

Top Military Leader: We've Underestimated North Korea's Nuclear Program

Chief of Staff of the U.S. Army Gen. Mark Milley sounded the alarm about North Korea and its nuclear weapons ambitions Thursday during a speech to the National Press Club in Washington, D.C.

In addressing a host of global challenges and threats during the hour-long speech, Milley said he considers North Korea the "single most dangerous threat" facing the U.S. and the world. He called Kim Jong-un's nuclear weapons program a near-term very significant threat, and one that has been previously underestimated.

"I don't want to go into a tremendous amount of detail on it; much of it is classified," he said. "But it is clear, based on what happened over the July Fourth weekend, that North Korea has advanced significantly and quicker than many had expected. Their intercontinental ballistic missile capability that could possibly strike the United States—more to follow, but the time has shortened significantly, and North Korea is a significant threat."

The general's comments were likely alluding to a Defense Intelligence Agency assessment that North Korea would be able to field a nuclear-capable ICBM by next year, which is substantially earlier than previously thought. That assessment isn't going over well with some Obama-administration holdovers in the federal government, but even they have had to concede the Hermit Kingdom is advancing further and faster in its efforts to field a nuclear weapon capable of reaching the continental U.S.

Milley, a member of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said U.S.

policy “for many, many decades now” was that North Korea would not be allowed to possess nuclear weapons, nor nuclear weapons capable of reaching the U.S. On both accounts, those policy goals have been met with failure.

“We’re trying a wide variety of methods in the diplomatic and economic spheres,” he said. “We—the military—fully support those. We want those to succeed. There is still time left for that to succeed.

“This is the pressure campaign that you read about in the media, and we are fully in support of the Secretary of State and Department of State and their efforts to bring this to a peaceful resolution.

“However, time is running out a bit. So North Korea is extremely dangerous. It gets more dangerous as the weeks go by. So, we’ll see on that one.”

Trump administration officials warned on Tuesday that another missile test by North Korea was imminent. Following the July 4 test, Pyongyang announced it had perfected a missile capable of carrying a nuclear warhead, and the atmospheric re-entry means to strike specific targets in the U.S. Pentagon officials question whether the latter statement is accurate, but have been forced to concede North Korean missiles now have the range to strike American soil.