

You'll have to do better than that, says Obama as he rejects N Korea's nuclear proposal

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Hannover: US President Barack Obama has rejected North Korea's proposal to suspend United States annual military exercises with South Korea if Washington wants Pyongyang to halt its nuclear tests.

Addressing media with German Chancellor Angela Merkel in Hannover, Obama on Sunday said that Washington isn't taking the proposal seriously and Pyongyang would "have to do better than that."

North Korea's foreign minister on Saturday said that his country is ready to halt its nuclear tests if the United States suspends its annual military exercises with South Korea,

North Korean Foreign Minister Ri Su Yong, interviewed Saturday by the AP, also defended his country's right to maintain a nuclear deterrent and warned that Pyongyang won't be cowed by international sanctions. And for those waiting for the North's regime to collapse, he had this to say: Don't hold your breath.

"Stop the nuclear war exercises in the Korean Peninsula, then we should also cease our nuclear tests," he said in his first interview Saturday with a Western news organization.

We don't take seriously a promise to simply halt until the next time they decide to do a test these kinds of activities," Obama said. "What we've said consistently ... is that if North Korea shows seriousness in denuclearizing the Korean Peninsula, then we'll be prepared to enter into some serious conversations with them about reducing tensions and our approach to protecting our allies in the region. But that's not something that happens based on a press release in the wake of a series of provocative behaviors. They're going to have to do better than that."

Obama also said that until North Korea does better, as he put it, the U.S. will continue to "emphasize our work with the Republic of Korea and Japan and our missile defense mechanisms to ensure that we're keeping the American people safe and we're keeping our allies safe."

Ri's interview with the AP came just hours after North Korea test-fired a ballistic missile from a submarine in its latest show of defiance as this year's U.S.-South Korea exercises wind down. He referred to the launch in the context of current tensions caused by the military exercises. "The escalation of this military exercise level has reached its top level. And I think it's not bad as the other side is going for the climax" why not us, too, to that level as well?"

The U.S. State Department said that in response to Saturday's launch, it was limiting the travel of Ri and his delegation to U.N. functions in New York, where they are attending a U.N. meeting on sustainable development. The U.S. noted "launches using ballistic missile technology are a clear violation of multiple U.N. Security Council resolutions."

In his interview with the AP, Ri held firm to Pyongyang's longstanding position that the U.S. drove his country to develop nuclear weapons as an act of self-defense. At the same time, he suggested that suspending the military exercises with Seoul could open the door to talks and reduced tensions.

"If we continue on this path of confrontation, this will lead to very catastrophic results, not only for the two countries but for the whole entire world as well," he said, speaking in Korean through an interpreter. "It is really crucial for the United States government to withdraw its hostile policy against the DPRK and as an expression of this stop the military exercises, war exercises, in the Korean Peninsula. Then we will respond likewise." DPRK is an abbreviation for North Korea's official name, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea.

Ri, who spoke calmly and in measured words, a contrast to the often bombastic verbiage used by the North's media, claimed the North's proposal was "very logical."

- (with AP inputs)