

North Korea tests submarine-launched missile

Peter Symonds
25 August 2016

Amid US-South Korean war games and heightened tensions on the Korean Peninsula, North Korea conducted the test of a submarine-launched ballistic missile on Wednesday. The missile, which was launched from waters near the coastal city of Sinpo, flew about 500 kilometres and landed in Japan's air defence identification zone (ADIZ).

North Korean leader Kim Jong-un bragged that the test had been the "greatest success and victory" and placed North Korea in "the front rank of the military powers fully equipped with nuclear attack capability." The launch followed two unsuccessful attempts in April and July during which the missile flew just 10 and 30 kilometres respectively.

Pyongyang's missile launch and militarist bluster, along with its bellicose threats, are reactionary. They do nothing to enhance the security of the North Korean people. In fact, by providing a pretext for Washington's military build-up in North East Asia as well as Japanese rearmament, North Korea's actions only heighten the danger of a devastating war in the Asia Pacific region.

The missile launch provoked immediate condemnations from Japan, South Korea and the United States as well as criticism from China. Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe declared: "It is a grave threat to Japan's security and an unforgivable act that damages regional peace and stability markedly."

South Korea's foreign ministry denounced the missile firing, saying it was a violation of UN Security Council resolutions and would only result in tougher sanctions. The US Pacific Command branded the launch as a "provocation" that will only increase the determination of the "international community" to implement existing UN sanctions.

The US and Japan called for an emergency session of the UN Security Council, which convened late last night. Malaysia's ambassador Ramlan Bin Abraham,

the current council president told the media that "there was a general sense of condemnation" by most UN members at the closed-door meeting.

The condemnations of North Korea by the US and its allies are utterly hypocritical. Washington as part of its "pivot to Asia" and military expansion in Asia has deliberately sharpened tensions on the Korean Peninsula by beefing up its military ties with South Korea, including preparations to install a Terminal High Altitude Area Defence (THAAD) system in South Korea supposedly to counter North Korea.

The US and South Korea began their annual Ulchi Freedom Guardian joint military exercises this week involving 25,000 American and 75,000 South Korean personnel. The war games are premised on Operational Plans 5015 (OPLAN 5015) adopted last November by Washington and Seoul, which involve pre-emptive strikes on North Korean targets and assassination raids against its top leadership, including Kim Jong-un.

Unlike the case of Iran with which it actively sought a rapprochement, the Obama administration has made no attempt to end the tense standoff with North Korea through talks. In fact, Obama has maintained the confrontational stance of President Bush and shunned six-party negotiations sponsored by China, insisting that Pyongyang must dismantle its nuclear arsenal in advance of any discussions.

While Washington hypes up the threat posed by its latest missile launch, Pyongyang's nuclear weaponry and delivery systems are still primitive. North Korea has an outdated fleet of about 70 submarines with Soviet-era technology that are unlikely to be able to fire a ballistic missile. The missile was likely fired from a 2,000-tonne vessel known as Gorae, "whale" in Korean, which has a limited range, is relatively noisy and thus easily detectable.

The missile launch took place during the annual meeting of foreign ministers from Japan, China and

South Korea in Tokyo. All three condemned the test with China's foreign minister, Wang Yi, declaring: "China opposes North Korea's nuclear and missile process, actions that cause tension on the Korean Peninsula." He said that the three neighbours, despite the disputes between them, should work together to deal with regional threats such as those posed by North Korea.

In its article on the trilateral meeting, the *New York Times* mused that the missile test had brought "temporary unity in East Asia." In reality, the three nations are opposed to North Korea's actions for widely differing and antagonist reasons. The two American allies—Japan and South Korea—are using Pyongyang's sabre rattling to strengthen ties with the US and to boost their own military capacities.

The Abe government will undoubtedly exploit the missile test as further justification for remilitarisation and its push to revise the Japanese constitution to end limitations on its ability to wage war in pursuit of its imperialist interests.

China, however, confronts a deepening dilemma. Beijing is well aware that Washington's "pivot to Asia" and military build-up is primarily aimed at preparing for war against China not North Korea. While criticising its formal ally, China also does not want to precipitate a political implosion in Pyongyang that could lead to the establishment of a pro-US regime on its border. It is also concerned that North Korea's nuclear tests, most recently in January, could provide Tokyo and Seoul with the pretext to develop their own nuclear weapons.

Foreign Minister Wang's appeal for closer collaboration with South Korea and Japan is aimed at trying to ease regional tensions and marginalise the United States. The US, on the other hand, has a definite interest in maintaining the dangerous standoff on the Korean Peninsula to strengthen defence ties with its two allies and justify its preparations for war against China.

As Washington has more aggressively pursued the "pivot," Beijing has more publicly hit back. A commentary yesterday in the state-owned Xinhua news agency was sharply critical of the US role in stoking up tensions on the Korean Peninsula. While noting that the North Korean missile launch was "a new violation of UN resolutions," the article stated that it was in

response to this week's joint US-South Korean military drills.

The comment warned that "Washington and Seoul are playing a dangerous game" by seeking to deter North Korea through sabre rattling. Their plan, it declared, was doomed to be wishful thinking, "as muscle-flexing leads to nowhere but a more anxious, more agitated and thus more unpredictable Pyongyang." It made an appeal for South Korea to pursue its security through "good neighbourly and friendly relations with its neighbours, rather than a bunch of US made [THAAD] missiles."

However, China, like North Korea, is seeking to counter the US through a military arms race that can only end in a disaster for humanity. Its whipping up of Chinese nationalism, and in particular anti-Japanese xenophobia, only drives a wedge between the working class in the region and internationally—the only social force capable of putting an end to capitalism and the drive to war.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact