

China appeals to US to back down from war with North Korea

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Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi appealed yesterday to the Trump administration to back away from its threats and preparations to unleash a military assault on North Korea. Reflecting the tremendous anxiety within the Chinese ruling elite of a catastrophic war on its northern border, he declared: “One has the feeling that a conflict could break out at any moment.”

Yi continued: “We call on all parties to refrain from provoking and threatening each other, whether in words or actions, and not let the situation get to an irreversible and unmanageable stage.”

The Russian government added its warnings. Spokesman Dmitry Peskov stated yesterday: “Moscow is watching with great concern the escalation of tensions on the Korean Peninsula. We call for restraint from all countries and warn countries not to pursue actions that could consist of any provocative steps.”

Unnamed “US intelligence officials” told NBC News on Thursday the United States will carry out a “preemptive strike” if the White House and Pentagon believe North Korea is about to carry out another nuclear weapons’ test.

The US and international media is full of reports and purported satellite imagery showing that the Pyongyang regime headed by Kim Jong-un is in the final stages of preparing for such a test at the Punggye-ri site, near North Korea’s border with both China and Russia. Today is the “Day of the Sun” in North Korea—official commemorations of the birth date of the regime’s first dictator Kim Il-sung. Tests of missiles and nuclear devices have been timed for such nationalist events in the past.

The US military is continuing to make provocative demonstrations of the power at its disposal in North East Asia. Following the announcement that the aircraft carrier Carl Vinson and its battle group have been

dispatched to waters off the Korean coast, the US 18th Air Wing lined up dozens of jet fighters, bombers and helicopters on the runway of its base on Okinawa, releasing photos showing F-15s and other aircraft being armed with missiles and bombs.

A vast array of other military hardware is deployed to the region, including submarines, B-1 strategic bombers, helicopter gunships, and an estimated 37,000 American ground troops supporting the well-equipped, 625,000-strong South Korean military.

Among the horrifying weapons of mass destruction that would presumably be at the disposal of US commanders against North Korea is the Massive Ordnance Air Blast (MOAB) conventional bomb that was used for the first time on Thursday on an alleged cave network in Afghanistan (see: “US drops largest non-nuclear weapon on Afghanistan: A crime against humanity”).

Every effort is being made in the American and allied media to amplify the sense that a US attack is not only imminent, but justified.

The bellicose rhetoric of the North Korean military command in response to the NBC report has been seized upon to propagandise about the “madness” of the regime and the purported danger posed by an isolated and backward country of just 25 million people and a gross domestic product of barely \$25 billion. Among other statements, Pyongyang declared that in the event of any attack, US bases in South Korea and Japan, as well as the South Korean presidential palace in Seoul, would be “pulverised.”

Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe’s government is exploiting the situation to step up its agitation for rearmament and the repudiation of the country’s nominal, post-World War II “pacifist” foreign policy. It has reportedly dispatched warships to join the Carl

Vinson battlegroup.

To generate as much hysteria as possible, Abe's National Security Council leaked to the media that it had discussed in February a range of plans to evacuate some 60,000 Japanese citizens from South Korea in the event of war, and considered how to respond to a flood of North Korean refugees trying to reach Japan by boat. Ominously, the reports noted that the security council assumed North Korean "spies and agents" would be among such desperate people, requiring "tightened security."

Figures within the American political and media establishment have raised concern over the consequences of a war on the Korean Peninsula. The *Los Angeles Times* recalled the modelling undertaken in 1994—when the Clinton White House was on the verge of ordering attacks on North Korea. Computer simulations, it noted, estimated that retaliation by the North Korean military could cause one million civilian deaths in Seoul alone. Some 23 years later, and with North Korea in possession of at least some nuclear devices, the potential cost of a war would be immeasurably higher.

Karl Baker, a former military officer now with the Center for Strategic and International Studies, told the *LA Times*: "Trump needs to understand that all options are not 'on the table'."

War, however, is not going to be prevented by placing hopes that reason will prevail in the imperialist corridors of power, whether in Washington or elsewhere. It is being driven not by the intentions of political leaders, but the ever-mounting economic crisis of global capitalism and intensifying competition for dominance over lucrative markets and sources of profit.

The primary objective of the US build-up toward war against North Korea is to apply unprecedented pressure on Beijing to bow down to Washington's dictates that it defer to American hegemony over the Asia-Pacific region. From the reckless vantage point of the US political and military establishment, if the threat of a devastating attack on North Korea can be used to bully China, so can threats of confrontation over issues as varied as trade relations and Chinese territorial claims in the South China Sea.

The Chinese government is desperately seeking to accommodate to the Trump administration. In the past week, it has announced the curtailment of coal

purchases from North Korea—one of the North's few viable exports—and the suspension of the only international flights into the country. State-owned publications such as the *People's Daily* and *Global Times*, which generally echo the views of the Chinese Communist Party leadership, have warned North Korea to abandon its attempts to assemble a nuclear arsenal, and, in so doing, deprive Washington of its pretext for war. In at least one editorial, the *Global Times* threatened that China may militarily intervene itself to prevent another North Korean nuclear test.

The Trump administration responded yesterday with an apparent concession to Beijing, issuing a statement that its policy is "increasing pressure on Pyongyang with the help of China, North Korea's dominant trade and military partner." At the same time, the White House has not retreated from its assertions that "all options"—including war—remain firmly "on the table."



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