

## North Korea fires two unidentified projectiles, South Korea says

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**Seoul, South Korea (CNN)** — North Korea has fired two unidentified short-range projectiles from an area near the coastal city of Wonsan into waters between the Korean Peninsula and Japan, South Korea's military said Monday.

The objects were fired at 12:37 p.m. Korea time and estimated to have a flight distance of 240 kilometers (149 miles) and altitude of 35 kilometers (22 miles), South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff said in a statement.

The projectiles are likely part of North Korea's combined military drills, the Joint Chiefs of Staff said.

The drills began on Friday, the one-year anniversary of leader Kim Jong Un's summit in Hanoi with US President Donald Trump that ended without a deal.

North Korean state media reported that Kim presided over the exercise, which was intended to "judge the mobility and the fire power strike ability of the defense units."

Japan's Defense Ministry said it could not yet confirm if the projectiles landed inside its territory or exclusive economic zone, and said no damage had been reported to aircraft or vessels in the area.

"The recent repeated launch of ballistic missiles by North Korea is a serious problem for the international community, including Japan," it said in a statement.

South Korea Director of National Security Chung Eui-yong and other ministers are holding an urgent meeting to discuss the launch this afternoon, according to South Korea's Presidential Blue House.

The South Korean military is "monitoring related movements for possible additional launches and maintaining its readiness" said the statement from the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

If this was a missile test, it would be Pyongyang's first of 2020. Last year, North Korean leader [Kim Jong Un](#) said his country would continue to "steadily develop" nuclear weapons and the ballistic missiles to deliver them unless Washington changes course and abandons what Pyongyang calls its "hostile policy."

Weapons experts say test-firing missiles is an important part of improving their accuracy and reliability. North Korea conducted several launches in 2019 as diplomatic efforts between Pyongyang and Washington began to falter, but the country steered clear of testing intercontinental range missiles or detonating nuclear weapons underground.

However, a yet-to-be-released report from a United Nations panel found North Korea's weapons development continued last year in violation of long-standing UN Security Council sanctions.

Though weapons tests are important for development purposes, North Korea's military moves are often timed for maximum political impact both at home and abroad.

Neighboring South Korea is dealing with a massive outbreak of the [novel coronavirus](#), killing at least 26 and [infecting more than 4,200](#). North Korea [has not publicly reported](#) any cases within its borders, but experts say it's plausible that the virus has made its way inside the country. Every other country in East Asia has confirmed numerous cases.

The US and South Korea [chose to postpone military](#) exercises due to the outbreak. These drills usually draw the ire of North Korea.

"The US and South Korea postponing their defense drills and offering humanitarian assistance has thus earned no goodwill from a Kim regime that sees little benefit in restarting diplomacy," Leif-Eric Easley, a professor at Ewha University in Seoul, said in email.

Seoul is also preparing to hold elections for the National Assembly, and President Moon Jae-in's ruling Democratic Party could suffer as a result of his rapidly declining popularity. Many voters feel Moon has yet to follow through on his promises to fix the economy, now in a state of flux due to the coronavirus, and reach some sort of lasting deal with North Korea.

US voters also head to the polls on Tuesday for the Super Tuesday primaries.

"Pyongyang instead appears intent on raising the stakes before South Korea's April elections and before the 'Super Tuesday' primaries of the US presidential campaign," Easley said.



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