



Va. Korean-American community reacts to possible U.S. and North Korea conflict

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The newspaper headlines outside the Newseum in downtown D.C. were like a magnet—drawing in almost anyone walking by.

The quote that got so much attention was President Trump’s warning to North Korea.

“They will be met with fire, fury, and frankly, power- the likes of which, this world has never seen before,” the president declared.

As protesters gathered outside the White House, calling for negotiation, not confrontation, others wondered about the verbal back and forth between Trump and North Korean leader Kim Jong Un.

“It’s a little scary to see,” says Kyra Kavarianian, visiting D.C. from California. “Knowing that they now have the capabilities to bomb us.”

Secretary of State Rex Tillerson was among the administration figures who tried to reassure people rattled by all the tough talk.

“I think Americans should sleep well at night,” he said. “I have no concerns about this particular rhetoric over the last few days.”

Shelby Hedgepeth, a Trump supporter from Mississippi, says she believes the president is doing the right thing.

“That’s his plan, is to not take anything,” she says. “I agree with that, I don’t think we should take anything from anyone.”

Edward Gray, from Pennsylvania, says the back-and-forth reminded him of the difficult days during the Cuban missile crisis.

“I’m worried it’s going to trigger a large war,” he says. “A lot of people will probably lose their lives.”

Concerns about the fallout from a U.S.-North Korea confrontation are especially high in the metro area’s Korean-American community, which includes an estimated 280,000 people.

“I hope there’s no war,” Paul Kim stated flatly.

Paul Kim, 46, left Seoul in his native South Korea when he was in middle school.

He has cousins there still and says they have learned to live with the threat of North Korea's military arsenal, just miles from the demilitarized zone, separating the two countries.

"Some people are afraid," he says quietly. "Somehow, it's been a long time living in this condition, so (others) are not really concerned. They always have the thought there's going to be a war."

Still, at gathering places like the Bang Ga Nae restaurant in Alexandria, Kim Jong Un is a presence, whether in the Korean-language newspapers customers read, or the big screen TV broadcasting the latest news alerts.

"I am concerned about war breaking out on the Korean Peninsula," says Young Cheon Kim, the president of the Korean American Association of Washington, through a translator.

Young Cheon Kim says she has a sister and several brothers living in South Korea.

"Are you afraid right now, for them?" she was asked. "Yes, I am concerned for my family in Korea, so I am lifting them up in prayer," she replied.

Meanwhile, Eric Gomez, a policy analyst at the CATO Institute, says he believes the U.S. needs to shift strategy--- and try to find a way to negotiate with Kim Jong Un.

"Right now, the US seems so focused on the pressure campaign, that there doesn't seem to be a release valve," he says. "That's where the danger lies. It's the miscommunication or misperception that creates an escalation that neither side wants."

Kavianian says she certainly understands how the U.S. needs to protect itself.

But she hopes cooler heads, on both sides, will prevail.

"I think need to take our egos out of it, and just sit together and actually have a conversation," she says. "Not 'I'm going to fight you, and I'm going to bomb you'."