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N Korea 'has extracted plutonium'



North Korea said in April it had begun reprocessing the fuel rods

North Korea has completed the reprocessing of spent nuclear fuel rods to extract weapons-grade plutonium, according to its official news agency.

The Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) added that "noticeable successes" had been made in turning the extracted material into weapons grade plutonium.

The statement comes one day after North Korea said it was ready for talks with the US on its nuclear programme.

It also threatened to "go its own way" if Washington refused direct talks.

Eight thousand spent fuel rods had been reprocessed, KCNA said. Analysts say this is enough plutonium to make at least one atomic bomb.

North Korea was already believed by some analysts to have enough weapons-grade plutonium for about six bombs, but had none small enough to place on a missile.

"Noticeable successes have been made in turning the extracted plutonium weapon-grade for the purpose of bolstering up the nuclear deterrent in the DPRK [North Korea]," said the KCNA statement.

'Grave insult'

The announcement is the latest move in stop-start attempts by the US and its allies to end North Korea's nuclear programme.

“ [North Korea] was compelled to take measures for bolstering up its deterrent for self-defence to cope with the increasing nuclear threat and military provocations of the hostile forces ”

Korean Central News Agency

[The nuclear fuel cycle](#)

[Q&A: North Korea nuclear row](#)

North Korea said on Monday that it was ready to return to six-party talks on rolling

back its nuclear programme if the US first agreed to hold bilateral talks.

The six parties are the two Koreas, the US, China, Japan and Russia.

The US has repeatedly said bilateral talks can be held as part of the six-party process.

The forum had reached agreement in 2007 that North Korea would shut down the Yongbyon nuclear complex in return for fuel aid and political concessions for the isolated country.

But the deal unravelled late last year amid a disagreement over how to verify North Korea's account of its atomic activity.

When North Korea's launch of a long-range rocket in April brought UN censure, Pyongyang announced it was restarting the Yongbyon reactor and would begin to reprocess the spent fuel rods.

An underground nuclear test, the second since 2006, triggered UN sanctions.

In September, the North said it had entered the final phase of enriching uranium, which would give it a second path to making nuclear weapons.

In its latest statement, KCNA said the UN censure of what it called a peaceful attempt to launch a satellite was "a grave insult to the dignity of its people".

North Korea "was compelled to take measures for bolstering up its deterrent for self-defence to cope with the increasing nuclear threat and military provocations of the hostile forces," the statement said.

2 November 2009

N Korea 'ready' for nuclear talks



North Korea is thought to have thousands of missiles

North Korea's Foreign Ministry has said the country is ready to return to stalled six-party negotiations about its nuclear programme.

It has also repeated its call for direct talks with its avowed enemy the United States.

Last month, leader Kim Jong-il said he might consider a return to the nuclear talks he had previously declared dead - after direct talks with Washington.

The latest comments offer the strongest hint yet that dialogue could resume.

The statement called on the United States to make the next move.

Rational move

"The conclusion we have reached is that the direct parties, which are the North and the United States, must first sit down and find a rational solution," the foreign ministry spokesman said in comments reported by the official KCNA news agency.

"Now that we have shown the generosity of stating the position that we would be willing to talk to the United States and hold multilateral talks including the six-way talks, it is time for the United States to make a decision," the spokesman said.

But the State Department says it has not yet decided whether to accept Pyongyang's invitation for a visit by the US special envoy on North Korea, Stephen Bosworth.

In its latest comments, North Korea said it would "go our own way" if Washington refuses dialogue.

The North in early October expressed willingness to return to the six-party nuclear disarmament negotiations it quit in April, but only after it talks directly to the United States to improve "hostile relations".

Envoy

North Korea's second-ranking nuclear envoy, Ri Gun, just spent a week in the US and met US academics and former officials.

These US contacts said after these meetings that the North appeared to be more open to resuming the six-way talks on its nuclear programme.

Ri Gun held talks in New York with Sung Kim, the US special envoy on the North's nuclear disarmament. They also met later on the sidelines of a California forum.

When asked about Mr Ri's visit to the US, the North Korean foreign ministry spokesman appeared to downplay its importance.

NORTH KOREA 2009 TESTS

4 July - Seven suspected ballistic missiles fired

2 July - four short-range cruise missiles launched

25 May - second underground nuclear test brings new UN sanctions

25/26 May - series of short-range rockets fired

5 April - N Korea says long-range rocket was satellite launch

[North Korea's missile programme](#)

[What is North Korea's game plan?](#)

"This contact was not a preliminary meeting for the DPRK (North Korea)-US talks, and thus there were no substantive discussions related to the DPRK-US talks," the

spokesman said.

He said if the two countries "end the hostile relationship and build trust, there will be a meaningful step towards the denuclearising of the Korean peninsula."

The spokesman added: "If the United States is not ready to sit down face-to-face with us for talks, we cannot but go on our own way."

Analysts have noted several signs of easing of the tensions between North Korea and its neighbours.

It has recently allowed family reunions from South Korea, and held talks with senior Chinese officials.

Some analysts believe the North is becoming more ready to resume talks because tough UN sanctions may be having an impact on the impoverished country, with food supplies low ahead of winter.

The sanctions were imposed after North Korea resumed nuclear testing and held several missile launches earlier this year.

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Scepticism over N Korea's talks offer

By Paul Reynolds

World affairs correspondent, BBC News website



North Korea is believed to be restoring the Yongbyon nuclear facility

North Korea's offer to return to talks about its nuclear programme has been met with scepticism by regional and Western experts.

The offer - to talk to the US bilaterally first before possibly rejoining the six-party talks it renounced earlier this year - came during a visit by the Chinese Prime Minister Wen Jiabao.

The suspicion is that Mr Wen twisted the arm of the North Korean leader Kim Jong-il.

"There is no doubt that Wen delivered a very clear-cut message. China wanted to give a push," said Zhu Feng, professor of international security at Peking University.

"The key question is not just how to bring them back to the negotiating table but also how to change their behaviour," he told Reuters news agency.

In London, Mark Fitzpatrick of the International Institute for Strategic Studies doubted whether North Korea would change its behaviour significantly.

"I am sceptical. I do not think that North Korea wants to give up its nuclear weapons. The North might even want the US to accept it as a nuclear state."

If this is so, then the challenge is to manage the always-present crisis with North Korea because it cannot be solved.

The S words

The key to understanding North Korea might well be the two S words.

The first is survival - the survival of the system and its leaders. That requires a strong defence, of which nuclear is the most powerful and attractive - justified by a constant refrain that the country is under threat.

“ Pyongyang had always interpreted the disablement process as making it more difficult, but not impossible to return to plutonium production ”

Prof Siegfried S Hecker
Stanford University

[Q&A: N Korea's nuclear programme](#)

[Timeline: N Korea nuclear stand-off](#)

The second is the military-first philosophy called "songun".

This has been emphasised under Kim Jong-il and basically requires that the military is the most important state organ and gets first pick of everything.

Songun would appear to preclude the idea of giving up nuclear weapons.

The United States maintains as its goal the denuclearisation of the whole Korean peninsula and will not unilaterally accept North Korea as a nuclear state. Its regional partners, especially Japan and South Korea, would be alarmed if it did.

As for direct talks, President Barack Obama's special envoy on North Korea, Stephen Bosworth, said in September that the United States was "willing to engage with North Korea on a bilateral basis".

But, he added: "We do not consider in any way that bilateral engagement is a substitute for multilateral engagement, and this is not a substitute for us for the re-ignition of the six-party talks."

Restoring a reactor

South Korean sources say in addition that North Korea has now reached the final stages of restoring the Yongbyon nuclear facility it had begun to disable after earlier six-party talks in 2007.

This development also casts doubt on North Korea's intentions.

And according to an American scientist who was invited to Yongbyon with a colleague over a period of five years, the North perhaps always intended to be able to put Yongbyon back together again.



The military gets the first pick of everything in North Korea

The scientist, Stanford University Professor Siegfried S Hecker, a former director of the Los Alamos laboratory, wrote in the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists in May: "I believe that North Korea can restore operations at all three of the [Yongbyon] facilities if it so chooses.

"Pyongyang had always interpreted the disablement process as making it more difficult, but not impossible to return to plutonium production."

If that is the case, the North's motives in agreeing to the disablement in the first place must be suspect.

It was perhaps always planning for a reversal of its position and the restoration of Yongbyon.

The confrontation between itself and the UN over its ballistic missile test in April this year, followed by its second nuclear test in May and further UN sanctions, might have offered it a

good opportunity to take a step backwards.

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