

The Washington Times

Trump warns North Korea: U.S. military 'ready if necessary'

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May 24, 2018

President Trump canceled his highly anticipated summit Thursday with North Korean leader Kim Jong-un and warned Pyongyang that the U.S. military is “ready if necessary” to respond to any reckless actions.

In a letter, Mr. Trump told Mr. Kim that he was canceling the summit due to North Korea’s “tremendous anger and open hostility” directed at the U.S.

“You talk about your nuclear capabilities, but ours are so massive and powerful that I pray to God they will never have to be used,” Mr. Trump wrote to the North Korean leader.

Speaking at the White House at mid-day, the president said the cancellation was “a tremendous setback for North Korea and indeed a setback for the world.”

He warned North Korea that he has already spoken to U.S. military leaders and to allies Japan and South Korea, and that beefed-up U.S. forces are “ready if necessary” to confront any “foolish” actions by Pyongyang.

“Hopefully positive things will be taking place,” Mr. Trump said. “But if they don’t, we are more ready than we have ever been before.”

In a comment directed at Mr. Kim, the president said “I am waiting” for him to reach out.

Mr. Trump said of the possibility of further negotiations, “Nobody should be anxious. We have to get it right. I really believe Kim Jong-un wants to do what’s right.”

The summit had been thrown into doubt in recent days due to increasingly hostile comments from North Korean officials. On Wednesday night, a top North Korean diplomat warned that the U.S. could face a “nuclear-to-nuclear showdown” if the administration didn’t give Pyongyang more respect.

A White House official said those comments by North Korea’s vice minister of foreign affairs “definitely were not helpful.”

Mr. Trump told Mr. Kim in the letter that he had been “very much looking forward to being there with you” in Singapore.

“Sadly, based on the tremendous anger and open hostility displayed in your most recent statement, I feel it is inappropriate, at this time, to have this long-planned meeting,” the president said. “Therefore, please let this letter serve to represent that the Singapore Summit, for the good of both parties, but to the detriment of the world, will not take place.”

Mr. Trump said the collapse of the summit was “a truly sad moment in history.”

“The world, and North Korea in particular, has lost a great opportunity for lasting peace and great prosperity and wealth,” the president wrote.

In his televised remarks, Mr. Trump said officials in South Korea and Japan have pledged to help defray the costs of any U.S. military action taken against North Korea.

“They are not only ready should foolish or reckless acts be taken by North Korea, but they are willing to shoulder much of the cost of any financial burden...by the United States in operations if such an unfortunate situation is forced upon us,” the president said. “We will never, ever compromise the safety and security of the United States of America.”

The president’s letter to Mr. Kim came within hours of North Korea carrying out what it said was the demolition of its nuclear test site and pledging to work toward “global disarmament.”

The developments capped a whirlwind series of high-level, secretive negotiations that had seemed poised to lower tensions between the two countries which had been escalating since early in Mr. Trump’s presidency. Throughout 2017, North Korea conducted a series of ominous missile tests and warned they were capable of striking the U.S., as both leaders traded personal insults.

Just two weeks ago, momentum for the summit appeared to be on the upswing as North Korea released three American captives, who returned to Washington with Secretary of State Mike Pompeo to fanfare. Mr. Trump said the gesture showed great promise that the talks with Mr. Kim would produce results.

“I felt a wonderful dialogue was building up between you and me, and ultimately, it is only that dialogue that matters,” Mr. Trump told Mr. Kim. “Someday, I look very much forward to meeting you. In the meantime I want to thank you for the release of the hostages who are now home with their families. That was a beautiful gesture and was very much appreciated.”

The North Korean vice minister of foreign affairs complained Wednesday night that the U.S. had been portraying the summit as something that North Korea requested. She said the U.S. actually sought the meeting. Mr. Trump said it didn’t matter either way.

“We were informed that the meeting was requested by North Korea, but that to us is totally irrelevant,” the president told Mr. Kim. “if you change your mind having to do with this most important summit, please do not hesitate to call me or write.”

Mr. Pompeo, testifying Thursday to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, called the cancellation of the summit “a little bit of a setback.”

He said the U.S. has tried repeatedly in recent days to connect with North Korea on logistical issues related to the planned meeting.

“We had received no response to our inquiries,” Mr. Pompeo said.

Republican lawmakers reacted to the summit’s cancellation by saying the U.S. now must keep up its campaign of economic sanctions against North Korea. A White House official said the so-called “maximum pressure campaign” will “absolutely” continue.

House Speaker Paul D. Ryan said the North Korean regime “has long given ample reason to question its commitment to stability.”

“We must continue to work with our allies toward a peaceful resolution, but that will require a much greater degree of seriousness from the Kim regime,” the Wisconsin Republican said in a statement. “At the same time, Congress has provided significant tools to hold North Korea accountable, and it is important that the United States not relent in this maximum pressure campaign.”

Sen. Tom Cotton, a member of the Senate Intelligence and Armed Services committees, applauded Mr. Trump’s decision.

“North Korea has a long history of demanding concessions merely to negotiate,” said the Arkansas Republican. “While past administrations of both parties have fallen for this ruse, I commend the president for seeing through Kim Jong-un’s fraud. As I have long said, our maximum-pressure campaign on North Korea must continue.”

Sen. Ben Sasse, Nebraska Republican and a member of the Senate Armed Services Committee, called Mr. Kim “a murderous despot and habitual liar.”

“The president made the right call to cancel this summit,” Mr. Sasse said. “If North Korea wants diplomacy, it should know that half-measures and spin about its nuclear program won’t cut it.”

Some national-security analysts said noted that the prospects for the summit had been crumbling for more than a week.

“Trump’s decision to back out of the summit is a better outcome than a failure of diplomacy at the summit itself,” said Eric Gomez, a specialist on East Asia defense issues at the libertarian Cato Institute. “Over the past week it became clear that Trump and Kim had wildly different expectations and demands. If they went ahead with the summit and didn’t resolve these differences, then the summit would have been a catastrophic failure, leaving both sides little room to maneuver diplomatically.”

He said there is a “good chance” that North Korea will resume ballistic missile tests soon.

“The testing moratorium was tied to ongoing diplomacy, and with the Trump-Kim summit called off the only avenue for diplomacy is inter-Korean dialogue,” he said, adding that the U.S. could become the “odd man out” if South Korea and China continue their diplomatic efforts with Pyongyang