

North Korea accused of cyber attacks in mounting demonisation campaign

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Unsubstantiated accusations by American and allied intelligence “experts” that North Korea was responsible for last week’s “WannaCry” ransomware cyber-attacks are being used to further demonise the isolated country and portray it as a dangerous rogue state that must be brought to heel. A propaganda campaign is underway in the US and international media—ominously reminiscent of the 2002-2003 hysteria over Iraq and “weapons of mass destruction”—to condition public opinion for the prospect of a devastating US-led war on the Korean Peninsula.

The same US media outlets that served as conduits for the false allegations against Iraq—particularly the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, CNN and Fox News—claimed that the Pyongyang regime has hundreds of hackers it uses to attack computer networks and Internet communications. The focus on North Korea serves the additional purpose of deflecting attention from the fact that the source code of “WannaCry” originated in the US National Security Agency (NSA)—the major actor in international cyber warfare.

Among the countries most affected by the “WannaCry” malware were North Korea’s nominal ally, China, as well as Russia, which has condemned the US military build-up on the Korean peninsula. Establishment journalists stretched their imaginations to explain why Pyongyang would target them. The *New York Times* enlisted Boo Hyeong-wook, a research fellow at the Korea Institute for Defense Analyses, to speculate that North Korea was sending a warning to China that it must not “abandon it.”

The claims of North Korean cyber warfare followed its testing on Sunday of a long-range missile, in defiance of US threats of military strikes. Japanese officials have reported that the weapon was fired on a vertical trajectory, reaching an altitude of 2,000

kilometres, before coming down in the Sea of Japan just 700 kilometres from its launch site. The Japanese reports were used in the media to make lurid claims that the test proved North Korea could attack US bases in Hawaii and Guam with a potentially nuclear-armed missile, and that it would soon have the capability to launch nuclear attacks on the continental United States.

“Emergency” sessions of the United Nations Security Council were held on Monday and Tuesday at which US ambassador Nikki Haley demanded Chinese and Russian collaboration with harsher sanctions. Both Beijing and Moscow fell into line, voting for a resolution condemning the missile test, and agreeing to negotiate the further economic isolation of North Korea. While denouncing Pyongyang, however, Russian President Vladimir Putin also told journalists on Monday that the US and its allies should “stop intimidating North Korea and find a peaceful solution to the problem.”

The response of the Trump administration and the Pentagon has been to ratchet-up the portrayal of North Korea, and its head of state Kim Jong-un, as an imminent threat.

The head of US Pacific Command (PACOM), Admiral Harry Harris, visited Japan on Wednesday for talks with Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, Foreign Minister Fumio Kishida and Defence Minister Tomomi Inada.

Speaking at a Japanese strategic think-tank later in the day, Harris declared: “Combining nuclear warheads with ballistic technology in the hands of a volatile leader like Kim Jong-un is a recipe for a disaster... every test he makes is a success because it takes North Korea one step closer to being able to deliver a nuclear-equipped missile anywhere in the world.”

Harris spoke as the commander of a massive military force, much of which is deployed in close proximity to

North Korea. At PACOM's disposal are two aircraft carriers, nuclear missile-armed submarines, destroyers and cruisers armed with cruise missiles, B-2, B-1 and B-52 long-range bombers, and hundreds of jet fighters and ground attack aircraft.

In the event of war, Harris's subordinate in South Korea, General Vincent K. Brooks, would assume operational command over the 625,000-strong, well-equipped South Korean military, as well as the tens of thousands of American ground troops in the country, and some 3.1 million South Korean reservists who could be called into active service. The Japanese military, one of the most advanced in the world, would provide additional air and naval power.

Playing his part in hyping up the air of tension, new South Korean President Moon Jae-in asserted on May 17: "We are living in the reality where there is a high possibility of military clashes." Elected on a policy of seeking a rapprochement with North Korea, Moon, in line with the Trump administration, stressed again that talks would take place "only if Pyongyang changes its behaviour."

The precondition for talks indicated by Washington has been a unilateral declaration by North Korea that it is ending its nuclear and missile programs and will allow existing weapons to be dismantled under international supervision. If Pyongyang does not, the Trump administration continues to assert that "all options are on the table"—that is, all-out war.

Japan's militarist Prime Minister Shinzo Abe once again endorsed the possibility of war during a joint interview on May 17 with CNBC and Broadcast Satellite Japan. He declared: "President Trump says all options are on the table. He is demonstrating this position both by words and by action... It is indeed very clear that the threat posed by North Korea's missile and nuclear program is now entering into a new stage."

A feature in the *Atlantic*, headlined "North Korea: The Military Options," sets out in chilling language the implications of war on the Korean Peninsula. The article interviewed New Zealand-based Korea researcher Van Jackson, from Victoria University in Wellington. Citing Jackson, it notes: "[T]he Trump administration also appears to have not ruled out a 'preventive strike' akin to what the George W. Bush administration undertook in Iraq—striking first to neutralize a threat that may materialise in the future."

The article ends with modelling of the consequences of a war by Sam Gardiner, a retired US Air Force colonel who has done such estimates for the past 25 years. His model is based on the scenario that the Trump administration launched only a limited cruise missile strike on North Korea's nuclear installations. For 48 hours, Pyongyang makes no response, while it covertly floods special forces into the South, who launch attacks on military bases, including with sarin gas. War begins. South Korea's capital, Seoul, comes under artillery bombardment, while the "US and South Korean militaries launch a massive military campaign against the North, with the goal of overthrowing the Kim regime and occupying the top half of the peninsula within 60 days."

Gardiner concludes his scenario: "We are less than 24 hours into the battle. The medical situation in Seoul is in crisis. Some estimates have put the casualties from conventional shelling and chemicals at over one million. It will be a long time before we really know."

The unstated aim of such modelling is to "prove" that a limited military strike by the US and its allies would be counter-productive as it would simply provide North Korea with the time to launch devastating retaliation. The intended conclusion is that an initial assault must be of such overwhelming "shock-and-awe" dimensions that the Pyongyang regime and the North Korean military are rendered incapable of any serious response.

It is estimated that up to two-thirds of the North Korean military—a force numbering some one million, mostly young conscripts with largely obsolete equipment—is based close to the border. Along with missile sites and attempts to assassinate the country's leadership, a pre-emptive US onslaught would target mass troop concentrations with a murderous air assault, seeking to slaughter as many people as possible with high explosives, cluster bombs and versions of the Massive Ordnance Air Blast (MOAB) bomb that the US military used for the first time in combat in Afghanistan last month.



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