



North Korea's new 4,000mph hypersonic missile could dodge US defences as chilling new arms race heats up, experts warn

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North Korea has taken another step in the hypersonic arms race as Kim Jong-un boasted his military fired a near 4,000mph missile.

The beggar kingdom took another step forward as it launched the weapon that can travel up to five times the speed of sound - and it's feared it could dodge US missile defence systems.

HYPERSONIC MISSILES ARMS RACE

US, China, Russia & North Korea all have the terrifying weapons



Experts believe the weapon is a new type for North Korea, likely based on the previously launched hypersonic missile known as the [Hwasong-8](#).

The [weapons test](#) appears to have been focused on the "glide vehicle" element - the piece of the missile that detaches and flies towards the enemy.

[North Korea](#) boasted that the missile "precisely hit" its target more some 430 miles away.

And experts believe the latest test is squarely aimed at attempting to beat US missile defence systems.

The defences are deployed in South Korea, Japan and to protect US military installations in Guam.

North Korea's test comes as the US, Russia and China all compete to develop potentially game-changing hypersonic weapons.

The next generation of missiles can hit speeds of up to 21,000mph - and potentially even faster - and are seen as a devastating new frontier for warfare.

Hypersonic missiles are a game changer because unlike ballistic missiles, which fly into space before returning on steep trajectories, they zoom towards targets at lower altitudes.

This combined with typical speeds of five times the speed of sound – or around 4,000mph – makes them extremely hard to shoot down and a potent weapon more countries want to get their hands on.

North Korea's development comes despite years of talks for [Kim](#) to stop his pursuit of missiles and nuclear weapons.

Dr Ramon Pacheco Pardo, from King's College London, told The Sun Online: "These missiles have more manoeuvrability and can fly at lower altitudes compared to others in the North Korean arsenal, so they would be better at evading the defence systems that South Korea and the US have."

He added: "This new type of missile would make North Korea able to reach targets in the region more easily. It could evade existing anti-missile defence systems."

North Korea has long raged about missile defence systems being deployed by the US in neighbouring nations - perceiving them as a threat to Kim's regime.

Melissa Hanham, an affiliate of the Center for International Security and Cooperation at Stanford University, told [The Korea Herald](#): "First, it can stay below the visibility of long-range ground-based radar for a longer period of time.

"Second, it can move laterally and longitudinally in a way that is hard to intercept.

"This becomes attractive to a country like North Korea that has a small nuclear arsenal and wants to increase the chances of its low number of nuclear warheads penetrating ballistic missile defense."

Nam Chang-hee, professor of international politics at Inha University, told [Yonhap](#): "The nuclear force is the sole military area where the North could highlight its relative primacy at this point.

"While the South and the US are seeking to build capabilities, including missile defense and preemptive strike assets, the North might be prioritizing at least disrupting or evading them."

Dr Edward Howell, from the University of Oxford, told The Sun Online the new missile highlights the North's increasingly sophisticated weapons.

"The test highlights Pyongyang's continued pursuit of nuclear and missile development," he said.

"Without testing, they will not be able to see the efficacy if such systems for themselves.

"The North has always been dissatisfied at missile defence systems in the region, not least the deployment of THAAD in [South Korea]. "

And the expert added Joe Biden's approach to North Korea will only "prolong the status quo".



Photos released of North Korea's latest hypersonic missile
Credit: EPA



Kim Jong-un - sporting his new slim look - pictured at a recent meeting in North Korea
Credit: AFP

North Korea is believed to be close to bringing its hypersonic weapons into operation - even if they are rushed into service without full testing completed.

Eric Gomez, director of defense policy studies at the Cato Institute, said: "This is likely due to a mix of resource constraints and the idea that it is better for deterrence to deploy fast rather than wait for the system to be perfected.

"Even if that assumption is wrong, it is safer to be wrong in that way than the other way around where we assume the weapons don't work/exist but they are real."

Ankit Panda, a senior fellow at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, however said he believes North Korea may hold off until at least 2023.

Kim's latest test comes after China appeared to take the lead in the hypersonic arms race in 2021.

Revelations that Beijing [flew a nuclear-capable missile around the world](#) throws down a gauntlet to the other nations chasing hypersonics, the US, Russia and North Korea.

US intelligence and military officials were reportedly left stunned after [China](#) launched a rocket in space carrying a hypersonic glide vehicle which circled the globe before speeding towards its target.

It means the missile can theoretically hit anywhere on Earth.

The shocking revelations of their missile test back in August has sent shockwaves through Western intelligence who fear they actually underestimated Beijing.

"We have no idea how they did this," an intelligence source said.



The hypersonic missile test was carried out on a Long March 2C rocket, pictured here launching the Shenzhou-13 spacecraft

Credit: Getty



China appears to have made astonishing progress on the development of its hypersonic weapons
Credit: Getty Images – Getty

The US however continues to develop its own weapons, last year testing another hypersonic missile, the Hypersonic Air-breathing Weapon Concept.

Unlike the public shows made by its rivals, the US has shrouded the test in secrecy with details like its range kept under wraps.

"Investments in hypersonic strike have begun to pay dividends, answering the progress already made by the likes of Russia and China," said Tom Karako, an analyst at the Center for Strategic and International Studies.

And last year, the Russian military announced it had tested a number of hypersonics missile it claimed was capable of evading all Western defences.

The [deadly Zircon](#) was unleashed at speeds of up to Mach 7 - with Putin claiming at the end of 2021 that Russia has fired ten of the weapons.

And the weapon has been identified by Moscow's state-controlled TV as [Putin](#)'s weapon of choice to wipe out coastal American cities in the event of a nuclear conflict.

The Kremlin also has in its armoury the 21,000mph Avangard hypersonic glide vehicle, which it reportedly brought into service in 2019.