

## North Korea Redefining New Normal on the Korean Peninsula

North Korea has already launched [more missiles in 2022](#) than any previous year (See attachment 1). The DPRK has also developed nuclear weapons and will never give them up [according to Kim Jong Un](#). On Sep. 9, 2022 North Korea announced a new law enshrining the right to conduct preemptive nuclear strikes if there is a threat of an imminent attack on DPRK leaders, or the country is at risk of destruction. Since then, the Hermit Kingdom has unleashed a flurry of dangerous military activity. The most recent activity was the launch of an intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) on Nov. 18 [Japanese officials](#) said had sufficient range to reach the mainland of the United States. North Korea [claimed](#) the launch was a new missile, the Hwasong-17. The ICBM splashed down just 130 miles off the coast of Japan.

North Korea's belligerent behavior has South Korea, Japan, and the United States exchanging statements and responses. On Nov. 1, North Korea warned of "[more powerful follow-up measures](#)" in response to U.S.-South Korea Vigilant Storm exercises, a four-day joint air training exercise beginning Oct. 31. On Nov. 2, Pyongyang launched approximately 25 missiles from numerous locations. One of those missiles landed south of the Northern Limit Line (NLL), the maritime border between the two Koreas, for the first time since North Korea began testing ballistic missiles in the 1980s. Pyongyang also fired roughly 100 artillery shells into the maritime buffer zone, set up in 2018 as part of negotiations with Washington and Seoul. Less than two hours later, South Korean and U.S. aircraft responded by firing three air-to-surface missiles into the sea north of the NLL.

Over the next several days, North Korea carried out a series of additional missile tests — including a failed launch of a suspected ICBM. A large-scale drill of military aircraft was also conducted across the country. On Nov. 7, Pyongyang claimed the launch of [two cruise missiles](#) in the waters off the South Korean city of Ulsan on Nov. 2, stating the South failed to detect the launches. Seoul and Washington denied the launches occurred.

While these events were concentrated around Vigilant Storm, they are more evidence Pyongyang has shifted approach in dealing with Seoul, Tokyo, and Washington. In doing so, the DPRK is asserting the United States and South Korea's sanctions and [isolation strategy are ineffective](#). North Korea's access to an expanded arsenal of weapons is giving more options to deal with the security situation around the Korean Peninsula. In the past, North Korea's room for escalation was hampered, due to limited capability and confidence to carry out reciprocal military actions without entering into conflict. Thanks to an expanded conventional capability, Pyongyang now has more tactical options to shape political calculations in Seoul and Washington, with less risk of a rapid descent into an all-out conflict as evidenced by this year's activity.



*A Tokyo resident looks at a television screen showing a news report about North Korea firing a ballistic missile. 11/18/22. Credit Kyodo via REUTERS*

## Key Events 2022:

- [January 5:](#)
  - o Short Range Ballistic Missile (SRBM) launch into the East Coast Sea.
- [March 24:](#)
  - o First successful ICBM launch since 2017.
- [October 5:](#)
  - o NK fires Intermediate Range Ballistic Missile IRBM over Japan.
  - o South Korean and American troops [fired a volley of missiles](#) into the sea in response.
- [October 14:](#)
  - o “Hundreds” of North Korean artillery shells fired into maritime buffer zones.
  - o 10 North Korean warplanes fly as close as 7 miles north of the sea border and 15 miles north of the Military Demarcation Line.
- [October 19:](#)
  - o N.Korea test-fires submarine-launched ballistic missile.
- [November 2:](#)
  - o North Korea fires [25](#) missiles of various kinds off its east and west coasts.
  - o 1 SRBM impacted 16 miles south of the Northern Limit Line (NLL).
  - o Largest number of missiles North Korea has fired in a single day.
  - o North Korea also fired 100 artillery shells into South Korea’s maritime buffer zone.
- [November 3:](#)
  - o ICBM Launch. Appears to have failed at high altitude.
- [November 4:](#)
  - o South Korea stated they scrambled warplanes in response to 180 North Korean military flights near the countries' shared border.
- [November 18:](#)
  - o North Korea test-fired an ICBM with range to reach the mainland of the United States that impacted off the coast of Japan. (8<sup>th</sup> test this year)
  - o South Korean F-35A fighters and U.S. F-16 jets flew off the east coast of the Korean Peninsula and conducted a firing drill against targets that simulated North Korea's mobile missile launchers.
    - [Weapons used](#) included an AGM-84H/K SLAM-ER.

North Korea is likely [slowly but steadily expanding areas of military action and operations](#) as they seek to reshape the political and security environment around the Korean Peninsula.

***"Pyongyang is trying to disrupt international cooperation against it by escalating military tensions and suggesting it has the capability of holding American cities at risk of nuclear attack."***

Leif-Eric Easley, Professor, Ewha University, Seoul.

Pyongyang views U.S.-South Korean military exercises as [an existential threat to the regime](#) and will use military demonstrations to emphasize the high risk of escalation around any future exercises. South Korea and the United States will, in turn, need to factor in a more bellicose and belligerent North Korean response to any bilateral military drills.

Concern is also mounting over the possibility of North Korea conducting a nuclear test for the first time since 2017. South Korean and U.S. officials have said the [North has completed preparations for such a test](#), expected to be underground and possibly using a smaller nuclear device designed for tactical use. The discussion of “tactical nukes” has been prominent and of concern to the West since Russia invaded Ukraine.

➤ **Integrity ISR Comment:** The days of North Korea’s behavior being considered “saber rattling” or “bullying” are likely gone. North Korea is likely to steadily expand areas of military action and operations seeking to reshape the political and security environment around the Korean Peninsula. North Korea’s multiple missile tests, combined with artillery firing and warplanes exercises, will likely become a new normal. The activities seen in 2022 have become Pyongyang’s way to respond to issues and activities they see as an existential threat like joint U.S.-South Korean military exercises. The DPRK will continue to use military demonstrations to emphasize the high risk of escalation around any future exercises. With more military action, there is an increased risk of short, sharp clashes (like the shelling of Yeonpyeong Island or the sinking of South Korea's Cheonan navy vessel in 2010), and potentially more exchanges of fire between the two Koreas. This is an ominous sign that adds more uncertainty to an already tense part of the world. Expect to see a nuclear test in the coming days as a parting “shot” to the Joint US/Korean exercises.



Attachment 1.

