

Senators Told Situation on Korean Peninsula 'Very Grave'

In a rare "White House briefing" for all 100 members of the U.S. Senate, President Donald Trump and key members of his national security team offered a "very grave" assessment of the situation on the Korean Peninsula.

According to Bill Gertz of the *Washington Free Beacon*, the senators were told during the meeting at the Eisenhower Executive Office Building that North Korea's nuclear weapons and ballistic missile programs pose an "urgent national security threat." In addition to the president, who only made very brief introductory remarks, the senators heard from Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Marine Corps Gen. Joseph Dunford, Secretary of Defense James Mattis, Secretary of State Rex Tillerson and Director of National Intelligence Dan Coats during the hour-long gathering.

Gertz reports:

"I think it's really an expression of how seriously the president is taking this, and that he wants to engage with Congress on it," a senior administration official said of the session that has been scheduled for some time and is not a response to any particular event.

The aircraft carrier strike group led by the USS Carl Vinson is expected to arrive near the Korean peninsula in the next day, and a U.S. missile submarine also has been deployed.

The Air Force Strike Command also announced that a U.S. long-range nuclear missile was test fired from Vandenberg Air Force Base, California, on Wednesday. The command called the test of a Minuteman III intercontinental ballistic missile "an important demonstration of our nation's nuclear deterrent capability."

The deployment comes as U.S. intelligence agencies are closely watching North Korea for signs of another underground nuclear test, or a long-range missile test.

North Korea earlier this week carried out a large-scale live-fire artillery drill with some 300 to 400 artillery pieces firing into the sea.

North Korea has amassed a large percentage of its forces, including hundreds of artillery pieces along the demilitarized zone separating North and South Korea. The artillery is within range of the South Korean capital of Seoul.

[Click here](#) for the full report.

After the meeting, Mattis, Tillerson and Coats issued a joint statement. Here is the full text of their comments:

Past efforts have failed to halt North Korea's unlawful weapons programs and nuclear and ballistic missile tests. With each provocation, North Korea jeopardizes stability in Northeast Asia and poses a growing threat to our allies and the U.S. homeland.

North Korea's pursuit of nuclear weapons is an urgent national security threat and top foreign policy priority. Upon assuming office, President Trump ordered a thorough review of U.S. policy pertaining to the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK).

Today, along with Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Gen. Joe Dunford, we briefed members of Congress on the review. The president's approach aims to pressure North Korea into dismantling its nuclear, ballistic missile and proliferation programs by tightening economic sanctions and pursuing diplomatic measures with our allies and regional partners.

We are engaging responsible members of the international community to increase pressure on the DPRK in order to

convince the regime to deescalate and return to the path of dialogue. We will maintain our close coordination and cooperation with our allies, especially the Republic of Korea and Japan, as we work together to preserve stability and prosperity in the region.

The United States seeks stability and the peaceful denuclearization of the Korean peninsula. We remain open to negotiations towards that goal. However, we remain prepared to defend ourselves and our allies. {eoa}