

War With North Korea Not Imminent, Officials Say, but U.S. Would Still Win

A day after President Trump threatened North Korea with “fire and fury,” his top diplomat and defense chief sent a more nuanced message on Wednesday, reinforcing the capacity of the United States to win any war while reassuring Americans that they did not think it would come to that.

Secretary of State Rex W. Tillerson, returning from a trip to Asia, said he saw no reason to believe that war was imminent despite the heated exchange of warnings between Mr. Trump and Pyongyang, emphasizing instead the possibility of a diplomatic solution to the standoff over North Korea’s efforts to build long-range nuclear weapons.

“I think Americans should sleep well at night, have no concerns about this particular rhetoric of the last few days,” Mr. Tillerson said as his plane stopped on the way back to the United States to refuel in Guam, the very island that North Korea threatened to target with an attack. He added: “Nothing I have seen and nothing I know of would indicate that the situation has dramatically changed in the last 24 hours.”

Hours later, Defense Secretary Jim Mattis issued a written statement that, while not as colorful as Mr. Trump’s comments on Tuesday, repeated the suggestion that North Korea risked “the end of its regime and the destruction of its people” if it did not “stand down” from its pursuit of nuclear weapons.

“While our State Department is making every effort to resolve this global threat through diplomatic means, it must be noted that the combined allied militaries now possess the most precise, rehearsed and robust defensive and offensive capabilities on Earth,” Mr. Mattis said. Using the initials for the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea, he added: “The D.P.R.K. regime’s actions will continue to be grossly overmatched by ours and would lose any arms race or conflict it initiates.”

The two secretaries made their comments a day after Mr. Trump warned of “fire

and fury like the world has never seen,” choosing language that neither had seen in advance. The stark words, evoking the horror of a nuclear exchange between the world’s most dominant superpower and the upstart outlaw nation, sent ripples throughout the United States and Asia.

Mr. Tillerson and Mr. Mattis were left with the task of ratcheting down some of the heat of the moment without undercutting the president. In the process, each emphasized different elements.

In speaking with reporters traveling with him, Mr. Tillerson said that the threats emanating in recent days from the North Korean government have come as a result of growing international condemnation and sanctions.

“What the president is doing is sending a strong message to North Korea in language that Kim Jong-un would understand, because he doesn’t seem to understand diplomatic language,” Mr. Tillerson said.

Mr. Tillerson continued: “I think the president just wanted to be clear to the North Korean regime that the U.S. has unquestionable ability to defend itself, will defend itself and its allies, and I think it was important that he deliver that message to avoid any miscalculation on their part.”

North Korea’s ballistic missile program has advanced remarkably during the Trump administration, with the regime testing two intercontinental ballistic missiles in recent weeks, prompting experts to warn that the nation now may have a missile capable of reaching the United States.

The Washington Post reported on Tuesday that American intelligence agencies had concluded that North Korea had miniaturized a warhead that could fit on top of one of its missiles. The Japanese government also said in an annual threat assessment on Tuesday that “it is possible that North Korea has already achieved the miniaturization of nuclear weapons and has acquired nuclear warheads.”

Source:

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