

## US should 'do its duty' to resolve North Korea nuclear crisis, not blame China

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*Core of problem is the conflict between Washington and Pyongyang, foreign ministry spokeswoman says*

Beijing said on Friday that the United States should take responsibility for resolving the North Korea nuclear crisis as the root of the problem was a conflict between Washington and Pyongyang.

"The nature of the North Korea nuclear problem is a security issue. The core of it is the conflict between the US and North Korea," Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Hua Chunying told a daily news briefing.

Her comments came just hours after North Korea fired another missile over Japan. The aggressive act prompted a statement by US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson, who singled out China and Russia as the two nations best equipped to rein in Kim Jong-un.

"China supplies North Korea with most of its oil. Russia is the largest employer of North Korean forced labour," he said. "China and Russia must indicate their intolerance for these reckless missile launches by taking direct actions of their own."

Hua, however, rebuffed the charges, saying China was not to blame for the situation on the Korean Peninsula.

"The focus of the conflict is not China. The cause of escalating tensions is not China and the key to the problem is also not China," she said.

"Parties who are directly involved should do their duty and any attempts to push away the problem is irresponsible."

Hua, however, said that China had "made tremendous sacrifices and paid a heavy price" by implementing sanctions against North Korea. China's determination and sincerity could not be doubted, she said.

Chinese experts said Hua's statement was an indication that China was not prepared to take any further action at this stage.

"China has been saying all along that more sanctions would not help the situation," Wang Sheng, a professor of Korean affairs at Jilin University in northeastern China, said.

"While the United States has been accusing China for not being strict enough in restricting North Korea economically, they can now see that North Korea won't be stopped even if China imposes more trade pressure."

The US had been pushing China to impose oil sanctions on Pyongyang, but a UN resolution endorsed on Monday was watered down, so that instead of an outright ban, China's oil supply to North Korea would be cut by 30 per cent. The latest UN sanctions also included a total ban on textile exports by the reclusive state.

Hua described the situation on the Korean Peninsula as "complicated, sensitive and severe", after North Korea once again defied global opposition to its nuclear programme by firing a missile over the northern Japanese island of Hokkaido.

According to Tokyo, the missile landed about 2,200km away in the Pacific. The US Pacific Command's initial assessment indicated it was an intermediate range ballistic missile.

The launch was the second over Japan in less than three weeks. North Korea described the previous launch, on August 29, as a prelude to it aiming a missile at the US island territory of Guam.

Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe said the country would "never tolerate" what he called North Korea's "dangerous provocative action that threatens world peace".

The United Nations' Security Council scheduled an urgent meeting later on Friday to discuss the launch.

Cai Jian, a Korean affairs expert from Fudan University in Shanghai, said he believed tensions would continue to rise and that the US would only agree to talk to North Korea once the two sides were on the brink of war.

"North Korea will not stop developing nuclear weapons because of the sanctions, as the regime now sees greater importance in increasing its bargaining power before any negotiations take place," he said.

"The firing of a second missile over Japan basically shows that North Korea could hit Guam, which it has threatened to do. So I still think it is not an option for the US to start a war when it seems North Korea's nuclear weapons are more developed than expected," he said. "Both sides will have to sit down somehow."

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