

As USS Carl Vinson aircraft carrier steams to waters off the Korean Peninsula, China warns against “an irreversible route” to war

Saturday 15 April 2017, by [Al Jazeera](#), [BORGER Julian](#), [Di PAOLO Jon](#), [McCURRY Justin](#), [McINTYRE Niamh](#), [PHILLIPS Tom](#) (Date first published: 14 April 2017).

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China urges US and North Korea to avoid irreversible route to war

Pyongyang feared to be preparing sixth nuclear test as foreign minister says country is ready to go to war with 'aggressive' US.

China has warned that conflict could break out “at any moment” over North Korea amid fears Pyongyang is preparing to launch a sixth nuclear test or more missiles in defiance of UN sanctions and stark warnings from the US.

China's Foreign Minister Wang Yi urged the US and North Korea to take steps to prevent the situation on the Korean peninsula from going down “an irreversible route”.

He said: “We call on all parties to refrain from provoking and threatening each other, whether in words or actions, and not to let the situation get to an irreversible and unmanageable stage,” Xinhua, China's official news agency reported

“If a war occurs, the result is a situation in which everybody loses and there can be no winner. It is not the one who espouses harsher rhetoric or raises a bigger fist that will win.”

Earlier, North Korea's vice foreign minister blamed President Donald Trump for escalating tensions through his tweets and expansion of military exercises, saying the US was becoming “more vicious and more aggressive” under his leadership than it had been under President Barack Obama.

“We will go to war if they choose,” Han Song Ryol told the Associated Press.

“Whatever comes from US politicians, if their words are designed to overthrow the DPRK system and government, we will categorically reject them,” he said.

He also said that despite demands from China to suspend weapons tests, North Korea would continue to build its nuclear arsenal in “quantity” and “quality”.

The US has sent an aircraft carrier to waters off the peninsula and is conducting its biggest-ever

joint military exercises with South Korea.

Donald J. Trump @realDonaldTrump

I have great confidence that China will properly deal with North Korea. If they are unable to do so, the U.S., with its allies, will! U.S.A.

3:08 PM - 13 Apr 2017

China may also have deployed as many as 150,000 troops to the North Korea border on Sunday, as part of these exercises.

Pyongyang, meanwhile, recently launched a ballistic missile, and some experts say it could conduct another nuclear test at virtually any time.

At the end of last month US monitoring group 38 North claimed satellite images showed the regime was very close to carrying out a nuclear test, while foreign journalists in the region were warned to prepare for an "important event" ahead of North Korea's biggest national holiday this Saturday.

The "Day of the Sun" commemorates the birth of Kim Il-Sung, the founder and president of North Korea, who adopted 'Il-Sung' (of the Sun) as one of his names during guerrilla campaigns in the 1930s.

US Vice President Mike Pence will also travel to South Korea on Sunday, in a signal of commitment to defending the country from North Korean aggression.

The White House said the purpose of the trip was to "consult with the Republic of Korea on North Korea's efforts to advance its ballistic missile and its nuclear program".

Jean H Lee, a Fellow at the Wilson Center and the first American journalist granted extensive access on the ground in North Korea, told *The Independent*: "This type of rhetoric is routine for this time of year - but that said, we have a couple of new factors. One is obviously President Trump, and the unpredictability of his statements and actions has created an unusually volatile situation."

The pace of North Korea's development of nuclear weapons is of chief concern - they have certainly been ramping up the testing.

"Every time Pyongyang tests, they get closer to developing the technology they would need to put a nuclear weapon on a course to strike the US.

"Another major concern is the aircraft carrier strike group in Korean waters. Everyone has their gun poised, and if somebody makes a move it could erupt into a deadly conflict. It has happened in the past, and the last few days have shown us that the Korean War not over."

Ms Lee also said she thought sanctions against North Korea would be a more effective course of action to pursue.

"Threatening to consider all options, including a pre-emptive military strike is, of course, inflammatory. We'll have to wait and see whether this is the right approach.

"North Korea is actually benefiting greatly from this stand off - as it plays into their desire to appear to be perceived as a 'strong country'," she added.

Jon di Paolo, Niamh McIntyre

* The Independent. Friday 14 April 2017 21:06 BST:

<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/asia/kim-jong-un-kim-jong-il-atomic-bomb-test-missile-firing-launch-weapon-trump-a7683401.html>

China urges North Korea and US to step back from brink of war

Chinese foreign minister Wang Yi says the region faced a precarious situation in which conflict could break out at any moment

China has urged the US and North Korea to step back from the brink of a potentially catastrophic conflict after Pyongyang warned it would not “keep its arms crossed” in the event of a pre-emptive strike.

Speaking in Beijing on Friday, the Chinese foreign minister, Wang Yi, told reporters the region faced a “precarious situation” in which “one has the feeling that a conflict could break out at any moment”.

He made his plea before an anticipated sixth North Korean nuclear test on Saturday to mark the birth of the country’s founder, Kim Il-sung [1].

“We call on all parties to refrain from provoking and threatening each other, whether in words or actions, and not to let the situation get to an irreversible and unmanageable stage,” Wang said, according to Xinhua [2], China’s official news agency.

“If a war occurs, the result is a situation in which everybody loses and there can be no winner. It is not the one who espouses harsher rhetoric or raises a bigger fist that will win.”

North Korea’s vice-foreign minister, Han Song-ryol, earlier warned it would not “keep its arms crossed” in the event of a pre-emptive US strike and would conduct a nuclear test when it saw fit.

Han told the Associated Press in an interview in Pyongyang that Donald Trump’s “aggressive” tweets aimed at the regime were “causing trouble”, adding that the mounting crisis on the peninsula was locked in a “vicious cycle”.

Experts believe Pyongyang could defy Trump by carrying out a missile launch or nuclear test to coincide with the so-called Day of the Sun on 15 April, commemorating the birth of the country’s founder. Satellite imagery has revealed signs of preparations for a possible nuclear test in a new tunnel complex at the Punggye-ri military site.

Scores of foreign reporters have been allowed into Pyongyang to cover celebrations to mark the 105th anniversary of Kim Il-sung’s birth, but they have not been granted access to military-related areas. Some North Korea specialists played down expectations of a test, however, saying the regime was more likely to use the military parade in Pyongyang to showcase a new long-range missile it is developing.

The US vice president, Mike Pence, is due to fly to South Korea on Sunday, in what the White House said was a show of support for its regional ally. Aides said there were contingency plans for trip in

case North Korea carries out a nuclear test.

On Thursday evening, NBC News cited intelligence officials as saying the US could carry out a pre-emptive conventional strike if it got intelligence that the North Koreans were about to test [3], but that was strongly denied by Pentagon officials.

However, administration officials repeated on Friday that military options were under active consideration in the search for containing Kim Jong-un's nuclear aspirations.

Speaking in advance of Pence's trip, a senior official said: "We've got some military options already being assessed, but we'll work that as we sit down in discussions with General Brooks, the commander there on Peninsula."

"[Kim] continues to develop this program," the official said. "He continues to launch missiles into the Sea of Japan. So with that regime it's not a matter of "if," it's "when." So we're well prepared to counter that."

Writing in the Global Times, a Communist party-controlled tabloid, one Chinese scholar urged Trump against carrying out a Syria-style bombing campaign against North Korea. "North Korea is not Syria. It may have the ability to strike South Korea and Japan with nuclear weapons," said Li Jiacheng, a fellow at Liaoning University in north-eastern China.

"If the US makes a pre-emptive strike on North Korea, Pyongyang will attack South Korea, Japan and the US forces stationed in the two countries," Li warned. "What's more, the war will not be a blitz but a protracted one, which will require a lot of energy from the countries involved."

"In the current situation, [the] possibility is still low that the US will initiate a war on the peninsula," Li added. "However, because of Trump's unpredictability, it is difficult to predict his policy toward the region."

On Thursday, Trump, who has previously accused Beijing of failing to rein in its North Korean ally, said he believed China was prepared to act. "I have great confidence that China will properly deal with North Korea. If they are unable to do so, the US, with its allies, will!" he wrote on Twitter.

However, despite signs of warming ties between the US and China, experts doubt the relationship is sufficiently sturdy for definitive collaboration on North Korea.

Steven Weber, an international relations specialist from the University of California, Berkeley, said: "If you want regime change in North Korea then you have got to have a plan for how to manage that on the other side of the collapse - and that requires a long-term collaborative relationship between the Americans and the Chinese to make sure that whatever happens, and however that reconstruction emerges, is acceptable to both sides."

"I don't think we are anywhere near a place right now where either side trusts the other to a depth that you believe that you could sustain and maintain that kind of relationship for that long a period of time."

The rise in tensions came ahead of the arrival in South Korea on Sunday of the US vice-president, Mike Pence, who will also visit Japan, Washington's other key ally in the region, early next week.

Previewing Pence's trip, a White House foreign policy adviser said: "We're going to consult with the Republic of Korea on North Korea's efforts to advance its ballistic missile and its nuclear programme."

Seoul and Tokyo are considered at greatest risk of a North Korean counterattack in the event of a pre-emptive strike by the US. On Thursday, Japan's prime minister, Shinzo Abe, warned that North Korea may be capable of attacking the country with a missile loaded with sarin nerve gas – the same substance used in a deadly attack on the Tokyo subway by a Japanese doomsday cult in 1995.

North Korea appears to have resumed the use of cold war scare tactics with the radio broadcast of indecipherable code that could be used to communicate with its spies in the South. Radio broadcasts containing a combination of mysterious random numbers were picked up in South Korea on Friday, according to Yonhap news agency.

Some experts in South Korea said the use of radio broadcasts – a common means of issuing orders to agents during the cold war – was outmoded and could instead be intended to raise tensions. The state-run Pyongyang Radio began broadcasting the messages early on Friday, with an announcer reading out a series of numbers and page numbers.

The radio announcer referred to the numbers as “review works in elementary information technology lessons of the remote education university for No 27 expedition agents”, according to Yonhap.

North Korea ended broadcasts of encrypted numbers after tensions with South Korea eased following a historic inter-Korea summit in 2000. Their resumption last June is seen as a reflection of how far relations have deteriorated.

Yonhap said Pyongyang Radio had made 32 such broadcasts since June last year, most recently last weekend. With agents based in the South now able to communicate with their handlers via the internet, the use of numbers, which they would then decipher using a reference book, appears outdated.

Justin McCurry in Tokyo, **Tom Phillips** in Beijing and **Julian Borger** in Washington

What are North Korea's nuclear capabilities?

North Korea has carried out five nuclear tests since 2006, so it unquestionably has the capacity to create some form of nuclear bomb.

To function effectively, however, the bomb needs to be small enough to fit on to a missile. Pyongyang says it has mastered “miniaturisation”, but that has never been independently verified, and some experts question the claim.

North Korea would also need a reliable delivery system for any bomb. Its proven short- and medium-range missiles could reach South Korea and Japan, but it is still working on longer-range missiles that would put the US within reach.

* The Guardian. Friday 14 April 2017 15.38 BST First published on Friday 14 April 2017 05.37 BST: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/apr/14/north-korea-blames-donald-trumps-aggression-amid-nuclear-test-crisis>

China: Military force won't halt North Korea threat

US put North Korea on notice it won't tolerate any provocation, while Pyongyang threatened a nuclear strike in response.

Military force cannot resolve tension over North Korea, China said on Thursday, while an influential Chinese newspaper urged the North to halt its nuclear programme in exchange for Chinese protection.

With a US aircraft carrier group steaming to the area and tension rising, South Korea said it believed the United States would consult it before any preemptive strike against the North.

Fears have been growing that the reclusive North could soon conduct its sixth nuclear test or more missile launches in defiance of UN sanctions and stark warnings from the United States that a policy of patience was over.

China, North Korea's sole major ally and benefactor, which nevertheless opposes its weapons programme, has called for talks leading to a peaceful resolution and the denuclearisation of the Korean peninsula.

"Military force cannot resolve the issue," Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi told reporters in Beijing. "Amid challenge there is opportunity. Amid tensions we will also find a kind of opportunity to return to talks."

While US President Donald Trump has put North Korea on notice that he would not tolerate any provocation, US officials have said his administration was focusing its strategy on tougher economic sanctions.

Trump has, however, diverted the USS Carl Vinson aircraft carrier group towards the Korean peninsula, which could take more than a week to arrive.

Wang warned that history would hold any instigator to account.

"Whoever provokes the situation, whoever continues to make trouble in this place, they will have to assume historical responsibility," Wang said.

South Korean Foreign Minister Yun Byung-se told parliament in Seoul he believed Washington would consult Seoul if it was considering a preemptive strike. The United States has about 28,500 troops in South Korea.

A Washington-based think-tank that monitors North Korea, 38 North, said satellite images on Wednesday showed activity around the North's Punggye-ri nuclear test site on the east coast that indicated it was ready for a new test.

South Korean officials said there were no new signs to indicate a test was more likely, although they also said the North appeared ready to conduct a test at any time.

An influential state-backed Chinese newspaper said the best option for North Korea and its leader, Kim Jong-un, was to give up its nuclear programme, and China would protect it if it did.

"As soon as North Korea complies with China's declared advice and suspends nuclear activities ... China will actively work to protect the security of a denuclearised North Korean nation and regime," said an editorial in the *Global Times*, which is published by the Communist party's *People's Daily*.

Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe underscored fears about threats from North Korea, telling parliament in Tokyo that Pyongyang could have the capacity to deliver missiles equipped with sarin nerve gas.

A senior Japanese diplomat said the United States was putting “maximum pressure” on North Korea to resolve issues peacefully, while putting responsibility on China to sway its old ally.

“We will watch what action China takes,” the diplomat said.

While Japan did not see a high risk of military action, it expected to be consulted by the United States if it decided to attack. North Korea has about 350 missiles that can hit Japan.

On Tuesday, North Korea warned of a nuclear attack on the United States at any sign of American aggression. The North is technically at war with the United States and South Korea after the 1950-53 Korean War ended in a truce and not a peace treaty.

The North regularly threatens to destroy both countries.

Trump and Chinese President Xi Jinping spoke by telephone on Wednesday, just days after they met in the United States for the first time, underscoring the sense of urgency about North Korea.

Trump said on Twitter his call with Xi was a “very good” discussion of the “menace of North Korea”. He said later on Wednesday the United States was prepared to tackle the crisis without China, if necessary.

Will the US try to denuclearise North Korea by force?- Inside Story

Al-Jazeera

Source: Reuters news agency

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<http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/04/china-military-force-won-halt-north-korea-threat-170413141010298.html>

Footnotes

[1] <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/apr/13/north-korea-preparing-for-nuclear-test-satellite-images-suggest>

[2] http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2017-04/14/c_136209335.htm

[3] <http://www.nbcnews.com/news/world/u-s-may-launch-strike-if-north-korea-reaches-nuclear-n746366>