

Danger of global war over Korea shakes Europe

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The US government's bellicose response to the North Korean regime's nuclear test on Sunday has placed the world only a few steps away from a global war that would rapidly engulf Europe. As European governments denounce the North Korean regime in Pyongyang, Washington is pressing for aggressive actions leading to regime change in North Korea and a military standoff with North Korea's neighbors, Russia and China, that could lead to nuclear war in Europe.

US Ambassador to the UN Nikki Haley said that Pyongyang is "begging for war" and told Russia and China to cut off trade with North Korea, including oil exports. This would rapidly bring North Korea's economy to a halt. If China and Russia acquiesce to these demands, or if Washington reacts to the likely Chinese and Russian refusal by launching a war with North Korea, Chinese and Russian forces in their countries and US forces in South Korea could all intervene in North Korea.

Significantly, when asked point-blank whether China would intervene militarily in North Korea if Washington attacks, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Geng Shuang pointedly refused to deny it. Calling it a "hypothetical question which it is hard to answer," Geng only said that military force was "not on the list" of means China would like to use to resolve the Korean crisis.

Amid the explosive tensions between NATO and Russia in Eastern Europe since the 2014 NATO-backed putsch in Kiev, Europe would inevitably be a theater of any resulting conflict. Since backing a putsch that toppled a pro-Russian regime in Kiev in 2014, NATO has sent tens of thousands of troops to Eastern Europe near the Russian border. Moreover, Germany's *Sueddeutsche Zeitung* recently reported that Washington is planning to annul the 1987 Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces treaty, in order to station nuclear missiles across Europe aimed at Russia.

Yesterday, Russia carried out large-scale exercises of its main strategic nuclear forces from Tver near Russia's European border to Irkutsk, near Mongolia and China. "Eleven missile regiments armed with Topol, Topol-M and Yars missiles are currently on patrol missions in areas from Tver to Irkutsk. One-third of them are conducting intensive maneuvering," the Russian Defense Ministry told the TASS news agency. "The exercise encompasses 20 regions of the country."

Speaking at the BRICS (Brazil-Russia-India-China-South Africa) summit in Xiamen, China, Russian President Vladimir Putin warned that aggressive action by the United States and its allies against North Korea could lead to world war: "Ramping up military hysteria in such conditions is senseless; it's a dead end. It could lead to a global, planetary catastrophe and a huge loss of human life. There is no other way to solve the North Korean nuclear issue, save that of peaceful dialogue."

Putin made clear that Pyongyang's reckless pursuit of its nuclear weapons program is a desperate attempt to deter an attack like the 2003 US war of aggression against Iraq or the 2011 NATO war in Libya, in which European powers including France and Britain played leading roles in launching.

He said, "We all remember what happened with Iraq and Saddam Hussein. His children were killed, I think his grandson was shot, the whole country was destroyed and Saddam Hussein was hanged ... We all know how this happened, and people in North Korea remember well what happened in Iraq. They will eat grass but will not stop their program as long as they do not feel safe."

The Korean crisis is the outcome of a quarter century of relentless imperialist war, waged by Washington and its European allies, since the Stalinist bureaucracy's dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991. By joining the Gulf War against Iraq in that year, the European powers signaled that they would also exploit the collapse of the

Soviet military counterweight to wage neocolonial wars. In this context, the bankrupt regime in Pyongyang has manifestly concluded that only the possession of nuclear weapons will give it some protection from suffering Hussein's fate.

The Trump administration's hysterical threats against North Korea are also exposing, moreover, the deep divisions that have emerged between Washington and its supposed European allies. While condemning the Pyongyang regime's nuclear tests, European governments have refused to endorse the Trump administration's threats of escalation against North Korea. They are continuing their opposition to US policy in Asia starting with the Obama administration's "pivot to Asia," notably by defying US calls to boycott China's Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank in 2015.

At present, the European powers are denouncing Pyongyang but calling for talks to defuse the Korean crisis. German Chancellor Angela Merkel and French President Emmanuel Macron issued a joint statement calling for sanctions: "This latest provocation by the ruler in Pyongyang has reached a new dimension. ... In addition to the United Nations Security Council, the European Union also has to act now. The Chancellor and the President expressed their support for a tightening of EU sanctions against North Korea." However, Merkel told the German parliament on Tuesday that only "peaceful, diplomatic solutions" to the crisis could be found.

Similarly, while London demanded "tougher action to have North Korea stop this dangerous and destabilising activity," spokespeople for British Prime Minister Theresa May also called for moves to "increase pressure and come to a peaceful solution. ... It's our view in the UK overwhelmingly that peaceful diplomatic means are best."

European countries including Switzerland, where North Korea President Kim Jong-Un studied in Bern, are attempting to mediate in the crisis. Mocking Trump's use of Twitter as not an "adequate instrument" in world diplomacy, Swiss President Doris Leuthard declared: "We are ready to offer our role for good services as a mediator. I think in the upcoming weeks a lot will depend on how the US and China can have an influence in this crisis. That's why I think Switzerland and Sweden can have a role behind the curtain."

This reflects not a desire for peace on the part of the European countries, in which the ruling elites are all pressing for big increases in military spending, but growing rivalries between US and European imperialism.

Since Trump's election, after which he threatened to launch a trade war on German automobile exports, Merkel has come to regularly contacting Chinese President Xi Jinping before meeting with the US president.

These tensions are reflected in a wave of comments critical of US policy in Korea by European media over the Korean crisis, including calls for a broad reorientation of European foreign policy.

German television ZDF interviewed Professor Rüdiger Frank, a former citizen of East Germany who studied in Pyongyang, who said that a "radical rethink is necessary" in North Korea. "The toughest sanctions will not prevent North Korea from arming itself," Frank said, adding that Pyongyang had made a "strategic decision" to pursue its nuclear program in an attempt to persuade the Trump administration to negotiate with it.

Frank called for talks with Pyongyang, saying that otherwise, specific predictions about what could occur would be only "café speculation." He refuted claims that North Korea was driving the conflict, saying: "They say, if you attack us, if you for example strike our leader, then we will retaliate with everything we have, and that includes nuclear weapons. Because they know rather well in North Korea that we are not afraid of a million Kalashnikov rifles."

When *Le Monde* asked Antoine Bondaz of France's Strategic Research Foundation (FRS) think tank about Trump's Twitter comments on Korea, Bondaz said: "his outbursts are totally counterproductive. Telling North Korea we can wipe it off the map by using nuclear weapons against it only serves to further legitimate its nuclear program inside the country." Bondaz called for Europe to "serve as an intermediary to facilitate dialogue and avoid a military escalation that would have a dramatic impact on European interests in Asia."



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