

Trump threatens North Korea, issues ultimatum to China

Peter Symonds
12 April 2017

US President Donald Trump made another menacing threat to North Korea yesterday, at the same time issuing a new ultimatum to China to force Pyongyang to submit to Washington's demands to abandon its nuclear and missile programs. Trump's tweets compound the danger of war following his order, last weekend, for the aircraft carrier strike group headed by the USS Carl Vinson to return to waters off the Korean Peninsula.

In one tweet, the US president declared: "North Korea is looking for trouble. If China decides to help, that would be great. If not, we will solve the problem without them! U.S.A." In an earlier tweet, Trump indicated that China might gain economic concessions if it bullied North Korea into submission: "I explained to the President of China [Xi Jinping] that a trade deal with the US will be far better if they solve the North Korean problem!"

The only conclusion that can be drawn from such reckless threats is that Trump is prepared to order a military attack on North Korea if China fails to heed his dictates and Pyongyang conducts another nuclear or missile test. Speculation is rife in the US and international media that North Korean leader Kim Jong-un might order such a test on Saturday to coincide with the birthday of his late grandfather, Kim Il-sung.

Top Trump officials have already ruled out any return to the Obama administration's policy of "strategic patience" based purely on ratcheting up sanctions on North Korea with the assistance of China. Speaking after Trump's meetings with Xi last weekend, US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson also rejected any return to negotiations with Pyongyang unless it bowed to US demands. Tillerson has repeatedly declared that "all options"—that is, including the use of military force—are on the table in dealing with North Korea.

Last Friday, NBC reported on the outcome of a lengthy review by the Trump administration of US strategy toward North Korea. The options under active consideration include: returning US nuclear weapons to South Korea; "decapitation" raids to kill North Korean leaders; and covert sabotage operations inside North Korea by special forces units.

The Australian newspaper, the *Daily Telegraph*, yesterday reported that the US was "fully prepared" to shoot down a North Korean missile and has placed Australia and its allies on standby. This alert includes the key Pine Gap base in central Australia that provides intelligence and targeting data to US forces across Asia and the Middle East.

Speaking to the Fox Business Network, Trump boasted that the US was sending more than just the Carl Vinson strike group toward the Korean Peninsula. "We are sending an armada," he said. "Very powerful. We have submarines. Very powerful. Far more powerful than the aircraft carrier. That I can tell you."

North Korea has responded to US threats with its own bellicose warnings that play directly into the hands of US imperialism. The official Rodong Sinmun newspaper declared: "Our military is keeping an eye on the movement of enemy forces while putting them in our nuclear sights." A Korean language statement issued by the foreign ministry declared that the country would "not miss a chance to sweep the imperialist group with a nuclear fire of justice."

Such irresponsible threats to use nuclear weapons do nothing to defend the North Korean people. They only raise the stakes and increase the likelihood of a US attack. Already, US Defence Secretary James Mattis has warned that any attempt by Pyongyang to use nuclear weapons would result in an overwhelming response—in other words, the nuclear annihilation of

North Korea.

The Trump administration is well aware that any US strike on North Korea or other military “options” could provoke retaliation and the rapid descent into a war that would drag in other powers, including China. Yet Trump has continued to heighten tensions and create a dangerous tinderbox on the Korean Peninsula in which any incident, whether accidental or deliberate, could set off a conflict.

The entire region is now on tenterhooks, especially China, which faces the prospect of war on its doorstep. Unconfirmed reports continue to emerge that Beijing has sent 150,000 troops to its border with North Korea in case conflict breaks out. The state-owned *Global Times* contradicted denials by the Chinese foreign ministry, citing South Korean diplomats as saying that military drills were underway in the border area.

A *Global Times* editorial yesterday urged North Korea not to “misjudge the situation at this crucial moment” and conduct a sixth nuclear test. “If it does so, responses from both Beijing and Washington might be unprecedented, even becoming a ‘turning point’,” it warned.

In another editorial today, the newspaper declared: “The Korean Peninsula has never been so close to a military clash since the North conducted its first nuclear test in 2006.” It suggested that Beijing would be prepared to impose crippling sanctions on Pyongyang. “If the North makes another provocative move this month, Chinese society will be willing to see the UNSC [UN Security Council] adopt severe restrictive measures that have never been seen before, such as restricting oil imports to the North.” North Korea relies completely on China for its oil supplies.

In South Korea, Defence Ministry spokesman Moon Sang-kyun sought to prevent a growing sense of public panic at the prospect of a new Korean war, in which Seoul could be one of North Korea’s first targets. He called for caution “so as not to get blinded by exaggerated assessments about the security situation on the Korean Peninsula.”

South Korea’s foreign ministry also tried to calm fears by declaring that the US “will not take a new policy or measures without consultations with us.” In fact, as the US wars in the Middle East underscore, Washington is quite capable of launching a war on the Korean Peninsula with complete disregard for the lives

of people in South Korea or anywhere else in the region.

In Australia, an editorial in the *Australian*, while denouncing North Korea, urged the Trump administration to act cautiously. “Cool heads are imperative in responding to the rogue nation’s provocations. A return to a shooting war on the Korean Peninsula would serve nobody’s interests.”

Far from “cool heads” prevailing in Washington, the Trump administration—dominated by generals, billionaires and fascists—has already launched strikes on the Syrian government, threatening a war with Russia, and could also attack North Korea, provoking a confrontation with China.

Millions of people died in the 1950–53 Korean War, which devastated the peninsular and sowed the seeds for the present dangerous confrontation. A new conflict that drew in nuclear-armed powers would be even more catastrophic.



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