

US threatens war with North Korea, demands China cut off support

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Over the weekend, US officials continued to threaten North Korea with war, demanding that China cut off its support to the regime in Pyongyang.

This comes after weeks of US threats aimed at Pyongyang's nuclear program, during which Washington flew nuclear-capable bombers to Korea to demonstrate its capacity to wage nuclear war against the North. Last week, US officials revealed that these moves were part of a laid-out "playbook" of US escalations—aimed to terrorize North Korea's government and population.

General Walter Sharp, the former US military commander in South Korea, told America's National Public Radio (NPR): "there's been a lot of effort over the past two and a half years now to build this counter-provocation plan. Because that's a hard balance of a strong response: don't escalate, but be prepared to go to war."

Sharp said that US and South Korean forces would rapidly respond to any firing along the border by the North Korean and prepare for an overwhelming response. He explained, "There are options that people have worked and thought through that could very quickly be brought to President Park [Geun-hye of South Korea] and President Obama."

NPR commented, "That's the escalation scenario, and it leads to all-out war."

Yesterday, amid intelligence reports that North Korea may be preparing a test missile launch for April 10, South Korea dispatched Aegis guided-missile warships to waters on both sides of the Korean peninsula.

Japan indicated that it was also considering deploying its own warships to the area. Japanese government spokesman Yoshihide Suga said Tokyo is preparing for a "worst-case" scenario and demanded that China and Russia play "significant roles" to resolve the stand-off.

There are unconfirmed reports that Washington has begun deploying groups of B-1 heavy bombers from the

United States to the Western Pacific.

US officials speaking Sunday demanded that China force the North Korean regime to give in to US demands. Pyongyang relies on China for critical food and fuel supplies.

On CBS, Republican Senator John McCain of Arizona said, "China can cut off their [i.e., North Korea's] economy if they want to. Chinese behavior has been very disappointing, whether it be on cyber security, whether it be on confrontation in the South China Sea, or whether it be their failure to rein in what could be a catastrophic situation."

Democratic Senator Charles Schumer of New York added, "The Chinese hold a lot of cards here. They're by nature cautious, but they're carrying it to an extreme. It's about time they stepped up to the plate and put a little pressure on the North Korean regime."

The Chinese regime in Beijing, which is in the midst of a leadership transition in both the state and the Chinese Communist Party, is divided on how to respond to the Korean crisis.

At Sunday's regional business summit in Boao, China, Chinese President Xi Jinping said, "No one should be allowed to throw a region and even the whole world into chaos for selfish gain." This carefully worded remark voices the alarm in Beijing over the possible outbreak of military conflict, without directly indicting either North Korea or the United States as the party responsible.

On the one hand, Beijing has given several indications of increasing hostility to Pyongyang. It has already voted for UN sanctions against North Korea over its nuclear program earlier this year.

At the Boao summit, Xi also agreed to an extensive series of military exercises and exchanges with Australia's armed forces. Australian Prime Minister Julia Gillard's government is closely aligned on US imperialist interests in the region, having agreed to open Australian

bases to US forces as part of the Obama administration's "pivot to Asia" aiming to contain China.

Sections of the Chinese army and bureaucracy have openly questioned Beijing's attempts to accommodate US policy, however.

As reported by the *Sydney Morning Herald*, Colonel Dai Xu of the People's Liberation Army's National Defense University protested moves to develop closer ties to Australia: "Australia is one of the links in America's encirclement of China. The first step of [America's] strategic eastward move was to send troops to Australia. The Sino-Australian relationship has been good always, very good—[Gillard] can of course say that, but in China we say, 'Listen to what they say, watch what they do.' The US is taking Australia as a base, and who is that aimed against?"

The Western press is speculating that Zhou Yongkang, a former member of Beijing's powerful Politburo Standing Committee, is an influential supporter of the North Korean regime. A CCP official who has had responsibility for oil and security policy, he reportedly backed the coming to power of Kim Jong Un in North Korea in 2011.

Washington is placing enormous pressure on Beijing. Sections of the US press and foreign policy establishment are now mooting the possibility that Washington will go to war and kill the North Korean leadership—as it murdered Iraqi President Saddam Hussein and Libyan Colonel Muammar Gaddafi when it took over their countries. This was the theme of a recent *Foreign Affairs* article by academics Keir Lieber and Daryl Press, titled "The Next Korean War."

If war started, they write, given Pyongyang's military weakness, "North Korea's inner circle would face a grave decision: how to avoid the terrible fates of such defeated leaders as Saddam Hussein and Muammar al-Gaddafi." Lieber and Press see two possibilities for Pyongyang's leaders to avoid murder at the hands of US and South Korean forces: a deal for them to flee to Beijing, or an attempt to deter US military action by using North Korea's nuclear bombs.

On this basis, they argue for a policy of pressuring Beijing to help Washington organize the demise of the Pyongyang regime and the flight of its leaders to China: "American and South Korean leaders should urge China to develop 'golden parachute' plans for the North Korean leadership and their families... In the past, China has been understandably reluctant to hold official talks with the United States about facilitating the demise of an ally. But the prospect of nuclear war next door could induce

Beijing to take more direct steps."

These lines bluntly spell out the nuclear blackmail with which Washington is threatening Beijing: China can either face nuclear war, or acquiesce to regime change in Pyongyang and a shift of Chinese foreign policy more favorable to US imperialism. In seeking to intimidate Beijing, US imperialism is playing for the highest stakes—not only geo-strategic dominance in East Asia, but in the Middle East and the entire world economy.

As it moves against Pyongyang, Washington is also threatening Iran with war if it does not abandon its own nuclear program. It aims to prevent Pyongyang from keeping its nuclear weapons and thus serving as a model for Iran's nuclear program, and from blocking China from protecting Iran against US war threats. This would give Washington greater leverage to continue fighting wars in the Middle East.

Washington is also trying to deter any economic pressure from China. According to US Treasury statistics, China held \$1.6 trillion in US public debt in September 2012. Any significant upward spike in interest rates or decision by East Asian countries to stop lending to the US government would have potentially catastrophic economic consequences.

Writing in *Foreign Affairs* on US trade and budget deficits during Obama's first term, economist Fred Bergsten noted that "foreign investors might at some point refuse to finance these deficits on terms compatible with US prosperity. Any sudden stop in lending to the United States would drive the dollar down, push inflation and interest rates up, and perhaps bring on a hard landing for the United States—and the world economy at large."

In response to these Washington is ruthlessly plunging ahead, aiming to push through its policies and avoid economic collapse through war threats and nuclear intimidation.



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