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A15

World at very edge of nuclear war—Pope



Pope Francis waves to followers on his way to the Apostolic Nunciature in Santiago.—AP

*nuclear war

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SANTIAGO—Pope Francis said on Monday that he was frightened by the prospect of an accidental nuclear apocalypse, as he began a weeklong visit to Chile and Peru.

"I think we are at the very edge," Francis told reporters aboard his plane when asked about the threat of a nuclear war in the wake of a recent string of tests by North Korea and a false missile alert last week that sparked panic in the US state of Hawaii.

"I am really afraid of this. One accident is enough to precipitate things," he said.

Francis landed in Santiago late on Monday on his first visit to Chile since becoming Pope, and his sixth to Latin America.

Tough talk in Vancouver

Francis made the statements as countries that supported South Korea in the Korean War were to explore ways at a meeting in Vancouver to better enforce sanctions to force North Korea to abandon its nuclear weapons program aimed at hitting the US mainland with nuclear-tipped warheads.

Foreign ministers and senior officials from 20 nations would hold a full-day meeting, hosted by the United States and Canada, in Vancouver on Tuesday to increase diplomatic and financial pressure on North Korea.

Canadian and US officials said the meeting would discuss ways to ensure implementation of wide-ranging UN sanctions, including steps agreed on last month to further limit Pyongyang's access to refined petroleum products, crude oil and industrial goods.

Brian Hook, the US state department's director of policy

planning, said last week that participants, including US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson, would probe how to boost maritime security around North Korea and options to interdict ships carrying prohibited goods in violation of sanctions.

Divisions

The Vancouver meeting primarily groups nations which helped South Korea in the 1950-1953 Korean War as well as South Korea and Japan.

China and Russia, which backed North Korea in the war, would not attend.

South Korea and the United States were technically still at

war with North Korea because the Korean War ended in a truce, not a peace treaty.

The meeting was announced after North Korea tested its most advanced intercontinental ballistic missile in late November, but now comes amid signs that tensions on the Korean peninsula were easing, at least temporarily.

'Cold War' thinking

North and South Korea held formal talks this month for the first time in two years and Pyongyang said it would send athletes across the border to the Pyeongchang Winter Olympics to be held in South

Korea next month.

China, North Korea's main ally and principal trading partner, has backed successive rounds of UN sanctions, but also urged dialogue to prevent a nuclear war.

It had reacted angrily to the Vancouver meeting as an example of "Cold War" thinking.

China's state media said Chinese President Xi Jinping, in a phone call with US President Donald Trump, stressed that a hard-earned alleviation of tension must continue.

"Maintaining international unity on the issue is extremely important," Xi said.—REPORTS

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