

US inflames North Korean missile scare

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Unnamed officials in the US Department of Defense announced today that they are “highly confident” that North Korea intends the imminent launch of a medium-range missile, according to *NBC News*.

This statement follows two days of speculation in the world press that Pyongyang would order the launch of a Musudan missile from its east coast by April 10—a deadline that has now passed.

The current tense standoff on the Korean peninsula is the direct result of the deliberate and calculated military provocations carried out by US imperialism. As the *Wall Street Journal* and CNN recently revealed, Washington was operating according to a “playbook” drawn up by the Pentagon and authorized by Obama months in advance. The playbook included staged bombing runs by nuclear-capable B-52 and B-2 bombers.

These were provocations targeted at Beijing at least as much as they were at Pyongyang. Washington was vividly demonstrating its ability and willingness to carry out nuclear war in the region to defend its interests.

North Korea, one of the world’s most politically and economically isolated countries, responded predictably with bluster and inflammatory war rhetoric.

Washington has seized the opportunity afforded it by the response from Pyongyang to further consolidate its geostrategic position in the region. In the last week, the United States has deployed an advanced ballistic missile defense system to the Pacific, and has stationed advanced “Aegis” guided missile destroyers in the East China Sea.

Japan and South Korea have also both deployed destroyers in the East China Sea. The South Korean ships are equipped with data link capability with the US military.

While threatening North Korea with war, Washington is at the same time making diplomatic overtures to it.

US Secretary of State John Kerry is scheduled to arrive in Seoul on April 12, with the publicly stated aim of providing North Korea a “diplomatic off-ramp.”

This diplomatic initiative will be two-pronged. Kerry will escalate pressure on Beijing to end its economic and political support for Pyongyang. Kerry recently referred to China’s important role in getting Pyongyang “back to the table,” stressing the need for Beijing to support sanctions against North Korea.

Kerry will at the same time be seeking to use this as an opportunity to win Pyongyang away from Beijing. Sections of the North Korean regime are looking for an end to their country’s isolation by opening up the North Korean economy to the world market as a cheap-labor platform. For this to occur, Washington would need to lift its crippling economic sanctions against the country.

A framework for such a shift has already been established in the parallel example of Burma. Under intense US diplomatic pressure, Naypyidaw shifted away from Beijing and oriented itself toward the United States and the Western imperialist powers. This shift was signaled when the ruling junta chose to end the Chinese-funded construction of Myitsone dam in September 2011.

The United States responded by lifting sanctions against Burma, and opening up economic and then military ties with the Burmese junta.

Speaking in Rangoon, during his visit to Burma in September 2012, US President Barack Obama declared, “To the leadership of North Korea, I have offered a choice: let go of your nuclear weapons and choose the path of peace and progress. If you do, you will find an extended hand from the United States of America.”

Burma is viewed as the model for change in North Korea and how the “hand” of Washington will be extended.

Beijing confronts a dilemma. It has long relied upon

North Korea as a geographical buffer against US imperialism and its proxy, South Korea. In return, China has propped up the Stalinist bureaucracy in Pyongyang, giving it economic and political support.

North Korea's stability and allegiance are far from certain, however. Installed as leader only a year ago, its young President Kim Jong Un's hold on power is seen as tenuous. Sections of the ruling bureaucracy are seeking to open North Korea's economy to global capitalism. This was signaled by the recent appointment of Pak Pong-ju, a market reformer, to the post of Prime Minister on April 1.

In January the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* revealed that North Korean officials were secretly consulting German economists and lawyers on restoration of ties to the world capitalist economy.

The continuation of North Korea's role as a buffer state seems increasingly untenable. There are rumblings in Beijing of a move away from support for North Korea. This has found public expression in commentary published in the Chinese state media. Sections of the Chinese bureaucracy call for abandoning North Korea and orienting instead to South Korea.

Part of this strategy has found expression in China's economic and political wooing of Seoul. Trade between China and South Korea totaled \$215.1 billion last year. With the recent rise to power of both Xi Jinping in China and Park Geun-hye in South Korea, moves are being made in Beijing to strengthen political and diplomatic ties between the two countries.

The Chinese state media have praised Park's ability to speak Chinese. When Park requested to speak with Xi regarding North Korea, he quickly agreed to her request. By contrast, Hu Jintao and Lee Myung-bak never spoke to each other on the phone. The Chinese government has printed Park's biography in Chinese and widely promoted it.

At the same time, military tensions are high throughout the region. China has reportedly amassed troops on the border with North Korea, and South Korean troops have been readied for war.

Each of the states in the region is engaged in geopolitical brinkmanship in which the stakes are the real possibility of war. All of this has been set in motion by the calculated assertion of US military force in the region, in line with the Obama administration's

“playbook.”



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