

Following new UN sanctions, North Korea tests more missiles

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North Korea has reacted to the imposition of further US and UN sanctions last week by condemning the punitive measures and conducting another round of missile tests yesterday.

According to South Korea's military, Pyongyang fired what appeared to be "multiple unidentified projectiles, assumed to be surface-to-ship missiles" from the country's east coast. The launches are the latest in an accelerating series of tests in recent weeks.

Far from defending the North Korean people, the missile-testing plays directly into the hands of the US and its allies by providing a pretext for its military expansion in the region and repeated threats of war against Pyongyang. On Tuesday, an American nuclear-powered attack submarine, the USS Cheyenne, docked at the South Korea port of Busan, following a port call in April by the nuclear guided-missile submarine, the USS Michigan. Both submarines are capable of launching Tomahawk cruise missiles.

The US Navy is building up what President Donald Trump described as an "armada" off the Korean Peninsula. Two aircraft carriers—USS Carl Vinson and USS Ronald Reagan—are already in the area, together with their strike groups of destroyers and cruisers, and have been engaged in exercises with Japanese naval vessels. Another aircraft carrier—USS Nimitz—and its strike group are en route to create an unprecedented US naval presence in the region.

The US finally pressured China and Russia into agreeing to extra UN sanctions, which were incorporated into a Security Council resolution passed last Friday. The new penalties were limited in scope, subjecting another four North Korean entities, including the Koryo Bank and Strategic Rocket Force, as well as 14 individuals, to a global travel ban and freeze on assets held overseas. While the new measures

did not require a public Security Council vote, Washington insisted on a vote to intensify the pressure on North Korea.

The UN sanctions followed further unilateral American measures announced last Thursday by the US Treasury, which blacklisted nine companies and government institutions, including two Russian firms, along with three individuals, for allegedly supporting North Korea's weapons programs.

The Trump administration has placed huge pressure on China to exploit its economic clout to force North Korea to abandon its nuclear and missile programs. Previous UN sanctions imposed crippling economic penalties, banning the purchase of a range of North Korean minerals and restricting the import of coal—the country's top export commodity. Beijing, however, is reluctant to take further steps, such as cutting of oil and food supplies, fearing that would provoke an economic and political crisis in Pyongyang that Washington would exploit.

Speaking at the Security Council, US ambassador to the UN Nikki Haley again made a thinly disguised threat to take military action if North Korea did not accede to US demands. While paying lip service to seeking a peaceful, diplomatic resolution, she warned: "Beyond diplomatic and financial consequences, the United States remains prepared to counteract North Korean aggression through other means, if necessary."

Liu Jieyi, China's ambassador to the UN, reiterated Beijing's call for dialogue with North Korea, declaring there was "a critical window of opportunity for the nuclear issue" to be settled through negotiations. He urged "all parties concerned to exercise restraint" and called for the US to suspend the deployment of a Terminal High Altitude Area Defence (THAAD) anti-ballistic missile battery in South Korea.

Beijing is well aware that the US military build-up in Asia is not primarily directed at North Korea and its limited nuclear arsenal. The THAAD system is just one aspect of the Pentagon's inter-linked, anti-missile systems in the Asia Pacific that are part of US military planning for nuclear war with China. The sophisticated X-band radar associated with the THAAD installation is able to peer deep inside the Chinese mainland and provide advanced warning of any missile launches.

Significantly, newly elected South Korean President Moon Jae-in called on Wednesday for a suspension of the controversial THAAD deployment. His office said two THAAD launchers already in place could remain, but the installation of a further four would depend on an environmental impact assessment—which could take months. During South Korea's recent presidential election, Moon exploited widespread opposition to THAAD by posturing as an opponent but stopped short of calling for its immediate removal. The proposed suspension is a blow to US war preparations that will undoubtedly provoke a reaction in Washington.

North Korea denounced the UN sanctions on Sunday and underscored the growing breach with China by lashing out at Beijing's support for the measures. A foreign ministry spokesman declared that Washington and Beijing had "railroaded" the resolution through the Security Council in "a high-handed and arbitrary act in pursuit of their own interests, trampling upon international justice." Pyongyang said the sanctions would not stop the development of its nuclear forces "even for a moment."

The US Treasury's decision to blacklist two Russian companies appears to be a warning to Moscow not to boost ties with Pyongyang as relations between North Korea and China deteriorate. Articles have appeared in the American media highlighting trade and transport links between Russia and North Korea.

The *USA Today* this week estimated that trade between the two countries grew by 73 percent in the first two months of the year, compared to the corresponding period last year. It added that a Russian company had opened a new ferry line in May to the North Korean port city of Rajin. It also cited talks about upgrading rail links, and an agreement to expand the employment of North Korean workers as cheap labour in Russia's timber and construction industries. However, as the article pointed out, North Korean trade

with Russia was just \$130 million annually, compared to \$6.6 billion with China.

Speaking last Friday, Russia's deputy UN ambassador, Vladimir Safronkov, said the US sanctions against Russian firms were "very puzzling and deeply disappointing." He added: "Instead of trying to work through the bilateral backlog in our work, Washington is doing exactly the opposite and undertaking unfriendly steps." This would make it "more difficult to cooperate on international affairs."

The latest North Korean missile tests will only heighten the geo-political tensions surrounding the Korean Peninsula and thus the danger of war. The Trump administration has repeatedly declared that time is short for a diplomatic solution, pointing to the alleged threat posed by North Korea's development of an intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) capable of hitting the American mainland.

Those warnings were underscored when Vice Admiral James Syring, head of the US Missile Defence Agency, testified to the US House Armed Services Committee on Wednesday. He said North Korea's missile tests in recent months were of "great concern." His agency assumed that Pyongyang could already "range the United States with an ICBM carrying a nuclear warhead."

This unsubstantiated assumption is precisely what Trump officials have repeatedly invoked as the pretext for pre-emptive military attacks on North Korea.



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