


North Korea has a secret missile base that poses a ‘potential nuclear threat’ to the US, new report says

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North Korea has a secret, previously unreported missile base near its northern border with China, which could pose a “potential nuclear threat” to much of East Asia and the United States, according to a new report released

Wednesday.

The Sinpung-dong missile base is located just 27 kilometers (about 17 miles) from the China border. It's believed to store up to nine nuclear-capable intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBM) as well as their mobile launchers, **said the report** by Washington-based think tank Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS).

The site is one of the estimated 15 to 20 ballistic missile bases and warhead storage facilities that North Korea has never declared, said the report, which drew from satellite image analysis, interviews with North Korean refugees and officials, declassified documents and open-source data.

“These missiles pose a potential nuclear threat to East Asia and the continental United States,” the report warned.



A satellite image provided by Planet Labs shows the Sinpung Dong Missile Operating Base in North Korea on August 12. (*Planet Labs*)

North Korea has **ramped up its weapons program** in the last few years under leader Kim Jong Un, rapidly modernizing its armed forces, developing new weapons and testing intercontinental ballistic missiles that can reach almost anywhere in the United States.

Those actions are in violation of United Nations sanctions that strictly limit North Korea's access to materials and weapons. But the isolated nation has also ramped up its **cooperation with Russia** since Moscow's invasion of Ukraine, sending troops to fight on the frontlines – raising fears that Moscow could help boost Pyongyang's **technologies and supply lines** in return.

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This secret base is part of North Korea's effort to bolster its nuclear program, the report said.

The base sits in a narrow mountain valley, cut in half by a stream, and measures 22 square kilometers (about 5,436 acres) – bigger than New York's John F. Kennedy International Airport.

Experts say that its location near the border lends a geographical advantage – countries like the United States might be wary of targeting it since any fallout could impact adjacent China.

“By building bases so close to China, North Korea may also seek to leverage the political risk and uncertainty of Beijing's response in order to deter an attack,” said Leif-Eric Easley, a professor at Ewha University in Seoul.

“US and South Korean policymakers are already aware of Pyongyang's unwillingness to trade away these capabilities in disarmament diplomacy,

but public knowledge of such bases might prompt more Chinese observers to resent North Korean attempts at strategic entanglement,” he added.

Construction on the base began in 2004, according to satellite images, and it has been operational since 2014, the report found. Since then, the base has been “well-maintained” and continues to be actively developed – potentially reflecting ongoing advancements in North Korea’s missile testing, it said.

It’s not yet clear what model of ballistic missile is stored at the base – but CSIS researchers believe it’s equipped with North Korea’s nuclear-capable Hwasong-15 or Hwasong-18 ICBMS, or a different type of ICBM that has not yet been revealed.

The report also said the base carries transporter launchers or mobile launchers – which can quickly shoot and move to a new position.

“During times of crisis or war, these launchers and missiles will exit the base, meet special warhead storage/transportation units, and conduct launch operations from dispersed pre-surveyed sites,” the report said.

The report also included satellite imagery that pointed out the base’s many facilities, including entrance checkpoints, headquarter buildings, warehouses, missile support facilities and small housing buildings.

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Some of these have been deliberately covered with trees and bushes to conceal their entrances – making them difficult to locate in satellite images except for winter “when vegetation is sparse,” the report said.