

North Korea's submarine-launched missile fails, claims South Korea

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Seoul, South Korea: North Korea on Saturday fired a submarine-launched ballistic missile off its eastern coast, but the missile failed in its initial flight stage, claimed South Korea's army.

The missile was fired from a location near the North Korean coastal town of Sinpo, where analysts have previously detected efforts by the North to develop submarine-launched ballistic missile systems, said an official from Seoul's Defense Ministry, who didn't want to be named, citing office rules. He couldn't immediately confirm how far the missile traveled and where it landed.

South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff said in a statement that it presumed the missile successfully ejected from the submarine's launch tube, but failed in its early stage of flight. South Korea's Yonhap news agency said that the missile likely flew only a few kilometers (miles) before exploding midair, but the Defense Ministry official couldn't confirm the report.

The U.S. Strategic Command also said that the missile was tracked over the sea between the Korean Peninsula and Japan, where initial indications are it fell. The North American Aerospace Defense Command, or NORAD, said the missile launch did not pose a threat to North America.

"We strongly condemn this and North Korea's other recent missile tests, which violate U.N. Security Council Resolutions explicitly prohibiting North Korea's launches using ballistic missile technology," said Cmdr. Gary Ross, a Pentagon spokesman.

North Korea's acquiring the ability to launch missiles from submarines would be an alarming development for rivals and neighbors because missiles from submerged vessels are harder to detect in advance. While security experts say it's unlikely that North Korea possesses an operational submarine capable of firing missiles, they acknowledge that the North is making progress on such technology.

North Korea already has a considerable arsenal of land-based ballistic missiles and is believed to be advancing its efforts to miniaturize nuclear warheads mounted on missiles through nuclear and rocket tests.

North Korea last test-fired a submarine-launched ballistic missile in April, calling it a success that strengthened its ability to attack enemies with "dagger of destruction." South Korean defense officials then said that the missile flew about 30 kilometers (19 miles) before likely exploding midair.

The North also test-fired a submarine-launched ballistic missile on Dec. 25, but that test was seen as failure, the South's Joint Chiefs of Staff said. The North first claimed a successful submarine-launched missile test in May last year.

The latest launch came a day after U.S. and South Korean military officials said they were ready to deploy an advanced U.S. missile defense system in South Korea to cope with North Korean threats.

Seoul and Washington launched formal talks on deploying the Terminal High-Altitude Area Defense, or THAAD, after North Korea conducted a nuclear test and a long-range rocket launch earlier this year. China, Russia and North Korea all say the THAAD deployment could help U.S. radars spot missiles in their countries.

The deployment decision for THAAD was announced hours after North Korea angrily reacted to new U.S. sanctions on

leader Kim Jong Un and other top officials for human rights abuses, with Pyongyang's Foreign Ministry saying such measures were tantamount to declaring war.

North Korea has already been sanctioned heavily because of its nuclear weapons program. However, the action by the Obama administration on Wednesday marked the first time Kim has been personally targeted, and also the first time that any North Korean official has been blacklisted by the U.S. Treasury in connection with reports of rights abuses.

The United States stations about 28,500 troops in South Korea as deterrence against potential aggression from North Korea.

- (With inputs from AP)