

Trump official warns “the clock has run out” on North Korea

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5 April 2017

In another warning that the Trump administration is preparing to launch war on North Korea, a senior White House official ominously told the press yesterday that “the clock has now run out and all options are on the table.”

Underlining the imminent character of US war plans, the White House official declared that North Korea was a “matter of urgent interest for the president and the administration as a whole.”

Coming just days before Chinese President Xi Jinping is due to meet Trump, the meaning is evident. Unless Beijing forces Pyongyang to bow to US demands to abandon its nuclear and missile programs, the US will use every means available, including its huge military forces, to crush the North Korean regime.

Top Trump officials have already ruled out a return to negotiations as proposed by China. The unnamed White House official emphasised the point again, by noting the failure of successive administrations to negotiate an end to North Korea’s nuclear program.

The menacing US threats of war against North Korea are aimed at placing intense pressure on President Xi to economically cripple the Pyongyang regime. The White House official told the media that the US wanted to work with China on North Korea but added: “This is a test for the relationship.”

Trump has repeatedly denounced China for failing to assist the US in dealing with North Korea. But it would be wrong to interpret the US threats as just bluster aimed at putting pressure on Xi, prior to talks with the US president on Thursday and Friday.

In an interview this week with the *Financial Times*, Trump was asked whether his abrasive language was just “the most brilliant softening-up exercise.” He replied: “This isn’t an exercise... This is not just... talk. The United States has talked long enough and you see

where it gets us, it gets us nowhere.”

Trump told the newspaper: “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.”

The US president then emphatically declared: “If China is not going to solve North Korea, we will. That is all I am telling you.” Asked if he thought that the US could “solve” it without Chinese assistance, he replied: “Totally.”

Testifying to the US Senate Armed Services Committee yesterday, General John Hyten expressed skepticism that the US could end the North Korean nuclear program without help from China. “Any solution to the North Korean problem has to involve China,” he said.

At the same time, the general made clear that the Pentagon is preparing war plans against North Korea regardless. “I’ll provide those military options. So that’s my job but I look at it from a strategic perspective and I can’t see a solution that doesn’t involve China,” he said.

Hyten is head of the US Strategic Command, which, among its other responsibilities, is in charge of the huge American nuclear arsenal.

The blunt remarks of retired General Jack Keane give an indication of the discussions taking place in the White House and the Pentagon. Keane, who was Trump’s first choice as defense secretary, told the *Times of London* yesterday that the United States was “rapidly and dangerously” edging closer to taking military action against North Korea’s nuclear missile program.

Keane dismissed the notion that the US should seek a diplomatic solution. “Our last three presidents spanning

over 20 years have failed to stop the North Korean nuclear program,” he said.

The general then proposed his “solution”—an all-out attack on North Korea. “A pre-emptive strike against launch facilities, underground nuclear sites, artillery and rocket response forces and regime leadership targets may be the only option left on the table,” he declared.

A massive, unprovoked US attack on North Korea would constitute a crime of historic proportions that would result in the deaths of millions and could rapidly draw in other major powers, including China and Russia. The fact that the Trump administration is even contemplating such reckless measures speaks to the depth of the political and economic crisis not only in the United States but globally.

The threats from the Trump administration go hand-in-hand with the drum beat for war in the jingoistic and supine American media, where the pros and cons of military attacks on North Korea are weighed with complete indifference to the consequences for the lives of millions in Asia.

In another sign of the advanced preparations for war, the NBC news network has sent its anchor Lester Holt to South Korea to ramp up the propaganda for war, in the manner of the journalists embedded with US military forces during 2003 invasion of Iraq. He reported breathlessly from US Osan Air Base close to the Demilitarized Zone between the two Koreas, emphasising the readiness of US fighter crews to “fight tonight” if the orders come through.

Holt also interviewed a high-ranking North Korean defector Thae Yong Ho to provide lurid accounts of North Korea’s police-state regime and grossly inflate the threat posed to the United States by its nuclear weapons and missiles. “Once he [Kim Jong-un] sees that there is any kind of sign of a tank or an imminent threat from America, then he would use his nuclear weapons with ICBMs [intercontinental ballistic missile],” he told NBC.

US Defence Secretary James Mattis has already made absolutely clear that any attempt by North Korea to use its nuclear weapons would result in an “effective and overwhelming” response. The US Strategic Command has at its disposal thousands of nuclear weapons and multiple sophisticated delivery systems and would not hesitate to use them against Pyongyang.

Early on Wednesday morning, the North Korean military tested another medium-range ballistic missile, which splashed down in the Sea of Japan. Such acts do nothing to defend the North Korean people and play directly into the hands of US imperialism as a pretext for war. As General Keane indicated, what the Pentagon is preparing is a massive pre-emptive assault designed to obliterate North Korea’s military and industrial capacities.

Echoing Trump’s comments to the *Financial Times*, US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson reacted by stating: “The United States has spoken enough about North Korea. We have no further comment.”

The remark should be understood as another dangerous warning. As the saying goes, when the talking stops, the fighting begins.



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