

Trump: If North Korea attacks U.S., it 'will regret it fast'

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BEDMINSTER, N.J. — President Donald Trump on Friday issued fresh threats of swift and forceful retaliation against nuclear North Korea, declaring the U.S. military “locked and loaded” and warning that the communist country’s leader “will regret it fast” if he takes any action against U.S. territories or allies.

The warnings came in a cascade of unscripted statements throughout the day, each ratcheting up a rhetorical standoff between the two nuclear nations. The president appeared to draw another red line that would trigger a U.S. attack against North Korea and “big, big trouble” for its leader, Kim Jong Un. Trump’s comments, however, did not appear to be backed by significant military mobilization on either side of the Pacific, and an important, quiet diplomatic channel remained open.

“If he utters one threat in the form of an overt threat — which by the way he has been uttering for years and his family has been uttering for years — or he does anything with respect to Guam or anyplace else that’s an American territory or an American ally, he will truly regret it and he will regret it fast,” Trump told reporters at his New Jersey golf resort.

Asked if the U.S. was going to war, he said cryptically, “I think you know the answer to that.”

The compounding threats came in a week in which longstanding tensions between the countries risked abruptly boiling over. New United Nations sanctions condemning the North’s rapidly developing nuclear program drew fresh ire and threats from Pyongyang. Trump responded by vowing to rain down “fire and fury” if challenged. The North then threatened to lob missiles near Guam, a tiny U.S. territory some 2,000 miles from Pyongyang.

Tough talk aside, talks between senior U.S. and North Korean diplomats continue through a back



This combination of photos show North Korean leader Kim Jong Un on April 15 in Pyongyang, North Korea, left, and U.S. President Donald Trump in Washington on April 29.

channel previously used to negotiate the return of Americans held in North Korea.

he talks have expanded to address the deterioration of the relationship. They haven’t quelled tensions, but could be a foundation for a more diplomacy, according to U.S. officials and others briefed on the process. They weren’t authorized to discuss the confidential exchanges and spoke on condition of anonymity.

Trump on Friday sought to project military strength, only dialing back slightly throughout the day.

He began with a morning tweet: “Military solutions are now fully in place, locked and loaded, should North Korea act unwisely. Hopefully Kim Jong Un will find another path!”

He later retweeted a posting from U.S. Pacific Command that showed



U.S. soldiers fire a salute during a change of command and change of responsibility ceremony for Deputy Commander of the South Korea-U.S. Combined Force Command at Yongsan Garrison, a U.S. military base, in Seoul, South Korea, Friday.

B-1B Lancer bomber planes on Guam that “stand ready to fulfill USFK’s #FightTonight mission if called upon to do so.” Such declarations, however, don’t indicate a new, more aggressive posture. “Fight tonight” has long been the motto

of U.S. forces in South Korea to show they’re always ready for combat on the Korean Peninsula.

Trump declined to explain the boast of military readiness when asked by reporters later in the day at an event highlighting workforce development programs. He also brushed away calls for caution from world leaders, including Germany’s Angela Merkel.

“I don’t see a military solution and I don’t think it’s called for,” Merkel said Friday, declining to say whether Germany would stand with the U.S. in a military conflict with North Korea. She called on the U.N. Security Council to continue to address the crisis.

“I think escalating the rhetoric is the wrong answer,” Merkel added.

“Let her speak for Germany,” Trump said, when asked about the

comment. “Perhaps she is referring to Germany. She’s certainly not referring to the United States, that I can tell you.”

By evening, after a briefing with top advisers and standing next to his secretary of state and U.N. ambassador, Trump suggested diplomacy could yet prevail.

“Hopefully it’ll all work out,” Trump said. “Nobody loves a peaceful solution better than President Trump.”

The president said he intended to speak Friday evening with China’s President Xi Jinping, whom he has pushed to pressure North Korea to halt a nuclear weapons program that is nearing the capability of targeting the United States.

Faced with perhaps his biggest international crisis as president, Trump has responded with an abundance of swagger and a lot of words. He’s held a series of freewheeling press conferences with reporters, answering complex and delicate questions apparently off the cuff. On Friday, he veered from North Korea to comments on politics. He even suggested he would consider military action against Venezuela, puzzling his military planners.

Trump announced he planned to hold another press conference in Washington Monday.

Behind the threats, U.S. officials insist there has been no new significant movement of troops, ships, aircraft or other assets to the region other than for long scheduled military exercises with South Korea.

American and South Korean officials said the exercises would happen as planned this month. North Korea claims they’re a rehearsal for war.

As it is, the U.S. has a robust military presence in the region, including six B-1 bombers in Guam and Air Force fighter jet units in South Korea, plus other assets across the Pacific Ocean and in the skies above. Military options range from nothing to a full-on conventional assault by air, sea and ground forces. Any order by the president could be executed quickly.

BRIEFLY

Trump says he won’t rule out military response to Venezuela

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump said Friday that he wouldn’t rule out military action against Venezuela in response to the country’s descent into political chaos following President Nicolas Maduro’s power grab.

Speaking to reporters at his Bedminster, New Jersey, golf club, Trump bemoaned the country’s growing humanitarian crisis and declared that all options remain on the table — including a potential military intervention.

“We have many options for Venezuela and by the way, I’m not going to rule out a military option,” Trump volunteered, adding, “A military operation and military option is certainly something that we could pursue.”

Trump’s comment mark a serious escalation in rhetoric for the U.S., which has up until now stressed a regional approach that encourages Latin American allies to escalate pressure on the Maduro regime. Hours before Trump’s comments, a senior

administration official speaking on condition of anonymity stressed that approach while briefing reporters on Vice President Mike Pence’s upcoming trip to the region later this week.

The Trump administration has slapped a series of sanctions against Maduro and more than two dozen current and former Venezuelan officials in response to a crackdown on opposition leaders and the recent election of a constitutional assembly charged with rewriting the country’s constitution.

Tillerson says diplomats in Havana suffered ‘health attacks’

HAVANA (AP) — Secretary of State Rex Tillerson said Friday that U.S. diplomats in Havana had been the victims of “health attacks” that left them with hearing loss — the most definitive U.S. statement yet on a series of mysterious incidents that have puzzled longtime observers of U.S.-Cuban relations.

His comments came two days after the State Department issued a vaguely worded statement saying there had been “incidents

which have caused a variety of physical symptoms.” U.S. officials later revealed that American diplomats had suffered unexplained losses of hearing, and on Thursday Canada’s government said at least one Canadian diplomat in Cuba also had been treated for hearing loss.

“We hold the Cuban authorities responsible for finding out who is carrying out these health attacks on not just our diplomats but, as you’ve seen now, there are other cases with other diplomats involved,” Tillerson said in Bedminster, New Jersey, where President Donald Trump and members of his administration spoke to reporters.

In the fall of 2016, a series of U.S. diplomats began suffering unexplained losses of hearing, according to officials with knowledge of the case. Some of the diplomats’ symptoms were so severe that they were forced to cancel their tours early and return to the United States, the officials said.

The officials told The Associated Press that the hearing loss appeared to have been caused by the deliberate use of some sort of sonic device operating outside the range of audible sound.

Amateur Danish sub sinks, inventor held on murder

COPENHAGEN, Denmark (AP) — The owner of an amateur-built submarine was arrested on suspicion of murder Friday after his vessel sank off Denmark’s coast and a journalist who had joined him for what was supposed to be a short voyage was reported missing, Copenhagen police said.

Police said in a statement Friday night that the man denied killing the missing woman and reported dropping her off on a redeveloped island in Copenhagen’s harbor about 3 1/2 hours into their Thursday night trip.

The statement did not identify the submarine’s owner, Peter Madsen, 46, but the Danish inventor’s financing of the project through crowdfunding and first launch of the UC3 Nautilus in 2008 made headlines.

The 40-ton, nearly 60-foot-long vessel has been described as the largest privately built submarine of its kind.

Before his arrest, Madsen appeared on Danish television to discuss the submarine’s

sinking and his rescue. It was the journalist’s boyfriend who alerted authorities early Friday that the sub had not returned from a test run, police said.

“I am fine, but sad because Nautilus went down,” Madsen told Denmark’s TV2 channel, which aired footage of him getting off what appeared to be a private boat and giving a thumbs-up sign.

Madsen said “a minor problem with a ballast tank” — a compartment that holds water to provide stability — “turned into a major issue” that ultimately caused the submarine to sink.

“It took about 30 seconds for Nautilus to sink, and I couldn’t close any hatches or anything,” he said. “But I guess that was pretty good, because I otherwise still would have been down there.”

Swedish police said later in the day they were investigating the whereabouts of a missing woman who had been on the submarine at some point.

“Whether the woman was on board the submarine at the time of her disappearance is unclear,” police said in a statement.

The woman was a journalist writing about Madsen and his submarine. Swedish and Danish media reported.

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