

UN head warns Korean crisis could spiral into world war

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United Nations Secretary-general Antonio Guterres warned on Tuesday that the conflicts being provoked by the bellicose US stance toward North Korea's nuclear weapons' program could lead to "unintended consequences."

Guterres invoked the years leading up to the outbreak of World War I, when rival responses to international incidents aggravated great power antagonisms culminating in all-out war. "Wars usually do not start by a decision taken in a moment by the parties to go to war," he stated. "If you look at the history of the First World War, it was on a step-by-step basis, one party doing one thing, the other party doing another, and then an escalation taking place... This is the risk we need to avoid in relation to the situation of North Korea."

The UN head issued the warning as sharp divisions emerged between the US, China and Russia over Washington's latest demands that the UN Security Council impose a total trade embargo on North Korea, including the supply of oil and gas.

US strategic think tanks have discussed the aim of such an embargo—itsself an act of war—for more than 25 years. It would seek to collapse the country's already crisis-stricken economy, provoke starvation and social upheaval, and create conditions for a US and South Korean intervention to install a client state in Pyongyang.

The Trump administration has ruled out any negotiations on the terms being advanced by North Korea. Pyongyang has signalled it would be prepared to begin talks on ending its nuclear program only if the US and South Korea ceased their constant military rehearsals for an attack. North Korean leader Kim Jong-un is well aware of the fate of the Iraqi and Libyan regimes after they bowed down to American imperialist dictates. Both were attacked, the countries devastated

and their leaders murdered.

Washington has answered the Pyongyang regime with provocative rhetoric, including President Donald Trump's tweet last week, declaring: "Talking is not the answer." Echoing Trump, US ambassador to the UN Nikki Haley issued an ultimatum to China and Russia on Monday "that the time has come for us to exhaust all of our diplomatic means before it's too late."

The implication is unmistakable. If the Security Council does not vote for harsher sanctions against North Korea, the US and its allies will launch a catastrophic war that could involve the first combat use of nuclear weapons since 1945.

Beijing and Moscow have both signaled they will not support such an economic blockade. Speaking yesterday during an economic summit in the far eastern Russian city of Vladivostok, Russian President Vladimir Putin stated: "We should not act out of emotions and push North Korea into a dead end. We must act with calm and avoid steps that could raise tensions."

The economic and strategic interests of the Chinese and Russian ruling elites would be severely compromised by either scenario being threatened by Washington. A blockade that led to the collapse of the Pyongyang regime and its replacement by a pro-US puppet state would mean American military forces operating on their borders with Korea. A war, on the other hand, would not only devastate the Korean Peninsula, but profoundly destabilise East Asia. Among the consequences could be the nuclear fall-out and contamination of northern China and the Russian Far East as well as a flood of millions of refugees over the borders.

Beijing and Moscow are desperately seeking to close off the possibility of a US attack. Both have bent over

backwards to accommodate to Washington's demands that they increase pressure on Pyongyang to end its nuclear weapons and long-range missile programs. They have voted in the UN Security Council for ever-harsher sanctions and claim they are enforcing them. At the same time, they have repeatedly called on Washington to accept North Korea's position that it will not cease its efforts to acquire a nuclear arsenal while it is permanently threatened with attack and invasion by the US and South Korea.

Putin signalled yesterday in a meeting with South Korean President Moon Jae-in that he is seeking to win Seoul away from the US stance and toward opening negotiations with Pyongyang.

Against Washington's demands for an economic embargo of North Korea, Putin advocated massive investment into the besieged and isolated country. He told a press conference: "We could deliver Russian pipeline gas to Korea and integrate the power lines and railway systems of Russia, the Republic of Korea [South Korea] and North Korea. The implementation of these initiatives will be not only economically beneficial, but will also help build up trust and stability on the Korean Peninsula."

Moon Jae-in responded favourably. He told Putin at the joint press conference: "The development of the Far East will promote the prosperity of our two countries and will also help change North Korea and create the basis for the implementation of the trilateral agreements. We will be working hard on this."

These "trilateral agreements" have been struck between China, Japan and South Korea since 2005 to strengthen their investment and trade relations. Putin's proposal is also in line with South Korea's "Sunshine Policy" in the 1990s to open up the North for investment and dovetails with China's "One Belt One Road" plans to develop energy and transport links across the Eurasian landmass to Western Europe.

Newsweek magazine noted yesterday that Putin had proposed to Moon a "vision for peace in the Korean Peninsula that marginalises the US."

Successive American administrations—Clinton, Bush, Obama and now Trump—have aggressively intervened to disrupt any such prospect. Washington has repeatedly exploited North Korea's "weapons of mass destruction" to ratchet up tensions in East Asia and block South Korea and Japan from developing an

economic and strategic orientation to China, Russia and Europe.

The war danger today is the outcome of decades of imperialist intrigue and provocation. The warnings by Guterres serve only to underscore that in the corridors of power around the world, the real dangers posed by the aggressive drive by the American capitalist class are well understood. Washington is seeking to preserve US global dominance against the challenges it faces, above all from the ambitions of the Chinese ruling elite to place Beijing at the centre of an integrated Eurasian economic bloc that largely excludes the United States.

As in the years prior to 1914, the competing interests of rival capitalist nation-states threaten to drag humanity into a catastrophic global war, fought this time with nuclear weapons.



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