

NORTH KOREA ARMY: 'WAR COULD BREAK OUT TODAY'

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North Korea Army: 'War Could Break Out Today'

The North Korean military says it has ratified a "merciless" attack against the United States, potentially involving a "cutting-edge" nuclear strike.

"The moment of explosion is approaching fast," the army said in a statement on state news agency KCNA.

War could break out "today or tomorrow", the statement said, quoting a spokesman for the General Staff of the Korean People's Army.

"The merciless operation of (our) revolutionary armed forces in this regard has been finally examined and ratified.

"The US had better ponder over the prevailing grave situation."

The North's Committee for Peaceful Reunification of Korea was later quoted by KCNA as threatening to withdraw its 53,000 workers from the joint industrial zone it shares with the South.

Pyongyang informed Seoul on Wednesday that it was stopping the daily movement of South Koreans to the Kaesong complex, the last real surviving point of contact between the two countries.

And the committee said: "If the South Korean puppets and conservative news media keep badmouthing (us), we will order all our workers to pull out from Kaesong."

North Korea's latest pronouncements came as Washington scrambled to reinforce its Pacific defences, preparing to move an advanced missile defence system to the island of Guam.

The land-based weapon, which is primed to shoot down short and medium-range missiles, will be sent to the US territory to defend its bases there.

The Pentagon has already sent bombers, stealth aircraft and ships.

South Korea's Yonhap news agency said the North had moved a mid-range Musudan missile to its east coast.

The missile is believed to have a range of 1,875 miles (3,000km) or more, which would put all of South Korea and Japan in range and possibly also the US territory of Guam in the Pacific Ocean.

North Korea is not believed to have tested these missiles, according to most independent experts

Tensions have been soaring on the Korean peninsula since the North launched a long-range rocket in December and conducted its third nuclear test in February.

North Korea has threatened missile and nuclear strikes against the US and South Korea in response to UN sanctions and joint military drills.

US Defence Secretary Chuck Hagel said on Wednesday that North Korea's "bellicose dangerous rhetoric" posed a "real and clear danger" to America and its allies South Korea and Japan.

"They have nuclear capacity now, they have missile delivery capacity now," he said.

"We take those threats seriously, we have to take those threats seriously.

"We are doing everything we can, working with the Chinese and others to defuse that situation on the peninsula.

"I hope the North will ratchet its very dangerous rhetoric down."

The tensions surrounding Kaesong - established in 2004 and a crucial source of hard currency for North Korea - carry enormous significance.

Neither of the Koreas has allowed previous crises to significantly affect the complex, which is the only surviving example of inter-Korean cooperation and seen as a bellwether for stability on the Korean peninsula.

China, the North's sole major ally, appealed for "calm" from all sides, repeating Beijing's oft-declared position.

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