

N. Korean diplomat says Trump tweet declared war

UNITED NATIONS (AP) — North Korea’s top diplomat said Monday that a weekend tweet by U.S. President Donald Trump was a “declaration of war” and North Korea has the right to retaliate by shooting down U.S. bombers, even in international airspace.

It was the latest escalation in a week of undiplomatic exchanges between North Korea and the U.S. during the U.N. General Assembly’s annual ministerial meeting.

Foreign Minister Ri Yong Ho told reporters that the United Nations and the international community have said in recent days that they didn’t want “the war of words” to turn into “real action.”

But he said that by tweeting that North Korea’s leadership led by Kim Jong Un “won’t be around much longer,” Trump “declared the war on our country.”

Under the U.N. Charter, Ri said, North Korea has the right to self-defense and “every right” to take countermeasures, “including the right to shoot down the United States strategic bombers even when they’re not yet inside the airspace border of our country.”

Hours later, the White House pushed back on Ri’s claim, saying: “We have not declared war on North Korea.” The Trump administration, referring to the tweet, stressed that the U.S. is not seeking to overthrow North Korea’s government.

U.S. Cabinet officials, particularly Secretary of State Rex Tillerson, have insisted that the U.S.-led campaign of diplomatic and economic pressure on North Korea is focused on eliminating the pariah state’s nuclear weapons program, not its totalitarian government.

But the more Trump muddies the picture, the tougher it may become to maintain cooperation with China and Russia, which seek a diplomatic solution to the nuclear crisis and not a new U.S. ally suddenly popping up on their borders. It also risks snuffing out hopes of persuading Kim’s government to enter negotiations when its survival isn’t assured.

Trump tweeted Saturday: “Just heard Foreign Minister of North Korea speak at U.N. If he echoes thoughts of Little Rocket Man, they won’t be around much longer!” Trump also used the derisive “Rocket Man” reference to Kim in his speech to the U.N. General Assembly on Sept. 19, but this time he added the word “little.”

This was not the first time North Korea has spoken about a declaration of war between the two countries. In July 2016, Pyongyang said U.S. sanctions imposed on Kim were “a declaration of war” against the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea — the country’s official name — and it made a similar statement after a new round of U.N. sanctions in December. The North Korean leader used the words again Friday.

The foreign minister’s brief statement to a throng of reporters outside his hotel before heading off in a motorcade, reportedly to return home, built on the escalating rhetoric between Kim and Trump.

“The United States has great strength and patience, but if it is forced to defend itself or its allies, we will have no choice but to totally destroy North Korea,” Trump told world leaders Sept. 19. “Rocket Man is on a suicide mission for himself and for his regime.”

Kim responded with the first-ever direct statement from a North Korean leader against a U.S. president, lobbying a string of insults at Trump.

“I will surely and definitely tame the mentally deranged U.S. dotard with fire,” he said, choosing the rarely used word “dotard,” which means an old person who is weak-minded.

Feds rush aid to Puerto Rico while Trump tweets about debt

By **MICHAEL BIESECKER**
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Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The U.S. ramped up its response Monday to the humanitarian crisis in Puerto Rico, even as President Donald Trump brought up the island’s struggles before Hurricane Maria struck — including “billions of dollars” in debt to “Wall Street and the banks which, sadly, must be dealt with.”

The Trump administration has tried to blunt criticism that its response to Hurricane Maria has fallen short of its efforts in Texas and Florida after the recent hurricanes there.

Five days after the Category 4 storm slammed into Puerto Rico, many of the more than 3.4 million U.S. citizens in the territory were still without adequate food, water and fuel. Flights off the island were infrequent, communications were spotty and roads were clogged with debris. Officials said electrical power may not be fully restored for more than a month.

Trump himself pointed out some differences between the two states and the island in a series of tweets Monday night.

“Texas & Florida are doing great but Puerto Rico, which was already suffering from broken infrastructure & massive debt, is in deep trouble.”

Trump also noted that the island’s electrical grid was already “in terrible shape.” Still, he promised, “Food, water and medical are top priorities - and doing well.”

In Washington, officials said no armada of U.S. Navy ships was headed to the island because supplies could be carried in more efficiently by plane. The Trump administration ruled out temporarily setting aside federal restrictions on foreign ships’ transportation of cargo, saying it wasn’t needed. The government had waived those rules in Florida and Texas until last week.

Though the administration said the focus on aid was strong, when two Cabinet secretaries spoke at a conference on another subject — including Energy Secretary Rick Perry, whose



La Perla resident Maritza Rosado stands inside her roofless home after Hurricane Maria, in San Juan, Puerto Rico, Monday. The island territory of more than 3 million U.S. citizens is reeling in the devastating wake of Hurricane Maria.



National Guard Soldiers arrive at Barrio Obrero in Santurce on Saturday to distribute water and food among those affected by the passage of Hurricane Maria, in San Juan, Puerto Rico.

agency is helping restore the island’s power — neither made any mention of Puerto Rico or Hurricane Maria.

Democratic lawmakers with large Puerto Rican constituencies back on the mainland characterized the response so far as too little and too slow. The confirmed toll from Maria jumped to at least 49 on Monday, including

16 dead in Puerto Rico.

“Puerto Ricans are Americans,” said Rep. Nydia Velazquez, D-N.Y., who traveled to Puerto Rico over the weekend to assess the damage. “We cannot and will not turn our backs on them.”

Trump himself was expected at the end of last week to visit Puerto Rico

and the U.S. Virgin Islands, after they had been ravaged by Hurricane Irma. But the trip was delayed after Maria set its sights on the islands.

The head of the Federal Emergency Management Agency, Brock Long, and White House homeland security adviser Tom Bossert landed in San Juan on Monday, appearing with

Puerto Rico Gov. Ricardo Rossello at a brief news briefing. Though Rossello had urgently called for more emergency assistance over the weekend, he expressed his gratitude for the help so far.

The governor said the presence of Long and Bossert was “a clear indication that the administration is committed with Puerto Rico’s recovery process.”

Long said, “We’ve got a lot of work to do. We realize that.”

Perry and Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke made no mention of Puerto Rico or the hurricane during a joint appearance before the National Petroleum Council, a business-friendly federal advisory committee. News reporters were not allowed to ask questions. Perry had traveled with Trump to Texas and Florida following hurricanes Harvey and Irma.

Energy Department crews are working in Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands, coordinating with the Puerto Rico Electric Power Authority, FEMA and a team from the New York Power Authority, among others.

Church shooting suspect charged with murder

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (AP) — The pastor shouted “Run, run, gunshots!” and congregants hid under pews or in bathrooms as a masked man armed with two guns opened fire at a Tennessee church, killing one person and wounding six before being subdued.

Burnette Chapel Church of Christ member Minerva Rosa said members were talking about the success of their yard sale the previous day when they heard gunshots Sunday outside the building in a Nashville neighborhood. The church pastor, David Spann, 60,

then shouted for everyone to run, according to a witness.

The gunman, Emanuel Kidega Samson, 25, entered the church from the back after fatally shooting a woman outside, police said. He then walked through the church silently, shooting six more people before an usher subdued him, police said. Police later recovered another pistol and a shotgun from the suspect’s vehicle.

Rosa said the reading that day had been from Luke, Chapter 8, and she recalled the part about a woman who touched Jesus and was cured of bleeding.

By the end of the shooting, she was on her knees, her dress stained with blood, putting pressure on the gunshot wound in Pastor Spann’s chest. She and others got on their phones to call 911.

Robert Engle, 22, tackled Samson and suffered injuries when he was pistol whipped. In the struggle, Samson shot himself, although it wasn’t clear if it was on purpose or an accident. Engle retrieved his own gun from his car and held him until police arrived, police said.

Samson came to the United States from Sudan in 1996 and is a legal U.S. resident.



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