



Missile Miscue

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Despite worldwide calls for restraint, North Korea chose to honor July 4 by going ballistic, launching seven missiles of various ranges into the Sea of Japan. It was a classic moment out of "Fatal Attraction" - a Glenn Close "I will not be ignored!" scream.

Without question, this provocation will turn out to be a complete loser for Pyongyang.

For starters, North Korean dictator Kim Jong Il looks foolish - his top o' the line intercontinental ballistic missile, the Taepodong-2, went pfhhtttt! splash! after flying only 40 seconds. (Believe you me, someone is going to be spending serious time cooling their heels in a North Korean political prison camp after making the "Dear Leader's" fireworks look like sparklers . . .)

Moreover, the launch, coming after

weeks of threats and demands, will lead to broad international condemnation and further political/economic isolation for North Korea. That will include more economic sanctions - something that its crippled economy and suffering people can ill afford.

And the Taepodong-2 failure (after a seven-year, self-imposed moratorium on ballistic-missile launches) makes Pyongyang look quite impotent as a long-range nuclear threat to the United States, significantly undermining its periodic bouts of brinksmanship.

The other bad news for Pyongyang is that the missile malfunction will make other potential buyers (most importantly Iran) think twice about adding the North Korean ICBM to their arsenals. (Obviously, this is great news for us.)

North Korea's hapless missile salvo also alienated its biggest benefactors, most notably China and South Korea. The blatant disregard for the wishes of neighboring Beijing and Seoul to not unsettle things is likely to bring real pain for Pyongyang.

Take China. As Pyongyang's largest aid donor (and host of the Six-Party Talks aimed at addressing North Korea's nukes), Beijing called for Pyongyang to return to the negotiating table and forgo the missile launches - to no avail.

As the country with the most influence in North Korea, China, the new diplomatic big dog on the block, isn't happy by the prospect of being publicly "dissed" by puny Pyongyang.

China still won't come down too hard on its communist country cousin. But Beijing will show some pique, at least - by giving some private diplomatic warnings, and perhaps temporarily reducing the shipment of fuel oil and other economic aid to Pyongyang.

North Korea has embarrassed South Korea as well. Seoul has been overly generous - arguably to a fault - with its northern neighbor, funneling billions in economic/humanitarian aid to Pyongyang in a bid to facilitate reconciliation/reunification. Seoul now has little choice politically, considering its missile launch warnings, but to put off increased cross-DMZ economic ties (including railroad crossings, rice/fertilizer donations

and business activity at the North's Kaesong industrial park).

Others aren't happy, either. Some of the North Korean missiles broached Japanese waters, falling within Japan's 200-mile Exclusive Economic Zone. And if the Taepodong-2 hadn't been a dud, it certainly would've passed over Japan en route to its target: us.

Tokyo is likely to restrict trade with Pyongyang, including port calls by North Korean ships. More painful, though, will be Tokyo's restrictions on money transfers and visits to North Korea by Pyongyang's supporters in Japan (known as the Chosen Soren - "Red Korea").

Without question, Tokyo will also take measures to protect itself from the menacing Pyongyang. Japan will further embrace missile defense, including the deployment of U.S. Patriot missiles in Japan, as well as boosting its defense-modernization program.

For Washington, North Korea's latest provocation is proof positive of the need for missile defense to protect the homeland and our troops overseas. Thankfully, we've already established a base-line missile-defense architecture to do just that.

Leaving our troops and cities deliberately vulnerable to the maniacal missile machinations of the likes of Kim Jong Il - especially missiles mated with nuclear, chemical or biological warheads - is out-and-out crazy.

And don't forget about Iran. Tehran is watching the to-ing and fro-ing with keen interest, contemplating its next move. If North Korea's provocation pays dividends, Iran will be all the more likely to indulge in defiance and risky behavior with its nuclear program.

Multilateral diplomacy, military deterrence and economic isolation are the way to go for the moment. But pressuring North Korea's supporters, especially China, to walk petulant Pyongyang back from the nuclear - and ballistic-missile - abyss is key.

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