

North Korea Threatens to Scuttle Talks With the U.S. and Resume Tests

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Vice Foreign Minister Choe Son-hui of North Korea, center, said in Pyongyang on Friday that Kim Jong-un had doubts about the value of continuing talks with President Trump. Eric Talmadge/Associated Press



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North Korea threatened on Friday to suspend negotiations with the Trump administration over the North's nuclear arms program and said its leader, Kim Jong-un, would soon decide whether to resume nuclear and missile tests.

Addressing diplomats and foreign correspondents at a news conference in Pyongyang, the North Korean capital, Vice Foreign Minister Choe Son-hui said that personal relations between Mr. Kim and Mr. Trump were "still good and the chemistry is mysteriously wonderful."

But she said that Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and John Bolton, Mr. Trump's national security adviser, had created an "atmosphere of hostility and mistrust" that thwarted the top leaders' negotiations in Hanoi, Vietnam, last month.

After the Hanoi meeting ended [without a deal](#), the North Korean leader had serious doubts about the merits of continuing negotiations with Mr. Trump, Ms. Choe said.

“We have neither the intention to compromise with the U.S. in any form nor much less the desire or plan to conduct this kind of negotiation,” said Ms. Choe, according to a report from Pyongyang by The Associated Press, which has a bureau there.

She also said the North might end its self-imposed moratorium on tests of nuclear weapons and long-range missiles.

“Whether to maintain this moratorium or not is the decision of our chairman of the state affairs commission,” she said, referring to Mr. Kim by one of his several leadership titles. “He will make his decision in a short period of time.”

In a briefing with reporters on Friday, Mr. Pompeo sought to lower any tensions related to Ms. Choe’s comments, framing them as nothing more than rhetorical speed bumps that tend to follow both summit meetings.

To make the point, he noted that he had been assigned a “gangsterlike” reputation by the North Koreans, but the name-calling had done nothing to hinder negotiations.

“I saw the remark that she made,” Mr. Pompeo said of Ms. Choe. “We are hopeful that we can continue to have conversations and negotiations.”

Mr. Pompeo added that Mr. Kim had made multiple promises during the Hanoi summit meeting to Mr. Trump that he would take steps to wind down his nuclear program. Despite the unpredictable messaging, he said, the administration would continue to take Mr. Kim at his word.

Mr. Bolton, for his part, told reporters at the White House that any suggestion that he and Mr. Pompeo undermined the negotiations were inaccurate, and that he had been in touch with national security officials in South Korea about the remarks.

“We’ve discussed their reaction and our reaction,” Mr. Bolton said. “I’d like to speak further within the U.S. government before we respond.”

The office of South Korea’s president, Moon Jae-in, who did much to broker the talks between the North and the United States, said it was closely monitoring the situation. “Whatever the situation, our government will try its best to help resume North Korea-U.S. negotiations,” it said in a statement.

The breakdown of the Hanoi meeting revealed a wide gap between North Korea and the United States over how to proceed with denuclearization.

North Korea insisted, as it has before, on moving in phases. In Hanoi, Mr. Kim offered to dismantle the plutonium, uranium-enrichment and other facilities at its Yongbyon

site, north of Pyongyang, and demanded that Washington in return lift crucial sanctions that have been imposed on the North since 2016.

Mr. Trump rejected the offer, demanding more substantial steps toward denuclearization. North Korea is widely believed to run at least one other uranium-enrichment plant outside Yongbyon, as well as keeping other elements of its nuclear program in secret locations around the mountainous country.

American officials have said that North Korea asked the United States at the Hanoi talks to lift five rounds of sanctions that have been imposed since 2016. But North Korean officials, including Ms. Choe on Friday, have insisted that they demanded that only those sanctions that affected their country's civilian economy be lifted.

United States officials are concerned that pulling back from major sanctions would diminish their leverage over North Korea and that the North would use any new revenues to subsidize its nuclear weapons program. United Nations sanctions imposed since 2016 have been the most punishing, banning all the North's key exports, including coal, and drastically cutting back its fuel imports.

Mr. Kim took a 65-hour train ride to meet Mr. Trump in Hanoi, and it was seen as a major embarrassment for him to [return home without badly needed sanctions relief](#).

By avoiding direct criticism of Mr. Trump and blaming the Hanoi talks' breakdown mainly on his aides, Ms. Choe appeared to signal that North Korea still hoped Mr. Trump might soften Washington's position.

But since the Hanoi talks, analysts have feared that North Korea might resume weapons tests in a bid to gain more leverage, and Ms. Choe's warnings on Friday could be a sign that North Korea is preparing to move in that direction.

"On our way back to the homeland, our chairman of the state affairs commission said, 'For what reason do we have to make this train trip again?'" Ms. Choe said on Friday, according to The A.P. "I want to make it clear that the gangsterlike stand of the U.S. will eventually put the situation in danger."

She said the United States had thrown away "a golden opportunity" in Hanoi, adding that the North was no longer interested in negotiating unless Washington changed its "political calculation."

North Korea [declared a moratorium](#) on its nuclear and long-range missile tests after flight-testing its [Hwasong-15](#) intercontinental ballistic missile in November 2017. A resumption of tests could scuttle the rapprochement between North Korea and the United States that began last year, after a series of belligerent threats from both sides during Mr. Trump's first year in office.

Mr. Trump has said that he and Mr. Kim “[fell in love](#)” at their first meeting in Singapore last June, and he has cited the North’s testing moratorium as one of his major diplomatic achievements. The Singapore meeting produced a vague agreement to transform bilateral relations, build peace and “work toward complete denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula.”

Mr. Trump has said he would be “[very disappointed](#)” if the North resumed weapons tests.

After the breakdown of the Hanoi talks, satellite-image analysts [concluded](#) that North Korea had been rebuilding a partially dismantled structure at its Tongchang-ri satellite-launching site, which the country has used to test and develop engines and other technologies for its long-range missiles.

North Korea [tested](#) what it said was a hydrogen bomb in September 2017. It also tested three long-range missiles in 2017. But outside missile experts say the North may need more tests to acquire all the technologies needed to build a reliable intercontinental ballistic missile.

Edward Wong and Katie Rogers contributed reporting.

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