

Articles on the US-North Korea crisis (VII) - Dogs barking

Sunday 8 October 2017, by [BORGER Julian](#), [McCURRY Justin](#), [PENGELLY Martin](#), [PILKINGTON Ed](#), [Press Agencies](#), [Reuters](#), [SIDDIQUI Sabrina](#), [The Guardian](#) (Date first published: 7 October 2017).

Contents

- [Trump says 'only one thing](#)
- [North Korea plans to test](#)
- [Trump says Rex Tillerson \(...\)](#)
- [Rex Tillerson: US has direct](#)
- ['Sound of a dog barking'](#)
- [Why are North Korea's leaders](#)
- [North Korea's foreign minister](#)

Trump says 'only one thing will work' with nuclear-armed North Korea

Donald Trump on Saturday said “only one thing will work” in dealing with North Korea, after previous administrations had talked to Pyongyang without results.

- *President says Pyongyang 'making fools of US negotiators' for 25 years*
- Trump refuses to elaborate and criticises secretary of state again

“Presidents and their administrations have been talking to North Korea for 25 years, agreements made and massive amounts of money paid,” Trump wrote on Twitter. “Hasn’t worked, agreements violated before the ink was dry, making fools of US negotiators. Sorry, but only one thing will work!”

Trump did not make clear to what he was referring. Amid rising tension and exchanges of insults with the nuclear-armed regime of Kim Jong-un, Trump has previously said the US will destroy North Korea if necessary to protect itself and its allies.

Later on Saturday, Trump spoke to reporters at the White House before he left for a fundraiser in South Carolina. Asked to clarify his cryptic “calm before the storm” remark earlier this week, which was made to reporters ushered into a dinner with military leaders, he said: “Nothing to clarify.”

Trump also repeated that he and the secretary of state, Rex Tillerson, had “a very good relationship”. Tillerson has been the target of criticism from the president about his attempts to talk to North Korea and to engage China to rein in Pyongyang.

Tillerson could be tougher, Trump said. He did not elaborate on what that meant.

It was reported this week that in a session with Trump’s national security team and cabinet officials at the Pentagon this summer, Tillerson openly criticized the president and called him a “fucking moron” [1].

At a press conference on Wednesday, Tillerson said he had never considered resigning and was committed to Trump's agenda, but failed to address whether he had referred to the president as a "moron", as NBC reported [2].

On Saturday Trump said again that the reports of the "moron" remark, which reportedly made him furious and led to staff efforts to control the controversy [3], were "fake news".

He also said his chief of staff, the retired general John F Kelly, was "one of the best people I've ever worked with", was "doing an incredible job" and would "be here in my opinion for the entire remaining seven years".

Kelly, the former homeland security secretary who replaced the fired chief of staff Reince Priebus in July, has been reported to be exasperated with the continuing ructions within the Trump White House.

Guardian staff and agencies

* The Guardian. Saturday 7 October 2017 23.47 BST Last modified on Sunday 8 October 2017 08.53 BST:

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/oct/07/donald-trump-nuclear-north-korea>

North Korea plans to test missile it thinks can reach US west coast, Russian official says

North Korea is preparing to test a long-range missile which it believes can reach the west coast of the United States, according to a Russian lawmaker who has just returned from a visit to Pyongyang.

Anton Morozov, a member of the Russian lower house of parliament's international affairs committee, and two other Russian lawmakers visited Pyongyang on October 2-6, Russia's RIA news agency reported.

"They are preparing for new tests of a long-range missile. They even gave us mathematical calculations that they believe prove that their missile can hit the west coast of the United States," Morozov said on Friday, according to RIA.

"As far as we understand, they intend to launch one more long-range missile in the near future. And in general, their mood is rather belligerent."

Morozov's comments drove up the price of US treasury bonds, as investors worried about the prospect of new North Korean missile tests moved into assets the market views as a safe haven in times of uncertainty.

Reuters was not able to independently verify Morozov's account, and he did not specify which North Korean officials had given him the information about the planned test.

In Washington, a US official said that there had been indications that North Korea could be

preparing for a missile test on or around 10 October, the anniversary of the founding of the ruling Korean Workers party.

The official, speaking on condition of anonymity, did not disclose the type of missile that could be tested and cautioned that North Korea in the past has not staged launches despite indications that it would.

A senior CIA analyst, speaking at a conference in Washington this week, said the North Korean government likely would stage some kind of provocation on 10 October but did not elaborate on what form it might take.

"There is a clarity of purpose in what [North Korean leader] Kim Jong-un is doing. I don't think he's done," said Yong Suk-lee, the deputy assistant director of the CIA's Korea Mission Center, which was set up this year.

"In fact, I told my own staff [that] October 10th is the Korean Workers party founding day. That's Tuesday in North Korea, but Monday - the Columbus Day holiday - in the United States. So stand by your phones."

Morozov's delegation had "high-level" meetings in Pyongyang, RIA news agency said, citing the Russian embassy in the North Korean capital.

Tensions over North Korea's nuclear programme have been running high in the past several weeks since Pyongyang staged a series of missile tests, and conducted a test explosion on 3 September of what it said was a hydrogen bomb.

There has also been an exchange of tough rhetoric between Pyongyang and Washington.

Donald Trump threatened to "totally destroy" North Korea if it threatens the United States. North Korean leader Kim Jong Un responded by calling Trump deranged and saying he would pay dearly for his threat.

Morozov is a member of the LDPR, a rightwing populist party. It casts itself as an opposition party, but hews close to the Kremlin line on matters of international affairs.

Describing meetings with North Korean officials, Morozov said they "displayed serious determination and bellicose rhetoric", RIA reported.

"The situation, of course, demands the swiftest intervention of all interested states, particularly those represented in the region, in order to prevent wide-scale military action," the agency quoted him as saying.

Russia has closer relations with Pyongyang than many other world powers, linked in part to Kim Il-sung, the founder of North Korea and the current leader's grand-father, having lived for a time in the Soviet Union.

Vladimir Putin has joined other world powers in condemning North Korea's weapons programme, but has taken a softer line than western governments.

Putin has said that Pyongyang will not be cowed into giving up its weapons programme. He has accused Washington of trying to effect regime change in North Korea, and predicted that would unleash chaos.

US treasury prices surged on the report of a possible new missile test, pulling yields lower, as investors cut risk out of their portfolios and sought the safety of Treasuries. Treasury prices move inversely to their yields.

Reuters in Moscow

* Friday 6 October 2017 19.49 BST Last modified on Friday 6 October 2017 20.06 BST:
<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/oct/06/north-korea-missile-test-us-west-coast>

Trump says Rex Tillerson 'wasting his time' with North Korea negotiations

US officials attempt to strike unified tone after president's Twitter outburst threatens to undermine Rex Tillerson's position during crucial Beijing visit.

US officials have attempted to play down Donald Trump's opposition to the possibility of talks with North Korea, saying the president and his secretary of state, Rex Tillerson, were in agreement on how to deal with the regime.

A day after Tillerson said the US had direct lines of communication to North Korea and was "probing" to find ways to resolve escalating nuclear tension between the two countries, Trump tweeted that his top diplomat should "save his energy" as "we'll do what has to be done!"

"I told Rex Tillerson, our wonderful secretary of state, that he is wasting his time trying to negotiate with Little Rocket Man," the president wrote, from his golf club in Bedminster, New Jersey, and using the nickname he has adopted for North Korean leader Kim Jong-un.

Later on a Sunday afternoon Trump was scheduled to spend at the Presidents Cup golf tournament, at Liberty National in New Jersey, he added: "Being nice to Rocket Man hasn't worked in 25 years, why would it work now? Clinton failed, Bush failed, and Obama failed. I won't fail."

But a state department spokeswoman, Heather Nauert, and Tillerson's chief public affairs adviser, R C Hammond, later used Twitter to deny that Washington was sending out mixed messages to the regime, and to other countries in the region.

"DPRK will not obtain a nuclear capability," Nauert wrote, using the country's official title, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. "Whether through diplomacy or force is up to the regime, she continued, "Diplomatic channels are open for -KimJongUn for now. They won't be open forever @StateDept @potus."

Hammond, meanwhile, said Trump's tweets were not a rebuke to Tillerson but were intended to send a message to Kim that time was running out for a diplomatic solution.

"Channels have been open for months. They've been unused and cooling for months," he said. "The president just sent a clear message to NK: show up at the diplomatic table before the invitation gets cold," he added in another tweet.

"Message to Rex? Try message to Pyongyang: step up to the diplomatic table."

One senior Trump administration official played down the significance of the communication channels, which include Washington and Pyongyang's UN missions, regular exchanges between senior diplomats, and unofficial discussions between North Korean officials and former US officials.

"At a time when North Korea is continuing its provocations, the president does not think now is the time to negotiate with them," the official said, speaking on condition of anonymity.

The official also said diplomatic channels between Washington and Pyongyang were designed to secure the return of Americans detained by North Korea.

The latest presidential Twitter outburst threatened not only to further escalate the North Korea crisis, but to undermine the nation's top diplomat at a highly sensitive moment. Tillerson was speaking in Beijing, where he met the Chinese president, Xi Jinping.

Bonnie Glaser, a senior adviser for Asia at Washington's Centre for Strategic and International Studies, said she saw some method in Trump's messaging. "I do think that when he sometimes will tweet things like: 'Negotiations are a waste of time, we have to move to the possibility of war', he is trying to help build some leverage for diplomacy. Ultimately there is really no solution other than diplomacy. I think even Trump knows that."

Glaser said she believed such tweets were deliberately "aimed at scaring the North Koreans and scaring the Chinese also".

"We know that the Chinese don't want war on the peninsula. The last thing they want is the US to use military force. So when he threatens that he is basically trying to bolster the prospects for alternatives [by] trying to scare the Chinese.

"I can't say whether [the tweeted threats] are effective with North Korea, but they are not likely effective with the Chinese," Glaser added. "The Chinese are more likely to cooperate with a US president that is consistent, predictable and reliable."

Tensions between Washington and Pyongyang have grown as North Korea has tested missiles and a nuclear device, part of its aim to develop a nuclear weapon that could reach the US mainland. Several missiles fired have flown over Japan and Pyongyang threatened to test a hydrogen bomb over the Pacific ocean.

Trump has responded with taunts and threats, through social media and in speeches including his debut last month at the United Nations in New York which was greeted among diplomats with alarm.

Tough sanctions on North Korea have been imposed through the UN and the US has promised to deploy "strategic military assets" near the Korean peninsula.

North Korea's foreign minister said the country would "shoot down United States strategic bombers even when they are not inside the airspace border of our country". Ri Yong-ho also said at the UN it was "inevitable" that his country would fire missiles at the US mainland, and said Trump had declared war.

Trump's latest diatribe adds to a growing list of vexations for Tillerson, the former CEO of ExxonMobil who only took the job of US secretary of state after his wife told him to. Early in the job Tillerson's choice of deputy, former diplomat Elliott Abrams, was vetoed by the president and there have been reports that Tillerson has been frustrated by the lion-sized influence over foreign policy exerted by Trump's son-in-law Jared Kushner.

Over the summer there was even speculation about a Tillerson departure, dubbed "Rexit".

To have the US president publicly slap down a major strategic statement by the country's top diplomat just 24 hours after it was made carries its own form of humiliation. On Saturday, Tillerson told reporters in China that a channel was open with the North Korean regime.

"We are probing, so stay tuned. We ask: 'Would you like to talk?'" The former oil executive then said the US had "a couple of, three channels open to Pyongyang".

"We can talk to them. We do talk to them," Tillerson said, although he also said "we haven't even gotten" as far as establishing a dialogue.

In a statement, the state department's Nauert said: "North Korean officials have shown no indication that they are interested in or are ready for talks regarding denuclearization."

"I think the whole situation's a bit overheated right now," Tillerson said. "I think everyone would like for it to calm down. Obviously it would help if North Korea would stop firing off missiles. That'd calm things down a lot."

On Sunday, a morning he spent stoking broiling controversies over NFL anthem protests and his reaction to a natural disaster in Puerto Rico, the president appeared to disregard such advice.

Tillerson met President Xi on Saturday, saying in opening remarks that relations between the two countries would "grow and mature on the strength of the relationship between yourself and President Trump".

Trump is expected to visit Beijing in November.

Critical response to Trump's Twitter storm was quick to come. Ted Lieu, a Democratic member of Congress from California, said that when the president undercuts his secretary of state, "it not only embarrasses Rex Tillerson, it confuses Americans & world leaders".

Richard Painter, a former chief ethics lawyer in the George W Bush White House, went further, warning: "If President Kennedy had acted this way during the Cuban missile crisis, we would all be dead."

Trump has previously kept the door open to possible talks with North Korea. In a meeting with the Japanese prime minister, Shinzō Abe, and the South Korean president, Moon Jae-in, on the sidelines of the UN general assembly last month, Trump responded "Why not?" when asked if talks were possible.

Martin Pengelly and Ed Pilkington in New York, **Tom Phillips** in Beijing and **Justin McCurry** in Tokyo

* Monday 2 October 2017 03.22 BST First published on Sunday 1 October 2017 16.41 BST:
<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/oct/01/donald-trump-rex-tillerson-north-korea-time-wasting>

Rex Tillerson: US has direct lines of communication with North Korea

Secretary of state says Washington is interested in dialogue.

The United States is exploring whether North Korea is interested in dialogue and has multiple direct channels of communication with Pyongyang, the US secretary of state, Rex Tillerson, said on Saturday.

The disclosure came as Tillerson expressed hope for reducing tensions with North Korea, which is fast advancing toward its goal of developing a nuclear-tipped missile capable of hitting the US mainland.

Donald Trump has said he will never allow that to happen.

"We are probing, so stay tuned," Tillerson told a small group of reporters during a trip to China, Reuters reported. "We ask: 'Would you like to talk?'"

He then said the United States had "a couple of, three channels open to Pyongyang".

"We can talk to them. We do talk to them," he said, without elaborating.

Tillerson's remarks followed a day of meetings in Beijing, which has been alarmed by recent exchanges of war-like threats and personal insults between the North Korean leader, Kim Jong-un, and Trump.

"I think the whole situation's a bit overheated right now," Tillerson said. "I think everyone would like for it to calm down. "Obviously it would help if North Korea would stop firing off missiles. That'd calm things down a lot."

South Korean officials have voiced concerns that North Korea could conduct more provocative acts near the anniversary of the founding of its communist party on 10 October, or possibly when China holds its Communist party congress on 18 October.

Trump has been pressing for tougher measures on Pyongyang from China, the North's chief trading partner and source of aid and diplomatic support. Although adamantly opposed to steps that could bring down Kim's regime, Beijing appears increasingly willing to tighten the screws on Pyongyang, and agreed to tough new United Nations sanctions that would substantially cut foreign revenue for the isolated North.

Tillerson reiterated on Saturday that the US would not recognize North Korea as a nuclear power, but said it also had no intention of overthrowing Kim's regime.

In opening remarks at his meeting with Xi, Tillerson said relations between the sides continue to "grow and mature on the strength of the relationship between yourself and President Trump", the Associated Press reported. "And we look forward to advancing that relationship at the upcoming summit," Tillerson said, referring to Trump's first state visit to Beijing expected in November.

Saying he had "a good working relationship and personal friendship" with Trump, Xi said the president's upcoming visit offered "an important opportunity for the further development of China-US relations." The exchange, he said, would be a "special, wonderful and successful one".

Earlier, Tillerson told top Chinese foreign policy adviser Yang Jiechi that a strong relationship between Trump and Xi boded well for dealing with political and economic differences between the two countries.

"Our two presidents have developed a very regular and close working relationship," Tillerson said.

Agencies

* The Guardian. Saturday 30 September 2017 16.12 BST Last modified on Monday 2 October 2017 12.15 BST:

<https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2017/sep/30/rex-tillerson-us-north-korea-direct-communication>

‘Sound of a dog barking’: North Korea ridicules Trump threat

North Korea’s foreign minister, Ri Yong-ho, responds to Donald Trump calling Kim Jong-un ‘rocket man’.

North Korea’s foreign minister, Ri Yong-ho, has issued a withering riposte to Donald Trump, likening his threat to destroy the regime to the “sound of a dog barking”, adding that he “felt sorry” for the US president’s advisers.

In his first speech to the UN general assembly, Trump said on Tuesday the US would be forced to “totally destroy” North Korea if Washington was forced to defend itself or its allies against the country’s missiles.

Referring to the North Korean leader, Kim Jong-un, by a nickname he gave him in a tweet last weekend, Trump said to the visible dismay of some in the hall: “Rocket man is on a suicide mission for himself and his regime.”

Speaking to reporters outside his hotel after arriving in New York on Wednesday, Ri cited a Korean proverb when asked to respond to Trump’s vow to destroy his country.

“There is a saying that the marching goes on even when dogs bark,” Ri said, according to South Korea’s Yonhap news agency.

“If he was thinking he could scare us with the sound of a dog barking, that’s really a dog dream,” he added. In Korean, a dog dream is one that makes little sense.

Asked what he thought of Trump’s description of Kim as rocket man, Ri replied: “I feel sorry for his aides.”

Trump’s confrontational speech came after months of rising tensions on the Korean peninsula, culminating in Pyongyang’s sixth, and biggest, nuclear test and the launch of two ballistic missiles over northern Japan.

As the US and North Korea traded verbal barbs, Washington’s allies in the region risked angering China by dismissing the prospect of dialogue with the regime.

Japan’s prime minister, Shinzo Abe, told the UN general assembly that previous talks had come to nothing and called for a global blockade that would deny North Korea access to “goods, funds, people and technology” for its missile and nuclear programmes.

Repeating his support for Washington's position that all options, including military action, remained on the table, Abe said pressure in the form of sanctions was preferable to negotiation.

"We must make North Korea abandon all nuclear and ballistic missile programmes in a complete, verifiable and irreversible manner. What is needed to do is not dialogue, but pressure," said Abe, who devoted his entire speech to North Korea.

Warning that time was running out for a solution to the North Korean crisis, Abe said the failure of a 1994 agreement between the North and the US to freeze Pyongyang's nuclear programme, and the stalling of six-party talks almost a decade ago, were proof the regime would not respond to dialogue.

North Korea had "no intention whatsoever of abandoning its nuclear or missile development," he said. "For North Korea, dialogue was instead the best means of deceiving us and buying time. In what hope of success are we now repeating the very same failure a third time?"

While China has voiced anger at North Korea's volley of missile tests in recent months, it fears the consequences of regime collapse in Pyongyang and has repeatedly called for a negotiated solution, with its foreign minister, Wang Yi, urging an end to the "current deepening vicious cycle".

But even South Korea's liberal president, Moon Jae-in, appears to have abandoned, for now, the idea of engaging his country's neighbour after its nuclear test earlier this month.

Moon's office said he welcomed Trump's "firm" speech to the UN. "It clearly showed how seriously the United States government views North Korea's nuclear programme as the president spent an unusual amount of time discussing the issue," the presidential Blue House said in a statement.

Trump's speech "reaffirmed that North Korea should be made to realise denuclearisation is the only way to the future through utmost sanctions and pressure", it added.

Justin McCurry in Tokyo

* The Guardian. Thursday 21 September 2017 04.36 BST Last modified on Thursday 21 September 2017 16.59 BST:

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/sep/21/sound-of-a-dog-barking-north-korea-ridicules-trump-threat>

Why are North Korea's leaders specifically threatening US bombers?

In response to Trump, Ri Yong-ho threatened to 'shoot down strategic bombers', showing fear of US bombardment and a potential for wider conflict.

After weeks of tension over North Korea's pursuit of a nuclear capability, the latest verbal exchanges between Washington and Pyongyang evoke a time, more than six decades ago, when the regime was at the mercy of conventional weapons.

Every North Korean schoolchild is taught, erroneously, that the US started the Korean war; but they also learn, correctly, that their nemesis was responsible for laying waste to dozens of towns and cities from the air during the 1950-53 conflict, a fact rarely reported in the US media at the time.

The carpet-bombing of North Korea has been all but forgotten in the US, but not in North Korea, where the regime exploits every opportunity to remind its people – in schools and museums, and via the state media – that the US is still the aggressor.

Donald Trump reinforced that narrative this week when, having heard the North's foreign minister, Ri Yong-ho, make a highly provocative speech at the UN general assembly, he tweeted: "If he echoes thoughts of Little Rocket Man, they won't be around much longer!"

Ri said Trump's words amounted to a "declaration of war" before piling more pressure on the US president.

"Since the United States declared war on our country, we will have every right to make countermeasures, including the right to shoot down United States strategic bombers even when they are not inside the airspace border of our country," he said.

It is not the first time the North has accused the US and its allies of declaring war. In fact, given that the Korean war ended with an armistice, but not a peace treaty, the two countries have been technically at war for the past 64 years.

In 2013, North Korea said it and South Korea were in a "state of war" following international condemnation of its nuclear test. Three years later, it said US sanctions targeting Kim Jong-un and other senior officials were tantamount to a declaration of war.

But Ri's explicit threat to shoot US warplanes out of the sky was telling. Not only did it open up frightening new possibilities for a miscalculation that leads to wider conflict; it also exposed a visceral fear of US air bombardment – greater, perhaps, than the fear of nuclear annihilation.

In a show of force last weekend, US B1-B Lancer bombers from Andersen air force base on Guam, along with F-15C Eagle fighter escorts from the southern Japanese island of Okinawa flew off the east coast of North Korea.

US bombers have carried out similar flights before – B1-B planes flew in the region as recently as last month – but the Pentagon was at pains to remind Pyongyang that this was the furthest north of the demilitarised zone separating the two Koreas that any US fighter or bomber has flown this century.

It did not take North Korea long to respond. On Monday, South Korea's Yonhap news agency reported that the regime had started moving planes and boosting defences on its east coast following the B-1B sorties.

While the bombers are no longer part of the US nuclear force, they can be loaded with large numbers of conventional weapons – a capability that will not have been lost on North Koreans old enough to remember the Korean war.

North Korea started the conflict when it sent almost a quarter of a million of its soldiers across the 38th parallel and into the South at dawn on 25 June 1950.

But, as Bruce Cumings notes in his book *The Korean War: A History*: "What hardly any Americans know or remember, however, is that we carpet-bombed the North for three years with next to no concern for civilian casualties."

Blaine Harden, author of *The Great Leader and the Fighter Pilot*, said North Korean targets were "mostly easy pickings" for US B-29s bombers that faced little or no opposition from the ground.

In an op-ed for the Washington Post, Harden cited Dean Rusk, a supporter of the war who went on to become secretary of state in the 1960s, as saying that the US had bombed “everything that moved in North Korea, every brick standing on top of another”.

Curtis LeMay, head of the US air force strategic air command during the conflict, would later boast that the US bombing campaign killed about 20% of the population. “We went over there and fought the war and eventually burned down every town in North Korea,” he said.

Cumings said that the public intent was to erode enemy morale and end the war sooner, “but the interior intent was to destroy Korean society down to the individual constituent”.

According to US air force estimates, the bombings caused more damage to North Korea’s urban centres than that seen in Germany or Japan during the second world war, with the US dumping 635,000 tons of bombs on Korea compared with 503,000 tons during the entire Pacific war.

“It is clear that for the North Korean regime and its military-first ideology, the devastation wrought by the Korean war looms large in their memory and mythology,” Daryl Kimball, executive director of the Arms Control Association in Washington, told the *Guardian*.

Despite the White House’s dismissal of Ri’s war declaration claim as “absurd”, his reference to US bombers betrays North Korean fears of a pre-emptive strike – and of what demonstrations of air power may preface for Kim’s leadership.

“The B1-B flights are a fairly regular feature of US ‘signaling’ to our allies that we stand ready to come to their defence,” Kimball added. “But they are also seen as a threat by North Korea’s military leaders because they would very likely be part of a first wave of retaliation in a conflict, or part of a ‘decapitation’ strike on leadership targets.”

Justin McCurry in Tokyo

* Tuesday 26 September 2017 15.32 BST Last modified on Tuesday 26 September 2017 17.38 BST:
<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/sep/26/why-are-north-koreas-leaders-specifically-threatening-us-bombers>

North Korea’s foreign minister: Trump has declared war on our country

Ri Yong-ho says in response to Donald Trump’s comments North Korea has ‘every right to make counter-measures’, including shooting down US bombers.

North Korea has threatened to shoot down US bombers in international airspace, claiming that, with a weekend tweet, Donald Trump had declared war.

The North Korean foreign minister Ri Yong-ho said: “The whole world should clearly remember it was the US who first declared war on our country.” He referred in particular to Trump’s tweet on Sunday that warned that the regime’s leaders “won’t be around much longer”.

In his first address to the UN last Tuesday, Trump had also warned that if the US and its allies were attacked, he would “totally destroy” North Korea. Ri said the UN and the international community

had hoped that the war of words between the two countries would not turn into “real action”.

“However, last weekend Trump claimed that our leadership won’t be around much longer, and hence at last he declared war on our country,” Ri said, speaking to journalists through an interpreter outside the UN general assembly in New York. “Given the fact that this came from someone who holds the seat of the US presidency, this is clearly a declaration of war.”

Ri added: “Since the United States declared war on our country, we will have every right to make counter-measures, including the right to shoot down United States strategic bombers even when they are not yet inside the airspace border of our country.

“The question of who won’t be around much longer will be answered then.

The US denied it had declared war but warned it had military options if North Korea does take further “provocative” actions.

“Frankly, the suggestion of that is absurd,” said White House press secretary Sarah Huckabee Sanders.

“Our goal is still the same: we continue to seek the peaceful denuclearization of the Korean peninsula,” she said. “That’s our focus – doing that through both the most maximum economic and diplomatic pressures as possible at this point.”

Katrina Adams, a spokeswoman for the state department, said “The United States has not ‘declared war’ on North Korea. We continue to seek a peaceful denuclearization of the Korean peninsula. No nation has the right to fire on other nations’ aircraft or ships in international airspace or waters.”

Meanwhile, the Pentagon said it had the right to fly sorties off the North Korean coast and would continue to do so. Col Robert Manning, a defence department spokesman said that the US had weighed military options in confronting the threat from North Korea.

“If North Korea does not stop their provocative actions ... we will make sure that we provide options to the president to deal with North Korea,” Manning said.

Ri’s threat came after a week in which tensions between the US and North Korea escalated rapidly, with an exchange of insults between Trump and Kim Jong-un, the North Korean dictator, and which culminated in Trump’s Sunday tweet and a sortie by US B-1B heavy bombers escorted by fighter planes off the North Korean coast – the first time this century that US warplanes have flown north of the demilitarized zone that has separated North and South Korea since the 1950-53 war.

The US and North Korea have remained at war ever since, formally speaking. There was no peace treaty, and a UN armistice has remained in force since 1953.

North Korea claims its national airspace as more than 50 miles off its coast, while the US recognizes only the international norm of 12 nautical miles. It is not clear how close Saturday’s flight came to the North Korean coast.

Nor is it entirely clear whether Pyongyang’s anti-aircraft missiles could shoot down a US bomber. Its KN-06 missiles have an estimated range of nearly 100 miles, but it is not known whether it has the means to target and hit an offshore target.

“It is easier to prevent penetration than strike an aircraft that is offshore. The US military will be calibrating how and where it flies,” said Adam Mount, a senior fellow at the Centre for American

Progress. "It will be tough to take shots, but we can't assume that they would fail."

"It's difficult to respond to a nuclear test - but if a US aircraft is shot at, there is a straightforward response, and many will want to shoot back at the missile site," Mount added. "So a conventional provocation is even more dangerous."

This is not the first time the Pyongyang regime has accused the US of declaring war, and it has previously shot down US aircraft, a navy surveillance plane in 1969, killing 31 servicemen, and an army helicopter in 1994, killing a pilot.

However, experts and officials say the risks of all out war are now substantially greater. North Korea, officially known as the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK), has developed and tested a nuclear warhead, probably a hydrogen bomb, and long range missiles, while the leaders of both countries have made the confrontation between their two countries, a personal test of strength.

Vipin Narang, an expert on the Korean peninsula showdown at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology said that the Pyongyang regime "really hates the B-1B flights. They're clearly making the regime nervous about a surprise attack. This is how war by miscalculation starts."

"Yesterday's flight went further north than any this century, though still in international airspace east of DPRK," Narang said. "But Kim seems to be worried, and reasonably so, that such a flight is exactly how a surprise decapitation or counterforce strike could start. So what we intend as a 'show of strength' could easily be mistaken as a prelude to a surprise attack, forcing Kim to go preemptively."

He said: "It is unclear to me what the more aggressive shows of strength achieve - we can deter DPRK and reassure our allies in a multitude of other ways that are less risky and don't throw poison ivy all over Kim's itchy finger trigger."

The UN secretary general, António Guterres, warned that heated rhetoric could only increase the risk of confrontation.

"Fiery talk can lead to fatal misunderstandings," UN spokesman Stéphane Dujarric told reporters. "The only solution for this is a political solution."

Julian Borger and Sabrina Siddiqui in Washington

* The Guardian. Tuesday 26 September 2017 08.45 BST First published on Monday 25 September 2017 16.11 BST:

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/sep/25/north-koreas-foreign-minister-says-trump-has-declared-war-on-country>

Footnotes

[1] <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2017/oct/04/rex-tillerson-trump-moron>

[2] <http://www.msnbc.com/all-in/watch/tillerson-called-trump-a-moron-and-almost-resigned-1062653507566>

[3] <https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/white-house/tillerson-summoned-white-house-amid-presidential-fury-n808216>