

**Ballistic Missile Testing Moratorium –
Will North Korea Break It?**

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**For
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North Korea is not likely to launch a ballistic missile unless Pyongyang's leadership determines it has more to gain than lose by breaking its moratorium. At the present time, the disadvantages outweigh the possible benefits.

Let us examine the few facts now available. The most obvious one is that the governments in Washington and Tokyo, after extensive consultation, have not confirmed speculation that North Korea is preparing to test a ballistic missile. The second fact is that obtaining precise intelligence about North Korea, particularly its secret military activities, is extremely difficult. Another fact is that breaking the moratorium would trigger a fire storm of international condemnation of Pyongyang. Finally, although North Korea has a potent ballistic missile capability based on old Soviet technology, the long range Taepodong missile is new technology that has never been successfully test. Its first test at the end of August 1998 failed, embarrassing Pyongyang and greatly strengthening the hand of those in Japan and the United States who advocate joint development and deployment of an anti-ballistic missile defense capability for both nations.

The US and Japanese governments thus far have neither confirmed nor denied press speculation that North Korea is preparing to launch a second Taepodong II. Japan's Chief Cabinet Secretary Abe in early June first sought to calm nerves by saying he was not aware of any convincing evidence of such preparations. He subsequently told journalists that it would be improper for him to comment on highly classified matters. This intensified speculation. Most recently, Japanese Foreign Minister Aso met the US ambassador to Japan in Tokyo. Without commenting on the speculation, they seize the opportunity to assert their joint determination to take resolute action against Pyongyang were it to break the ballistic missile test moratorium.

Precise intelligence about North Korea remains extremely difficult to obtain. If the two allies had such intelligence, they certainly would have released it by now to substantiate their warning of severe repercussions should Pyongyang test a ballistic missile. Both governments share three types of intelligence: Humit (human intelligence), Comint (communications intelligence) and imagery (satellite pictures). Humit is usually obtained from visitors to North Korea and North Korean defectors. This makes it the least reliable intelligence. Comint is more reliable because it comes directly from a target nation's

communication's network. But Comint can be incomplete, making it unreliable. Pictures provide details about physical objects and human movements, but they cannot reveal anything about human intentions.

Almost inevitably, the three kinds of intelligence contribute to disagreements more often than consensus. In the United States, the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) favors using intelligence to create worst case scenarios while the Department of State's Bureau of Intelligence and Research (INR) leans toward restraint. The Defense Department's Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA), particularly during the Bush Administration, often favors the worse case scenario over INR's more cautious stance. The ensuing disagreement within the intelligence community often produce leaks to the press as the competing factions attempt to sway the US Congress and the American public to a particular point of view. Similar "politics of intelligence" have developed in Japan.

The leaking of classified information often occurs when the US Congress and Japanese Diet are considering whether and how much to budget for particular defense programs. Funds for Japan's Standard Missile 3 (SM3) anti-ballistic missile program have gradually declined in recent years, slowing US-Japan co-development and deployment of the SM3. The system is designed to become Japan's first line of defense against a possible North Korean ballistic missile attack. Intensifying the Japanese public's concern about North Korea's ballistic missile threat could pressure the Diet to increase spending for the SM3.

Let us now shift our focus from Tokyo and Washington to Pyongyang. Pyongyang's leadership is not irrational. North Korea recognizes that its primary adversaries, the United States and Japan, are the world's superpowers. North Korea cannot afford to expose itself to unnecessary and potentially destructive risks. Thus its leadership has developed expertise in pursuing carefully crafted initiatives designed to maximize benefits and minimize the costs of its actions.

North Korea would not now gain anything significant by ending the moratorium. Washington and Tokyo have warned that they would take unspecified but strong steps to punish Pyongyang for breaking its moratorium. Such a test on the even of the last summit between President Bush and Prime Minister Koizumi would strengthen the hand of so-called "hard liners" in both capitals as they strive to intensify their pressure tactics to compel North Korea to return to the Six Party Talks. A missile test would make it even more difficult politically for Washington's advocates of intensifying diplomatic dialogue with North Korea, like Senate Foreign Relations Committee chairman and Republican Senator Richard Lugar, to continue asserting their views publicly.

Seoul, Beijing, and Moscow also would come under heavy pressure from the international community to chastise their ally and friend North Korea. A missile test would certainly discourage former South Korean president Kim Dae-jung from visiting Pyongyang, a visit Pyongyang seems eager to host. In Tokyo, the newly designated Ministry of Defense would benefit from an increase in its anti-ballistic missile defense budget. The Bush Administration could also re-invigorate campaign to develop a National Missile Defense (NMD) program by pointing to Pyongyang's ballistic missile

test and breaking of another promise to the international community. Finally, a North Korean ballistic missile test would intensify international concern and impatience with Pyongyang's nuclear weapons development program.

The launching of another Taepodong II ballistic missile would appear to benefit Pyongyang's adversaries far more than North Korea.