

US rejects talks over North Korea, declaring “all options on table”

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Amid sharply rising tensions on the Korean Peninsula, the Trump administration has flatly rejected a Chinese proposal for negotiations with North Korea despite warnings from the Chinese foreign minister, Wang Yi, that Washington and Pyongyang are on a collision course. A confrontation looms, with huge South Korean-US military exercises underway, involving over 300,000 troops backed by a US aircraft carrier strike group, stealth fighters and strategic bombers.

China is clearly alarmed at the prospect of war on its doorstep. Speaking in uncharacteristically blunt terms in Beijing yesterday, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi warned: “The two sides are like accelerating trains coming toward each other with neither side willing to give way,” he said. “The question is: Are the two sides really ready for a head-on collision? Our priority now is to flash the red light and apply the brakes on both trains.”

US ambassador to the UN Nikki Haley emphatically rebuffed the Chinese plan for the US and South Korea to halt their annual Foal Eagle war games, in return for a freeze by North Korea on its nuclear and missile programs. Speaking after an emergency UN Security Council meeting yesterday, Haley not only rejected China’s “dual suspension” scheme but provocatively declared that North Korean leader Kim Jong-un was “not a rational person,” effectively ruling out any future negotiations.

Haley told the media that the US was reevaluating how to deal with North Korea. “We are not ruling anything out and we’re considering every option that’s on the table,” she said, in a thinly veiled threat that the US could attack North Korea. To emphasise that time was running out, Haley warned: “We are making those decisions now and will act accordingly.” The US

ambassador was flanked by her South Korean and Japanese counterparts to highlight their support for Washington’s aggressive stance.

After coming to office, the Trump administration initiated a “comprehensive rethink” of US strategy toward Pyongyang. According to the *Wall Street Journal*, deputy national security adviser K.T. McFarland called for proposals, including those “well outside the mainstream”—ranging from talks with North Korea to “regime-change” and military strikes. Given Haley’s comments yesterday, the White House appears to have ruled out any negotiations and is preparing to embark on a reckless course of action that could potentially plunge Asia and the world into a catastrophic conflict.

The *New York Times* reported on Tuesday that three meetings of National Security Council deputies concluded that “a dramatic show of force, like attacks on the North’s missile and nuclear sites, would probably start a war.” Chillingly, the article did not say that, as a result, the White House had ruled out military strikes.

The US is exploiting North Korean missile launches this week to justify its military build-up in North East Asia, which is primarily directed against China. Foreign Minister Yang yesterday opposed the installation that began on Monday of a US Terminal High Altitude Area Defence (THAAD) anti-ballistic missile system in South Korea. “It’s common knowledge that the monitoring and early warning radius of THAAD reaches far beyond the Korean Peninsula and compromises China’s strategic security,” he said.

However, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) regime’s response to the danger of war—seeking a deal with Washington, on the one hand, and expanding its

own military capacities, on the other—only heightens the danger of conflict. A commentary in the official Xinhua news agency warned that THAAD would result in a regional arms race and suggested China would build more nuclear missiles to counter the US anti-missile systems.

The immediate pretext for the escalating US confrontation with North Korea was Monday's test firing of four intermediate-range ballistic missiles, which flew about 1,000 kilometres before splashing down in the Sea of Japan. The missile launches, which coincided with the war games underway in South Korea, were accompanied by a militarist statement from North Korea. It declared it would "reduce the bases of aggression and provocation to ashes with its invincible Hwasong rockets tipped with nuclear warheads" if its territory were attacked. Such reckless threats do nothing to defend the North Korean people. They play directly into the hands of US imperialism and only heighten the danger of war.

Washington's primary target is not North Korea, but China. During the presidential election campaign, Trump deliberately whipped up anti-Chinese xenophobia, accusing China of stealing American jobs and "raping America." The White House fired the first shot in trade war measures on Tuesday, by slapping a record \$1.19 billion fine on the Chinese technology giant ZTE for allegedly breaching US sanctions.

Having previously made menacing statements over the South China Sea and threatened to tear up the "One China" policy, the Trump administration seems to have settled on North Korea as the means for exerting intense pressure on China. US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson is heading for Asia next week for meetings in Tokyo, Seoul and Beijing that will focus on "the advancing nuclear and missile threat" from North Korea. The State Department said the discussions would "try to generate a new approach to North Korea."

Tillerson's trip will seek to further concretise Japanese and South Korean support for US war planning and exploit the mounting crisis over North Korea to bully the Chinese government into making major concessions—not only over Pyongyang, but the entire range of US demands. The overriding aim of the Trump administration, which is accelerating Obama's confrontational "pivot to Asia" against Beijing, is to

halt the historic decline of US imperialism and subordinate China to its economic and strategic interests.

The risk of war is compounded by the political and economic crisis wracking the US and its allies in North East Asia. The South Korean government is mired in a corruption scandal that has resulted in the impeachment and possible removal of President Park Geun Hye and could lead to an early election. Seoul is backing a belligerent approach to North Korea as a welcome diversion from its domestic strife. Similarly, the Japanese government is exploiting the confrontation with Pyongyang to deflect attention from its stagnant economy and justify its own military rearmament. Senior government figures have called in recent days for Japan to acquire the military hardware to conduct pre-emptive strikes against North Korea or any other potential enemy.

However, the most explosive factor in the profoundly unstable situation is the United States, where the entire political establishment and state apparatus is mired in bitter infighting and recriminations over foreign policy and tit-for-tat hacking allegations. The danger is that the Trump administration, which is guided by fascistic figures such as Stephen Bannon on the National Security Council, will choose the path of provocations and military action against North Korea to distract from the profound crisis at home, and to advance its plans for a confrontation with China, regardless of the potentially disastrous consequences.



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