

China appeals for calm amid fears of war over US escalation in Korea

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Chinese officials appealed for calm in the Korean peninsula yesterday, as the United States deployed missiles and further military forces to East Asia amid a standoff over North Korea's nuclear program.

Chinese foreign ministry spokesman Hong Lei said that Chinese Deputy Foreign Minister Zhang Yesui had expressed "serious concern" over the Korean crisis, in meetings with the US and South Korean ambassadors.

Hong added, "In the present situation, China believes all sides must remain calm and exercise restraint and not take actions which are mutually provocative, and must certainly not take actions which will worsen the situation."

Tensions continued to rise, however, amid fears of a border clash in Korea that could trigger a wider war. Washington continued to deploy overwhelming firepower to the region and pressed China—the key ally of North Korea, a small and impoverished state that depends on it for critical food and fuel supplies—to whip Pyongyang into line.

According to Pentagon press secretary George Little, US Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel warned his Chinese counterpart, General Chang Wanquan, of a "growing threat to the US and our allies posed by North Korea's aggressive pursuit of nuclear weapons." Hagel demanded "sustained US-China dialogue and cooperation on these issues."

Washington also continued to ratchet up military tensions, deploying missile batteries to its Pacific island base at Guam. This came after weeks of US-South Korean "Eagle Foal" military exercises, during which the United States repeatedly sent nuclear-capable bombers and high-tech guided-missile ships to the Korean peninsula.

Details continue to emerge about the US military buildup in the region, which is aimed at escalating

military tensions.

Washington is in particular arming the South Korean army, amid its "pivot to Asia" designed to contain China and maintain US hegemony in the region. It is upgrading a shipment of 60 F-15 fighter planes to Seoul, as well as sending a large number of Mine-Resistant Ambush-Protected (MRAP) trucks.

USA Today indicated that these trucks, used to guard against roadside bombs in US-occupied Afghanistan and Iraq, would "offer similar protection in North Korea, should US forces need to travel on its roads"—that is, if US forces invaded and occupied North Korea.

American B-1 bomber pilots at Dyess Air Force Base in Texas have reportedly shifted their training programs, training for trans-Pacific flights towards targets in East Asia, instead of flights to Afghanistan and the Middle East. US ground troops have also already deployed to bases in Australia, while the US recently announced plans to send more warships to Singapore.

In another sign of rising tensions in the region, China yesterday cancelled its participation in a joint summit with South Korea and Japan. It cited tensions with Japan over the Senkaku (Diaoyu) islands.

The North Korean regime, for its part, released a statement through the Korean Central News Agency (KCNA), stating that "The moment of explosion is approaching fast." It added that US threats would be "smashed" by "cutting-edge smaller, lighter and diversified nuclear strike means."

Given that Pyongyang is thought to have only a few crude nuclear bombs, and no means to mount them on a missile—let alone miniaturized, subdivided nuclear devices like those fielded by the United States—such threats appear to be a bluff.

Pyongyang closed down the border crossing between South Korea and the industrial export zone at Kaesong, North Korea. The Kaesong zone generates a vital \$2 billion a year in trade for impoverished North Korea, including approximately \$80 million in wages to 53,000 North Korean workers. Some 1,000 South Koreans are also employed at the complex; if they returned to South Korea, they will no longer be able to return to Kaesong, as a result of the closure of the border crossing.

South Korean Defense Minister Kim Kwan-jin provocatively announced that he is preparing contingencies for “military action” to rescue South Koreans at Kaesong, if needed.

Cheong Seong-chang of the Sejong Institute think-tank in Seoul told the *Guardian* that Pyongyang closed the border crossing at Kaesong apparently due to anger at “having been ridiculed for keeping Kaesong open for financial reasons,” while it was threatening war with South Korea.

Together with reports that sections of the North Korean regime are in discussions with German officials to restore full trading and market relations with the imperialist powers, such comments suggest that media presentations of Pyongyang as bent on waging suicidal nuclear war with the US are misleading. A divided, reactionary bureaucracy in Pyongyang is desperately seeking some form of accommodation in the face of overwhelming US pressure on Pyongyang and on Beijing.

Under conditions where no deal is forthcoming from Washington, however, North Korea’s rhetoric simply further inflames the situation.

Behind the US conflict with North Korea stands preparations and planning for a far wider and potentially devastating conflict, with China—America’s largest foreign creditor, who has also helped block US war plans against Middle Eastern countries such as Syria and Iran.

An article titled “War with China” in *Survival*, the magazine of the International Institute for Strategic Studies, lays out some of the calculations in leading US circles regarding the possibility of war with North Korea or a collapse of the regime in Pyongyang.

The piece was written by James Dobbins, a former US assistant secretary of state who currently holds top positions at the RAND think-tank. He lists “collapse”

in North Korea as the most likely cause of a war between China and the United States, followed by conflict over Taiwan, cyber war, conflict over control of the South China Sea, and conflicts with India.

Dobbins makes clear that aggressive military operations by the United States, sending forces into North Korea, is the heart of any response envisaged by Washington. This action, taken with complete contempt for international law, would rapidly raise the possibility of a clash with Chinese forces stationed along the China-North Korea border.

He writes, “The immediate operational concerns for United States Forces—Korea/Combined Forces Command would be to secure ballistic-missile-launch and WMD sites. If any coherent North Korean army remained, it could be necessary to neutralize its long-range artillery, it could be necessary to neutralize its long-range artillery threatening Seoul as well... While South Korea would provide sizable forces and capabilities for these missions, they would be inadequate to deal with the scope and complexity of a complete North Korean collapse. Substantial and extended commitments of US ground forces would be required to rapidly seize and secure numerous locations, some with vast perimeters.”

Dobbins adds, “The likelihood of confrontations, accidental or otherwise, between US and Chinese forces is high in this scenario.”



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