
RUSSIA SAYS NORTH KOREA IS READY FOR DIRECT NUCLEAR TALKS WITH THE US

- 08.12.2017

The Telegraph, 08 December 2017

North Korea is open to coming to the table for direct talks with the US over its nuclear ambitions, Sergei Lavrov, the Russian foreign minister, told his American counterpart Rex Tillerson on Thursday.

The message was delivered to Mr Tillerson during an international conference in the Austrian capital, Vienna, but there was no immediate response from the state department which has long insisted that North Korea be willing to denuclearise as a condition for talks.

We know that North Korea wants above all to talk to the United States about guarantees for its security. We are ready to support that, we are ready to take part in facilitating such negotiations, Mr Lavrov said at an international conference in Vienna, according to the Interfax news agency.

Mr Lavrov's apparent offer coincided with a meeting between Jeffrey Feltman, United Nations political affairs chief, and Ri Yong-ho, North Korean foreign minister, during the first UN trip to Pyongyang in six years.

The diplomatic overtures come amid heightened tension between the US and North Korea after the hermit kingdom tested its most powerful intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) to date last week, claiming that it could strike the US mainland.

America and neighbouring South Korea responded with a show of force this week, conducting their largest ever joint air force drill, involving 12,000 US service members, and F-22 Raptors and F-35 stealth fighters training close to the border with the North.

Although Washington stressed that the joint operation was a routine annual exercise, North Korea warned on Wednesday that the outbreak of war had become an established fact.

But despite its overt bellicose statements, early indications that Pyongyang may be ready for talks with Washington initially emerged after a Russian parliamentary delegation paid a visit to the North Korean leadership from November 27 to December 1.

According to the TASS news agency, Vitaly Pashin, a member of Russia's lower house, reported back that the North Koreans would be willing to go to the table with Moscow as a mediator between the two sides.

Pyongyang had complained to the Russian delegation about regular external aggression on the part of the US, using this as a justification for its latest ICBM test, he said.

The North Koreans claimed that they had refrained from military provocations for 75 days awaiting reciprocal steps from the US, which, instead of meeting [North Korea] halfway, announced large-scale surprise military drills, Mr Pashin said.

In the face of looming military confrontation, Washington has also reached out informally to Pyongyang over the past year through Joseph Yun, the US special representative for North Korea policy.

The North Koreans walked away from the so-called New York channel after US President Donald Trump threatened to totally destroy the country in a speech to the UN general assembly in September.

But they have since indicated during a meeting of western experts and officials in Stockholm in late November that they may be open to military to military communication.

Kaynak/Source: