

US threats of war against North Korea continue

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Despite a failed North Korean missile launch on Sunday morning and Washington's relatively muted response, tensions in North East Asia remain extremely high. The Trump administration is continuing to warn that military force could be used in response to any nuclear or missile test by Pyongyang.

Trump's national security adviser H.R. McMaster stressed that "all of our options are on the table, undergoing refinement and further development" in relation to North Korea. He said: "The president has made clear that he will not accept the United States and its allies and partners in the region being under threat from this hostile regime with nuclear weapons."

Speaking on ABC's "This Week" program yesterday, McMaster said that in the first instance Washington would rely on Beijing to put enormous pressure on Pyongyang to bow to US demands to end its nuclear and ballistic missile programs. "North Korea is very vulnerable to pressure from the Chinese. Eighty percent of North Korea's trade comes from China. All of their energy requirements are fulfilled by China," he said.

The national security adviser made clear that "this problem is coming to a head." He stated that this was the time "to undertake all actions we can, short of a military option, to try to resolve this peacefully," but ruled nothing out. No credibility should be given to McMaster's suggestion that the Trump administration will explore options, short of military force, "in the coming weeks, months."

McMaster himself declared that the Trump administration would not telegraph how it would respond to certain situations. Citing the devastating cruise missile strikes on Syria, he emphasised that Trump was "clearly comfortable making tough decisions."

Last week Trump ordered the aircraft carrier strike group led by the USS Carl Vinson to return to waters off the Korean Peninsula and boasted that he had sent an "armada" including nuclear submarines to the area. The Pentagon also has at its disposal advanced fighters and strategic bombers stationed in Japan and Guam.

In South Korea, the US has 28,500 troops as well as military aircraft and other hardware on a high state of alert, ready to "Fight Tonight." In the event of war with North Korea, the US military assumes operational control over the well-equipped South Korean military with some 625,000 personnel as well as sophisticated naval, air and anti-missile systems.

The South Korean government immediately denounced the failed missile test, making clear it fully supported US military threats. "The government condemns this clear threat to the peace and security of the Korean Peninsula and the international community," the defense ministry said in a statement on Sunday.

The London-based *Sunday Times* reported that US officials had briefed their British counterparts on Washington's preparations for war with North Korea. "They'll do anything it takes," a senior British source told the newspaper. "Nothing is off the table. They think they've got the capabilities to target things and utterly destroy them."

A former US official familiar with the war plans told the *Sunday Times*: "Trump is pushing the Chinese hard, but in his gut he ultimately feels he will have to take a strong step himself. There are plans to destroy the missile sites and the military have strong confidence in what they know."

A US foreign policy adviser travelling with Vice President Mike Pence on his current tour of Asia repeated the threats made by McMaster. He noted that

North Korea appeared to have tested a medium-range ballistic missile, not an ICBM, but it failed within seconds.

While ruling out any American action, the adviser stressed: “We’ve got options; we’ve got a range of options both militarily, diplomatic and others, so we have a wide array of tools at [our] disposal for the president should he choose to use them.” He also made clear that “other actions would have been taken by the US,” if North Korea had conducted a nuclear test.

At the same time, the Trump administration, along with the American and international media, is continuing to demonise North Korea as “a rogue state” that threatens the security of the US and the world. This is in line with the propaganda campaigns that have preceded every illegal intervention and war carried out by US imperialism over the past 25 years from the Middle East, to the Balkans, North Africa and Central Asia.

National security adviser McMaster condemned the brutality of the Pyongyang regime headed by Kim Jong-un. “This is someone who has demonstrated his brutality by murdering his own brother, by murdering others in his family, by imprisoning large numbers of people in horrible conditions for no reason, for political reasons,” he said.

North Korea is certainly under the thumb of a vicious police-state regime and its reactionary, militarist response to US threats only heightens the danger of war. However, it is utterly hypocritical for the US to posture as a defender of peace and stability given its ongoing brutal wars in Iraq, Afghanistan and the Middle East as well as other military interventions and provocations.

As for Washington’s claims to defend “human rights,” this is a slogan that is turned off and on depending on a particular country’s alignment with US imperialism.

The events of the past week or so—missile strikes on Syria, the detonation of the Massive Ordnance Air Blast (MOAB), and the threats of an imminent attack on North Korea—all underscore that US imperialism is the greatest source of international instability and danger of war.

Speaking to the *Sunday Times*, a British military source, who had talked to national security adviser McMaster this month, said that he was aware that any

US attack on North Korea “would come at terrible cost” because it would likely provoke retaliation.

While the article did not spell out the consequences, any new war on the Korean Peninsula could result in the deaths of millions, or far more if China and other powers were drawn into the conflict. Nevertheless, the US is prepared to recklessly plunge the world into just such a catastrophe in its desperate bid for global hegemony.



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