

Japan: Destroy rocket if launch fails

by UPI

PYONGYANG, North Korea -- Japan's defense minister Friday ordered troops to destroy a North Korean rocket or its debris if a planned launch fails and it falls into Japanese territory.

The order by Japanese Defense Minister Yasukazu Hamada comes a week before North Korea's planned launch of what it says is a communications satellite but what Western leaders fear may be a long-range ballistic missile test-firing, Japanese news agency Kyodo reported.

"It's important to deal with and eliminate the North Korean projectile should it threaten the people's security and safety by falling into our airspace, waters or soil," Hamada said.

Meanwhile, South Korea's chief nuclear envoy traveled Friday to Washington to coordinate a strategy to counter the launch, the South Korean news agency Yonhap reported. Wi Sung-lac said he plans to meet with Stephen Bosworth, the U.S. envoy for North Korea, as well as his Japanese counterpart, Akitaka Saiki.

Japan, South Korea and the United States have urged Pyongyang not to proceed, saying the launch would violate U.N. Security Council resolutions banning North Korea from nuclear and missile testing.

Analysts told The Washington Post the April firing is worrisome because it demonstrates that North Korea has built or is trying to build nuclear warheads small enough to fit on its growing missile arsenal.

North Korea "may be able to successfully mate a nuclear warhead to a ballistic missile," U.S. Army Lt. Gen. Michael D. Maples, director of the Defense Intelligence Agency, said in prepared testimony earlier this month for the Senate Armed Services Committee.

David Albright, a nuclear weapons expert who directs the Institute for Science and International Security, has written that North Korea is "likely able to build a crude nuclear warhead" for its mid-range missiles.

Copyright © 2009, by United Press International. All Rights Reserved.

Japan: Destroy rocket if launch fails by UPI