US aircraft carrier deployed in direct threat to North Korea

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Just days after launching its criminal cruise missile attack on Syria, the Trump administration has provocatively authorised the US aircraft carrier Carl Vinson, together with its full strike group of guided missile destroyers and a cruiser, to waters off the Korean Peninsula. The move is a direct military threat to North Korea, which was at the top of the agenda in talks last weekend between the US and Chinese presidents.

An unnamed US official told the *Financial Times* that the deployment was designed to be a "show of force." The carrier strike group had taken part in joint US-South Korean war games but was heading south for port calls in Australia before being ordered to turn north from Singapore. The *Navy Times* noted that "announcing carrier movements in advance is rare, and generally done to send a clear message."

US Pacific Command spokesman Dave Benham declared the decision was "a prudent measure to maintain readiness and presence in the Western Pacific," then castigated North Korea in blunt terms. "The number one threat in the region continues to be North Korea," he said, "due to its reckless, irresponsible and destabilising program of missile tests and pursuit of a nuclear weapons capacity."

The *Navy Times* boasted that "the strike group brings with it a ton of firepower, including the strike- and air-combat capacities of the Hornets [fighter aircraft], early warning radars, electronic-warfare capabilities and more than 300 missile tubes on the carrier's escorts."

The dispatch of the Carl Vinson is a deliberate escalation of tensions on the Korean Peninsula following the Trump administration's completion of a lengthy review of US strategy toward North Korea. NBC revealed last Friday that three military options were under active consideration: the return of US nuclear weapons to the Korean Peninsula, "decapitation" attacks to kill the North Korean leadership and covert operations inside North Korea to sabotage nuclear, military and industrial targets.

Speaking on "Fox News" on Sunday, President Donald Trump's national security adviser, General H. R. McMaster, justified the deployment of the Carl Vinson as "prudent," adding: "This is a rogue regime that is now a nuclear-capable regime. The president has asked [us] to be prepared to give him a full range of options to remove that threat to the American people and to our allies and partners in the region."

Citing US officials, the *Navy Times* reported that "the Pentagon and US Pacific Command have been sharpening plans for military strikes on the North as an option should the administration want to pursue that action."

All these highly provocative "options" threaten to trigger a devastating war on the Korean Peninsula that could kill millions. The *Navy Times* suggested that "an all-out regional conflict" would bring "the US and its allies head-to-head with not only North Korea, but perhaps with China"—that is, a conflict between the world's two largest economies, both nuclear-armed.

Trump undoubtedly exploited the threat of military action against North Korea to pressure Chinese President Xi Jinping to take tougher action against the Pyongyang regime. Speaking after talks between Trump and Xi last weekend, US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson told CBS's "Face the Nation" yesterday that Xi "clearly understands ... that the situation has intensified and has reached a certain level of threat that action has to be taken."

Tillerson ruled out any talks with North Korea at present, saying only that "we can work together with the Chinese to change the conditions in the minds of

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the DPRK [North Korean] leadership." But if Beijing fails to bully Pyongyang into accepting Washington's demands, Tillerson left no doubt that the US would take aggressive measures against North Korea. Trump bluntly told the *Financial Times* last week: "If China is not going to solve North Korea, we will."

In an interview yesterday with ABC's "This Week," Tillerson was asked whether North Korea's development of an intercontinental ballistic missile would constitute "a red line." He answered ominously: "If we judge that they have perfected that type of delivery system, then that becomes a very serious stage of their further development."

Drawing a link with last week's attack on Syria, Tillerson said: "The message that any nation can take is if you violate international norms, if you violate international agreements, if you fail to live up to commitments, if you become a threat to others, at some point, a response is likely to be undertaken."

The North Korean regime denounced the US missile strikes on Syria as "an unforgiveable act of aggression," adding that "the US has been picking only on countries without nuclear weapons." A spokesman declared: "The reality of today shows that we must stand against power with power and it proves a million times over that our decision to strengthen our nuclear deterrence has been the right one."

In reality, Pyongyang's limited nuclear arsenal has only provided US imperialism with a pretext for a massive build-up of its military forces in Asia, which are not primarily directed against North Korea, but China. Trump is continuing and expanding the Obama administration's "pivot to Asia" in a bid to ensure the continued US dominance of the Asia Pacific region.

While North Korea is not the same as Syria, the US will not hesitate to use military force against Pyongyang to further its strategic ambitions. US Defence Secretary James Mattis has already warned North Korea that any attempt to use its nuclear weapons will be met with an "effective and overwhelming response." The Carl Vinson strike group alone has the capacity to carry and deliver enough nuclear weapons to obliterate North Korea's industrial and military capabilities.

Moreover, no one should conclude that the strikes on Syria will preclude a US attack on North Korea. Damascus and Pyongyang are just the proxy targets for a far broader strategy of subordinating Russia and China—and thus the Eurasian landmass—to the hegemony of US imperialism. The bitter infighting within the American political, military and intelligence establishment over tactics—whether to confront Moscow or Beijing first—does not rule out attacks on both Syria and North Korea, with devastating consequences for humanity.

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