

South Korea prepares for war amid US-China stand-off

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As the United States escalates tensions on the Korean peninsula, the South Korean bourgeoisie has moved to aggressively implement its own militaristic agenda towards North Korea. Cynically portraying its policy as defensive and aimed against potential aggression of the North, Seoul is in fact sending a message that it will not accept Chinese interference in the event of a collapse of the North Korean regime in Pyongyang.

Since 2010, South Korea, in conjunction with the United States' "pivot" towards Asia, has taken an increasingly threatening stance towards the North, declaring its readiness for war. At the end of 2010, right-wing President Lee Myung-bak declared in a radio address, "If [we] are afraid of war, we can never prevent war."

At the same time, Seoul's Unification Ministry reportedly was preparing "for righteous national reunification," making it clear that preparations for war were on the table.

The South's favored plan for reunification of the Korean peninsula is known as absorption, wherein Southern troops would be sent in to secure North Korea, should the Pyongyang regime show signs of instability.

However, Chinese officials have indicated that should this scenario unfold, China may also send in troops to secure its own economic interests, according to a report in December 2012 by United States Republican Senator Dick Lugar's staff members. This directly raises the possibility of war between China and South Korea, a US ally.

Since the escalation of tensions, China has reportedly been carrying out its own military buildup along its border with North Korea.

The South Korean bourgeoisie views the North as a largely untapped source of labor for exploitation. In a

report last year, the Finance Ministry stated, "Unification will contribute to the expansion of the economy's potential growth through increased labor, investments, production and economic cooperation." Seoul believes that eliminating the Pyongyang regime would lead to increased investment and access to cheap labor and mineral resources.

Given the economic weakness and isolation of the Pyongyang regime, this day may be closer than many believe. Last September, Lee Myung-bak's finance minister Bahk Jae-wan said, "The unification of South and North Korea is a future that is not very far off, which makes the assumption that the countries will not be unified within the next 30 to 40 years seem absurd."

In preparation, Seoul has repeatedly proposed a unification fund as well as unification tax, supported by both South Korea's major parties, to fund the occupation of the North.

The ratcheting up of tensions on the Korean peninsula is not in response to supposed threats from Pyongyang, but is in fact the following of a set of steps laid out in advance—as shown by recent revelation that, in its dealings with Pyongyang, the Obama administration has been following a "playbook" prepared well before the crisis.

South Korea's new right-wing president, Park Geun-hye, the daughter of military dictator Park Chung-hee, has made increasingly militaristic statements of her own despite promising to build trust and understanding with Pyongyang. She recently told the military, "If the North attempts any provocation against our people and country, you must respond strongly at the first contact with them, without political consideration."

Calls for nuclear weapons are also becoming more common on the right. Rep. Chung Mong-joon, the former chairman of the right-wing Saenuri Party, has

led calls for the redeployment of American nuclear weapons in South Korea, as well as for the South's own acquisition of nuclear weapons.

Speaking to CNN, he said: "The question is, for South Koreans, can we live peacefully with a nuclear-armed North Korea? The answer is 'no.' Nuclear deterrence can be the only answer. We have to have nuclear capability."

Seoul has been in negotiations with Washington over the right to enrich uranium from spent fuel rods. Currently, South Korea is banned from doing so by the South Korea-United States Nuclear Energy Agreement, signed in the 1970s, and up for renegotiation next year. Currently, South Korea produces 36 percent of its energy from nuclear power. It claims enrichment is only a means of recycling the spent fuel rods, though enrichment could also lead to the creation of nuclear weapons.

This militarist escalation has met with limited opposition from within the bourgeois liberal ranks of the South Korean elite. The main opposition Democratic United Party has called for talks with the North to de-escalate tensions.

DUP member Moon Hee-sang recently stated, "Now is the time to think seriously about sending an envoy to North Korea to seek a breakthrough for reopening inter-Korean talks."

The DUP's tepid posturing as a party of peace is entirely disingenuous. It would undoubtedly support the ruling party in the event of war, and it is no different from the Saenuri party in its drive to dominate the Korean peninsula.

The DUP represents growing economic interests within South Korea connected to China. The Sunshine Policy of former Democratic presidents Kim Dae-jung and Roh Moo-hyun was part of a policy of reducing tensions with North Korea, and therefore China, and thus get access to cheap North Korean labor. This policy was scrapped when Lee Myung-bak, a supporter of American policy, came to office in 2008, however.

The DUP's criticisms of the ruling party's calls to develop nuclear weapons are similarly empty. Former DUP floor leader Park Jie-won recently commented in a radio interview, "If we say we will develop nuclear weapons, it will prompt Japan's nuclear rearmament and turn northeast Asia into a nuclear warehouse."

These comments—which echo Washington's reasons

for opposing the development by Seoul of nuclear weapons—reflect the DUP's long-standing invocation of anti-Japanese chauvinism to give a cynical, anti-imperialist veneer to its pro-business policies. In so doing, the DUP's purpose is to divide the working class in the region, who all face the same threat of war.



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