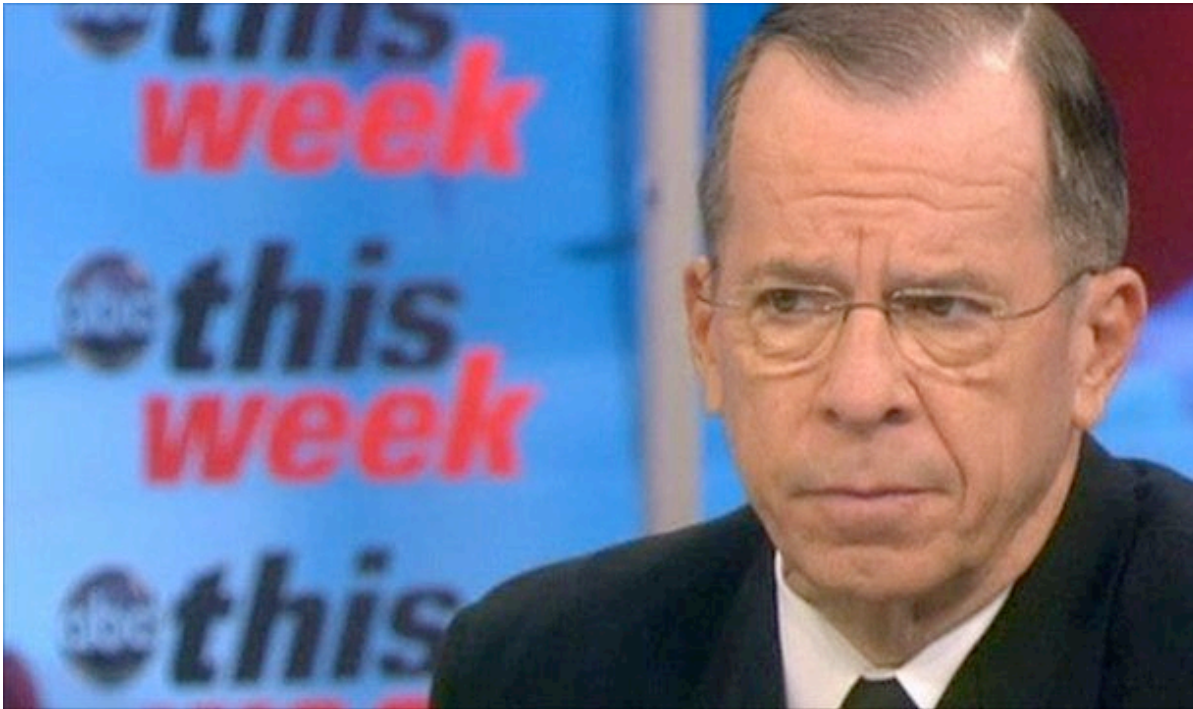


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North Korea nuclear plant 'confirms US suspicions'



Adm Mike Mullen on ABC's This Week

The US has said a report that North Korea has built a new nuclear facility is further evidence of Pyongyang's "belligerent behaviour".

The top US military officer, Adm Mike Mullen, said North Korea was "continuing on a path which is destabilising for the region".

A US scientist said he been shown "more than 1,000 centrifuges" for enriching uranium on a visit to North Korea.

Enriched uranium can be used for nuclear fuel or made into weapons.

"From my perspective, it's North Korea continuing on a path which is destabilising for the region," Adm Mullen, the head of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, told CNN.

"It confirms or validates the concern we've had for years about their enriching uranium, which they've denied routinely," he said.

In September last year, after having denied enriching uranium, North Korea said it was in the final stage of uranium enrichment, and further warned that it was continuing to reprocess and weaponise plutonium.

Adm Mullen said the latest report of the North's nuclear activity should be seen in the light of

the March sinking of a South Korean warship, which Seoul and Washington blamed on Pyongyang.

The sinking of the Cheonan in a suspected torpedo attack left 46 South Korean sailors dead and inflamed tensions on the Korean peninsula.

"All of this is consistent with belligerent behaviour, the kind of instability creation in a part of the world that is very dangerous," Adm Mullen said.

His remarks followed the publication of [a report by US nuclear scientist Siegfried Hecker](#) on his trip last week to North Korea's Yongbyon nuclear complex, which is about 100km (60 miles) north of the capital Pyongyang.

'Easily converted'

He said he had been shown an experimental light-water nuclear reactor that was still under construction and a new facility that contained "more than 1,000 centrifuges" that the North Koreans told him was processing low-enriched uranium for fuel for the new reactor.

The North Koreans told him the facility contained 2,000 centrifuges.

He said the facility seemed designed primarily for civilian nuclear power but could be easily converted to further process uranium to weapons grade.

The plant was modern and clean, unlike all the other Yongbyon facilities he had seen, and he was stunned at how sophisticated it was, the Stanford University scientist said.



The US is hoping to revive six-party talks over the North's nuclear facilities based at Yongbyon

He also said the North Koreans told him the new plant was "constructed and operated strictly with indigenous resources and talent".

When international weapons inspectors were expelled from North Korea in 2009, the plant did not exist, officials say.

The North is believed to have weaponised enough plutonium for at least six atomic bombs but is not known to have a uranium-based weapons programme.

The report came as Stephen Bosworth, a senior US state department official responsible for North Korea, was travelling to Asia to try to revive six-party talks on Pyongyang's nuclear programme.

Beginning with a stop in the South Korean capital Seoul, Mr Bosworth will then travel to

Tokyo and Beijing.

North Korea has nuclear and missile programmes and conducted underground atomic tests in 2006 and 2009.

The speed with which the country is pressing ahead with its nuclear programme will deepen suspicions that it is receiving help from abroad in circumventing United Nations sanctions, correspondents say.

The North has reportedly expressed a conditional willingness to return to the stalled talks and some analysts suggest it may have revealed these new uranium enrichment facilities in a bid to strengthen its negotiating hand.

N Korea 'shows new atomic plant'

US scientist said to have been given tour of uranium-enrichment facility with "hundreds and hundreds" of centrifuges.

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The latest claims follow the release of satellite images showing construction of a new reactor [Reuters/DigitalGlobe]

A nuclear scientist has seen hundreds of centrifuges in North Korea this month, a US daily says citing sources familiar with the matter.

The *New York Times* said on Saturday that Siegfried Hecker of Stanford University was told by North Korean officials they had 2,000 centrifuges operating.

Hecker, the co-director of the Centre for International Security and Co-operation, told the newspaper he had been "stunned" by the sophisticated new plant, and that he had already privately informed the White House of his findings.

He said he saw "hundreds and hundreds" of centrifuges set up in an "ultra-modern control room".

Hecker said he was forbidden from taking photographs and could not verify North Korean claims that the plant was already producing low-enriched uranium.

The US team that visited the country was also unable to verify North Korea's claims.

While the existing ageing reactor at Yongbyon has supplied plutonium for North Korea's nuclear weapons, light-water reactors are generally used for generating electricity.

The New York Times said the White House started to brief allies and legislators on Saturday about Hecker's revelations.

Envoy in Seoul

The news of the centrifuges came as a high-level US envoy led a delegation to South Korea for consultations with regional leaders on North Korean issues.

The US state department said in a statement that Stephen Bosworth, the US special representative for North Korea, would arrive in Seoul on Sunday for talks with counterparts from South Korea, Japan and China.



Hecker says he saw 'hundreds and hundreds' of centrifuges during a tour of Yongbyon [EPA

The US team will later travel to Japan and China before returning to the US on November 24.

Days earlier a US research institute said a new nuclear reactor being built by North Korea at its Yongbyon complex could be used to produce weapons-grade plutonium.

The Institute for Science and International Security released satellite images on Thursday showing construction of an experimental light water reactor at the complex.

Hecker's claims were backed by Jack Pritchard, the president of the Korea Economic Institute, who said in Washington on Tuesday that he had visited the light-water reactor at the Yongbyon complex.

Pritchard told the *New York Times* on Saturday that he had heard the North boasting of another new facility, saying: "The intel agencies dropped the ball."

Barack Obama, the US president, recently warned that North Korea must show "seriousness of purpose" before six-party nuclear talks can resume, saying he was not interested in simply

"going through the motions".

North Korea quit the aid-for-disarmament talks in April 2009 and staged its second atomic weapons test a month later. The talks group the two Koreas, the United States, China, Russia and Japan.

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N Korea showed US scientist 'vast new nuclear facility'



Dr Hecker said he was shown hundreds of centrifuges

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An American nuclear scientist says he was shown a vast new nuclear facility when he visited North Korea last week.

Dr Siegfried Hecker said he had been shown hundreds of centrifuges for enriching uranium, which can be used for making nuclear weapons.

The Stanford University scientist was stunned at how sophisticated the new plant was, he told The New York Times.

When international weapons inspectors were expelled from North Korea in 2009, the plant did not exist, officials say.

Dr Hecker said he saw "hundreds and hundreds" of centrifuges set up in an "ultra-modern control room", [the newspaper reported](#).

But he did not have time to ascertain whether the site was meant to produce the low-grade uranium required for a power plant, or the highly enriched uranium used in bomb-making, the paper quoted him as saying.

The report came as Stephen Bosworth, a senior US state department official responsible for North Korea, was travelling to Asia to try to revive six-party talks on Pyongyang's nuclear programme.

North Korea has nuclear and missile programmes and conducted underground atomic tests in 2006 and 2009.

The speed with which the country is pressing ahead with its nuclear programme will fuel suspicions that it is receiving help from abroad in circumventing United Nations sanctions, correspondents say.

Multinational talks on how to end the North's nuclear programme stalled when tensions rose over the alleged North Korean sinking of a South Korean warship in March, in which 46 South Korean sailors died.

Dr Hecker, 67, is a former head of the Los Alamos Nuclear Laboratory. He was a member of an unofficial US delegation who were shown a secret nuclear complex at Yangbyon in North Korea in January 2004.