

# Trump cancels secretary of state's trip to North Korea one day after its announcement

By Ben McGrath  
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United States President Donald Trump on Friday canceled Secretary of State Mike Pompeo's upcoming fourth visit to North Korea next week, citing a lack of progress on Pyongyang's denuclearization. The decision coming only one day after Pompeo announced his trip highlights the unpredictability of the Trump administration and the continued ramping up of tensions in Northeast Asia, aimed primarily at China.

Trump wrote in a series of messages on Twitter, "I have asked Secretary of State Mike Pompeo not to go to North Korea, at this time, because I feel we are not making sufficient progress with respect to the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula."

The move is a seemingly abrupt about-face for Trump, who on Monday claimed that North Korea had in fact taken steps to denuclearize in an interview with Reuters, despite the apparent impasse that had been reached on the issue in recent weeks. Pyongyang, however, had previously agreed to halt nuclear and missile tests, had begun dismantling a missile test site, and had returned the remains of US soldiers.

But Washington has refused to meet any of Pyongyang's demands, including an easing of sanctions and a formal declaration ending the 1950-1953 Korean War, supposedly until Pyongyang completely denuclearizes. In the short term, the US has called for the North to hand over 60 to 70 percent of its nuclear warheads within a six-to-eight-month period. During one of Pompeo's previous trips to the North in July, the Stalinist regime denounced the secretary of state for his "gangster-like" approach to the negotiations.

In the same set of tweets canceling Pompeo's visit, Trump also denounced China, linking the growing trade war between Washington and Beijing with North Korea: "Additionally, because of our much tougher

Trading (sic) stance with China, I do not believe they are helping with the process of denuclearization as they once were."

In other words, Trump is using the canceled trip to not only apply further pressure to North Korea to bow to US demands but to force Beijing to acquiesce to US dictates on trade. Trump added that Pompeo would likely return to Pyongyang "after our Trading relationship with China is resolved."

The measures against both countries Washington has taken since Trump and North Korea's Chairman Kim Jong-un held their Singapore summit on June 12 expose the fraudulent nature of their supposed "peace talks."

Trump's agenda from the beginning was to issue Pyongyang an ultimatum: either join the US war drive against China, which would likely mean US troops on the Chinese border and even North Korea's own participation in such a war against its former ally, or the US would "totally destroy" the poverty-stricken country as Trump had previously threatened.

The US president, still attempting to drive a wedge between Pyongyang and Beijing, had nothing but warm words today for Kim, saying, "In the meantime I would like to send my warmest regards and respect to Chairman Kim. I look forward to seeing him soon!" Trump said earlier this week that a second summit with Kim would "most likely" happen.

With the US-China trade war escalating and another Chinese delegation expected to arrive in Washington in the near future, Trump is leveraging North Korea against China to gain an upper hand in the talks. However, this tactic risks a further increase in an already tense situation that could lead to military conflict. "[Conflating trade with North Korea] definitely conveys the impression that overall relations

[with China] are quite bad right now,” said David Dollar, a Brookings Institution senior fellow.

On Thursday, Washington imposed \$16 billion of tariffs on Chinese goods, on top of the \$34 billion leveled in July. Beijing responded to both sets of tariffs with reciprocal measures. If Beijing refuses to give in to the Trump administration’s demands, an additional \$200 billion of tariffs could be forthcoming, as soon as next month.

Washington has also placed additional pressure on Beijing this month by leveling three sets of unilateral sanctions against Chinese and Russian companies that have the added goal of further cutting off trade with and strangling North Korea into submission. On Tuesday, Washington announced sanctions targeting Russian ships accused of delivering oil to North Korea. This followed sanctions on Russian, Chinese, and Singaporean companies last week.

The trade war measures and sanctions are part of Trump’s reactionary “America First” policy, which not only pits Washington against adversaries like Beijing and Moscow, but longtime allies including South Korea. Last week, South Korean President Moon Jae-in proposed in a Liberation Day speech deepening economic cooperation with North Korea, aimed at exploiting the latter’s ultra-cheap labor force and at opening up new trade routes.

While the differences between the agendas of Washington and Seoul have always existed, Trump’s approach to China and North Korea is exacerbating these divisions. Moon’s speech last week, as well as the announcement of a third inter-Korean summit in September, caused some concern in the US and the decision to cancel Pompeo’s trip was also likely aimed at forcing Seoul to apply the brakes on further planned cooperation with the North.

The carrying out of South Korea’s plans would require moving towards a formal declaration ending the 1950-1953 Korean War, something Washington has refused to do despite North Korea’s continued requests for this security guarantee.

However, any sort of peace treaty would cut across the broader US goals in the region. As Joseph Yun, a former leading US State Department diplomat on North Korea, told the *New York Times* last week, “For the United States, an end-of-war declaration or a peace declaration or a peace treaty has always had a broader

context.”

A peace treaty would raise the question of why the US military and the massive amount of weaponry it commands continue to remain on the Korean Peninsula and would expose even more publicly Washington’s preparations for war against China.

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