

Amid North's aggression, South Korean President seeks talks with Kim Jong Un

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Seoul: South Korean President Moon Jae-in reiterated that he was willing to meet North Korean leader Kim Jong Un even as he condemned the North's first intercontinental ballistic missile test-launch this week as a "reckless" move that incurred punishment by the international community.

South Korean President Moon Jae-in

During a speech on Thursday ahead of the Group of 20 summit in Germany, Moon also proposed the two Koreas resume reunions of families separated by war, stop hostile activities along their heavily fortified border and cooperate on the 2018 Winter Olympics to be held in Pyeongchang, South Korea. But it's unclear that North Korea would accept any of Moon's overtures as South Korea is working with the United States and others to get the country punished for its ICBM launch Tuesday.

It's not the first time Moon has talked about a summit with Kim, but repeating that idea two days after the North's most successful missile test to date clearly indicates he prefers dialogue to applying more pressure or sanctions on the North. "The current situation where there is no contact between the relevant officials of the South and the North is highly dangerous. I am ready to meet with Chairman Kim Jong Un of North Korea at any time at any place, if the conditions are met and if it will provide an opportunity to transform the tension and confrontation on the Korean Peninsula," Moon said.

President Donald Trump Thursday said that he's considering unspecified "pretty severe things" in response to the North's ICBM launch. While a pre-emptive military strike may be among Trump's potential options, analysts say it's one of the unlikeliest because the North Korean retaliation would cause massive casualties in South Korea, particularly in Seoul, which is within easy range of North Korea's artillery.

Moon said that he and Kim could put all issues on the negotiating table including the North's nuclear program and the signing of a peace treaty to officially end the 1950-53 Korean War. An armistice that ended the war has yet to be completed with a peace treaty, leaving the Korean Peninsula in a technical state of war. Since taking office in May, Moon has been trying to improve ties with North Korea, but his efforts have produced little, with the North testing a series of newly developed missiles.

"I hope that North Korea will not cross the bridge of no return. Whether it will come out to the forum for dialogue, or whether it will kick away this opportunity of dialogue that has been made with difficulty is only a decision that North Korea can make," Moon said in Thursday's speech.

The North's ICBM launch has stoked security worries as it showed the country could eventually perfect a reliable nuclear missile capable of reaching anywhere in the United States. Analysts say the reach of the missile tested Tuesday could extend to Alaska. After the launch, Kim said that he would never put his weapons programs up for negotiation unless the United States abandons its hostile policy toward his country. Kim's statement suggested he will order more missile and nuclear tests until North Korea develops a functioning ICBM that can place the entire US within its striking distance.

In a show of force against North Korea, South Korea and the United States staged "deep strike" precision missile firing drills on Wednesday. In North Korea's capital, thousands of people rallied Thursday in Kim Il Sung square to celebrate the launch.

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