

Trump again warns North Korea against nuclear testing

Peter Symonds
1 May 2017

US President Donald Trump issued another thinly-veiled warning to North Korea yesterday of military action if it carries out a sixth nuclear test. His remarks on the CBS program “Face the Nation” are the latest in a string of threats by Trump officials as the Pentagon moved an aircraft carrier strike group and a nuclear submarine to waters off the Korean Peninsula.

Trump said he would “not be happy” if North Korea tested another nuclear weapon. Asked whether that meant the US would conduct military strikes, he contemptuously declared: “I don’t know. I mean, we’ll see.” He added later: “It is a chess game. I just don’t want people to know what my thinking is.”

The Trump administration is deliberately keeping the world in the dark as to its plans and is arrogating to itself the right to wage war at a time of its choosing—as it did with its illegal cruise missile strikes on Syria last month.

Despite the servility of the Democrats and Congress, the US president declared his unreserved contempt for “the system,” signaling his determination to assert an autocratic rule. “It’s just a very, very bureaucratic system,” he said. “I think the rules in Congress and in particular the rules in the Senate are unbelievably archaic and slow moving... You’re forced into situations that you hate to be forced into.”

At present, the Trump administration is placing intense pressure on China to bully the North Korean regime in Pyongyang to bow to US demands. Trump boasted he had developed a “very special” relationship with Chinese President Xi Jinping. “But again, you know, we’ll find out whether or not President Xi is able to effect change [in Pyongyang],” he added.

Trump is in effect blackmailing Beijing, warning that if China does not “solve” the North Korean crisis, the US will do so through military means. He has

recklessly placed the Korean Peninsula on a hair trigger where any incident—deliberate or accidental—could set off a devastating conflict.

The US president is well aware that such a war would cause immense human suffering. Defending his decision not to immediately brand China as a currency manipulator, he declared: “Trade is very important. But massive warfare with millions, potentially millions of people being killed? That, as we would say, trumps trade.”

In fact, the Trump administration’s determination to force North Korea to capitulate to its demands is just one component of broader plans aimed against China, which the US regards as the chief obstacle to its growing hegemony. Its decision not to adopt trade war measures against Beijing at once is a purely tactical one, which will quickly change whether or not China brings North Korea to heel.

Trump has repeatedly stated that the US will not tolerate a nuclear-armed North Korea and expects quick results. “We cannot let what’s been going on for a long period of years continue,” he said. Last week he underscored his willingness to use military might when he declared “absolutely” there was a definite chance of a “major, major conflict” with North Korea.

Trump’s national security adviser H.R. McMaster made the same threats yesterday on the “Fox News Sunday” program. “We do have to do something [with other countries] that involves enforcement of the UN sanctions that are in place,” he said. “It may mean ratcheting up those sanctions even further. And it also means being prepared for military operations, if necessary.”

Alongside the constant propaganda drumbeat, the Trump administration has embarked on an intense diplomatic offensive to ensure that US allies and

strategic partners in the Asia Pacific are primed for a crisis that could descend into war. Vice President Mike Pence has just completed a tour of Asia to hold discussions on North Korea with key allies—Japan, South Korea and Australia—as well as Indonesia, which plays a pivotal role in the Association of South East Asia Nations (ASEAN).

As ASEAN leaders met over the weekend, Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte on Saturday joined with China in calling on the US and North Korea to tone down their militarist rhetoric. On the same day, Trump called Duterte and invited him to visit the White House, undoubtedly to pressure him to toe Washington's aggressive line against Pyongyang. Under Duterte, the Philippines, which has an extensive military basing agreement with the US, has tilted its foreign policy towards China.

Speaking on the ABC's "This Week" program, White House Chief of Staff Reince Priebus dismissed concerns about Duterte's "war on drugs" and gross human rights abuses. "The issues facing us developing out of North Korea are so serious that we need cooperation at some level with as many partners in the area as we can get to make sure we have our ducks in a row," he said.

Trump also phoned the leaders of Thailand and Singapore to discuss North Korea and invited them to visit Washington. Thailand is a formal US military ally, while Singapore's military bases are used by American warships and military aircraft.

Australian Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull is flying to Washington this week to meet with Trump. If war breaks out on the Korean Peninsula, Australia, which hosts key US communications, targeting and spy bases, would be involved automatically. Since 2011, the US has greatly expanded its use of Australian military bases for its Marines, warships and aircraft, including long-range bombers.

Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe immediately joined the US in condemning North Korea's failed missile test on Saturday. "Despite strong warnings by the international community, North Korea today went through its ballistic missile launch," he said. "It is a grave threat to our country. This is absolutely unacceptable."

Abe is exploiting the tense situation on the Korean Peninsula not only to demonstrate his support for the

US alliance but to advance his own agenda of Japanese remilitarisation. The Japanese military has dispatched the huge helicopter carrier Izumo to protect a US supply ship in the Western Pacific, using the Abe government's "collective self-defence" legislation. It is the first time the law, which breaches the country's constitution, has been used to send a Japanese warship into what could rapidly become a war zone.

The South Korean and American militaries have just completed their huge annual joint war games, which involve rehearsals for a war with North Korea. A new strategy agreed in 2015—OPLAN 5015—shifted the emphasis from nominally defensive to offensive exercises, including pre-emptive strikes against military targets and "decapitation" raids to kill North Korean leaders. US warships are continuing naval drills with their South Korean counterparts.

Admiral Harry Harris, head of US Pacific Command, gave an indication of the massive scale of the attacks being planned against North Korea when he addressed the Senate Armed Services Committee last week. Asked whether a US military pre-emptive strike could destroy North Korea's artillery aimed at Seoul, he simply noted: "It depends on the level of the pre-emptive strike."

In other words, what is under discussion in the Pentagon is a full-scale blitzkrieg that would destroy North Korea's nuclear arsenal and facilities, ballistic missiles and its large but poorly-equipped military, as well as its leadership and industrial capacity. Such reckless and unpredictable actions could rapidly draw in other powers, including China and Russia, with catastrophic consequences.



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