

# Pompeo to return to North Korea for denuclearization talks despite stalled progress



Mike Pompeo, left, is seen meeting with North Korean leader Kim Jong-un in May. KCNA/Reuters

- Secretary of State Mike Pompeo will travel to North Korea at the weekend for denuclearization talks with the country's leader Kim Jong Un, the State Department said on Tuesday.
- Pompeo will also travel to Japan, South Korea and China from Oct. 6-8, and will be in North Korea on Sunday local time, or Saturday in U.S. Eastern Time.
- North Korean leader Kim Jong Un's actions have fallen short of Washington's demands for a complete inventory of its nuclear weapons and irreversible steps to give up an arsenal that potentially threatens the United States.

WASHINGTON (Reuters) - U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo will travel to North Korea at the weekend for denuclearization talks with the country's leader Kim Jong Un, the State Department said on Tuesday, calling this "forward progress," despite negative signals from Pyongyang.

Pompeo will also travel to Japan, South Korea and China from Oct. 6-8, and will be in North Korea on Sunday local time, or Saturday in U.S. Eastern Time.

"I think it shows forward progress and momentum that the secretary is making his fourth trip back in less than a year," State Department spokeswoman Heather Nauert told a briefing, referring to the Pyongyang stop.

"Of course, we have quite a ways to go but we look forward to the next steps in this conversation."

Pompeo's visit comes ahead of a planned second summit between Kim and President Donald Trump. The invitation to return to Pyongyang was made during a meeting with North Korean Foreign Minister Ri Yong Ho on the sidelines of their United Nations General Assembly last week.

Nauert said the stops in Japan, South Korea and China were intended to brief counterparts on the Pyongyang talks. She said he would meet Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and Foreign Minister Taro Kono in Tokyo and President Moon Jae-in and Foreign Minister Kang Kyung-wha in Seoul, while in Beijing he would meet counterparts to discuss "bilateral, regional and global issues."

At an unprecedented June meeting with Trump, Kim pledged to work toward denuclearization of the Korean peninsula, but his actions have fallen short of Washington's demands for a complete inventory of its nuclear weapons and irreversible steps to give up an arsenal that potentially threatens the United States.

Trump has nevertheless hailed progress and on Saturday took his enthusiasm for his detente with Kim to new heights by declaring at a rally with supporters that "we fell in love" after exchanging letters.

## **Deepening mistrust**



## **Last time Pompeo visited, Kim didn't meet with him and instead visited a potato farm. KCNA/Reuters**

Earlier that day, North Korea's Ri struck a different tone, telling the United Nations that continued U.S. sanctions were deepening Pyongyang's mistrust in the United States and there was no way the country would disarm unilaterally under such circumstances.

Ri said North Korea had taken "significant goodwill measures," such as stopping nuclear and missiles tests and dismantling a nuclear test site, but there had been no corresponding response from Washington.

North Korea has been seeking a formal end to the 1950-53 Korea War, but the United States has said Pyongyang must give up its nuclear weapons first. Washington has also resisted calls to relax tough international sanctions.

Pompeo's last trip to North Korea did not go well. He left Pyongyang in July hailing progress, only for North Korea to denounce him for making "gangster-like demands."

In a commentary on Tuesday, North Korea's official KCNA news agency said declaring the end of the 1950-53 Korean War could "never be a bargaining chip"

for denuclearization and said experts calling for North Korea to declare details of its arms programs were “spouting ... rubbish.”

Pompeo had planned to travel to North Korea in August but Trump canceled the trip at the last moment and publicly acknowledged for the first time that his efforts to get Pyongyang to denuclearize had stalled.

Nauert said she did not agree that talks had stalled and when asked if Trump’s comments on Saturday had been helpful, replied: “I think if our leaders have relatively friendly relations, that that’s a good thing. That that can only help us to achieve our final goal.”

She said that in the meantime, sanctions would remain in place.

“We are not easing the pressure in that regard at all,” she said, while responding when asked if Washington was considering any kind of peace declaration: “We are not. Nothing has changed with regard to our policy.”

Pompeo’s trip to China comes at a time of deteriorating relations and tit-for-tat tariffs sparked by Trump’s accusations of unfair Chinese trade practices. Last week, Trump accused China of seeking to meddle in the Nov. 6 U.S. congressional elections, saying it did not want his Republican Party to do well.

Reuters reported on Sunday that China had canceled a security meeting with U.S. Defense Secretary Jim Mattis planned for October.

Asked if Pompeo would attend the diplomatic side of the so-called Diplomatic and Security Dialogue, Nauert said: “The trip is, as far as I understand, to have conversations about North Korea and other issues of bilateral concern. I don’t have anything beyond that right now.”

“In any relationship you have your high points, you have your medium points and with some countries you have your low points,” she said.

“I am not going to characterize our relationship with China in any one of those three ways, but relationships can ebb and flow over time, so we certainly have a lot to talk about with the government of China.”

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