

The militarist agenda behind Washington's confrontation with North Korea

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North Korea was hit by a second Internet shutdown on Saturday in what has all the earmarks of a US cyber-attack aimed at escalating its confrontation with Pyongyang. According to the Xinhua news agency, North Korea's entire Internet access and mobile phone 3G network came to a standstill in the morning and remained "very unstable" throughout the day.

The Internet blackout follows unsubstantiated allegations by the FBI and the Obama administration that North Korea was behind the hacking of Sony Pictures Entertainment in response to *The Interview*—a provocative film made in collaboration with the American intelligence-military establishment about a fictional assassination of North Korean leader Kim Jong-un.

President Obama warned of a "proportionate response" against Pyongyang at "a time and place of our choosing." He further inflamed tensions with North Korea by urging Sony to reverse its decision to withdraw the film from circulation. Just days later, on December 22, North Korea's Internet access collapsed for the first time, blacking out the entire country. On both occasions, Washington refused to confirm or deny responsibility.

Every aspect of the intensifying confrontation reeks of a calculated US provocation. While the American and international media have presented North Korea's alleged hacking of Sony as fact, the FBI "evidence" is so threadbare that many analysts have questioned its conclusion. Sam Glines, who runs the cyber-security company Norse, bluntly told CNN: "It's clear to us, based on both forensic and other evidence we've collected, that unequivocally they [North Korea] are not responsible for orchestrating or initiating the attack on Sony."

Pyongyang has denied any involvement in hacking

Sony and proposed a joint investigation into the incident—an offer the US dismissed out of hand. Instead, the two cyber-attacks on North Korea appear to be directed at goading the Stalinist regime into a response that can be seized on to generate a major international dispute. On Saturday, North Korea hit back, accusing the US of disrupting its Internet operations and Obama of being "reckless in words and deeds."

There is nothing "proportionate" in the US response to Pyongyang's alleged hacking of Sony. The *New York Times* reported on December 20 that Obama had instructed the US military's Cyber Command to devise "a range of offensive options" that could be used against North Korea, in addition to possible further sanctions, including measures aimed at isolating the country from the global financial system.

A comment published in the *Wall Street Journal* entitled "Time to End the North Korean Threat" demonstrates that powerful sections of the American ruling elite are pressing for a far more aggressive strategy directed at nothing less than regime-change in Pyongyang—a policy that threatens to trigger World War III. The article's author, Richard Haass, is a central figure in the US foreign policy establishment—a former director of foreign policy studies at the Democratic Party-aligned Brookings Institution and former top-level diplomat, who is currently president of the semi-official Council on Foreign Relations.

After reviewing the options against North Korea currently being aired, Haass writes: "These ideas are fine as far as they go, but they don't go far enough. The serious threat posed by North Korea far transcends cyberspace. Only one approach is commensurate with the challenge: ending North Korea's existence as an independent entity and reunifying the Korean

Peninsula.”

To justify such a dangerous course of action, Haass grossly magnifies the threat posed by North Korea’s very limited nuclear arsenal and its large but poorly equipped military. In fact, the capacity of North Korea to fight any military conflict has been seriously undermined by six decades of US-led economic sanctions, which have only escalated over the past decade on the pretext of halting the country’s nuclear programs.

Haass brushes aside the previous US approach, declaring: “There is no evidence that negotiations, sanctions or anything else have had or is having any effect on halting any of these [North Korean] activities.”

In fact, Washington’s negotiations with North Korea have never been in good faith. Offers to end Pyongyang’s isolation have always been accompanied by extortionate demands. When tentative deals have been reached, the US has sabotaged them. Since assuming office in 2009, Obama has never made a serious proposal to restart the six-party talks sponsored by China.

The US is not ratcheting up tensions with North Korea because the country poses a growing threat. Since taking over as leader following his father’s death in 2011, Kim Jong-un has hinted that the regime could be open to a rapprochement with Washington. Rather, the Obama administration’s aggressive policy towards Pyongyang is bound up with its far broader “pivot to Asia,” centrally targeting China and aimed at ensuring US hegemony throughout the region.

Haass’s comment was published just days after initial reports in the English language press that Beijing had decided to provide financial assistance to Moscow, threatening the US financial blockade of Russia. The WSWs warned at the time that Washington would react aggressively to this challenge to its plans not only to dominate Asia, but the entire Eurasian landmass. By winding up tensions with North Korea, Obama is also threatening China, which has long regarded North Korea as a crucial buffer on its northeastern borders.

Given its strategic significance to China, Haass’s suggestion that Washington could enlist Beijing’s help in his proposal to eliminate North Korea as “an independent entity” is simply window dressing. While China has expressed concerns about the unstable

Pyongyang regime, the last thing Beijing wants is a Korea unified by the US and South Korea, a long-time American client and ally, on its borders.

Haass himself makes clear that Washington should proceed with regime-change regardless of any assistance from China, writing: “Whether this is the case or not, the US needs to work with South Korea (and, if possible, Japan) to try to undermine North Korea from within.” His proposal to incite an internal rebellion along the lines of US-sponsored “colour revolutions” in former Soviet republics is utterly reckless and threatens to trigger a war on the Korean Peninsula that could draw the US into conflict with China and Russia.

The last time that US imperialism attempted regime-change in Pyongyang was in 1950. Having established a puppet police state in South Korea following World War II and encouraged its provocations against North Korea, the US and its allies seized on a North Korean military intervention into the South to launch a full-blown invasion. During the war, which cost the lives of millions of Koreans as well as many Chinese, US and allied troops, Washington seriously considered dropping nuclear weapons on China—as advocated by the top US commander, General Douglas MacArthur. A new war on the peninsula would have far more devastating consequences for humanity as a whole than the Korean War bloodbath.



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