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# EXPERTS: U.S. SHIFTS FOCUS AWAY FROM NORTH KOREA

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By Christy Lee

U.S. President Donald Trump is shifting his priorities away from North Korea in his run up to the presidential election this year, experts said, after fruitless efforts at denuclearization talks that remain deadlocked.

I suspect the administration sees little opportunity for renewed nuclear diplomacy before the 2020 election, said Robert Manning, a senior fellow at the Atlantic Council.

Trump has been reassigning U.S. officials involved in negotiations with North Korea to other posts, a move that experts think signals that his administration is putting less emphasis on denuclearization talks that failed to make a breakthrough last year.

The White House announced Tuesday that Trump has nominated Alex Wong, the deputy special representative for North Korea at the State Department, to a post at the U.N. Wong will be the alternative U.S. representative for special political affairs at the U.N. with a rank of ambassador, the White House said.

In December, Steve Biegun, who served as the State Departments special representative for North Korea since his appointment in August 2018, was confirmed as the Deputy Secretary of State. In January, Mark Lambert, who was the special envoy for North Korea, took up a role at the U.N. to contain Chinese influence at the international body. He began working at the State Department as director for Korea policy in 2015.

The reassignments of officials who have worked on North Korea, combined with Trumps silence on the subject during his State of the Union address, suggest that no further engagement with Pyongyang is planned for the rest of this presidential term, said Joshua Pollack, a North Korean expert at the Middlebury Institute of International Studies in California.

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