

US vice president warns North Korea “the sword is ready”

Peter Symonds
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As he continued his tour through Asia, US Vice President Mike Pence issued another ominous military threat yesterday to North Korea. While absurdly claiming that the US “always seeks peace,” he declared that under Trump “the shield stands guard and the sword stands ready.”

Pence warned: “We will defeat any attack and meet any use of conventional or nuclear weapons with an overwhelming and effective American response... All options are on the table. History will attest the soldier does not bear the sword in vain.”

Underscoring the threat, Pence was speaking on the nuclear aircraft carrier USS Ronald Reagan at its home port of Yokosuka, Japan. Another aircraft carrier strike group headed by the USS Carl Vinson is headed to waters off the Korean Peninsula and is due to arrive there next week. Earlier false reports by the White House and Pentagon suggested it was on its way last week.

Pence’s renewed threats against Pyongyang were amplified by open support by Republican Senator Lindsey Graham for a pre-emptive US attack on North Korea even while acknowledging that millions of people would die.

Speaking on NBC’s “Today” program, Graham declared: “It would be terrible... It would be bad for the Korean Peninsula. It would be bad for China. It would be bad for Japan, be bad for South Korea. It would be the end of North Korea. But what it would not do is hit America and the only way it could ever come to America is with a missile.”

The remarks of Graham, who sits on the Senate Armed Services Committee, reflect the recklessness and callous indifference for human suffering that pervades the entire US political and military establishment. A war on the Korean Peninsula could draw in nuclear-armed powers such as China and Russia and result in a catastrophe for the entire planet.

Graham was scathing about the failure of previous

administrations to force North Korea to halt its limited nuclear and missile programs. “Twenty years ago, North Korea really didn’t have any nuclear weapons. Every Republican and every Democrat has screwed up North Korea. They’re close to getting a missile to hit the [American] homeland. Now is the time to stop [them].”

Graham is simply repeating more overtly the militaristic logic of the Trump administration. In comments yesterday to the *Washington Post*, Pence declared: “I think the path of negotiations with North Korea has been a colossal failure now for more than 25 years.” He said the US was not seeking negotiations with North Korea and was not in any direct talks at this time.

In a separate interview with CNN, the vice president said: “The only thing we need to hear from North Korea is that they are ending and ultimately dismantling their nuclear weapons and ballistic missile program.”

Significantly, when asked whether US cyber sabotage was responsible for North Korea’s failed missile test last weekend, Pence refused to respond directly. “I really can’t comment on the electronic and technical capabilities of our military,” he stated.

The *New York Times* revealed last month that the Obama administration established a cyber warfare program that was believed to be responsible for the high number of failed North Korean missile tests. In a follow up article this week, the newspaper reported that the Trump administration embraced the program “with enthusiasm” and had “no compunction about using this new class of weapon against missile tests.”

The sabotage of a missile test is an act of war that invites retaliation. Yet according to the *New York Times*, the Trump administration regards such measures as legitimate because the UN Security Council has banned North Korea’s missile tests. This logic could be used to justify any action, including the use of military force, even though the UN resolutions on North Korea are

limited to economic sanctions.

The risks involved in US cyber sabotage were underscored by North Korea's *Rodong Sinmun* newspaper on Monday, which implied that a US "special operation" was responsible for Sunday's failed missile test and denounced "America's bellicose and reckless acts."

Pyongyang's own militarist response only plays into the hands of the US administration and media, which routinely condemns North Korea as a "rogue state" that threatens the United States and the world. The regime released a video clip showing North Korean missiles passing over the Pacific and engulfing an American city in flames.

The US drum beat for war against North Korea is continuing on a daily basis. Speaking in Britain, US House of Representatives speaker Paul Ryan declared: "Of course we don't want to have military options employed, but we must keep all options on the table."

Speaking in the Middle East this week, Defence Secretary James Mattis insisted: "North Korea has got to change its behaviour." Echoing Pence this week, he warned: "Just in the past two weeks, the world witnessed the strength and resolve of our new president in actions taken in Syria and Afghanistan. North Korea would do well not to test his resolve or the strength of the armed forces of the United States in this region."

The references to the US cruise missile attack on Syria and the US use of its huge Massive Ordnance Air Blast (MOAB) bomb in Afghanistan only underline the fact that US imperialism is for war, not peace, with North Korea. After a quarter century of military interventions and wars of aggression in the Middle East, Central Asia, the Balkans and North Africa, the US, in its striving for global hegemony, is on the brink of conflict that could precipitate a war involving nuclear-armed powers.



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