

## Tensions High on Korean Peninsula

From VOA Learning English, this is IN THE NEWS.

North Korea is urging foreign embassies to consider telling their workers to leave the capital, Pyongyang, because of rising tensions. Britain says North Korea gave the warning to embassies and international organizations on Friday. The North Korean government reportedly said it cannot guarantee their safety after April tenth in, what it called, “the event of a conflict.”

The government has made a series of threats in recent weeks against South Korea and the United States.

The two countries have long enjoyed a strong alliance. For years, the United States stored nuclear weapons in South Korea for use against the North if it attacked the South. Those weapons were removed in 1991. But South Korean officials have been debating whether to have the United States redeploy the arms.

North Korea has wanted to keep its military strong. The North launched its first long-distance rocket in 1998. After a year of negotiations, North Korea agreed to stop long distance missile tests in exchange for better contacts with the United States and its allies. As part of the 1999 agreement, the North received money and food aid.

Since then, North Korea has gone back, periodically, to using threats to get more money and food. But in the past few months, the war of words has gotten louder and more threatening. Last December, North Korea launched a long distance rocket. Then, in February, it carried out an underground nuclear test.

Those actions led the United Nations Security Council to expand existing sanctions against North Korea. The Council’s decision so angered the North that this week, the government said it had been given final approval for a nuclear attack against the United States. But many military experts do not believe the North can act on the threat.

South Korea reported this week that North Korea has moved one of its missiles to its eastern coast. South Korean Defense Minister Kim Kwan-Jin said the missile appears to have what he called “considerable range.” But he does not believe it can reach the United States mainland.

American Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel said he is taking the threat seriously.

“Some of the actions they’ve taken over the past few weeks present a real and clear danger and threat certainly to the interest of our allies, starting with South Korea and Japan.”

On Wednesday, the United States said it plans to deploy an advanced missile defense system to Guam, an American territory in the Pacific Ocean. The move is meant to serve as a warning, but it will take several weeks for the system to arrive.

South Korea’s Ministry of National Defense has confirmed the movement of at least one missile by North Korea.

South Korea is also preparing for an attack. It has deployed two warships with radar designed to monitor missiles.