

US warns of “catastrophic consequences” if North Korea is not brought to heel

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In an address yesterday to the UN Security Council, US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson warned of “catastrophic consequences” if member states did not take swift action to force North Korea to the negotiating table on harsh US terms.

Tillerson again reiterated that “all options” were on the table, saying that diplomatic and financial measures “will be backed up by a willingness to counteract North Korean aggression with military action if necessary.”

His remarks came as North Korea conducted the test launch of a medium-range ballistic missile early Saturday morning local time, which reportedly failed.

Tillerson’s comments underline the acute danger of conflict that the Trump administration’s brinkmanship has created on the Korean Peninsula. The US is using the threat of an imminent war, which could rapidly escalate into a global nuclear disaster, to bully the world—especially North Korea and China—into accepting its demands.

Throughout his speech, the secretary of state repeatedly stressed the urgency of the UN Security Council taking action against North Korea. “For too long, the international community has been reactive in addressing North Korea. Those days must come to an end,” he declared. “Failing to act now on the most pressing security issue in the world may bring catastrophic consequences.”

The US has applied immense pressure to both North Korea and China through its military build-up in North East Asia. In addition to continuing joint US-South Korean war games, the Pentagon has dispatched an aircraft carrier strike group, headed by the USS Carl Vinson, and a nuclear submarine, which are currently engaged in exercises with South Korean and Japanese warships near the Korean Peninsula.

In that context, Tillerson declared that the US

“preferred a negotiated solution to this problem” and set out the terms for any talks with Pyongyang. “North Korea must take concrete steps to reduce the threat that its illegal weapons programs pose to the United States and its allies before we even consider talks.”

At the close of the meeting, Tillerson spelled out the conditions again: “We will not reward their bad behaviour with talks. We will only engage in talks with North Korea when they exhibit a good-faith commitment to abiding by the Security Council resolutions and their past promises to end their nuclear programs.”

Such an undertaking would involve a halt to all North Korea’s nuclear- and missile-testing, the mothballing of its nuclear facilities and their eventual dismantlement, and highly intrusive UN inspections. Tillerson did not indicate the “concrete steps” Pyongyang would have to take before Washington would “consider talks.”

The entire speech was laced with hypocrisy. On two prior occasions—in 1994 and 2007—North Korea agreed to all of the above terms and began their implementation, only to have the agreements sabotaged by the United States, which failed to keep its side of the bargain. Washington has never demonstrated its “good faith” by easing the decades-long diplomatic and economic embargo on North Korea.

Moreover, Tillerson’s claims that the US does not want “regime-change” in Pyongyang and has no “desire to threaten the North Korean people or destabilise the Asia Pacific region” are absurd. Ever since the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, the barely disguised aim of successive US administrations has been to abolish the North Korean regime.

Tillerson’s speech was, in effect, an ultimatum to the world. He outlined a series of demands on UN member

states—that they fully implement existing sanctions on North Korea, suspend or downgrade diplomatic relations, and “increase North Korea’s financial isolation” through new sanctions. “This new pressure campaign will be swiftly implemented and painful to North Korean interests,” he declared.

Tillerson’s insistence on the full implementation of existing sanctions was especially aimed at China, which the Trump administration has repeatedly criticised for failing to do. “We must all do our share, but China, accounting for 90 percent of North Korean trade, China alone has economic leverage that is unique, and its role is particularly important,” he said.

China’s foreign minister, Wang Yi, rebutted the criticism, declaring: “The state of affairs on the Korean Peninsula is not caused by any single party, nor is it reasonable to ask any party to take sole responsibility.” Wang again called on those parties directly involved—the US and North Korea—to “demonstrate sincerity for dialogue and restart dialogue” and warned against “provocative rhetoric or action.”

Tillerson’s UN remarks are in line with President Trump’s comments on Thursday night, when he declared that “we’d love to solve things diplomatically, but it’s very difficult.” He then went on to make clear that if the pressure campaign, particularly by China, failed, then the only option was military force. Trump warned that there was “absolutely” the chance of a “major, major conflict” with North Korea.

Having brought the Korean Peninsula to the brink of war, the Trump administration is not prepared to wait months for Pyongyang to agree to its demands. The *Korean Times* last week reported that China and North Korea have been engaged in secret talks. It noted that NBC had cited a US government source as saying that Beijing had sent its “top nuclear negotiators” to “communicate the gravity of the situation to the North.”

According to the newspaper, Hong Kong military analyst Liang Guoliang indicated that in the talks, North Korea had demanded that China guarantee its security and economy and give it three years to abandon its nuclear weapons. Reportedly, Chinese officials replied by saying Pyongyang had three months to dismantle its nuclear arsenal and two to three weeks to agree to US terms.

The *Korean Times* also cited South Korean journalist

Jeong Kyu-jae, who claims that the US has already been engaged in secret talks in New York with North Korean officials. “If the dialogue turns out to be productive, US President Donald Trump might send a special envoy to the North in a clandestine manner in late April or early May,” he said.

However, Jeong warned: “This is a scenario that will play out only when things unfold smoothly. If the talks are unsuccessful, the US might consider a military strike as the next option.”



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