

UN Security Council to meet again after North Korea missile test

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The US, Japan and South Korea have requested that another emergency meeting of the United Nations Security Council be held this Tuesday in response to the firing of a missile by North Korea on Sunday.

The Security Council met last Monday and Tuesday following the test of a long-range missile by North Korea on May 14. The US and its allies are demanding that China, and to a lesser extent Russia, collaborate with escalating economic sanctions on the Pyongyang regime, with the aim of compelling it into talks on dismantling its nuclear and other weapons' programs.

If it does not agree to such talks, Washington has threatened that "all options are on the table" to disarm North Korea.

Unlike the device fired on May 14, the latest test has not been assessed as militarily significant by White House and Pentagon representatives. It was a medium-range missile that travelled some 500 kilometres. Nevertheless, Secretary of State Rex Tillerson stated it was "disappointing" and "disturbing." South Korea's foreign ministry condemned the test as "reckless and irresponsible." Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe declared it was a "snub and a challenge to international efforts for a peaceful resolution."

The weekend test, however, followed actions by the US and its allies that would have heightened fears in the North Korean regime that a massive military assault on the isolated country is being prepared, regardless of what concessions it makes or are made by Beijing.

On Thursday, the Japanese air force used the alleged entry of Chinese coastguard vessels into Japanese-claimed waters to scramble jet fighters. According to figures released in April, Japan's air force has scrambled its war planes 1,168 times over the preceding 12 months—up from 873 in 2016—to drive off Chinese and Russian aircraft or warships and assert

dominance in the airspace adjacent to the Korean Peninsula.

The same day, the US Navy reported that the aircraft carrier USS Ronald Reagan and its battlegroup, which is permanently based in Japan, has left port for "exercises" in the Sea of Japan. The aircraft carrier USS Carl Vinson and its support ships and submarines are already operating in the area.

US command in South Korea revealed that special forces among the 28,000 American troops based in the country had completed training with their South Korean counterparts for operations to "take out" North Korea's "weapons of mass destruction."

On the ideological front, a series of unsubstantiated claims were made in the American and international media last week that North Korean intelligence was behind the "WannaCry" malware attacks and other acts of cyberwarfare. Further lurid reports were published on the weekend concerning the alleged operations of the North Korean "Unit 180," a secretive cell that purportedly hacks international banks and companies from locations outside the North, such as China and Eastern Europe, so it cannot be tracked back to Pyongyang. North Korea dismissed the allegations as "ludicrous."

Military analysts openly concede that a war on the Korean Peninsula, even if it did not draw China into conflict with the US and Japan, would be devastating. US Defense Secretary General Jim Mattis bluntly stated on Friday that "if this goes to a military solution, it's going to be tragic on an unbelievable scale."

The US *Military Times* published modelling on Sunday of how the US and South Korea would wage war on the North. Retired general Mark Hertling, who commanded forces during the occupation of Iraq and is now a frequent media commentator, told the journal:

“Anybody that assumes this [North Korea] could be knocked out in 30 days would be dead wrong. There would literally be thousands, tens of thousands, of casualties, some say more than 100,000 civilian casualties.”

The modelling reviewed the prospect of “thronges of US aircraft” flying 24 hours a day to slaughter and destroy largely defenceless North Korean ground forces. Hertling speculated that if the North’s military could strike Seoul and its suburbs with mass artillery fire, however, “the world would see civilian casualty numbers equal to the entire Syrian conflict in a matter of days.” An estimated 465,000 people have been killed in Syria, millions more wounded and over 10 million displaced.

Among the most warmongering American analysts, the possibility of North Korean resistance is presented as evidence that a US strike must be pre-emptive and on a scale of immense proportions. On May 18, Lamont Calucci of the American Foreign Relations Council advocated such a war crime in the *Washington Times*, calling for “the elimination of the North Korean regime,” a “massive” military assault, followed by the occupation of North Korea by 500,000 foreign troops for “a few decades.”

Calucci declared that the “president” should justify a war as the “only way to ultimately prevent the vaporisation of San Francisco and Milwaukee.”

The US imperialist motive in the ever more dangerous confrontation with North Korea is, in fact, to weaken the position of China and escalate American pressure upon the Beijing regime. For all the hype of the threat posed by North Korea, it is an impoverished, backward country with a population of around 25 million and a GDP of barely \$25 billion—a national income less than what Japan, South Korea and Australia spend on their armed forces each year, and some 30 times less than what the US spends on its military machine.

North Korea’s significance is geo-strategic. It borders both China and Russia, with Vladivostok and the major Russian Pacific naval and air bases just hundreds of kilometres away. It has served since the Korean War as buffer between China and key US allies and bases in East Asia—in Japan and in South Korea. The establishment of a unified US-aligned Korea, achieved by either a deal with the North or through regime-

change, would represent an ever-present challenge to Beijing and Moscow.

The greatest danger in the situation is that the degree of tension produced by the accusations and military movements dramatically heightens the possibility of miscalculations or accidents. A minor incident could trigger open clashes on the Korean Peninsula itself, or between US and Japanese forces and the Chinese military in the Sea of Japan.



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