

INSIGHT DAILY CURRENT AFFAIRS



OCTOBER 07, 2022

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North Korea's expanding missile capabilities

Why in the news?

- This week's rare North Korean test flight, which sent a missile soaring over Japan, underscored the nuclear-armed state's rapidly advancing arsenal amid stalled denuclearisation talks.
- Tuesday's ballistic missile was the 39th launched by North Korea this year. Its record schedule began in January with the launch of a **new "hypersonic missile,"** and went on to include long-range cruise missiles; short-range ballistic missiles fired from rail cars, airports, and a submarine; and its first intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) launches since 2017.



Here are some of the key missile capabilities that North Korea is developing:

LONG-RANGE LAUNCHES

- North Korea claimed in March to have **successfully tested its largest ICBM ever**, the **massive Hwasong-17**.
- South Korean and U.S. officials dispute that, saying it appears that the North in fact fired an older Hwasong-15 ICBM, while some apparent Hwasong-17 tests ended in failure.
- In any case, that March test was its **highest missile flight to date**, sending an ICBM more than 6,000 km into space. This week it demonstrated its longest-range test when it fired an intermediate-range missile over Japan and into the Pacific Ocean some 4,600 km away.
- The return to **long-range testing has raised the stakes for the United States** and other distant countries that had played down some of North Korea's short-range weapons.

MANOEUVRABLE MISSILES

- Many of North Korea's most recent **short-range ballistic missiles (SRBMs)** such as its **KN-23 and KN-24** are designed to fly on a lower, "depressed" trajectory and potentially manoeuvre, complicating efforts to detect and intercept them.

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- North Korea said it tested a new type of “**hypersonic missile**”, which usually fly at lower altitudes than ballistic missiles at more than five times the speed of sound – or about 6,200 km per hour (3,850 mph).
- Despite their name, analysts say the **main feature of hypersonic weapons is not speed but their manoeuvrability**, which can help them avoid interception.
- Analysts also say that the size of the **Hwasong-17 as well as work on what North Korea says is technology for controlling satellites**, suggests that Pyongyang is looking to tip its ICBMs with multiple, manoeuvrable nuclear warheads and decoys that can help them evade defences.

DIVERSE LOCATIONS

- This year has seen North Korea test fire missiles from different locations and launch platforms in what analysts say is an effort to simulate a conflict and make it difficult for enemies to detect and destroy the missiles.
- In January North Korea **launched a pair of short-range ballistic missiles (SRBMs)** from a train near the northern border with China, in what state media said was a short-notice drill aimed at boosting the proficiency of the troops operating the missiles.
- Despite the country’s limited and sometimes unreliable rail network, **rail-mobile missiles are** a relatively cheap and efficient option to improve the survivability of their nuclear forces.
- North Korea also conducted tests from the international airport outside Pyongyang, and launched a new, **short-range missile** from its experimental missile submarine. It has also promised that an operational missile submarine would soon be deployed.

TACTICAL NUCLEAR WEAPONS

- If North Korea resumes nuclear testing, it could include development of **smaller “tactical” warheads** meant for battlefield use and designed to fit on short-range missiles, according to South Korean officials.
- In April the North test-fired a new, short-range missile that state media said was for “enhancing the efficiency in the operation of tactical nukes,” marking the first time it has linked a specific system to tactical nuclear weapons.
- Analysts say putting **small warheads on short-range missiles could represent a dangerous change** in the way North Korea deploys and plans to use nuclear weapons, allowing Pyongyang to field more of them. Instead of threatening a few cities to deter an attack, it could use them against a wide range of military targets in the South.

Source: Indian Express

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