

Will Threat of War with North Korea Ruin Winter Olympics? Trump Official says it might.

The U.S. may be forced to boycott the Winter Olympics if war with North Korea becomes more likely, U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations Nikki Haley suggested on Wednesday.

The games will be held in February in South Korea, only 50 miles from the demilitarized zone between the two Koreas and within easy range of North Korean missiles. As the warlike rhetoric between the U.S. and North Korea continued to rise, Haley told a television reporter that the United States' participation in Pyeongchang was an "open question."

Pressed about whether she would feel comfortable sending a family member to attend the games, Haley noted that the situation between the two countries was changing constantly.

"I think it depends on what's going on at the time in the country," Haley told Fox News reporter Martha MacCallum. "We have to watch this closely, and it's changing by the day."

The U.S. held joint military exercises with South Korea and flew a B-1B bomber over the country on Wednesday, leading North Korea to declare that the U.S. was bringing the Korean Peninsula to the brink of war. North Korea also recently tested an intercontinental ballistic missile that experts said could reach anywhere in the U.S.

The escalating tensions have put a damper on the Winter Games in South Korea, and organizers complained that ticket sales for the event were notably low. Experts warned that a U.S. boycott of the games could have further implications.

"I think a U.S. boycott of the 2018 Pyeongchang Olympic Games is not warranted and is one of the worst actions that could be taken at a very tense time on the Korean Peninsula," said Lisa Collins, a North Korea expert at the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington, D.C. "It would demonstrate to

North Korea that they can influence U.S. action through coercive measures.”

Collins said that the absence of U.S. athletes at the games would suggest volatility at a time when officials should be intent on remaining calm, and could undermine the relationship with key allies in the region. “[A boycott] would signal to the international community that the Korean Peninsula is less stable rather than more stable, at a time when we need a very calculated and rational approach towards North Korea.”

She continued, “South Korea would likely be very upset at even the hint of such an action, and this could cause great friction in the alliance relationship that could have consequences for years to come.”

The U.S. and South Korea typically held large joint military exercises around the first week of March, an event that irked North Korea. This year’s Winter Olympics will likely be over before the exercises begin, but some in South Korea have called for the military exercises to be canceled this year anyway.

The Olympics were the site of terrorist attacks in the past, including the massacre of 11 members of the Israeli delegation at the 1972 Summer Games in Munich, and the 2008 games in Beijing when an assailant stabbed an American businessman to death and injured his wife and their tour guide.

Haley’s comments about the Olympics came as observers wondered whether the Trump administration’s policies were making Americans a target for terrorists and extremists abroad. In the wake of the president’s controversial decision to declare Jerusalem the official capital of Israel, a move that was lambasted by leaders across the Arab world, the U.S. State Department issued security warnings to U.S. embassies and citizens traveling abroad.

“U.S. citizens are strongly encouraged to maintain a high level of vigilance and take appropriate steps to increase their security awareness when traveling,” the State Department message read.

In that context, some experts said it was more likely that attacks would be carried out against U.S. targets in response to Trump’s decision to recognize Jerusalem than a full-scale war would break out with North Korea before the Olympics.

“I’d be more concerned about staying in a Trump hotel in the Middle East than

sending athletes to S Korea for the Olympics,” tweeted Ian Bremmer, head of political risk firm the Eurasia Group.

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