

U.S. Vice President Pence Heading to Seoul, Is US Attack against North Korea “On Hold”?

By [Stephen Lendman](#)

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In-depth Report: [NORTH KOREA](#)

On Sunday, Vice President Mike Pence heads to Seoul, part of a 10-day Asia trip to include Japan, Indonesia and Australia visits. A White House statement said he'll "arrive in Seoul...on April 16," return home on April 25.

Trump launching aggression on North Korea risking nuclear war while his vice-president is in East Asia seems unlikely.

For now, he'll most likely continue tough talk, saber rattle off North Korea's coastline, pressure China and impose more sanctions. What comes later remains to be seen.

An unnamed White House foreign policy advisor said Pence will meet with South Korea officials on Pyongyang's nuclear and ballistic missile programs, arriving the day after the DPRK's Day of the Sun national holiday, commemorating Kim Il-sung's 105th birthday, the country's founder.

The White House has contingency plans in case Pence's trip coincides with Pyongyang's sixth nuclear test, the White House added without further elaboration.

According to the US official, the DPRK continues developing its nuclear and ballistic missile capabilities, expecting further tests, saying:

"With the regime, it's not a matter of if. It's when. We are well prepared to counter that," adding:

"We are fully committed to our security alliances, especially in the face of our evolving security challenges."

"And you've seen the nuclear threat of North Korea, and we'll reinforce those security alliances," suggesting a possible military response.

On Saturday, Pyongyang showcased its ICBMs during a military parade, commemorating Kim Il-sung's birthday. Seoul said they appeared to be a new type – longer than the existing KN-08 or KN-14 ICBMs.

Submarine-launched ballistic missiles (SLBMs) were publicly displayed for the first time. On State television, a male voiceover said "(t)oday's parade will provide a chance to display our powerful military might" – a clear message to Trump, the West, Seoul, Tokyo and Beijing.

Senior DPRK official Choe Ryong-hae said his country is ready to challenge any US-initiated aggression, accusing Trump of "creating a war situation" by hostile rhetoric and positioning US warships off North Korea's coastline.

"We will respond to an all-out war with an all-out war and a nuclear war with our style of a nuclear attack," he said.

On Friday, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi warned "conflict could break out at any moment." Pyongyang considers Trump "unpredictable."

Perhaps its leadership chose a saber-rattling military parade in lieu of an expected Saturday nuclear test, maybe postponed, not cancelled.

China is Pyongyang's key ally. In 1961, both countries signed the Sino-North Korean Mutual

Aid and Cooperation Friendship Treaty.

It obligates both nations to provide military and other aid if either one is attacked by a foreign power. The treaty remains in force until 2021.

Beijing wants conflict avoided for obvious reasons. It shares a border with North Korea. Hordes of refugees would seek safe haven in China if war erupts.

Nuclear war fallout would affect the entire region. South Korea and Japan want things resolved diplomatically. Everyone loses in case of war.

Trump said the North Korean problem "will be taken care of." If China doesn't help, he'll go it alone.

Pyongyang's General Staff urged Washington "to come to its senses and make a proper option for the solution (to) the problem."

Vice Foreign Minister Han Song Ryol warned "we will go to war if they choose. If the US comes with reckless military maneuvers, then we will confront it with the DPRK's preemptive strike."

China's Foreign Minister Wang Yi "call(ed) on all parties to refrain from provoking and threatening each other, whether in words or actions, and not let the situation get to an irreversible and unmanageable stage."

Putin spokesman Dmitry Peskov made similar comments. Possible Korean war with nukes should terrify everyone.

It's Trump's call. His belligerence over diplomacy is great cause for concern.

Stephen Lendman lives in Chicago. He can be reached at lendmanstephen@sbcglobal.net.

His new book as editor and contributor is titled "Flashpoint in Ukraine: How the US Drive for Hegemony Risks WW III."

<http://www.claritypress.com/LendmanIII.html>

Visit his blog site at sjlendman.blogspot.com.

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About the author:

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