

U.S. says North Korea missile test was with ICBM, tensions escalate

WASHINGTON (AP) — The United States asserted Tuesday that North Korea's latest missile launch was indeed an intercontinental ballistic missile, as the North had boasted and the U.S. and South Korea had feared. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson called it a "new escalation of the threat" to the U.S.

At the request of the U.S., Japan and South Korea, the United Nations Security Council was to hold an emergency session on Wednesday afternoon. Tillerson said that was part of a U.S. response that would include "stronger measures to hold the DPRK accountable," using an acronym for the isolated nation's formal name, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea.

"Global action is required to stop a global threat," Tillerson said. "Any country that hosts North Korean guest workers, provides any economic or military benefits, or fails to fully implement UN Security Council resolutions is aiding and abetting a dangerous regime."

He said the U.S. "will never accept a nuclear-armed North Korea."

Tillerson's statement, issued Tuesday evening as most Americans were celebrating the Fourth of July holiday, notably did not mention China, whose help the Trump administration has been aggressively seeking to press Pyongyang over its



AP Photo/Ahn Young-joon
South Korean army soldiers ride on the back of a truck during an annual exercise in Paju, near the border with North Korea, South Korea, Tuesday.

nuclear weapons program. In recent days, as the North has continued to test missiles in defiance of global pressure, President Donald Trump has started voicing doubt that Beijing is up to the task. His administration has taken steps against China's interests that suggested its patience has run short.

Tillerson's comments were the first public confirmation by the United States that the missile was indeed an ICBM, constituting a major technological advancement for the North and its most successful missile test yet.

The prime danger from the U.S. viewpoint is the prospect of North Korea pairing a nuclear warhead with an ICBM. The latest US intelligence assessment is that the North probably does not yet have that capability — putting

a small-enough nuclear warhead atop an ICBM.

Initial U.S. military assessments had been that it was an intermediate-range missile. NORAD, or the North American Aerospace Defense Command, said the missile did not pose a threat to North America.

Trump, in his initial response to the launch on Monday evening, urged China on Twitter to "put a heavy move on North Korea and end this nonsense once and for all!" But he also said it was "hard to believe" that South Korea and Japan, the two U.S. treaty allies most at risk from North Korea, would "put up with this much longer."

But China has long resisted intensifying economic pressure on neighboring North Korea, in part out of fear of the instability.

No 'specific agenda,' but Trump and Putin have lots to discuss

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump's first face-to-face meeting with Russian President Vladimir Putin on Friday will be brimming with global intrigue, but the White House says there's "no specific agenda." So in the absence of a set list of topics, what are two of the world's most famously unpredictable leaders to discuss?

Trump, who prefers to have neatly packaged achievements to pair with high-profile meetings, may be looking for some concessions from Russia to show he's delivering progress and helping restore a productive relationship between the two powers. Putin would almost surely want something in return, and there's a long list of "irritants" between the two countries that they could potentially resolve.

Ahead of the meeting, White House National Security Council and State Department officials have been reviewing possible gestures the U.S. could offer Russia as part of the meeting, a current and a former administration official said. They weren't authorized to comment publicly and requested anonymity.

Yet any outward sign of bonhomie between Trump and Putin would be immediately seized upon by the president's critics and Russia hawks eager to show he's cozying up to the Russian leader. The ongoing investigations into Russia's interference in the U.S. election and potential Trump campaign collusion won't be far from anyone's minds.

The two leaders will sit down in Hamburg, Germany, on the sidelines of a Group of 20 summit of leading rich and developing nations. Ahead of the meeting, Russian Ambassador Sergey Kislyak met Monday in Washington with the No. 3 U.S. diplomat, Thomas Shannon, to prepare. Some issues that will be discussed:

ELECTION HACKING

Trump has been reluctant to publicly and directly acknowledge Russia's role in meddling in the U.S. election, out of

apparent concern it undermines the legitimacy of his win. He's also insisted there was no collusion with him or his campaign, a conclusion that U.S. investigators have not yet reached.

U.S. officials says Russia tried to hack election systems in 21 states and to sway the election for Trump, a level of interference in the U.S. political system that security experts say represents a top-level threat that should command a forceful response from the U.S. Putin has denied all this.

There are no indications Trump plans to raise Russia's meddling at the meeting. Yet if he doesn't, it will give fuel to Trump's critics who say he's blatantly ignoring a major national security threat. It could also embolden those who say Trump is trying to cover for the Russians after benefiting from their interference.

IRRITANTS

Each side has a long list of complaints about the other that do not rise to the geopolitical level but are nonetheless impeding broader attempts to coordinate or cooperate on larger concerns. After meeting in Moscow earlier this year, Secretary of State Rex Tillerson and Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov agreed to set up a mechanism to deal with these issues the Russians describe as "irritants" and the Americans call "the smalls."

But even that effort has stalled. After the Treasury last month imposed new sanctions on Russia for its intervention in Ukraine, Moscow called off a scheduled second meeting between Thomas Shannon, the U.S. undersecretary of state for political affairs, and Sergey Ryabkov, a Russian deputy foreign minister. Shannon and Ryabkov's canceled June 23 meeting in St. Petersburg has yet to be rescheduled.

It was not clear if either Trump or Putin would seek to reopen the channel when they see each other in Hamburg, although Tillerson and other State Department officials have taken pains to stress that they remain open to a resumption of the talks.

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