

The year Kim Jong Un played with fire

Sabre-rattling between an untested North Korean leader and a new president in the White House sent shock waves across the world. Tay Hwee Peng and Lim Yong trace the key events.




Jan 1
Kim Jong Un says North Korea is close to launching an intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) capable of reaching the US.

President-elect Donald Trump tweets: "It won't happen!"

Feb 12
North Korea fires its first ballistic missile for the year – the Pukguksong-2 (left).

BROTHER'S MURDER

- Feb 13**
- Assassins kill Mr Kim's estranged half-brother Kim Jong Nam, 45, with the nerve agent VX at KLIA.
 - Two women are arrested and charged with murder.

- October**
- Murder trial opens at Shah Alam High Court. Indonesian Siti Aisyah, 25 and Vietnamese Doan Thi Huong, 28 (below, left and right respectively), plead not guilty, saying they were tricked.
 - Four others, likely North Korean agents, remain at large.
 - Chinese police reportedly foil a plot to kill Mr Kim Jong Nam's son, Kim Han Sol, 22 (right), who had gone into hiding with his mother and younger sister.



THAAD AND MISSILE TESTS

April 26

- The Terminal High-Altitude Area Defence (Thaad) anti-missile system (below) is rushed into deployment in Seongju, less than two weeks before South Korea's May 9 presidential election.
- Beijing and Moscow oppose the move.



Pyongyang's other missile tests

May 14

Hwasong-12, capable of hitting Guam, tested as China hosts a Belt and Road Forum.

July 4

- Hwasong-14 ICBM that could reach Alaska launched on America's independence day.
- "American bastards would be not very happy with this gift," Mr Kim said, adding to laughter: "We should send them gifts once in a while to help break their boredom".

July 28

Second ICBM test.

Aug 29

Hwasong-12 fired over Hokkaido, Japan, to mark 107th anniversary of "disgraceful" Japan-Korea treaty.

Sept 3

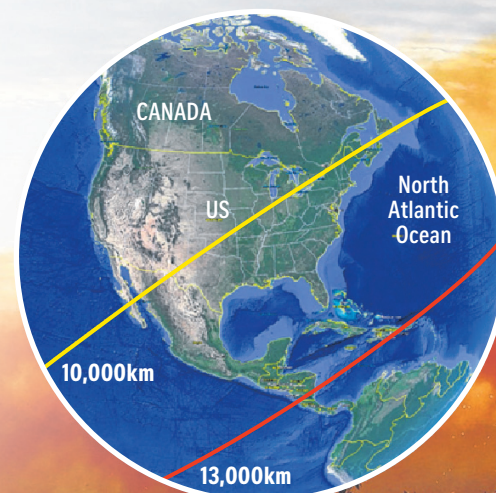
- Sixth and most powerful nuclear test to date – a hydrogen bomb designed for use on ICBMs.
- Monitoring groups estimated a yield of 250 kilotons – 16 times the size of the 15-kiloton US bomb that destroyed Hiroshima in 1945.

Sept 15

- Second Hwasong-12 fired over Hokkaido (right).
- The North Korea threat helped Japanese PM Shinzo Abe score a landslide in a Oct 22 snap election.

Nov 29

- 3am test of Hwasong-15 – its most advanced missile that puts the entire US within reach. It was North Korea's 20th launch of a ballistic missile this year.
- Mr Kim declared his country had "finally realised the great historic cause of completing the state nuclear force".



Above: The yellow and red lines show the maximum range of Hwasong-14 and Hwasong-15 ICBMs respectively if fired from north-eastern city of Rason.

WAR OF WORDS

Mr Trump and North Korea have traded barbs and at one point, tensions wiped out US\$1 trillion from global stock markets

August

- Mr Trump warns Pyongyang of "fire and fury like the world has never seen".
- The North said it was considering missile strikes near US military installations on Guam. Tensions cooled after Pyongyang said it would hold off after "watching the behaviour of the US".

Sept 11

- United Nations imposes its most extensive sanctions on North Korea.
- Caps were imposed on oil imports, but a 32km pipeline that spans North Korea's border with China and supplies 90 per cent of its crude oil is excluded.

Sept 19

- Mr Trump tells the UN (right) that if the US is threatened: "We will have no choice but to totally destroy North Korea."
- "Rocket Man is on a suicide mission for himself and his regime," he adds.



Sept 22

Mr Kim (right) responds by calling Mr Trump a "mentally deranged US dotard".

Sept 24

Mr Trump tweets: "Just heard Foreign Minister of North Korea speak at UN. If he echoes thoughts of Little Rocket Man, they won't be around much longer!"

Sept 25

North Korean Foreign Minister Ri Yong Ho says the tweet amounted to a declaration of war. The White House dismisses this as "absurd".

Nov 12

Mr Trump tweets: "Why would Kim Jong Un insult me by calling me 'old' when I would NEVER call him 'short and fat'? Oh well, I try so hard to be his friend – and maybe someday that will happen!"

Nov 20

Mr Trump puts North Korea back on a US list of countries it says support terrorism, allowing it to impose more sanctions.

Nov 30

At an emergency UN Security Council meeting, Washington calls on the international community to cut all ties with Pyongyang, and demands China cuts off all oil exports. Analysts doubt harsher sanctions will work.



Source: Twitter account of Melissa Hanham, a North Korea specialist at the James Martin Centre for Nonproliferation Studies