

Dongwha

www.dongwha.com



3 Foreign workforce

Economist challenges Yoon's immigration policies

Nationwide 24-hour reservation
1588-2001

KOREAN AIR

Washington, Seoul cast doubt over NK's satellite photos

*Pyongyang claims
its satellite snapped
US naval base,
White House*

By Nam Hyun-woo
namhyun@dongwha.com

North Korea claimed, Tuesday, that its military satellite took photos of the White House, the Pentagon and nuclear-powered aircraft carriers docked at a U.S. naval base.

The U.S. responded immediately by saying, "Pyongyang must immediately cease its provocative actions." But at the same time, officials in Seoul, Washington and experts are voicing doubts about the capability of the North's spy satellite, as Pyongyang is not revealing any photos that it claimed the spacecraft took.

According to the North's official Korean Central News Agency (KCNA), leader Kim Jong-un inspected photos taken by the Malligyong-1 spy satellite as he was briefed by the National Aerospace Technology Administration on Monday and Tuesday.

KCNA said Kim observed photos showing Naval Station Norfolk, Newport News Shipyard and an airfield in Virginia taken at 11:35 p.m., Monday, and the White House and the Pentagon a minute later.

Four nuclear-powered U.S. Navy aircraft carriers and a British aircraft carrier were apparently included in the photos.

Since the launch of the Malligyong-1, the North claimed that it photographed military installations and key targets in Seoul, Pyeongtaek and other parts of South Korea, as well as U.S. military bases in Guam and Hawaii. Despite the claims, the regime has yet to reveal any photos that the satellite has taken.

The apparent spying activities triggered an angry response from the U.S.

The U.S. National Security Council said in written comments to Newsis, "We cannot independently verify such claims, but we strongly condemn North Korea's launch of space vehicles using ballistic missile technology."

The U.S. NSC added, "The door has not closed on diplomacy," and urged Pyongyang to immediately stop "its provocative actions and instead choose engagement."

South Korea also lambasted the North's military satellite launch and increasing military activities in the border area that are raising tensions on the Korean Peninsula.

On Monday night, First Deputy Director of National Security Kim Tae-hyo said in an interview with broadcaster KBS that "Seoul has a plan" to rebuild guard posts in the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) separating the two Koreas, after South Korea's military confirmed that the North recently restored guard posts and beefed up its military presence after declaring it was no longer bound by a 2018 inter-Korean military agreement that had banned all hostile activities against each other.

North Korea vowed last week to resume all banned military measures under the 2018 pact in response to Seoul's partial suspension of the agreement after the North's launch of the spy satellite.

In a related move, North Korean soldiers stationed in the Joint Security Area (JSA) of the DMZ have been reissued pistols, according to sources, also on Tuesday. In response, the South Korean Joint Chiefs of Staff said it has been keeping close tabs on the North's activities to take necessary steps.

But South Korean military officials are voicing doubts about the satellite's reconnaissance capabilities.

"Compared to previous attempts, it seems that the new satellite achieved its own technological progress to some extent," a military official said.

See photos on page 15

Photos

"The North claims that it photographed U.S. aircraft carriers and naval bases in Hawaii just 10 hours after the launch. That is not possible, but a proper operation of a military satellite requires months of testing, verification and correction. Given this, (the recent KCNA news reports) appear to be propaganda."

The official said that the military had analyzed the debris of a satellite that the North failed to put in orbit in May, and it had limited operational capabilities and provided very poor resolution images. "It is highly questionable whether North Korea addressed these limitations in a short period," the official added.

Shin Jong-woo, a senior researcher at the Korea Defense and Security Forum, a think tank, assumed that the

satellite would be an entry-level optical one, based on KCNA's description.

"The North said the Malligyong-1 photographed four aircraft carriers in Naval Station Norfolk. Considering the size of an aircraft carrier, which is equivalent to three or four football fields, failing to observe such a large object doesn't even qualify as an optical satellite," Shin said. "Frankly speaking, you can find those photos on Google Earth."

"Nowadays, commercial satellites are capable of identifying whether it is a passenger vehicle or a truck, and even what type of vehicle it is. A military satellite has to be more accurate. It should be able to photograph a certain region 24/7 under any weather condition, with equipment such as synthetic aperture radars and electro-optical infrared telescopes."

Shin said it is too early to tell whether the Malligyong-1 is a proper

military satellite, but the real concern for Seoul and Washington is the potential progress when Russia provides technological support.

"Even if the Malligyong-1 is an entry-level optical satellite, it is functioning as a satellite in orbit, meaning North Korea is learning technologies for controlling and maneuvering a satellite in outer space," he said.

"If Moscow provides optical devices or other technological assistance, it is possible for the North to achieve swift progress in its war capabilities."

Against that backdrop, the South Korean military is also beefing up efforts to launch a military reconnaissance satellite.

According to the Ministry of National Defense, South Korea will launch its first domestically-built reconnaissance satellite on Dec. 2, two days later than initially planned, due to weather conditions at the launch site.