



Written by [Warren Mass](#) on November 21, 2017

United States Designates North Korea a “State Sponsor of Terrorism”

During remarks made before a November 20 cabinet meeting, President Trump announced: “Today, the United States is designating North Korea as a state sponsor of terrorism.”



Trump’s remarks came just a few days after completing his 12-day trip to Asia, during which he discussed relationships with North Korea with the leaders of several allied nations, including Japan and South Korea. During that trip, Trump seemed more open to talking to the communist leadership in Pyongyang than he has been in recent months, with one reporter for the *Washington Post* describing as “conciliatory” the president’s words during a joint press conference with South Korea’s President Moon Jae-in in Seoul on November 7.

During his November 20 remarks, the president stated that one of the primary goals of his Asian trip was to pursue the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula. He then proceeded to make his major announcement that, starting immediately, the United States is designating North Korea as a state sponsor of terrorism. Trump stated: “It should have happened a long time ago. It should have happened years ago.”

However, the president’s reason for changing the status of North Korea went beyond the Pyongyang regime’s ongoing weapons programs that have included tests of both nuclear weapons and long-range ballistic missiles. Trump explained, “In addition to threatening the world by nuclear devastation, North Korea has repeatedly supported acts of international terrorism, including assassinations on foreign soil.”

Administration officials cited the killing of North Korean leader Kim Jong Un’s estranged half brother with a nerve agent at Kuala Lumpur International Airport in Malaysia last February as an act of terrorism, the *Los Angeles Times* reported.

President Trump said at the start of a Cabinet meeting that North Korea “must end its unlawful nuclear and ballistic missile development and cease all support for international terrorism — which it is not doing.”

After making the announcement about the new designation for North Korea, Trump spoke of Otto Warmbier, the American university student who, while visiting North Korea as a tourist in January 2016, was arrested and sentenced to 15 years imprisonment with hard labor after being convicted for the trivial offense of attempting to steal a propaganda poster from his hotel.



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A month after his sentencing, Warmbier suffered severe neurological injury from an unknown cause. In June 2017, North Korean officials announced that he had fallen into a coma as a result of botulism and a sleeping pill. After the United States made diplomatic efforts to seek his release, Warmbier was freed and returned to the United States. Back home, U.S. physicians found no evidence of botulism. Warmbier never regained consciousness and died on June 19, 2017, six days after his return to the United States.

Trump described Warmbier as “a wonderful young man,” and spoke of the countless others so brutally affected by the North Korean oppression. “This designation [as a state sponsor of terrorism],” he said, “will impose further sanctions and penalties on North Korea and related persons, and supports our maximum pressure campaign to isolate the murderous regime that you’ve all been reading about and, in some cases, writing about.”

The president also said that on November 21, the Treasury Department will be announcing an additional “very large” sanction that will be implemented over the next two weeks.

The United States first put North Korea on the State Department’s state sponsor of terrorism list in 1988, under President George H.W. Bush, after agents of North Korea’s government were identified as having planted a bomb in a South Korean airliner. The plane exploded mid-air, resulting in the deaths of 104 passengers and 11 crew members, most of whom were South Koreans. Other reasons for adding Pyongyang to the list were that it sold weapons to terrorist groups and gave asylum to Japanese Communist League-Red Army Faction members.

The elder Bush’s son, President George W. Bush, removed North Korea from the list in 2008 because it supposedly had met all nuclear inspection requirements.

“[Removing North Korea from the state sponsor of terrorism list] obviously failed, because we can see where we are today,” Secretary of State Rex Tillerson said at the White House.

BBC News reported that Tillerson told reporters that the designation was meant to hold North Korea accountable for recent actions it has taken “including assassinations outside of their country” and “using banned chemical weapons.”

Tillerson admitted that given existing sanctions, the state sponsor of terrorism designation was “very symbolic,” but also said the new measures could “disrupt and dissuade some third parties from undertaking certain activities with North Korea.” “The practical effects may be limited but hopefully we’re closing off a few loopholes with this,” he said.

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