

World teeters on the brink of war

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US officials made a series of extraordinary and provocative statements directed against North Korea Tuesday, underscoring the growing danger of the eruption of a major war in the Pacific.

“The clock has now run out, and all options are on the table” in dealing with North Korea, one US official told reporters. After North Korea test-fired another ballistic missile into the Sea of Japan Tuesday evening, US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson issued an ominous statement, declaring, “The United States has spoken enough about North Korea. We have no further comment.”

The implications of these cryptic and threatening statements were further elucidated by retired General John “Jack” Keane, a top advisor to the Hillary Clinton campaign who declined an offer to be Trump’s Secretary of Defense in November.

“A preemptive 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,” Keane told the *Times of London* on Tuesday. “We are rapidly and dangerously moving towards a military option.”

On Saturday, US President Donald Trump declared that he is prepared to go to war against North Korea “unilaterally.”

Former US Defense Secretary Ashton Carter, a supporter of US military escalation against China and North Korea, said over the weekend that a US military operation against North Korea would “have an intensity of violence associated with it that we haven’t seen since the last Korean War,” which killed nearly three million people.

Even as the White House threatens to initiate a major military conflict in the Pacific, the US media has been braying for a further escalation in Syria in response to what it claims to be a chemical weapons attack by the government of Bashar Al-Assad.

The United States, Britain and France proposed a United Nations Security Council resolution condemning the attack, which is set for a vote on Wednesday. Trump in a statement condemned the “heinous actions by the Bashar al-Assad regime,” which he blamed on the “weakness” of his predecessor, Barack Obama.

The US is in the process of funneling hundreds of additional troops into Iraq and Syria, all with no public discussion or debate. Last week, a Pentagon spokesman told the *Los Angeles Times*, “The coalition will not routinely announce or confirm information about the capabilities, force numbers, locations, or movement of forces in or out of Iraq and Syria.”

Trump reiterated this point in an interview with the *Financial Times* this weekend, saying, “I am not the United States of the past where we tell you where we are going to hit in the Middle East... why are they talking? There is no reason to talk.”

The raging conflict in Syria and the potential for a “preemptive strike” against North Korea are in fact proxy fights in the US’s conflict with its larger geopolitical adversaries: China and Russia, against whom the US is likewise directly ramping up its military posture.

Over the weekend, a further 1,350 troops from NATO’s Enhanced Forward Presence in Eastern Europe arrived in Orzysz in northeastern Poland. These troops, together with thousands of other NATO forces deployed in Poland, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, have been deployed to counter “violent Russian agitation and Russian aggression,” according to Tillerson.

Within days, Trump is expected to announce the US response to alleged Russian violations of the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty, which media outlets like the *New York Times* are clamoring should become the occasion for the

escalation of tensions with Russia.

On Friday, Trump also signed two executive orders furthering his administration's trade war agenda against China, while making clear that his meeting this week with Chinese Premiere Xi Jinping will be "difficult."

The administration has likewise escalated tensions with its NATO ally Germany, demanding Friday that NATO members increase their defense spending. That day, German Foreign Minister Sigmar Gabriel accused the United States of engaging in "trade war" and called for the EU to launch a complaint against the US at the World Trade Organization.

While the US is at the center of global war preparations, the deepening crisis of the US-dominated world order is fueling military tensions all over the globe.

Just days after the United Kingdom officially initiated its exit from the European Union under Article 50 of the Lisbon Treaty, the UK and Spain have become embroiled in a dispute over the strategic territory of Gibraltar. Former Tory leader Michael Howard strongly implied Sunday that Britain would be prepared to go to war to defend its claim to the territory. British Rear Admiral Chris Parry added, "Spain should learn from history that it is never worth taking us on and that we could still singe the King of Spain's beard."

Meanwhile Japan is rapidly rearming itself, having this month launched its second helicopter carrier. Last week, the governing Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) issued a proposal for Japan to acquire "counterattack" weapons, such as aircraft carriers and long-range missiles, that are banned under its constitution.

At the same time India, according to press accounts, has been quietly revising its nuclear doctrine, with the *New York Times* carrying a report last week that the country "is considering allowing for preemptive nuclear strikes against Pakistan in the event of a war."

As was the case a century ago with the outbreak of World War I, the whole world has been transformed into one great powder keg. Any one of these myriad conflicts and flashpoints risks setting off a chain of events that could lead to war between nuclear-armed powers, resulting in the deaths of hundreds of thousands, if not millions of people, within hours.

The immense danger of a new world war is an expression of the deepening crisis of the nation-state

system, which is breaking down under the weight of a profound crisis of the entire capitalist order.

The world's capitalist ruling classes have only one solution to this deepening and insoluble crisis: a new world war, with all the horrors that it entails. The international working class must oppose the drive to war with its own program: the abolition of the nation-state system and private ownership of production, and the reorganization of world economy into a worldwide socialist federation.



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