North Korea Nuclear Update: Grim Reality Behind Threats to the U.S.

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After days of unprecedented aggressive language hurled at the U.S., satellite images emerged Sunday, January 27, that appear to show how North Korea is gearing up for another nuclear test.

The pictures, taken by a U.S. research institute, show the Punggye-ri site in the north east of the country where nuclear tests were carried out in 2006 and 2009. They reveal that roads have been cleared of snow and that preparations are underway to seal a tunnel into a mountainside where a nuclear device would be detonated. Such a test would be conducted underground.

The photos, the latest of which was taken on Wednesday of last week, came from 38 North, the website of the U.S.-Korea Institute at Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies and were released to The Associated Press on Friday.

North Korea’s state-run media announced on Sunday that leader Kim Jong-un has told his leading security and foreign affairs officials to take "substantial and high-profile important state measures."

The order only heightened speculation that the highly-secretive communist regime is moving forward with its threat to explode a nuclear device in defiance of the United Nations.

The threats came after the U.N. resolution 2087 was passed last week expanding sanctions against North Korea as an "appropriate response" to the Pyongyang regime’s rocket launch on December 12, 2012.

While some analysts initially dismissed the Kim Jong-un comments as toothless angry lashings, it is clear the U.S. authorities remain anything but complacent about the situation.

On Monday, January 28, the U.S. Special Representative for North Korea Policy Glyn Davies urged North Korea to return to the international order and immediately cease the development of its nuclear capabilities.

Mr. Davies met with Japanese Foreign Ministry officials in Tokyo to discuss the implications of the nuclear test. He visited Seoul in South Korea for talks on the same subject over the weekend.

Kim Jong-un’s statements in the past few days indicate that his ultimate intention is to have the ability to target the U.S.

The Pyongyang regime has called the U.S. the “arch-enemy of the Korean people.”

The North Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) said in a statement: “We are not disguising the fact that the various satellites and long-range rockets that we will fire and the high-level nuclear test we will carry out are targeted at the United States.”

Pyongyang then turned its ire on South Korea, warning that it will take "strong physical countermeasures" against its hated neighbor if Seoul takes part in the U.N. sanctions.

*Sanctions mean war and a declaration of war against us,* the Committee for Peaceful Unification of the Fatherland
said in a statement carried by North Korea’s official Korean Central News Agency.

That, in turn, drew China into the mess. China is North Korea’s biggest trading partner and provides all of its fuel.

In a stark warning, China’s state-run media indicated that Beijing would cut aid to Pyongyang if it goes ahead with a nuclear test.

The Global Times, which is close to China’s ruling Communist Party, said in an editorial: “If North Korea engages in further nuclear tests, China will not hesitate to reduce its assistance. China hopes for a stable peninsula, but it’s not the end of the world if there’s trouble there.”

North Korea believes that launching rockets to put satellites into orbit is its sovereign right. Defending the rocket program, the regime believes, is a matter of national pride and independence.

The U.N. Security Council, however, viewed the launch as simply a cover for testing intercontinental ballistic missile technology.

Watch the video below to see the official Pentagon reaction to the North Korean threat.

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