anticipate the likelihood of more missiles, each weapon more high-technology than the last, as well as the pending possibility of another horrific war.