

North Korea warns of harsh response if UNSC approves imposition of new sanctions

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Seoul: North Korea says it will make the United States pay a heavy price if a proposal Washington is backing to impose the toughest sanctions ever on Pyongyang is approved by the UN Security Council this week.

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The North's Foreign Ministry issued a statement early today saying it is watching the United States' moves closely and threatened it is "ready and willing" to respond with measures of its own.

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Last Tuesday, the US circulated a draft resolution proposing the toughest-ever UN sanctions on North Korea, including a ban on all oil and natural gas exports to the country and a freeze on all foreign financial assets of the government and its leader, Kim Jong Un.

Security Council diplomats, who weren't authorized to speak publicly because talks have been private, said the US and China were still negotiating the text late Sunday.

Previous UN sanctions resolutions have been negotiated between the United States and China, and have taken weeks or months. But the Trump administration is demanding a vote in six days.

"The US is trying to use the DPRK's legitimate self-defensive measures as an excuse to strangle and completely suffocate it," the statement said, using the acronym for North Korea's formal name.

"Since the US is revealing its nature as a blood-thirsty beast obsessed with the wild dream of reversing the DPRK's development of the state nuclear force which has already reached the completion phase, there is no way that the DPRK is going to wait and let the U.S. feast on it."

North Korea conducted its sixth nuclear test a week ago and has been launching ballistic missiles at a record pace.

Both are violations of UN resolutions, but Pyongyang claims it must carry them out to build nuclear deterrent against what it sees as US aggression.

Undaunted by the international criticism of its test, which Pyongyang says was of a hydrogen bomb, Pyongyang celebrated through the weekend, with concerts and banquets for the country's nuclear scientists and engineers.

Blocking textile exports and cutting off the flow of oil from China would potentially be crippling measures. North Korea gets nearly all of its oil supply from China, with a much smaller amount coming from Russia or the open market.

According to a recent study by the Nautilus Institute think tank, a massive cutback in the flow of oil from China would definitely hurt the North Korean economy, and especially average citizens. But the report said the impact would likely be blunted on the military, which probably has enough fuel stockpiled to continue normal operations for the immediate future.

Russian President Vladimir Putin recently expressed doubt over whether sanctions are an effective means of getting

the North to stop its missile and nuclear testing, and China, harboring similar concerns, has repeatedly hesitated in the past to fully support US sanction plans.

German Chancellor Angela Merkel on Sunday also stressed the importance of diplomacy and offered to act as a facilitator if needed.

"If our participation in talks is wanted, I will say yes immediately," she said in an interview with the Frankfurter Allgemeine Sonntagszeitung newspaper that was published Sunday.

The five permanent members of the UN Security Council and Germany conducted long-running talks with Iran that led to a 2015 deal for international sanctions to be lifted in exchange for Tehran curbing its nuclear activities.

"I could also imagine such a format to settle the North Korea conflict," she said.

- AP