

# Trump's nuclear war threat against North Korea

Bill Van Auken  
10 August 2017

US President Donald Trump's threat to unleash "fire and fury like the world has never seen" against the impoverished and oppressed nation of North Korea has sent shockwaves of dread and anxiety around the world.

The very week that survivors in Hiroshima and Nagasaki were marking the 72nd anniversary of the US atomic bombings that killed nearly a quarter million Japanese men, women and children, the American president interrupted his golf vacation to threaten a nuclear war in Asia with incalculable consequences for all of humanity.

A senior White House aide tried to play down the chilling implications of Trump's statement, telling the media that the president's comment had been "unplanned and spontaneous," while US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson told Americans they "should sleep well at night, have no concerns about this particular rhetoric of the last few days."

Yet even as these less than convincing reassurances were being uttered, Trump's defense secretary, the former Marine General James "Mad Dog" Mattis, routinely referred to by the media as the "adult in the room" and a force for moderation, echoed the president's threat. He demanded Wednesday that North Korea "cease any consideration of actions that would lead to the end of its regime and the destruction of its people." The meaning is unmistakable: bow to Washington's demands or face nuclear annihilation.

Trump himself followed up his earlier threat with a tweet Wednesday boasting of Washington's ability to prosecute a nuclear war. "My first order as president was to renovate and modernize our nuclear arsenal," he declared. "It is now far stronger and more powerful than ever before. Hopefully we will never have to use this power, but there will never be a time that we are not the most powerful nation in the world!"

The recklessness of such threats and bullying rhetoric is staggering. What are the leaders of the North Korean government supposed to think when the most powerful nuclear power in the world repeatedly threatens to attack them with "fire and fury" and wipe out their entire population?

These threats are made under conditions where the US has positioned a battle group led by the aircraft carrier USS Carl Vinson off Korean shores and sent B-1 Lancer bombers flying menacing sorties near the North Korean border.

North Korea has responded to the US war threats with its own threat to launch a missile attack on the US Pacific territory of Guam, home to bases for American nuclear submarines and strategic bombers. While the threat could be brushed off as mere rhetoric from Pyongyang, that is by no means certain. What if the North Koreans calculate that the American threats are real and war is imminent? They could well decide that rather than lose their military to US bombs and missiles they should carry out their own preemptive strike and show Washington that they are not bluffing.

While the *World Socialist Web Site* holds no brief for the reactionary hereditary regime in North Korea and its own provocative actions, there is nothing irrational about such calculations.

There is an immense weight of history underlying North Korea's position. The US war against Korea 65 years ago killed at least three million people, two million of them in the north. According to the US Air Force's own assessment, "Eighteen of twenty-two major cities in North Korea had been at least half obliterated." Air Force Gen. Curtis LeMay later recalled, "We burned down just about every city in North Korea and South Korea both."

So to North Korea, US talk of "fire and fury" and threats to exterminate the entire population are anything but inflated rhetoric.

The entire basis of the current conflict is Washington's demand that North Korea stop its tests of nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles and surrender its entire nuclear capacity. But the government of North Korea's Kim Jong-un is well aware of the fate of other regimes that bowed to such demands.

Iraq, which like North Korea was proclaimed part of an "axis of evil" by George W. Bush, agreed to give up its weapons programs and was invaded anyway in 2003 on the lying pretext that it retained "weapons of mass destruction."

The US war took some one million Iraqi lives and ended with the lynching of the country's head of state, Saddam Hussein. Similarly, Libya's Muammar Gaddafi agreed to give up his weapons program after the Iraq invasion, only to see the US and NATO launch a war against his country in 2011 that killed tens of thousands of Libyans, left the society in ruins and ended with his own lynch-mob murder.

North Korea's nuclear program is the only thing that has kept the country and its government from suffering a similar fate.

Trump's seemingly mad threats are a signal that US imperialism is no longer willing to accept the risk of a nuclear confrontation as an insurmountable barrier to its plans for aggressive war.

The US administration is attempting to prepare the public for what almost certainly would become a world catastrophic war, with devastating consequences for the economic conditions, democratic rights and very lives of working people in the US and every other part of the planet. The White House, the Pentagon and the various think tanks that elaborate US imperialist policy all claim that Pyongyang has crossed the threshold of becoming a nuclear power, having allegedly developed miniaturized warheads and the intercontinental ballistic missiles capable of delivering them against a US city.

There is no more reason to take these assertions for good coin than there was to swallow the Bush administration's lies about Iraqi WMDs. And while Washington proclaims North Korean nukes to be an existential threat, it has assisted equally unstable and aggressive regimes in Israel, India and Pakistan to develop their own nuclear arsenals.

The calculations of the capitalist ruling class in preparing for war against North Korea are spelled out in horrifying terms in the latest issue of the *Economist* magazine, which elaborates a hypothetical scenario for the outbreak of a war that ends in a swift victory for the US. It estimates the initial civilian death toll at 300,000, with many more to die from radiation poisoning. It concludes with a hypothetical tweet from Trump: "Nuke attack on Seoul by evil Kim was BAD! Had no choice but to nuke him back. But thanks to my actions, America is safe again!"

This ghastly prospect is something of a best case scenario, as such a war would potentially impact not only the entire population of North Korea, but also 10 million people in Seoul and 38 million in greater Tokyo, not to mention tens of thousands of US troops stationed in South Korea. Moreover, a US attack on North Korea could, as it did 65 years ago, draw in China, now a major nuclear power.

The escalating war danger and the seemingly insane threats of nuclear extermination are not merely a matter of the criminal and fascist mindset of Donald Trump. It is the

entire US government that has begun to speak in the language of Adolf Hitler.

This is the end product of a political culture that has been developed over the course of 25 years of unrelenting wars of aggression, threats and bullying by a capitalist oligarchy in the US that embraced militarism and aggressive war as a means of offsetting its eroding economic dominance.

War abroad has been accompanied by ever widening social inequality and ceaseless attacks on the living conditions and basic rights of the working class at home. Social opposition is growing under conditions where Trump is the most unpopular president in American history. The political establishment is internally divided and the Trump administration is at war with itself. There is a real danger that the White House will seize upon a war with North Korea to project internal social and political tensions outward against a foreign "enemy."

No one should doubt the far-reaching consequences of such a policy. The launching of a war that means mass slaughter, including the deaths of thousands of American soldiers, will be used as the pretext for violent political repression within the US itself.

The efforts of Google to blacklist the *World Socialist Web Site* are a warning of the dictatorial methods being prepared for the working class as a whole.

Driving the threat of a nuclear world war is the deepening crisis of US and world capitalism, at the center of which is the insoluble contradiction between global economy and the division of the world into rival nation states. The same crisis of the profit system, however, creates both the objective conditions for and the political necessity of the working class fighting for its own revolutionary solution, through the building of an international movement against war based on a socialist perspective to put an end to capitalism before it plunges humanity into barbarism.



To contact the WSWS and the  
Socialist Equality Party visit:

**[wsws.org/contact](https://wsws.org/contact)**