Beat: Politics

North Korea proposes talks with U.S. to ease tensions

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USPA News - North Korea on Sunday invited the U.S. government to hold high-level talks to ease tensions on the Korean Peninsula, following months of threats during which the country threatened to launch a nuclear strike against South Korea and the United States. The North`s invitation was accompanied by strong criticism of the U.S. government, but invited Washington to hold high-level talks to defuse tensions and to ensure peace and security in the region.

It comes just days after North Korea abruptly canceled government-level talks with South Korea. "If the U.S. has true intent on defusing tensions on the Korean Peninsula and ensuring peace and security in the U.S. mainland and the region, it should not raise precondition for dialogue and contact," an unnamed spokesman for the North`s National Defense Commission (NDC) said. The spokesman indicated the talks could cover a wide range of subjects and said the North would allow the U.S. to choose the date and venue to its convenience. "The talks can have broad and in-depth discussions on defusing military tensions, replacing the armistice system with peace mechanism and other issues of mutual concern, including the building of a `world without nuclear weapons` proposed by the U.S.," he said. It was not immediately clear if Washington would agree to hold talks, but U.S. National Security Council spokeswoman Caitlin Hayden said the United States is willing to have credible negotiations with North Korea. "But those talks must involve North Korea living up to its obligations to the world, including compliance with U.N. Security Council resolutions, and ultimately result in denuclearization," she said. But the North urged the United States to accept, describing their invitation as a "bold decision" with "good intention." "If the U.S. truly wants to realize a `world without nuclear weapons` and bring detente, it should positively respond to the DPRK`s bold decision and good intention, not missing the opportunity," the NDC`s spokesman said. "All the future developments entirely depend on the responsible option of the U.S., which has strained the situation on the Korean Peninsula." The spokesman said the North is seeking to abandon its nuclear program, but emphasized it depends on South Korea and the United States. "The denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula does not only mean `dismantling the nuclear weapons of the North,`" he said. "It is the complete one that calls for denuclearizing the whole peninsula including South Korea and aims at totally ending the U.S. nuclear threats to the DPRK." South Korea does not have nuclear weapons, but the U.S. government has maintained a so-called `nuclear umbrella` over the South since the Korean War. The U.S. first deployed nuclear weapons to South Korea in January 1958 and kept them there until December 1991, but the nuclear umbrella of protection remains. "It is the strategic option taken by the DPRK for self-defense to [nuclearize] the Korean Peninsula," the NDC spokesman explained. "The legitimate status of the DPRK as a nuclear weapons state will go on and on without vacillation whether others recognize it or not until the whole Korean Peninsula is denuclearized and the nuclear threats from outside are put to a final end." In March, North Korea declared the Korean War Armistice Agreement nullified and threatened to launch a preemptive nuclear strike against the United States in response to massive military exercises in the region. The U.S. responded by placing 14 additional ground-based interceptors at Fort Greely, Alaska, and Vandenberg Air Force Base, California, to counter any North Korean attack. And on March 7, the United Nations (UN) Security Council voted in favor of tough new sanctions to punish the reclusive country for its third nuclear test. The sanctions aim to significantly impede North Korea`s ability to further develop nuclear and ballistic missile programs, as well as its proliferation activities. Sanctions were first imposed on North Korea by the UN Security Council following nuclear tests in 2006 and 2009, including a ban on the import of nuclear and missile technology. The sanctions were further tightened in January 2013 after the country launched a long-range Unha-3 rocket which North Korea claimed to be a weather satellite, but other countries have described it as a long-range missile test in disguise.

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