

North Korea reminds Trump its nuclear weapons won't come cheap

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July 10, 2018

US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo went to Pyongyang to get Kim Jong-un to give up his nuclear weapons. He left with a harsh reminder that the North Korean leader expects something in return.

While US President Donald Trump's point man for nuclear talks summed up his 27 hours in the North Korean capital as "productive", the regime called the visit "regretful". No sooner had Pompeo left when Kim's media published a statement saying the US' "unilateral and gangster-like demand for denuclearisation" risked upending ties less than a month after Trump and Kim shook hands in Singapore.

The next line of the more than 1,200-word statement may have captured the central complaint: "The US side never mentioned the issue of establishing a peace regime on the Korean Peninsula, which is essential for defusing tension and preventing a war," an unidentified Foreign Ministry spokesman said.

The statement shows that Kim is willing to test Trump's patience and not bargain away his arsenal without sufficient security guarantees. The regime's belief that the weapons are needed to deter a US attack dates back nearly 70 years to the still-unresolved Korean War, and will take more than a handshake to dispel.

'Better Relationship'

"The president and high-ranking officials have been talking about this very quick timeline and are focused on the nuclear issue only, and not on the broader situation," said Eric Gomez, a foreign policy analyst at the Cato Institute in Washington. "Realistically, the only way you get to a denuclearised North Korea is if it has a better

relationship with the US." That's why the vague 1 1/2 page agreement Kim signed with Trump on June 12 called for establishing a new relationship and a "lasting and stable peace regime". The pledge to "work toward complete denuclearisation of the Korean Peninsula" was listed third. Practically, assuaging Kim's security fears could require risky choices for the US and its North Asian allies, such as rolling back America's nuclear umbrella or pulling back its troops in South Korea. The desire for a broader security realignment explains why Kim agreed to "denuclearisation" and not disarmament.

Trump has already faced criticism for being too quick to make security concessions to Kim, including his unilateral suspension of military exercises with South Korea. The North Korean

statement indicated such gestures hadn't gone far enough, saying the US moves were "highly reversible" and left its military force intact "without scraping even a rifle."

'Good Faith'

The statement included a personal appeal to the US president: "We still cherish our good faith in President Trump," it said.

"Their statement is typical North Korean negotiating style," Duyeon Kim, a visiting fellow at the Korean Peninsula Future Forum in Seoul, said in an email. "The administration should press on with talks and expect more stumbling blocks along the way, but it must be careful that nuclear talks aren't held hostage to peace talks."

South Korea's so-called peace stocks — a group of companies that stand to benefit from increased economic ties with North Korea — slumped yesterday. Hyundai Elevator Co, the largest shareholder of the operator of Mount Geumgan resort in North Korea, tumbled 12% as of 1:36pm in Seoul yesterday, while Namhae Chemical Corp, Hyundai Rotem Co and Hyundai Engineering & Construction Co, fell, as well.

Pompeo was under increased pressure to show progress after reports that Kim expanded his nuclear weapons production in the run up the Singapore summit. The discoveries have further undercut Trump's assertion that North Korea was "no longer a nuclear threat". The regime is estimated to have as many as 60 nuclear bombs, plus missiles that can reach the US.

In Tokyo on Sunday, Pompeo rejected the suggestion the two sides were far apart, describing North Korean officials as more receptive to US demands behind closed doors. "When we spoke to them about the scope of denuclearisation, they did not push back," he said