

Alarm or No Alarm? Understanding North Korea's Missile Launch | Aggies GO

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An emergency alert text indicating the launch of a North Korean missile over Japan in 2017.

Jonah Carlson - North Korea recently launched a missile over northern Japan, marking its first launch over the island nation since 2017. [Motoko Rich and Choe Sang-Hun examine](#) the effects of the missile on Northeast Asian security and analyze how it effects the region's relations.

To understand why the missile caused some stir, one needs to understand [material power](#). Material powers focuses on material capabilities, such as military might or industrial capability. The launch of this missile and the distance it traveled – 2,850 miles, or a little over a fifth of the Pacific Ocean – indicates that North Korean military capabilities are increasing. The demonstrated range of North Korean missile technology not only threatens the security of U.S. allies but also threatens the U.S. territory of Guam. Rich and Sang-Hun note that Guam was the subject of violent rhetoric from North Korean officials, who “threatened to attack [Guam] with an ‘enveloping fire’ five years ago.” The security threat grows when you factor in North Korea's [nuclear weapons testing](#).

So why didn't the launch cause total panic, if such missiles could be armed with nuclear warheads? Leading theories require an understanding of [relational power](#). Relational power examines the interaction between capabilities and state relations. While North Korea holds nuclear capabilities, the ability of the U.S. and its allies to ensure a secure second strike discourages Kim Jong-Un from fully

utilizing North Korea's military might. However, China and Russia's relationship with North Korea recently [prevented the United Nations from levying sanctions](#) against the state thanks to China and Russia's veto power on the Security Council, stopping the West from increasing global pressure on the isolated nation. Relational power complicates the material power dynamic, thus raising tension in Northeast Asia.