

Tillerson calls on North Korea to engage in US talks



Tillerson has been accused of ‘wasting his time’ in trying to negotiate with North Korea by US President Donald Trump [Jonathan Ernst/Reuters]

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US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson has said that the United States is willing to talk to North Korean leader Kim Jong-un without “precondition”.

Tillerson, speaking on Tuesday at the Atlantic Council in Washington, DC, stated the US “cannot accept” a nuclear-armed North Korea but called on the two countries to begin a dialogue.

“We’re ready to talk anytime North Korea would like to talk, and we’re ready to have the first meeting without precondition,” he said.

“It’s not realistic to say we’re only going to talk if you come to the table ready to give up your [nuclear weapons] programme.”

Tillerson added that North Korea has “too much invested” in their nuclear weapons programme and said US President Donald Trump is “realistic about that”.

Following the secretary of state’s speech, White House press secretary Sarah Sanders reiterated that Trump’s views on North Korea remain unchanged.

“North Korea is acting in an unsafe way ... North Korea’s actions are not good for anyone and certainly not good for North Korea,” she added in a statement to reporters.

Trump has been openly sceptical of diplomatic efforts to engage with Kim in recent months, saying on Twitter on October 1 that Tillerson was “wasting his time trying to negotiate with Little Rocket Man (Kim Jong-Un).”

Trump threatened to impose “major sanctions” on North Korea after the communist country test-launched its most powerful intercontinental ballistic missile yet on November 29.

The missile reached an altitude of 4,500km, with analysts estimating it could fly a distance of 13,000km - potentially giving North Korea the ability to strike any part of continental United States with its nuclear weapons.

Trump - who has previously threatened to “totally destroy” North Korea - tweeted his displeasure after a phone call with President Xi Jinping of China, Pyongyang’s increasingly perturbed, main ally.

Just spoke to President XI JINPING of China concerning the provocative actions of North Korea. Additional major sanctions will be imposed on North Korea today. This situation will be handled!

Tillerson said the US president “would like to see” China stop supplying oil to North Korea in order to drive the government in Pyongyang towards diplomatic talks.

“The last time the North Koreans came to the table, it was because China cut the

oil off," he said.

"Three days later, the North Koreans were at the table talking. And the president feels we're really at that stage. So he's putting a lot of pressure on the Chinese to do more with respect to oil."

Al Jazeera's Adrian Brown, reporting from Beijing, said diplomacy regarding issues on the Korean Peninsula is happening at "multiple levels".

"A delegation from Russia's defence ministry has arrived in Pyongyang today, and South Korea's president is in China now," he said on Wednesday.

"[The South Korean president] is here for one reason only and that's to talk about North Korea," Brown said, adding discussions will focus on "how diplomacy can be brought to bear to try and rein in" the government in Pyongyang.

"Both China and South Korea believe that diplomacy can work, they don't believe in the military option ... what has brought these two leaders together is the spectre of war on the Korean Peninsula."

The United Nations and North Korea agree that the current security situation in the Korean Peninsula is "the most tense and dangerous" in the world today, according to a statement made by Stephane Dujarric, spokesman for the UN secretary-general, on December 9.

Source: <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/12/tillerson-calls-north-korea-engage-talks-171213074758378.html>

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