

## Experts “totally floored” by ‘frankenmissile’



Kim Jong-un enjoys the parade on Saturday.



The ‘frankenmissile’ in Pyongyang on April 15, 2017.

Jonathan Cheng, The Australian, 12:00AM April 17, 2017

North Korea showed off what appeared to be at least one new long-range missile at a military parade on Saturday to mark the 105th birthday of founding father Kim Il-sung.

The weaponry on show, which appeared to include a newly modified intercontinental ballistic missile and two types of large launchers with never-before-seen missile canisters, is likely to trigger fresh concerns about the speed with which Pyongyang's missile program has advanced in recent years. An expert on North Korean weapons said the new hardware appeared to be far more advanced than expected. North Korea said it had perfected a new high-thrust rocket engine, a day after the US said it was considering a military option against the North.

"We're totally floored right now," said Dave Schmerler, a research associate at the Middlebury Institute of International Studies in Monterey, California. "I was not expecting to see this many new missile designs."

Mr Schmerler called the new ICBM, which appeared to have elements of two other ICBMs, the KN-08 and KN-14 missiles, a "frankenmissile".

Missile experts said the new capabilities, if confirmed, may increase Pyongyang's options as it seeks to test-launch an ICBM able to deliver a nuclear warhead to the continental US, as North Korean leader Kim Jong-un indicated in a speech in January.

Recent satellite imagery suggests North Korea may be preparing a sixth nuclear test at Punggyeri, where the recorded blasts have escalated in strength since the first one in 2006. US and Asian intelligence agencies will be closely analysing what type of device North Korea detonates, should it move ahead with a test.

The US believes North Korea's first five tests have been plutonium bombs, but if uranium is used in the next test, it could suggest the North has a much larger arsenal than initially believed. Current estimates are that the country has between 20 and 40 atomic weapons. North Korea has also said it was seeking to develop hydrogen bombs, which have much larger explosive impact than conventional nuclear weapons.

The North also paraded two missile canisters that hadn't been seen before and that appeared to be able to accommodate larger missiles than the North has ever displayed publicly. While the canisters may not contain missiles, experts said the display indicated the North's intentions to build larger ICBMs.

"A lot of this may be intimidation or bluffing, but it's potentially a sign of things to come," Mr Schmerler said.

North Korea also paraded a submarine-launched ballistic missile and a land-based variant, which it fired into the Sea of Japan during a February summit in Florida between US President Donald Trump and Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe. Ahead of the parade, the North Korean leader arrived in a limousine and walked along a red carpet as soldiers chanted "mansei," or "long live". Kim then appeared on a balcony overlooking Kim Il-sung Square to watch the parade.

North Korea experts monitoring footage of the march said Mr Kim's younger sister, Kim Yo-jong, was visible on the stage, as was Kim Won-hong, the head of North Korea's secret police, who South Korean intelligence said this year had been removed.

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