

US generals discuss “military options” after North Korean missile test

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The North Korean test of another long-range missile yesterday produced a new round of condemnations and threats by the US and its allies. The launch follows a missile test on July 4, which, according to US analysts, had a range capable of reaching Alaska.

US President Donald Trump condemned the latest test and declared that the US “will take all necessary steps to ensure the security of the American homeland and protect our allies in the region.”

US Joint Chiefs of Staff chairman General Joseph Dunford and US Pacific Command chief Admiral Harry Harris called South Korea’s top military official, General Lee Sun Jin. After affirming an “ironclad commitment” to South Korea’s defence, Dunford and Harris “also discussed military response options,” Pentagon spokesman Captain Jeff Harris stated.

In a show of force just hours after the call, the US and South Korean militaries conducted a joint live fire exercise, which included firing missiles into the sea. A similar drill followed the North Korean test earlier this month.

Details provided by the South Korean military indicate that the latest missile was launched on a very steep trajectory, climbed to an altitude of about 3,700 kilometres, travelled about 1,000 kilometres and landed in waters off the northern Japanese island of Hokkaido.

Estimates put the potential range of the missile, if flown on a flatter trajectory, at 9,000 to 10,000 kilometres. This provoked lurid claims in the US media that major American cities could be targeted by North Korea with nuclear weapons.

As analysts have pointed out, however, the missile’s range is uncertain without knowing its payload—a heavier load would significantly shorten the range. As is also acknowledged, North Korea has yet to demonstrate that its missiles are accurate or that it has

overcome the technological problems involved in reentry into the earth’s atmosphere.

The *New York Times* headlined its article “North Korea tests a ballistic missile that experts say would hit California.” Its first paragraph insisted this was “a milestone that American presidents have long declared the United States could not tolerate”—implying that the Trump administration needed to respond forcefully.

A lengthy CNN article reviewed all of Trump’s options, pointing out that last month “the US military updated its options for North Korea with the goal of giving Trump plans for a rapid response.” Two American officials told CNN that the war plans would be presented to the president if a missile or nuclear test indicated that significant progress was made to developing a weapon capable of hitting the continental United States.

Such articles are designed to create a climate of fear and panic that North Korea is going to attack major American cities with nuclear weapons. This turns reality on its head. It is not the small, impoverished country of North Korea that is about to attack the US—a move that would result in annihilation by the huge American nuclear arsenal.

Rather it is the US—which has launched one illegal war of aggression after another over the past 25 years—that is planning and preparing pre-emptive strikes on North Korea. Pyongyang’s nuclear and missile tests only provide a convenient pretext for a US attack, and for the massive American military build-up throughout the Asia-Pacific that is primarily aimed against China, which Washington regards as the chief threat to its global hegemony.

North Korea’s bellicose posturing and weapon testing is utterly reactionary: it plays directly into US hands, sows divisions in the international working class

and does nothing to defend the population. Nevertheless, the Pyongyang regime's quest for nuclear weapons is motivated by very real fear of a devastating US attack.

Article after article in the US media openly discusses the pros and cons of "pre-emptive strikes" on North Korea while Trump and his officials repeatedly declare that "all options are on the table." In its article on the latest missile test, CNN's only objection to military aggression against Pyongyang was that it would result in North Korean attacks on South Korea and a new war on the Korean Peninsula.

Significantly General Dunford, who as Joint Chiefs of Staff chairman is the top US military official, dismissed such objections last weekend. Speaking at the Aspen Security Forum, he said the use of military force against North Korea would result in a "horrific" war but it was not "unimaginable," as some commentators suggested.

What was ruled out or "unimaginable," Dunford said, was North Korea having the capacity to "hit the US with a nuclear weapon." He added: "So my job will be to develop military options to make sure that doesn't happen."

At the same forum, CIA director Mike Pompeo suggested the US should intensify its plans to assassinate North Korean leader Kim Jong-un. He said the real problem was not North Korea's nuclear weapons but who controlled them. Pompeo declared he was "confident that the intelligence community will present ... a wide range of options for the president" to "separate those two." Pompeo added that he was sure the North Korean people "would love to see him [Kim] go."

The *Washington Post* reported on Monday that the US Defence Intelligence Agency (DIA) had, following the July 4 missile test, revised its assessment of North Korea's capabilities. It claimed Pyongyang would have a "reliable, nuclear-capable ICBM [intercontinental ballistic missile]" as early as next year—two years earlier than previously estimated.

Yesterday's missile test will only heighten the clamour in Washington for action, including covert regime-change operations and military strikes. The extraordinary political crisis embroiling the Trump administration, which is under siege over allegations of collusion with Russia, only increases the danger that it

will resort to reckless measures against North Korea to deflect attention.



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