

UN report on North Korea targets both Pyongyang and Beijing

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The UN report on human rights in North Korea released yesterday marks an acceleration of the US-led campaign to destabilise and ultimately remove the Pyongyang regime. The catalogue of horrors in North Korea is designed to stampede public opinion behind any US provocations directed against Pyongyang, but above all to intensify the pressure on North Korea's ally, China.

The highly political character of the UN commission of inquiry was underlined by the comments of its chair, former Australian judge Michael Kirby, who declared that the repressive methods of the North Korean regime were “strikingly similar” to the crimes of Nazi Germany. He likened North Korean prisons to the Nazi concentration camps in which millions of Jews, gypsies and political prisoners were exterminated.

Kirby has already written to North Korean leader Kim Jong Un, declaring that his commission is recommending that “the international criminal court render accountable all those, including possibly yourself, who may be responsible for the crimes against humanity.” In his comments yesterday, Kirby declared that the purpose of the commission's report was to “galvanize action on the part of the international community.”

Kirby's condemnation of the North Korean regime, picked up and amplified by the US and international media, recalls the demonisation of Serbian leader Slobodan Milosevic as the “Serbian Hitler” prior to the 1999 NATO bombing campaign that rained death and destruction on that country's population. Similarly, Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein was subjected to a campaign of vilification prior to the illegal 2003 US-led invasion of Iraq that devastated the country and killed hundreds of thousands of people.

North Korea is a small, impoverished and isolated

country, not an imperialist power like Germany, which, under the Nazis, launched wars of aggression that ravaged Europe. The international working class should give absolutely no political support to the Stalinist police-state regime in Pyongyang, which is certainly responsible for crimes against its people. However, the targeting of governments and individuals by the UN and its associated institutions is invariably highly selective, politically coloured and geared to the predatory interests of the imperialist powers, above all the United States.

No one is suggesting that a UN commission of inquiry be established into any of the crimes of US imperialism, such as waging wars of aggression in Afghanistan and Iraq—the crime for which the Nazi leaders were convicted at Nuremberg. Similarly, no UN investigations are under way into the crimes and human rights abuses of US allies such as Israel or Saudi Arabia.

The lengthy report is based largely on the testimony of North Korean refugees and exiles who provided gruesome details of their treatment inside the prison camps. The commission of inquiry was barred from entering North Korea.

While some of the accounts are undoubtedly true, the North Korean exile community, particularly in South Korea, is heavily influenced by anti-communist organisations, right-wing Christian groups and the state apparatus, particularly the South Korean National Intelligence Service. The UN commission of inquiry has now given its official seal to testimony from this layer.

It is no accident that the report itself echoes the propaganda that has emanated from Washington for years. An entire section is devoted to “violations of the right to food,” which accuses the Pyongyang regime of

causing widespread starvation and famine, while “large amounts of state resources... have been spent on the luxury goods and the advancement of his [the supreme leader’s] personality cult.”

Those who should be held criminally responsible for starving the North Korean people are above all the successive US administrations that maintained an economic blockade of the country following the 1953 termination of the Korean War, in which the United States killed hundreds of thousands of Korean civilians and soldiers. In the wake of the collapse of the Soviet Union, Washington systematically tightened the sanctions regime on North Korea in a calculated effort to bring about its collapse. Any humanitarian aid came with political strings attached. In the mid-1990s, economic sanctions compounded food shortages caused by a string of natural disasters, leading to widespread famine and deaths.

While the role of the US and its allies in systematically destabilising North Korea goes unmentioned, the UN commission report does single out China for special mention. It specifically criticises China for its return of asylum seekers to North Korea, suggesting that it is in breach of its obligations under international refugee laws.

China is not alone, however, in branding asylum seekers as so-called “economic refugees” and forcibly repatriating them to face danger and persecution. Governments in Kirby’s own country, Australia, are notorious for the “refoulement” of refugees.

The real purpose of the accusation against China is to place it in the dock alongside North Korea, potentially opening up Chinese leaders to charges of complicity in “crimes against humanity.” The UN commission report feeds directly into the Obama administration’s escalating provocations and pressure against China throughout the Indo-Pacific region, as part of its “pivot to Asia.”

The US is targeting North Korea in particular because it is China’s only formal ally and acts as a buffer for China on its northern border. A change of regime in Pyongyang to one sympathetic to Washington would further tighten the noose of US alliances, bases and strategic partnerships around China.

Not surprisingly, the US State Department welcomed the UN report, saying it “clearly and unequivocally documents the brutal reality of North Korea.” An

editorial in the *Wall Street Journal* praised the report for “naming and shaming Pyongyang’s accomplices in Beijing.”

The editorial continued, “The report marks the first major mention of China by name in a UN assessment of North Korea,” and concluded by bluntly declaring, “The report’s findings underscore that Western policy should focus on squeezing the regime with a goal of toppling it.”

The trip to Asia by US Secretary of State John Kerry over the past week signaled that the Obama administration intends to step up the “squeeze” not only on North Korea, but China as well. North Korea topped the agenda in Kerry’s talks with Chinese leaders. He told the media that China had to use “every tool at their disposal, all of the means of persuasion that they have” to compel North Korea to denuclearise.

By extending the accusations against the North Korean regime to “crimes against humanity”, the US is effectively ruling out any compromise or deal with North Korea and setting course for a confrontation with Pyongyang and its ally in Beijing.



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