

U.S. prepares high-seas crackdown on North Korea sanctions evaders – sources

Required Annotations		Student-Created Annotations		Summary / Questions / Reflection	
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The Trump administration and key Asian allies are preparing to expand interceptions of ships suspected of violating sanctions on North Korea, a plan that could include deploying U.S. Coast Guard forces to stop and search vessels in Asia-Pacific waters, senior U.S. officials said.

Washington has been talking to regional partners, including Japan, South Korea, Australia and Singapore, about coordinating a stepped-up crackdown that would go further than ever before in an attempt to squeeze Pyongyang's use of seagoing trade to feed its nuclear missile program, several officials told Reuters.

While suspect ships have been intercepted before, the emerging strategy would expand the scope of such operations but stop short of imposing a naval blockade on North Korea. Pyongyang has warned it would consider a **blockade** an act of war.

The strategy calls for closer tracking and possible seizure of ships suspected of carrying banned weapons components and other prohibited cargo to or from North Korea, according to the officials, who spoke on condition of anonymity. Depending on the scale of the campaign, the United States could consider beefing up the naval and air power of its Pacific Command, they said.

The U.S.-led initiative, which has not been previously reported, shows Washington's increasing urgency to force North Korea into negotiations over the abandonment of its weapons programs, the officials said.

North Korea may be only a few months away from completing development of a nuclear-tipped missile capable of hitting the U.S. mainland, despite existing international sanctions that, at times, have been sidestepped by smuggling and ship-to-ship transfers at sea of banned goods, according to officials.

"There is no doubt we all have to do more, short of direct military action, to show (North Korean leader) Kim Jong Un we mean business," said a senior administration official.

The White House declined official comment.

The effort could target vessels on the high seas or in the territorial waters of countries that choose to cooperate. It was unclear, however, to what **extent** the campaign might extend beyond Asia.

Washington on Friday slapped sanctions on dozens more companies and vessels linked to North Korean shipping trade and urged the United Nations to blacklist a list of entities, a move it said was aimed at shutting down North Korea's **illicit maritime** smuggling activities to obtain oil and sell coal.

[Despite opposition from China and Russia,] Washington is

expected to start gradually **ratcheting** up such operations soon even if discussions with allies have not been completed, according to the senior U.S. official.

U.S. experts are developing legal arguments for doing more to stop sanctions-busting vessels, citing the last U.N. Security Council resolution which they say opened the door by calling on states to inspect suspect ships on the high seas or in their waters.

Washington is also drawing up **rules of engagement** aimed at avoiding armed confrontation at sea, the officials said.

The Trump administration has also sought greater cooperation from Southeast Asian countries, which may have little military capability to assist but are seen as sources of intelligence on ship movements, U.S. officials said.

“The more partners we have, the more resources we have to dedicate to the effort,” said Chris Ford, assistant secretary of state for international security and **nonproliferation**. He declined to talk about discussions with specific countries.

Washington is especially interested in detecting of ship-to-ship transfers at sea of banned goods, something North Korea has increasingly resorted to as vessels have faced greater **scrutiny** of their cargo in Asian ports, the officials said.

Reuters reported in December that Russian tankers had supplied fuel to North Korea at sea in a violation of sanctions. Washington also said at the time it had evidence that vessels from several countries, including China, had engaged in shipping oil products and coal. China denied the allegation.

U.S. interception of ships close to Chinese waters is something likely to be avoided, in favor of informing Chinese authorities of banned cargo onboard and asking them do the inspection, one official said.

“It’s probably impossible to stop everything, but you can raise the cost to North Korea,” said David Shear, former deputy secretary of defense for Asia under President Barack Obama.

Questions

1. The first paragraph of a news article should answer the questions who, what, where and when. List the who, what, where and when of this news item. (NOTE: The remainder of a news article provides details on the why and/or how.)
2. Which regional partners has the U.S. been talking to about coordinating a stepped-up crackdown on sanctions evaders?
3. What is the Trump administration’s aim for this latest crackdown?
4. What does this new strategy entail¹?
5. How have countries managed to get goods into North Korea despite the sanctions?
6. What does this U.S.-led initiative show, according to unnamed officials?
7. Why is it so important to take such strong steps right now?

1 entail: involve (something) as a necessary or inevitable part or consequence.