

Washington pushes world to brink of nuclear war

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The repeated statements by US Vice President Mike Pence and other Trump administration officials Monday that the “era of strategic patience” with North Korea is over and “all options are on the table” have laid bare the mounting threat that Washington will provoke a war on the Korean peninsula involving the use of nuclear weapons and the deaths of millions.

“Just in the past two weeks, the world witnessed the strength and resolve of our new president in actions taken in Syria and Afghanistan,” Pence declared during a provocative visit to South Korea that brought him to the demilitarized zone (DMZ) on the North Korean border. “North Korea would do well not to test his resolve or the strength of the armed forces of the United States in this region,” Pence said.

This boasting about the reckless acts of military aggression—first, the cruise missile attack on Syria on April 7 and then, a week later, the use in Afghanistan of the Massive Ordnance Air Blast (MOAB) bomb, the most destructive weapon unleashed anywhere since the US incineration of Hiroshima and Nagasaki—cannot be read by the government of North Korea as anything other than an ultimatum to accept US demands or expect to be on the receiving end of far greater violence.

With the naval strike group led by the nuclear-powered aircraft carrier USS Carl Vinson set to take up a position off the Korean peninsula, the means of inflicting such violence are being put into place. The global implications of this buildup were underscored Monday with the report that both Russia and China have dispatched spy ships to trail the Vinson battle group. For these two nuclear-armed countries, Washington’s launching of a war against North Korea poses an existential threat.

The drive toward a military confrontation in Asia that could lead to a nuclear third world war has unfolded largely behind the backs of the people of the United States and the entire world. Neither the politicians of the two big business parties in the US nor the corporate-controlled media have so much as hinted to the public the horrific consequences of even a “limited” nuclear exchange on the Korean peninsula, nor the likelihood that such a catastrophe would draw all of the major nuclear powers into a global conflagration.

The recklessness of the path being pursued by Washington is staggering. Why the “era of strategic patience” has ended is not explained, nor are the conclusions drawn from this declaration even challenged. There are a whole number of states that now have nuclear weapons. North Korea’s pursuit of such arms does not

represent a credible threat to the US.

“All options are on the table” can only mean that Washington is prepared to launch an unprovoked first strike against North Korea. Yet, within the media, there is barely a mention that such a course involves the threat of nuclear war. Nor is there the slightest suggestion that the US Congress should convene to vote on whether to authorize an attack that could produce casualties in the millions. The accepted wisdom is that Donald Trump doesn’t have to tell anyone what military action he will take until after the attack is executed. The only hint Trump gave of his intentions was at a Monday Easter egg-rolling event on the White House lawn, where he declared that North Korea has “gotta behave.”

The real character of the policy being pursued by Washington was indicated by John Bolton, the Bush administration’s ambassador to the United Nations, who told Fox News that the “way to end North Korea’s nuclear weapons program is to end North Korea,” i.e., topple the government and militarily smash the country.

The real and growing danger posed by Washington’s reckless policy is beginning to be registered, if only in the mildest form.

The *New York Times*, which had previously celebrated the Trump administration’s turn toward stepped-up militarism against Syria and Russia, proclaiming its feeling of “emotional satisfaction and justice done” over the cruise missile strike of April 7, has become somewhat nervous that things are spinning out of control.

The newspaper, which increasingly functions as the house organ of the CIA, expressed concern Monday that Trump’s “intemperate talk is adding to regional tensions, unnerving allies and likely reinforcing North Korea’s longstanding fear that it could one day be attacked by America—the very reason North Korea invested in a nuclear arsenal in the first place.” It warned that the US president’s bellicose threats served to “box him into some kind of showdown” and paved the way for a “devastating miscalculation.”

Gideon Rachman, the chief foreign affairs columnist of the *Financial Times*, wrote in a piece posted Monday that if North Korean leader Kim Jong-Un “concludes that the US is indeed poised to attack his regime, he will be tempted to attack first. His incentive to move fast will only have been increased by stories in the media that the US’s war plans involve an early attempt to kill the North Korean leadership.” In fact, the same US Special Operations unit that carried out the 2011 assassination of Osama bin-Laden has been reported carrying out exercises in South Korea.

While Trump's intimidation and threats could produce a capitulation by Pyongyang, Rachman continues, "... It is more likely that North Korea will not back down--and that the Trump strategy will therefore fail. In that case, the US president is faced with a dilemma. Does Mr. Trump's 'very powerful armada' steam away from the Korean peninsula with its mission unaccomplished?"

To ask the question is to answer it. Neither Trump nor the cabal of active duty and retired generals who are setting his foreign policy are inclined to back down from the brink of war without having achieved the objectives over which such a war would be fought, i.e., the complete capitulation and disarmament of North Korea.

After 25 years of waging continuous war against largely unarmed oppressed countries and killing millions, while suffering relatively few consequences, US imperialism is now being driven by its own internal crisis and contradictions to an entirely different level of military confrontation.

More and more the situation resembles that which prevailed in the late 1930s on the eve of the Second World War. If Adolf Hitler had possessed a Twitter account, it is hard to imagine how he would have used it much differently from the way the US president is using his own.

"Our military is building and is rapidly becoming stronger than ever before. Frankly, we have no choice!" Trump tweeted Sunday.

Three days earlier: "I have great confidence that China will properly deal with North Korea. If they are unable to do so, the US, with its allies, will! USA."

Trump's rhetoric echoes that employed by Hitler in the run-up to Germany's march into Czechoslovakia and Poland. The Nazi leader proclaimed of the Czechoslovak "problem" that it "must be solved." Then it was the Polish "problem" that "must be solved." He deliberately created crises as pretexts for military action.

Trump employs similar rhetoric, describing an entire nation, North Korea, as a "problem," and then warning menacingly that "it will be taken care of." Why this problem is now so urgent, no one explains, and, as far as the media is concerned, virtually no one asks.

What could Pyongyang possibly do to satisfy Washington? It would have to renounce its nuclear program and open itself up to an inspections regime, going down the same road traveled by Iraq's Saddam Hussein and Libya's Muammar Gaddafi, ending in their nations' destruction and their own violent deaths.

The assumption that China can be pressured into imposing Washington's diktat in relation to North Korea is without foundation. China was compelled to go to war in 1950 when US troops reached the Yalu River, sacrificing hundreds of thousands to drive the American army back. Now Washington wants China to intervene to hand the US and South Korea what they were unable to achieve half a century ago through war. If Beijing were to accede to these demands, it would have immense strategic implications for China as well as major internal political consequences.

There are already indications that tensions between Beijing and Washington are escalating on the Korean peninsula after Seoul's announcement that it intends to move ahead rapidly with the

installation of the US Terminal High Altitude Area Defense system, or THAAD, which the US claims is designed to defend against North Korean missiles, but which China recognizes as a means of assuring the US a nuclear first-strike capability.

Twice in the 20th century, the crisis of world capitalism drove capitalist heads of state and their general staffs to seek a way out through war, leading to the deaths of tens of millions. Today, similar pressures are unleashing a drive toward a nuclear confrontation that could lead to the destruction of life on the planet.

Everything that is being done by the US government involves astonishing levels of risk, including that of a nuclear war. Whether it happens in the immediate confrontation with North Korea cannot be predicted, but that this is the course Washington is prepared to pursue all over the world is undeniable.

No one can afford the illusion that today's capitalist governments, unlike those of 1914 and 1939, will not risk war because of the threat of nuclear annihilation. If anything, they are far more reckless than their predecessors. Confronted with deepening economic and social crises for which they have no progressive solution, they are even more prone to dragging humanity to the brink of destruction.

The present crisis is characterized by a terrible chasm between the scale of the danger of war and the absence of any organized movement against it. There is no way to stop the drive toward war outside of the politically conscious intervention of the working class within the United States and internationally.

The Socialist Equality Party and the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) are fighting for a new international anti-war, anti-imperialist and anti-capitalist movement of the working class based on socialist policies. The fight for the development of this movement includes the organization of demonstrations at workplaces, universities and in working class neighborhoods against war.

The ICFI on April 30 will hold its annual International May Day Online Rally, which will have as its central aim the fight to mobilize the working class against imperialist war. We call on all of our readers and supporters to participate in and build this rally among the widest possible layers of workers and youth.



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