

South Korea urges continued U.S.-North Korea talks despite cancellation of Pompeo trip

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South Korea's Foreign Ministry on Saturday urged Washington and Pyongyang not to walk away from the negotiating table despite the unexpected cancellation of U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo's planned trip to North Korea.

President Trump called off Pompeo's visit Friday, days before the secretary was due to arrive in Pyongyang, citing insufficient progress in the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula. The abrupt shift in Trump's public position appeared to surprise many people in Asia but did not come as a complete shock — many observers had sensed that negotiations between the two sides had stalled.

[\[Trump calls off Pompeo's North Korea visit, citing a lack of progress on denuclearization\]](#)

North Korea did not immediately react to the announcement. But South Korea sought to play down concerns.

South Korean Foreign Minister Kang Kyung-wha spoke to Pompeo by telephone Saturday and expressed regret over the cancellation of the trip while calling for continued talks on peace and North Korea's nuclear program, according to the ministry.

“Rather than reading into each and every turn in the situation, it is more important to focus diplomatic efforts on the faithful execution of what has been agreed in the United States-North Korea summit and the inter-Korean summit, while maintaining the momentum for talks on the long-term outlook,” the ministry said in a statement.

Japanese Foreign Minister Taro Kono expressed appreciation for Pompeo’s “prompt communication” of the decision by telephone and said the two countries would continue to work together to take “specific actions” to achieve the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula.

From China, though, there was silence. The only reports of Trump’s decision in state media relayed the news without commentary — and without mentioning that the president had partly blamed the Chinese government for difficulties in talks with Pyongyang.

In [tweets](#), Trump argued that because of his “tougher Trading stance,” the Chinese were not “helping with the process of denuclearization as they once were.”

“Secretary Pompeo looks forward to going to North Korea in the near future, most likely after our Trading relationship with China is resolved,” Trump tweeted. “In the meantime I would like to send my warmest regards and respect to Chairman Kim. I look forward to seeing him soon!”

Experts have said that China continues to broadly enact U.N. Security Council sanctions against North Korea but has eased up on enforcement at the border in recent months. China also has been allowing more Chinese tourists to visit North Korea this year, as relations between the two countries have improved significantly.

But Chung Min Lee, a senior fellow at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace in Washington, said that China is not responsible for the impasse between the United States and North Korea. Trump “overplayed the gains” from his Singapore summit with North Korean leader Kim Jong Un and needed someone else to blame, Lee said.

Only now does Trump realize that North Korea did not intend to give up its nuclear weapons, at least not as soon as he wanted, Lee said.

[\[North Korea has not taken steps to denuclearize, John Bolton says\]](#)

Trump is, however, right in one sense, experts said. His trade war with China has caused considerable anger in Beijing and makes it unlikely that the government

there could be persuaded to cooperate if the United States wants to return to exerting “maximum pressure” on North Korea’s economy.

“It’s difficult, what Trump is trying to do,” Lee said. “He is trying to punish China on trade. . . . At the same time, he wants China’s help.”

Cheong Seong-chang, a North Korea expert at the Sejong Institute, a government-affiliated think tank in Seoul, said Trump has the will to resolve the North Korea situation but lacks a coherent strategy.

“On his last visit to Pyongyang, Pompeo reportedly demanded a list of nuclear sites in North Korea without suggesting any plans for compensation in return,” Cheong said. “North Korea is aware that the list reveals all their cards to the U.S., and they won’t do so without any tangible promise from Washington. The demand for the timeline of denuclearization must come with the timeline for rewards.”

Cheong said the cancellation of Pompeo’s visit put the ball in the court of South Korean President Moon Jae-in, who is due to visit Pyongyang in September and could play a role in facilitating negotiations between Washington and Pyongyang.

But it could also strengthen China’s hand, with President Xi Jinping widely expected to attend Pyongyang’s Sept. 9 celebrations of the 70th anniversary of the founding of North Korea.

“If Xi can produce a meaningful agreement with Kim Jong Un on his September visit to Pyongyang, China will get a boost in the diplomacy game by taking on the role the U.S. failed to play,” Cheong said.

Park Jie-won, a former special envoy of former South Korean president Kim Dae-jung who has met North Korean leader Kim Jong Un and his late father, Kim Jong Il, also warned Trump not to walk away from dialogue.

“If this chance is missed, the future of North Korea will darken towards immense chaos. The leaders of North Korea and the U.S. should go back to Sentosa, Singapore,” he posted on his [Facebook page](#) Saturday.
