

Trump threatens China with war on North Korea

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Ahead of his meeting this week with Chinese President Xi Jinping, President Trump issued a blunt, menacing warning to Beijing to force North Korea to abandon its nuclear and missile programs ... or else. Speaking to the *Financial Times*, he declared: “If China is not going to solve North Korea, we will. That is all that I am telling you.”

Trump outlined the ultimatum that he intends to deliver to Xi: “China has great influence over North Korea. And China will either decide to help us with North Korea, or they won’t. And if they do that will be very good for China, and if they don’t it won’t be good for anyone.”

Trump’s threats have only one meaning: if the Chinese government is not prepared to economically cripple or oust the Pyongyang regime, the US is prepared to use every means at its disposal, including its massive military might, against North Korea. As US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson emphasised during his trip to Asia last month, all options, including war with North Korea, are on the table.

Whatever measures the US might initially take, Trump made absolutely clear that he was prepared to attack North Korea and could do so with no notice. “I am not the United States of the past where we tell you where we are going to hit in the Middle East,” he told the newspaper. “Where they say ... ‘We will be attacking Mosul in four months.’ ... Why are they talking? There is no reason to talk.”

Behind closed doors, the Trump administration has been preparing for a war with North Korea that will not only be catastrophic for the Korean people on the divided peninsula but could drag in other major powers, including China, Russia and Japan.

The White House has just completed a review of US policy towards North Korea ahead of Xi’s meeting

with Trump. While the options reportedly include heavy sanctions not only against North Korea but also Chinese firms doing business with Pyongyang, the Trump administration would not stop there.

During his recent trip, Tillerson declared that the Obama administration’s policy of incrementally increased sanctions—dubbed “strategic patience”—had failed. He also ruled out any immediate negotiations with Pyongyang. All of the remaining options—cyber warfare, provocations and covert operations to destabilise the North Korean regime and military action of various forms—threaten to rapidly plunge the region into war.

The *Financial Times* asked Trump: “Do you think you can solve it [North Korea] without China’s help?” His utter recklessness is summed up in his one word reply: “Totally.” Asked the same question again, he responded: “I don’t have to say any more. Totally.”

The incalculable consequences of war on the Korean Peninsula were summed up by Obama’s defence secretary, Ashton Carter, who has long been a supporter of military strikes on North Korea. Speaking to ABC News on Sunday, Carter declared that he was not optimistic about pressuring China to take action against North Korea.

Carter insisted that the military option had to remain on the table then, with callous indifference to the human suffering involved, sketched what would happen in the wake of a US pre-emptive strike on North Korea. “It is quite possible that they [Pyongyang] would ... launch an attempted invasion of South Korea. As I said, I’m confident of the outcome of that war, which would be the defeat of North Korea.

“But I need to caution you. This is a war that would have an intensity of violence associated with it that we haven’t seen since the last Korean War. Seoul is right

there on the borders of the DMZ [border with North Korea], so even though the outcome is certain, it is a very destructive war,” Carter declared.

Carter knows of what he speaks. As assistant defence secretary in the Clinton administration, he was deeply involved in planning for the war with North Korea in 1994 that was called off at the last minute when the Pentagon conservatively estimated the likely outcome—300,000 to 500,000 South Korean and American military casualties, not counting the death toll in North Korea and civilian dead and injured.

The death toll in the Korean War between 1950 and 1953 ran into the millions. Casualties in a war today in which North Korea as well as the US have nuclear weapons and could use nuclear weapons would be far higher. US Defence Secretary James “Mad Dog” Mattis has already warned that any attempt by Pyongyang to use its nuclear weapons would be met with an “effective and overwhelming response”—that is, nuclear annihilation.

The Korean War was the only time that China and the United States directly fought a war. The strategic position of the Korean Peninsula in North East Asia has made it a focus for invasions and wars for more than a century—involving not only the United States and China, but also Japan and Russia. The danger is that a new war would rapidly drag in other military powers, including those armed with nuclear weapons.

The danger of world war arises not simply as a result of the erratic and reckless behaviour of Trump. Rather, his irrationality is a product of the profound crisis of American and global capitalism and the determination of the US ruling class for whom he speaks to exploit its current military dominance to arrest its historic decline—whatever the outcome. A quarter century of military provocations and invasions in the Middle East and Central Asia are now coalescing into a confrontation with major US rivals—above all, China and Russia.

The reaction of the North Korean regime to the growing threat of war is utterly reactionary. Its missile and nuclear tests play directly into Washington’s hands by providing a pretext for war. Moreover, Pyongyang’s nationalist bombast and bloodcurdling threats against the US, Japan and South Korea only heighten the danger of war and sow divisions in the international working class.

Unlike the criminal US-led invasion of Iraq in 2003 or the more recent wars in the Middle East, the countdown to war against North Korea is not being made public. Nevertheless it is proceeding with a relentless logic. Workers around the globe cannot afford to wake up one morning to find that the US has bombed North Korea and the world stands on the brink of a nuclear war.

The only means for halting the drive to war is to put an end to its source—the bankrupt profit system and its division of the world into rival nation states—through the building of a unified anti-war movement of the working class based on socialist internationalism.



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