

US exploits North Korean missile test to threaten war and isolate China

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Washington has seized upon North Korea's test-firing on July 4 of a purported intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) to attempt to shift the focus of the upcoming G20 summit in Germany to condemnations of Chinese support for the Pyongyang regime.

The summit was expected to be dominated by the realignment of major European powers toward closer pan-Eurasian relations with China in response to the "America First" protectionist stance of the Trump administration. It has been preceded by talks between Russia and China, the commitment of the European Union and Japan to enter into a free trade agreement, and top-level meetings between German and Chinese officials on enhanced ties.

Now, Washington intends to push such moves into the background by demanding that the G20 nations line up behind its war buildup against North Korea, with the aim of whipping Germany and the EU into line and isolating China and Russia.

An emergency meeting of the United Nations Security Council yesterday was used by Washington to hold Beijing responsible for what US ambassador Nikki Haley asserted was a direct threat by North Korea "to deliver nuclear weapons to strike cities in the United States, South Korea and Japan."

It is by no means clear to weapons experts that the North Korean missile could even be armed with a nuclear warhead, let alone accurately reach a target. The White House, the Pentagon and most of the US media have nevertheless declared the test to be a transformative event that requires an immediate and bellicose response.

Once again threatening a possible unilateral American attack and a catastrophic war in East Asia, Haley declared that the US was prepared to use "our considerable military forces" against North Korea. She stressed that Washington's intention is to demand that the entire world, and China above all, collaborate in a complete economic blockade of the underdeveloped and poverty-

stricken country.

"Much of the burden of enforcing UN sanctions rests with China," she asserted. "Ninety percent of trade with North Korea is from China." She flagged that she will table a new resolution in the coming days outlining a raft of new sanctions, affecting air and sea links, currency transactions and the export of oil to North Korea.

In a blatant threat of economic reprisals if Beijing refuses to support such actions, Haley stated: "There are countries that are allowing, even encouraging, trade with North Korea in violation of UN Security Council resolutions... such countries would also like to continue their trade arrangements with the United States. That's not going to happen. Our attitude on trade changes when countries do not take international security threats seriously."

Haley's statements were in line with two tweets sent by Trump some hours earlier, in which he adopted a hostile tone toward Beijing. In the first, referring to trade arrangements, he wrote: "Why should we continue these deals with countries that do not help us?" In the second, more explicit comment, he asserted: "Trade between China and North Korea grew almost 40 percent in the first quarter. So much for China working with us—but we had to give it a try."

Chinese and Russian UN representatives openly opposed the US ultimatums.

Both China and Russia still view North Korea as a strategic buffer between their own borders and US-aligned South Korea, which hosts considerable American military forces. North Korea's economic and political collapse would destabilise the region, including South Korea. For decades, Beijing has insisted that the tensions on the peninsula, which date back to the 1950–53 Korean War, can be resolved ultimately only by the withdrawal of the US from East Asia.

China's UN ambassador Liu Jieyi declared that

“military means must not be an option” and counterposed to the US demands the joint communique China signed with Russia proposing a diplomatic solution. Beijing and Moscow have called for North Korea to suspend its nuclear and missile programs in exchange for the US ending military exercises and terminating the deployment of the THAAD missile defence system to South Korea, followed by longer-term talks.

Russia’s deputy ambassador Vladimir Safronkov was even blunter in rejecting Haley’s statement. He stated that a “military solution” was “inadmissible” and that “attempts to economically strangle North Korea are equally unacceptable, as millions of people are in great humanitarian need.”

In an indication of the poisoned atmosphere that will prevail at the G20, Haley responded by accusing Russia of “holding the hands of [North Korean leader] Kim Jong-un.” If China and/or Russia does not support greater sanctions, she continued, the US “will go our own path” and take punitive actions against both countries. Presumably, the White House will also demand that the European powers do likewise, cutting across efforts led by Germany to develop a more independent stance from the US.

To a considerable extent, the White House is returning to the bellicose anti-China stance that characterised Trump’s campaign in the presidential election. Trump made threats to brand Beijing a “currency manipulator” and impose sweeping tariffs on Chinese products.

Over recent months, with official American politics preoccupied with accusations of Russian interference in the US election, the question of trade war with China has not been centre-stage. Trump had instead lauded his talks with Chinese President Xi Jinping and Beijing’s efforts to rein in North Korea’s missile tests.

Such language has fallen by the wayside and been replaced with a series of calculated US provocations against China over recent weeks. These have included two military violations of Chinese-claimed territory in the South China Sea, encouragement of an Indian-Chinese border dispute, arms sales to Taiwan, and talk of Japan acquiring a range of offensive weapons that are technically prohibited under its constitution.

At the same time, the Trump White House has sought to accommodate itself to the anti-Russia campaign in Washington. It has imposed new sanctions over Ukraine and stepped up its rhetoric against Moscow’s military intervention in Syria.

Propelling the day-to-day geopolitical turmoil and shifts

are more fundamental processes flowing from the collapse of the key mechanisms of the post-World War II economic and political order.

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, the key objective of American imperialism has been to prevent the emergence of any single power or group of powers that could challenge US dominance around the world. US strategists have come to identify the possibility of China consolidating an alliance with Russia, and forging relations with Germany and other European imperialist powers looking to distance themselves from Washington, as the greatest danger to its global interests.

As the International Committee of the Fourth International stressed in its February 18, 2016 statement, “Socialism and the Fight Against War”:

“As its global weight has grown, Beijing has promoted alternatives to the systems of investment and trade currently dominated by the United States and sought international support, including from the European and Asian allies of Washington. The United States fears that developments such as the formation of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank and China’s pursuit of its ‘Silk Road’ initiatives in Eurasia will significantly undermine its position in the world economy.”

The statement warned: “The American ruling class has drawn the conclusion that the nuclear-armed states in Beijing and Moscow must be brought to heel, sooner rather than later. Washington’s objective is to reduce China and Russia to the status of semi-colonial client states, control the ‘heartland,’[of Eurasia] and rule the world.”

In pursuit of this strategic agenda, US imperialism seeks to use every possible means to destabilise and undermine its rivals—whether they are nominally allies such as Germany or adversaries such as Russia. Washington’s reckless and incendiary actions, however, trigger inevitable counter-reactions. As in the years prior to 1914, the fault-lines of great power blocs are emerging, and with them the danger of world war.



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