

US lawmakers add to North Korea criticism

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WASHINGTON— Top US lawmakers have joined in criticizing North Korea after it launched a long-range rocket Sunday, dubbing the test a "provocation" and calling on regional powerbrokers to condemn it.

"North Korea's launch of a Taepodong missile is a provocative act that calls for a stern, unified response from the members of the six party talks on the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula," Senator John Kerry said in a statement.

The former presidential candidate and head of the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations also urged North Korea to abandon its rocket program, believed by many in the West to be cover for a missile system capable of carrying nuclear warheads.

"North Korea's leaders have yet to realize that the only way for them to achieve genuine security is to abandon their pursuit of weapons of mass destruction."

That message was echoed by Kerry's homologue in the House of Representatives Howard Berman, who also called on the United Nations to act.

"Since the launch violates UN Security Council resolution 1718, I urge the Security Council to take strong and concerted action to demonstrate that," Berman said.

"Pyongyang's actions are unacceptable," he added.

North Korea has faced broad international condemnation since the test, thought to be of a Taepodong-2 missile, with an estimated range of 4,100 miles (6,700 kilometers) -- long enough to reach the US state of Alaska.

China, a key member of the six-party denuclearization talks which also include Japan, both Koreas, Russia and the United States, has urged restraint in the face of the launch, but has not publicly condemned it.

Washington and its allies have taken the matter of the rocket launch to the UN Security Council, which was due to meet later Sunday to discuss a response.

Experts say China, North Korea's close ally, and Russia are expected to veto any move to impose sanctions on the secretive communist regime.