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Daily Press Briefing

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QUESTION: Tomorrow, of course, is the Workers’ Party Congress and it’s coming at a time when James Clapper is in the region. He’s in Seoul this week. First, is the U.S. anticipating any provocations from Pyongyang?

MR TONER: Well, I’ve talked about this before. I don’t have anything, obviously, that I can point to, but we have seen a consistent trend of provocations from North Korea over the past months. So let’s just say that our – it wouldn’t be surprising.

QUESTION: Is the U.S. working closely with its allies in Asia on any possible additional steps that will be taken if there are provocations?

MR TONER: Well, I mean, that’s always something when we – every time we have a provocation, certainly we did take significant – excuse me – steps with the new sanctions that were passed by the UN Security Council last month. And now we’re in the implementation phase and we’ve already seen signs that these sanctions are having an effect, that the regime in North Korea is feeling the effects of these sanctions. But obviously, they have not done enough or taken enough concrete steps, really, to fulfill their commitments and their international obligations to denuclearize.

So we’re going to continue to look at ways that we can apply increased pressure on them at the same time as we ensure that the security of the peninsula is kept ironclad.

QUESTION: Have you put out any – is the U.S. at all on any heightened alert, in the face of the upcoming congress?

MR TONER: Again, it’s hard to say what – I mean, look, we’re always – and we’re always on heightened alert with regard to North Korea, given its actions over the past weeks and months. It’s a highly unpredictable regime. We’re looking at ways, as I said, that we can continue to apply the kind of pressure that convinces the regime to refrain from actions and rhetoric that only escalate tensions and destabilize the region. And we’re going to continue to do that.

QUESTION: Is there any particular – are there any expectations or is there anything that you’re focusing on that might come out of the congress in --

MR TONER: No. I mean, look, it’s a pretty opaque regime in that regard. I don’t know if we’re looking for any great outcomes from the congress. We certainly would welcome some kind of sign that they are willing to, as I said, de-escalate, refrain from, as I said, actions that destabilize the region, and really pursue steps that fulfill its obligations, international obligations to denuclearize.

The White House

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**Press Briefing by Press Secretary Josh Earnest, 5/6/16**

James S. Brady Press Briefing Room

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Q Josh, is the White House watching the congress in North Korea that Kim Jong-un opened today in which he talked about nuclear successes but also boosting economic development? Do you take that seriously? And what’s your reaction to that?

MR. EARNEST: Well, the administration is obviously aware of developments in North Korea and we watch them closely to the extent that those kinds of developments occur in public. That makes this situation a little unusual.

We obviously are aware of the risk that is posed by North Korea’s effort to develop nuclear weapons and systems capable of delivering those nuclear weapons. The United States has worked effectively with the international community to counter those efforts, and as a result, North Korea has faced increasing isolation, which is saying something because they were pretty isolated at the end of last year and that trajectory has only gotten worse for them. And we know that it’s had a negative impact on what is already a rather weak economy.

Our efforts have targeted those elements of the North Korean economy that we know benefit North Korea’s weapons programs, and our concerns stem from the fact that those programs are inconsistent with their international obligations. And those aren’t just concerns that the United States has raised; those are concerns that have also been raised by countries like China and Russia and South Korea and Japan. And the international community is serious about holding North Korea to account for their destabilizing and provocative behavior, and there is a path that North Korea can take to come out of the wilderness, to emerge from isolation, but it will require them renouncing nuclear weapons and demonstrating a clear commitment to ending their provocative actions and denuclearizing the Korean Peninsula.