

May Day 2017

The danger of nuclear war in North East Asia

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This speech was delivered by Peter Symonds, national editor in Australia of the World Socialist Web Site, to the 2017 International May Day Online Rally held on April 30.

For the first time since the Cuban missile crisis in 1962, workers around the world confront the real and immediate danger of nuclear war. Amid a rising frenzy of media vilification of North Korea, the Trump administration has repeatedly declared that it will not tolerate that country's continued nuclear- and missile-testing, and that "all options are on the table" to stop it.

In reality, the White House has already ruled out many of the obvious "options." Secretary of State Rex Tillerson has rejected any talks with the North Korean regime unless it submits to Washington's demands in advance. He has also declared that the sanctions policy of the Obama administration—so-called "strategic patience"—has failed.

Immense pressure is being applied to China to bully North Korea into submission, but the bottom line is that if Beijing does not solve the problem, the US will. The only options left are military ones. Trump has warned that "a major, major conflict" with North Korea is a definite possibility and has sent an "armada"—a full nuclear aircraft carrier strike group and a nuclear submarine—to the Korean Peninsula.

Vice-President Mike Pence has just toured Asia to brief major US allies—Japan, South Korea and Australia. Washington has military forces in all three countries as well as Guam, tied together by communications, targeting and spying systems, in which Australian bases such as Pine Gap play a central role.

The sheer recklessness of the Trump administration is underscored by its determination to keep everyone in the dark about its plans—a game of brinkmanship that

greatly heightens the danger of a war in which millions would die.

Why is the Trump administration preparing war against North Korea, a small impoverished country devastated by decades of a US-led embargo? It has no oil or significant natural resources, and, despite its constant demonization by the US, poses no real threat to the United States. It is, however, strategically located on the border with Russia and China.

The threats against North Korea are part of a broader confrontation with China, which the US regards as the chief obstacle to its global hegemony. The "pivot to Asia," initiated by the Obama administration with a major military build-up against China, is being intensified under Trump. His administration has threatened trade war against Beijing, to tear up the One China policy and thus diplomatic relations, and to challenge China militarily in the South China Sea.

The threat of a catastrophic nuclear war is not simply the product of the madness of Trump or previous administrations. Rather, it is being generated by an insane social order—the capitalist system and its outmoded division of the world into competing nation states. The US drive to war against China and Russia, as well as in the Middle East and Eastern Europe, is a desperate attempt to extricate itself from a worsening economic and social crisis, and to assert its domination of Asia and the world.

The lessons of the Russian Revolution a century ago demonstrate that the danger of war can only be ended through socialist revolution. On May Day, the day that marks the international unity of the working class, workers in the US, China, both Koreas, Japan, Australia, throughout Asia and the world need to answer the threat of war with the building of a movement that sets as its task the abolition of the profit

system that produces war.

The danger of nuclear conflict cannot be overcome through pacifist phrase-mongering or futile appeals to capitalist governments, which are all committed to ruthlessly pursuing their economic and strategic interests.

Nor should there be any illusions that the United States will refrain from using nuclear weapons because of the sheer scale of the devastation involved. The phrase “thinking the unthinkable,” coined by the notorious Cold War strategist Herman Kahn in the 1950s, is again being discussed in Washington’s strategic circles. The Obama administration committed \$1 trillion over the next 30 years to upgrading the US nuclear arsenal.

Far from defending the North Korean people, the Pyongyang regime’s efforts to assemble a rudimentary nuclear arsenal only compound the danger of nuclear war. The US has declared it will meet any attempt by North Korea to use its nuclear weapons with an “effective and overwhelming response.” In 1945, US imperialism dropped atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki as a warning to the Soviet Union and to the rest of the world. It would use the nuclear bombing of North Korea to send a stark message to its rivals today.

The North Korean and Chinese regimes do not represent socialism. Deeply hostile to socialist internationalism, both propagate the poisonous fumes of nationalism and chauvinism that divide the international working class. The Chinese Communist Party defends the interests of the tiny, ultra-rich elite that has benefitted from capitalist restoration. It oscillates between craven efforts to strike a deal with US imperialism at the expense of North Korea and expanding its own military apparatus. Both only heighten the danger of conflict.

Awareness is growing among workers and youth of the imminent danger of conflict, along with a healthy distrust in the deluge of propaganda and widespread opposition to war. The lack of an anti-war movement today is the responsibility of definite political forces, especially the various pseudo-left organisations. Those that led, or rather misled, the mass demonstrations around the world in 2003 against the US invasion of Iraq have swung sharply to the right, backing the US-led regime-change operations in Libya and Syria. Their unscientific and ahistorical characterisation of China as

an “imperialist power” dovetails with the US State Department’s denunciations of Chinese aggression and expansionism.

The International Committee of the Fourth International and its organ the *World Socialist Web Site* are alone in exposing the machinations of US imperialism and its allies in Asia and around the world, and in building an international anti-war movement of the working class to halt the drive to a disastrous world war.

This is an urgent task. We appeal on May Day to workers in every country to join us in our efforts to build the necessary revolutionary leadership for the struggles that lie directly ahead.



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