

Trump administration recklessly escalating the conflict with Korea

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The danger of a military conflict between the United States and North Korea continued to escalate throughout the weekend. Far from seeking to lessen tensions between the two countries, the Trump administration continued to employ rhetoric that signaled the possibility of imminent military action by the United States.

On Sunday, North Korea reportedly test-fired a medium-range ballistic missile, but this launch failed. The American media is speculating that covert US-organized sabotage may have been responsible. Trump administration officials have refused to deny or acknowledge involvement, but the US has been developing such techniques directed at North Korea for several years.

Trump's national security advisor, Lieutenant General H.R. McMaster, declared Sunday morning on ABC's *This Week* program that the "situation just can't continue." He added, "The president has made very clear that he is not in the business of announcing in advance exactly what he's going to do."

This deliberate ambiguity about US intentions serves no other purpose than to increase North Korean fears that an American preemptive military strike is being prepared. It heightens the danger of events spinning out of control.

The fact that no one really knows what the Trump administration will do next makes the situation even more dangerous than during the height of the Cold War in the early 1960s. During the Cuban missile crisis of 1962, as has been thoroughly documented in historical accounts, the Kennedy administration was extremely fearful that its actions might be misinterpreted by the Soviet Union, thus precipitating a nuclear exchange.

No such concern is evident today. Moreover, the danger is intensified by the fact that Trump has boasted of having authorized local military commanders to order actions as they see fit. The administration has let it be known that the decision last week to use the Massive Ordnance Air Blast bomb (MOAB), the largest nonnuclear weapon in its arsenal, was made by military officials in Afghanistan. Any potential target of the United States, whether it be North Korea, China, Russia or Iran, is dealing with countless potential decision makers, with no way of determining who is in control.

Beyond the Trump administration and the military, the entire political and media establishment in the US is consumed by war fever. The major newspapers and television networks pump out nothing but government propaganda. There is a complete absence of any critical evaluation of the bellicose rhetoric coming out of Washington, let alone a frank assessment of the consequences of a

war.

The official government narrative surrounding the confrontation with North Korea goes completely unchallenged. In keeping with every other war launched by the United States over the past quarter century, the conflict is being explained in the most absurd and infantile terms. As with Panama's Noriega, Iraq's Saddam Hussein, Serbia's Milosevic, Libya's Gaddafi, Syria's Assad and Russia's Putin, North Korea's Kim Jong-Un is being portrayed as a "mad dictator," provoking confrontation and threatening the peace of the world. North Korea's nuclear weapons and ballistic missile program is denounced as a criminal and insane enterprise, for which there is no rational explanation.

In this fraudulent and cynical narrative, there is no reference to the history of imperialist oppression of the Korean people: of the 35 years of brutal Japanese colonial occupation between 1910 and 1945, or of the horrific toll exacted by the United States during its war against North Korea between 1950 and 1953, which resulted in approximately 3 million Korean deaths. The US media says nothing of the fact that throughout the Korean War, the American military exerted continuous pressure for the use of nuclear weapons.

It is a political fact that North Korea is a small country, with a long history of Great Power occupation and oppression, which is threatened with destruction by the most powerful imperialist state in the world. Without in any way endorsing the policies of the Pyongyang regime, it is not difficult to understand why it believes that nuclear weapons are essential for its survival. In a statement carried by Pyongyang's official Korean Central News Agency, a spokesman for the general staff of the North's People's Army said: "Nothing will be more foolish if the United States thinks it can deal with us the way it treated Iraq and Libya, miserable victims of its aggression, and Syria, which did not respond immediately even after it was attacked."

Behind the US threat to North Korea lies the more fundamental conflict with China, which American officials and military strategists see as a major long-term economic and geopolitical competitor. At the center of the campaign on the Korean peninsula is the effort to force China, which also possesses nuclear weapons, to accept US hegemony over the Asia-Pacific region.

Even as the attention of the world is focused on East Asia, the United States is intensifying its campaign against Syria and Russia—another flashpoint that could spark a conflict between nuclear-armed powers.

Barely a week ago, the Trump administration launched military strikes against Syria, seizing on still wholly unsubstantiated allegations that the Syrian government carried out a chemical weapons attack. On Friday, Russian, Iranian and Syrian foreign ministers issued a joint statement declaring that any further attack against the Syrian government would have “grave consequences not only for regional, but global security”—that is, it could provoke world war.

The recklessness of American foreign policy must be seen within the context of a broader international crisis of the world capitalist system.

Increasingly, the American ruling class sees war as the only way out of a series of interconnected global and domestic crises. Despite the official bluster about economic growth, the ruling elite is terrified of the possibility of a deflationary implosion of the asset bubbles that have developed in the aftermath of the economic crisis of 2008. Already there are indications that the markets are beginning to turn and financial volatility is increasing.

The economic tensions are intensifying the conflicts between the major imperialist powers. The European Union and the NATO alliance are breaking down. Germany is reasserting itself as a European and global economic and military power. Nationalist forces are on the rise in the wake of Brexit.

Powerful sections of the US and European ruling elites believe centrifugal pressures that threaten to destroy the existing world order can be counteracted by identifying and targeting a common enemy. This is a motive underlying the increasingly aggressive stance taken by both the United States and major European states toward Russia.

There is yet another critical factor driving the United States toward war. The ruling class is acutely aware of the tremendous level of social discontent. War is seen as a means of directing social tensions outward, while at the same time creating the framework for the suppression and criminalization of social and political opposition.

Despite the relentless propaganda of the establishment media, there is a deep-rooted distrust of the government and opposition to war. But antiwar sentiment finds no expression within the framework of official politics. The Democratic Party has been leading the hysterical anti-Russian campaign and demanding the escalation of military operations in Syria. In just the past week, the Democrats have rushed to support the air strikes on Syria, the campaign against North Korea and the dropping of the massive MOAB bomb in Afghanistan.

The vast majority of the world’s population knows that war is madness, and that a conflict involving advanced weaponry—nuclear and nonnuclear—must lead to a catastrophe. The prospect of a major war is so horrifying that ordinary people cannot bring themselves to think it can happen. Somehow or other, they want to believe, the governments will pull back from the brink.

But this hope is an illusion. The danger of war is rooted in the very nature of capitalism, imperialism and the nation-state system. The recklessness of the political leaders, their willingness to take incredible risks with the lives of millions, is a *subjective* expression of an *objective* crisis.

A quarter century of unending war and fifteen years of the “war

on terror” are developing into a confrontation involving major nuclear-armed powers. Even if the present crises do not erupt in such a war, another crisis will follow.

Opposition to imperialist war must be rooted in the working class, in the United States and internationally. It is the working class that will pay for war with their lives and their livelihoods.

Spending on the massive military apparatus will be paid for by the destruction of health care, pensions, wages and social programs. The working class, unified internationally on an anti-capitalist program, is the only social force that can put an end to the madness that threatens the entire human race.

There is only one way that war can be stopped, and that is through the political mobilization of tens of millions of working people and youth within the United States and throughout the world against the capitalist-imperialist warmongers.

The Socialist Equality Party and the International Youth and Students for Social Equality, in solidarity with its fraternal organizations throughout the world, calls for the organization of protest rallies and meetings denouncing the war policies of the ruling elites. It is vital to build an international antiwar movement, based on socialist policies. The fight against war must be brought to all demonstrations and manifestations of opposition, including the internationally coordinated protests on April 22 against the attack on science. The defense of science, reason, progress and humanity itself is inseparable from the fight against war.

On April 30, the International Committee of the Fourth International is organizing its annual International May Day Online Rally. At the center of the rally is the fight against imperialist war. The ICFI calls on all readers of the *World Socialist Web Site* to attend and build for this rally. Organize meetings and demonstrations against war on college campuses and in the neighborhoods. Help take the fight against war into every factory and workplace.

The same contradictions that produce imperialist war also produce the objective basis for socialist revolution. The urgent necessity is to organize and politically mobilize the working class, to connect the fight against war to the fight against social inequality, political repression and the capitalist system.

Contact the ICFI to *organize a meeting or demonstration*.



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