

US, Japan to continue North Korea sanctions

North test-fires new type of ‘tactical weapon’

By MATTHEW LEE
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Secretary of State Mike Pompeo today rejected a North Korean demand that he be replaced as President Donald Trump’s top negotiator, as the United States and Japan vowed to continue to enforce tough sanctions on North Korea until it dismantles its nuclear weapons and ballistic missile programs.

Pompeo’s refusal to step down and the joint U.S.-Japanese pledge made at a meeting of their foreign and defense ministers at the State Department threw more uncertainty over the possible resumption of stalled denuclearization talks. The talks have been at an impasse over sanctions since Trump’s second summit with North Korean leader Kim Jong Un ended without any agreement in late February, and the North has warned it may not return to the table without immediate sanctions relief.

“Nothing changed, we’re continuing to work. I’m



North Korean leader Kim Jong Un and Secretary of State Mike Pompeo meet in Pyongyang in October 2018.

still in charge of the team,” Pompeo told reporters, insisting that he and his special envoy for North Korea Stephen Biegun would remain on the job.

“President Trump is obviously in charge of the overall effort, but it will be my team and special representative Biegun who will continue to lead the U.S. efforts to achieve what Chairman Kim committed to do,” he

said. “He’s made that commitment to President Trump multiple times, he’s made it to me personally half a dozen times and I am convinced we still have a real opportunity to achieve that outcome and our diplomatic team will continue to remain in the lead.”

Pompeo’s comments — at a news conference with acting Defense Secretary Patrick Shanahan, Japa-

nese Foreign Minister Taro Kono and Defense Minister Takeshi Iwaya — were his first response to the North Korean demand, which followed an announcement by Pyongyang on Thursday that it had tested a new tactical weapon. The test, along with the North’s criticism of Pompeo for “talking nonsense” and misrepresenting Kim’s positions, signaled a hardening stance and cast

doubt on a quick resumption of negotiations.

Pompeo, Shanahan, Kono and Iwaya all said that they would not bow to North Korea’s sanctions relief demands.

“We will continue to press North Korea to abandon all of its weapons of mass destruction, ballistic missiles and related programs and facilities,” Pompeo said, speaking on behalf of the group. “We will continue to enforce all sanctions against North Korea and encourage every country to do so.”

Kono said today’s meeting came at “a critical time to align the response to the North Korean situation,” noting that Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe will travel to the U.S. to meet Trump next week and that Trump will soon visit Japan. “Japan and the United States will continue to cooperate on full implementation of all U.N. Security Council resolutions,” he said in reference to international sanctions the world body has imposed on the North.

The U.S. is refusing to ease major sanctions until North Korea completely and verifiably dismantles its nuclear weapons and long-range ballistic missiles while

the North wants significant sanctions to be lifted before the process is completed.

Japan has also advocated a tough approach to the North in contrast to South Korea, which has pushed for a step-by-step approach that would lift some international sanctions as incentives. Pompeo has said some minor relief, including the possible easing of travel restrictions, could be considered in the short-to medium-term but that the crippling sanctions the North most wants removed will not be lifted until it fulfills what he says have been Kim’s repeated pledges to Trump to completely denuclearize.

On Thursday, North Korea said it had test-fired a new type of “tactical guided weapon,” its first such test in nearly half a year, and demanded that Pompeo be excluded from future negotiations. Although the test didn’t appear to be of a banned mid- or long-range ballistic missile that could scuttle chances of resuming the negotiations, it allowed North Korea to show its people it is pushing ahead with weapons development and reassuring hardline military officials worried that diplomacy with Washington is a sign of weakness.

WORLD IN BRIEF

Associated Press

House subpoena for Mueller report escalates investigation

WASHINGTON — The chairman of the House Judiciary Committee issued a subpoena today for special counsel’s Robert Mueller’s report as Congress escalates its investigation of President Donald Trump.

“It now falls to Congress to determine the full scope of that alleged misconduct and to decide what steps we must take going forward,” said Rep. Jerrold Nadler, D-N.Y. He expects the Justice Department to comply by May 1.

While Mueller declined to prosecute Trump on obstruction of justice, he did not exonerate the president, all but leaving the question to Congress.

Mueller’s report provides fresh evidence of Trump’s interference in the Russia investigation and challenges lawmakers to respond. The risks for both parties are clear if they duck the responsibility or prolong an inquiry that, rather than coming to a close, may be just beginning.

The committee’s top Republican, Rep. Doug Collins of Georgia, said the subpoena was “wildly overbroad” and that Trump already declined to assert executive privilege in a move of “unprecedented openness.” Collins said Nadler was rushing the process for political gain.

Storms batter South, kill 2 in Mississippi, 1 in Alabama

LEARNED, Miss. — Strong storms again roared across the South on Thursday, killing two Mississippi drivers and a woman in Alabama while leaving more than 100,000 people without power across Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana and Texas.

National Weather Service forecasters said they believe multiple tornadoes hit southwest and central Mississippi, although they won’t be sure until damage is surveyed. Heavy winds also were reported in Louisiana earlier in the day and in central Alabama as the system quickly pushed eastward. Forecasters predicted the system would push into Georgia before sunrise.

On the back side of the system, there were also reports late Thursday of high winds in southern Oklahoma.

Schools and colleges sent students home early across much of Louisiana, Mississippi and Alabama. In Jackson, state Auditor Shad White said his staff huddled in a stairway in a high-rise state office building while tornado sirens wailed, winds howled and rains poured. Spokeswoman Cathy Hayden said employees at Hinds Community College in Raymond hid in an underground bookstore storage room.

The same system produced tornadoes and hail earlier in

North Texas, the Texas Panhandle, Oklahoma and southeastern Kansas.

California couple who shackled children faces life in prison

LOS ANGELES — The desperate cry for help came from a girl who had lived in such isolation for 17 years that she didn’t know her address, the month of the year or what the word medication meant.

But after jumping out a window from the filthy home where she lived with her parents and 12 siblings, she knew enough to punch the digits 9-1-1 into a barely workable cell-phone and then began describing years of horrific abuse to a police dispatcher.

The brave girl’s call that freed her siblings — some who had been chained to their beds — led to the opposite fate for their parents, David and Louise Turpin, who face 25 years to life in prison when sentenced today.

The couple pleaded guilty in Riverside County Superior Court in February to torture and other abuse and neglect so severe it stunted their children’s growth, led to muscle wasting and left two girls unable to bear children.

Deputies were shocked by what they discovered. A 22-year-old son was chained to a bed and two girls had just been set free from their shackles. The house was covered in filth and the stench of human waste was overwhelming.

Although the couple filed paperwork with the state to homeschool their children, learning was limited. The oldest daughter only completed third grade.

Two-wave US flu season is now the longest in a decade

NEW YORK — Three months ago, this flu season was shaping up to be short and mild in the U.S. But a surprising second viral wave has made it the longest in 10 years.

This flu season has been officially going for 21 weeks, according to reports collected through last week and released today by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. That makes it among the longest seen since the government started tracking flu season duration more than 20 years ago.

Some experts likened the unusual double waves to having two different flu seasons compressed, back-to-back, into one.

“I don’t remember a season like this,” said Dr. Arnold Monto, a University of Michigan researcher who had been studying respiratory illnesses for more than 50 years.

Flu can cause a miserable, relatively mild illness in many people and a more severe illness in others. Young children and the elderly are at greatest risk from flu and its complications. Flu vaccinations are recommended annually for all but the very young.

Climate protests close London bridge; 570 arrests in 4 days

LONDON — Climate protesters are once again trying to shut down parts of London to urge residents to do more to protect the Earth from rising temperatures.

Oscar-winning actress Emma Thompson joined a rally by the Extinction Rebellion protesters in central London today. She told the demonstrators in Oxford Circus “it makes me so happy to be able to join you all and to add my voice to the young people here who have inspired a whole new movement.”

The protesters managed to keep Waterloo Bridge over the River Thames in London closed to vehicles, although a demonstration at London’s Heathrow Airport drew only a small number of people and did not affect the busy facility.

London police say more than 570 climate protesters have been arrested since the protests began four days ago.

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