



Analysts: N. Korea's Missile Launch is Not True Military Advance

By: Luis Ramirez - December 13, 2012

PENTAGON — North Korea's first successful long-range missile launch shows Pyongyang has advanced its capabilities, but analysts say the North is a long way from being able to threaten the United States.

North Korea blasts its way into a club of nations with long-range missile capabilities. Four launches, three failures and, finally, success.

North Korean scientists watched as the rocket lifted off before putting an object into orbit. The director of North Korea's satellite command center says the objective was achieved.

"Kwangmyongsong-1 was a test of the rocket's ability to put the satellite into the orbit," said Kim Hye Jin at the Satellite Command Center.

For North Korea, it is a giant step. But defense analyst Christopher Preble at the Cato Institute in Washington says Pyongyang is a long way from proving its missiles can threaten the United States.

"One successful missile launch does not make them a reliable and credible threat in terms of long-range missiles," he stated. "And the ability to deliver weapons over great distances."

A North Korean news announcer called the launch a glorious success. But Pyongyang has yet to prove it can create a nuclear warhead small enough to mount on a missile.

The rocket launched this week is of a primitive liquid-fuel type that takes hours to load and is cumbersome to set up.

Pyongyang already has shown it can hit Japan with its mid-range rockets, and it can strike South Korea using artillery. But by most accounts, the North's long-range rocket test does not represent a true military advance.

Still, Preble says he was surprised the launch was successful.

"Their previous missile tests were abysmal failures. In fact, the safest place to be in previous North Korean missile tests was wherever they were aiming. It appears this time around - we still don't know all of the details - but it appears that it was successful launch

in that it did not blow up on the launch pad or soon after launch," he said. "We don't know a lot about the payload. We don't know quite yet what they've actually put into space. That, of course, is the next question."

Analysts say that for the North, the rocket is more of a political tool than a military weapon.

The U.S. military, however, says it is not underestimating the steps that Pyongyang is taking.

In September, the Pentagon said it would expand its missile defense system and place an anti-missile radar system in Japan.