

'Provocative moves must be halted'

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Beijing calls for all parties to show restraint after the DPRK fires short-range missiles, expresses "serious concern"

China has urged all parties to stop "provocative actions" and maintain calm and restraint to prevent tension from escalating on the Korean Peninsula.

Earlier on Thursday, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea launched two short-range missiles and declared it would liquidate all of the Republic of Korea's assets in the DPRK, Xinhua reported.

It said it will also nullify all inter-Korean economic cooperation projects in response to Seoul's unilateral sanctions against Pyongyang, after the UN Security Council voted to adopt a tough resolution against Pyongyang earlier this month.

Foreign Ministry spokesman Hong Lei said on Thursday that "the US and the Republic of Korea have started large-scale joint military drills in the ROK, and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea has consistently responded fiercely" to what it perceives as threats.

'China expresses serious concern about the situation,' he said.

Pentagon Press Secretary Peter Cook said on Thursday that the US is concerned by all the recent activities of the DPRK.

"It's another provocative action by the North Koreans and only further escalates the tension on the Korean Peninsula," he told a press briefing.

"The rhetoric we were hearing from North Korea, they just make us stand closer, if you will, with our South Korean allies," he said.

Jonathan Pollack, a senior fellow at the John L. Thornton China Center of the Brookings Institution, said the missile tests and the confiscation of ROK economic assets in the DPRK are not a surprise. They are predictable responses to the US-ROK exercises and to the ROK decision to close the Kaesong Industrial Zone.

Pollack believes that Seoul likely anticipated that both steps would be taken.

"The bigger question is whether they are the initial steps in a North Korean escalatory campaign, as opposed to lashing out without triggering a larger crisis. But this is undoubtedly a time of heightened risk on the Korean Peninsula," said Pollack, author of the 2011 book *No Exit: North Korea, Nuclear Weapons and International Security*.

The DPRK warned on Sunday that it would make a "pre-emptive and offensive nuclear strike" in response to the US-ROK drills.

Ted Carpenter, senior fellow of defense and foreign policy at the Cato Institute, said instead of persuading Pyongyang to be more reasonable and cautious, the new UN sanctions appear to be causing the opposite reaction.

"North Korea is becoming even more isolated, belligerent, and reckless. Kim's government shows even less willingness to listen to voices of restraint, even from close, important allies like Russia and China," he said.

Carpenter said tightening sanctions is not a realistic strategy to defuse the DPRK crisis. "Indeed, that approach increases the risk of brinkmanship and a fatal miscalculation by one side or the other," he said.

Zhang Liangui, an expert in Korean studies at the Party School of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China, said that it was not the first time that the DPRK has decided to liquidate assets of the ROK, and the capital involved is "limited".

"So the decision is actually a symbolic move, serving as a protest," Zhang said.

He estimated that "it was unlikely that tension on the peninsula would lessen in the short term" because the US and its allies will continue to act in ways that prompt the DPRK to react militarily.

Shi Yongming, an Asia-Pacific studies researcher at the China Institute of International Relations, echoed Zhang, saying that the US and ROK are pressuring the DPRK militarily and politically.

At a time that the US and ROK are conducting drills on the peninsula, they also refuse to enter into negotiations unless the DPRK gives up its nuclear programs first, Shi said.

As a result, Pyongyang has no choice but to react militarily, including its recent short-range missile launches, Shi said.

"As the DPRK has no assurance that its security concerns will be addressed, it feels unsafe to engage in negotiations now about its nuclear programs," Shi added.

