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NORTH Korea is just months away from perfecting its nuclear weapons capabilities and could strike the United States within months.

That is the grim warning given by CIA Director Mike Pompeo who said the secretive state was getting closer to achieving its nuclear ambitions.

Mr Pompeo told a national security forum in Washington that US needed to behave as if “we are on the cusp of them achieving their objective of being able to strike the United States”.

“When you’re now talking about months, our capacity to understand that at the detailed level is in some sense irrelevant,” he said.

“Whether it happens on Tuesday or a month from Tuesday, we are at a time where the president has concluded that we need a global effort to ensure that Kim Jong-un doesn’t have that capacity.”

However he said there’s a difference between having the ability to fire a single nuclear missile and the capability of producing large amounts of material and developing an arsenal of such weapons.

During the same conference, US President Donald Trump's National Security Adviser HR McMaster said the country was in a race to resolve the crisis.

"We are not out of time," he told the forum, organised by the Foundation for Defense of Democracies think tank.

"But we are running out of time," he said.



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'BACKED INTO A CORNER

It comes as Russia called for support for a plan between Moscow and Beijing to end US and South Korean military drills in exchange for North Korea halting its missile testing.

Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said a dialogue would prevent a huge humanitarian, economic and ecological catastrophe in the region.

Russian President Vladimir Putin has also repeated his calls for calm.

While condemning Pyongyang's nuclear ambitions, Putin said the stand-off should be settled through dialogue and without "cornering North Korea, threatening to use force or going down to outright boorishness and swearing."

Speaking to international policy experts at the Valdai forum in Sochi, Putin criticised the US and its allies for missing a chance to build a safer and more stable world after the Cold War.

Last month, Putin said the tense standoff between North Korea and the United States was on the verge of a big conflict.

He also said it was a mistake to try and pressure Pyongyang over its nuclear missile program.

"It is essential to resolve the region's problems through direct dialogue involving all sides without advancing any preconditions (for such talks)," Mr Putin wrote on an article posted on the Kremlin's website.

"Provocations, pressure, and bellicose and offensive rhetoric is the road to nowhere."

North Korea is working to develop a nuclear-tipped missile capable of hitting the US and has threatened to fire missiles near the US Pacific territory of Guam.

Mr Trump and North Korean leader Kim Jong-un have been engaged in a dramatic war of words in recent months after Pyongyang conducted several missile tests.

North Korea also conducted what it claimed was a successful test of a hydrogen bomb on August 3, sparking global condemnation.



US WILL ‘MEET MOST MISERABLE DEATH’

Meanwhile North Korea launched new violent threats against the US and South Korea overnight, promising any nations that provoke or invade the country would “meet the most miserable death”.

Speaking via KCNA, the rogue nation said the joint US–South Korean naval drill in the waters off the Korean Peninsula risked nuclear war.

A spokesman for the Pan-Korean Emergency Measure Committee for Opposing Nuclear War Drills said the US was “running amok” in the region.

“The US should expect that it would face unimaginable strike at an unimaginable time,” he said.

“The South Korean puppets, too, will not go scot-free as they are introducing the US nuclear strategic assets and turning the whole land of South Korea into the worst-ever field of a nuclear war without seeing the imminent catastrophic disaster.

“All the Koreans in the north, the south and overseas will, with concerted efforts, mercilessly smash the war frenzy of the US and South Korean puppet warmongers to get rid of the abyss of ruin through dangerous war gambling and inflict the most miserable death on the invaders, provokers increasing the danger of a nuclear war.”

— with wires













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