

European Union criticizes US nuclear war threats against North Korea

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The military stand-off that is emerging between Washington and the North Korean regime in Pyongyang threatens the entire world, including Europe, with nuclear war. European Union (EU) officials and European media are warning of the risk of war and ever more openly criticizing the Trump administration's threats to incinerate North Korea with nuclear bombs.

The European press noted that Trump threatened to unleash “fire and fury like the world has never seen” against North Korea the day before the 72nd anniversary of the US atom bombing of Nagasaki. It is also widely reporting Pyongyang's reckless threats to bomb the US Pacific island of Guam and the dispatches of its Korean Central News Agency (KCNA). These include the KCNA report of North Korean General Kim Rak Gyom's dismissal of talks with Trump: “Sound dialogue is not possible with such a guy bereft of reason, and only absolute force can work on him.”

German Foreign Minister Sigmar Gabriel indicated that Berlin is deeply concerned by the policies of both the North Korean regime and Germany's ostensible ally in Washington. “Our main concern, now that this struggle is escalating,” Gabriel said, “is that both sides are ramping it up, and this can in fact end in military conflict.”

France's Catholic daily *La Croix* pointed to the effects of even a limited war in Northeast Asia: “Even if the North Korean regime collapsed after a military conflict, the human and political cost for countries in the region would be considerable. The economic consequences of such a war would also be considerable, especially given the region's role as a motor of the world economy; China, Japan, and South Korea are the world's second, third and eleventh largest economies, respectively.”

Le Figaro cited retired General Jean-Bernard Pinatel, who indicated that a US attack would likely end in a nuclear holocaust. Speaking of Trump, Pinatel said: “What can he do? A pre-emptive strike? North Korea today has 10 to 20 nuclear weapons that are miniaturized enough to reach South Korea, Japan, or even Guam. There is the anti-missile shield, but if he asks his military staff what guarantees he has, his generals will reply that zero risk in military matters does not exist. Can he risk North Korean retaliatory strikes that claim a million lives in Seoul or Tokyo?”

Le Figaro reported that Pinatel believes Trump's nuclear war threats are to a large extent addressed “to the American people, to make them forget his difficulties in domestic politics.”

The inescapable conclusion that emerges from the remarks of European bourgeois politicians and media is that world capitalism is passing through a political collapse on a scale comparable to the world wars of the last century. Pre-emptive wars and their use to divert the attention of angry and impoverished populations from social issues—policies employed by US imperialism for decades with the tacit acceptance of its European imperialist allies—have criminalized the NATO countries' domestic regimes. They now threaten humanity with disaster.

The central feature of the remarks by European politicians and generals is that they downplay the threat posed to humanity in general, and the European population in particular, by the Korean crisis. Speculating about the disastrous initial effects of one or another US or North Korean missile strike, they do not address what the outcome of such a war would be.

However, anyone suggesting that a war would only have economic effects on Europe, or that conflict would stop once North Korea had been reduced to

ashes—together with much of South Korea, Japan, and potentially the United States—is placing heavy bets against history. It is clear that what is emerging is a conflict with the potential to escalate rapidly into a world war.

China already intervened in the Korean War of 1950-1953 to prevent the US army from destroying North Korea, and to maintain a buffer between itself and US troops in South Korea. North Korea's other great-power neighbor, Russia—already on high alert after the NATO-backed overthrow of a pro-Russian regime in Ukraine in 2014, and amid NATO war games across Eastern Europe—would doubtless also prepare for war in the event of a US strike on North Korea.

US war threats are aimed not in the final analysis at North Korea, moreover, but at more powerful states that Washington sees as rivals. Above all, US imperialism's Asia policy is driven by increasing tensions with its nominal NATO allies in Europe. As the “unipolar moment” of US global military hegemony that followed the Soviet bureaucracy's dissolution of the USSR rapidly fades, and class conflict rises in the NATO countries, inter-imperialist tensions between Europe and America are surging.

This is particularly the case in Asia. Britain and the EU powers joined China's Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank in 2015 over US objections. EU officials hailed their strategic relations with China after Washington obtained a ruling against China last year, over the South China Sea dispute at a UN court in The Hague. And Berlin and Paris attacked Trump after his election last year when he indicated he could move away from the One China policy, with French officials warning that US policy meant China's “unity is being put into question.”

As Germany announces the re-militarization of its foreign policy and countries across the EU prepare vast social cuts to spend billions of euros more on their military machines, the EU countries are also seeking to expand their commercial penetration of Asia. The Trump administration's threats in recent weeks to place massive trade sanctions on Russia and China are to a large extent a trade war measure aimed at its imperialist rivals in Europe. The US foreign policy establishment itself now remarks on the US-EU tensions in Asia.

After the election of French President Emmanuel Macron in May signaled a period of close strategic ties

between Berlin and Paris, *The National Interest* pointed to the potential dangers to US interests in Asia posed by a Franco-German axis. It wrote, “This will signal a significant diminution in American prestige and influence abroad. Imagine, for example, that Merkel decided to defy Trump's push for sanctions and isolating Iran by establishing trade ties with North Korea, including selling it weapons.”

Workers and youth opposed to war in Europe and internationally cannot oppose the threat of escalation against North Korea by endorsing the foreign policy of the EU powers against that of Washington. It is ever clearer that EU policy is to wait for a better moment to assert, commercially and militarily, imperialist interests not fundamentally different from those of Washington.

For now, Berlin and its allies have not carried out sufficient attacks on workers' living standards to build a military machine capable of rivaling the Pentagon. After Britain's exit from the EU, moreover, London is hostile to the Berlin-Paris axis and is aligning itself with aggressive US military measures against North Korea and China. Under these conditions, the EU powers are pressing for China to broker a settlement with Washington at Pyongyang's expense.

German Defense Minister Ursula von der Leyen stressed that China is “the only country with influence over North Korea,” while *La Croix* wrote, “The only diplomatic card is China, Pyongyang's ally. Donald Trump blows hot and cold on Beijing, not without success, since Beijing voted with the rest of the UN Security Council, at the end of last week, to impose new sanctions on North Korea.”

German Foreign Ministry spokesman Martin Schäfer said, “These sanctions must above all be firmly imposed. Thus we can increase the pressure for Pyongyang to join talks. Therefore we see US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson's offer of talks as the right way forward, to set talks with North Korea into motion immediately once the [North Korean] regime stops its illegal missile tests.”



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