

NORTH KOREA

PLANS NUCLEAR TEST

'AIMED AT US'

Sky News

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North Korea plans a nuclear test and more long-range rocket launches, aimed at what it calls its "arch-enemy", the United States.

A declaration by the National Defence Commission, said: "We do not hide that the various satellites and long-range rockets we will continue to launch, as well as the high-level nuclear test we will proceed with, are aimed at our arch-enemy the United States."

The commission, which is commanded by the country's leader Kim Jong-Un, added: "Settling accounts with the US needs to be done with force, not with words, as it regards jungle law as the rule of its survival."

The threat is seen as a direct response to the UN Security Council's decision two days ago to increase sanctions against Pyongyang in response to its long-range rocket launch last month.

It marks an escalation in North Korea's hostility towards the West.

Sky's Asia Correspondent Mark Stone said: "We know that North Korea is always defiant on this issue but what's different here is that all along North Korea claimed that these rocket launches and these nuclear tests have been peaceful."

"Now, today, in a remarkable turn, they are saying from now on their rocket launches and their nuclear tests will be aimed at the United States."

The commission statement, carried by the official Korean Central News Agency, did not mention when the test might be carried out, nor did it give explanation of the meaning of "high level".

The test would mark the country's third detonation of a nuclear device, the previous two were held in 2006 and 2009.

North Korea's foreign ministry had denounced the move on Wednesday, when it also gave the first hint that Pyongyang would react with a nuclear test, saying the country would take "physical actions" to boost its nuclear deterrent.

China, North Korea's sole major ally, was quick to urge restraint following the announcement from Pyongyang.

Foreign ministry spokesman Hong Lei hoped that North Korea would "stay calm, be discreet in words and deeds and look at the long term interest and push for the resumption of the six-party talks".

The six-party negotiations over the North's nuclear programme have long since stalled, however, China's incoming leader Xi Jinping has indicated he is keen to see them resume.

South Korea's Yonhap news agency, citing a South Korean intelligence source, reported that Pyongyang had finished technical preparations and could conduct an atomic test within days of a decision by Kim Jong-Un.

Last month, a US think-tank reached a similar conclusion based on satellite photos, suggesting the North had repaired rain damage at its nuclear test site and could conduct a detonation at two weeks' notice.

However, experts doubt North Korea has rockets capable of reaching the west coast of the US, despite reports from South Korea saying the rocket launched in December could have hit San Francisco.

The United States has condemned the threat.

"North Korea's statement is needlessly provocative," said White House spokesman Jay Carney.

He added that a nuclear test would be a significant violation of UN sanctions and would further isolate Pyongyang.

Earlier Glyn Davies, the US envoy to North Korea, said: "It is important that they heed the voice of the international community."

He said that if North Korea begins "to take concrete steps to indicate their interest in returning to diplomacy, they may find in their negotiating partners willing partners in that process."

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