

Japanese PM backs US “military option” against North Korea

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In an op-ed article published in the *New York Times* on Sunday, Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe gave his unalloyed support to the reckless and provocative US build-up to war with North Korea.

Referring to the supposed threat posed by North Korea, Abe stated: “Japan has responded by reaffirming the ironclad Japan-United States alliance, and Japan has coordinated in lock-step with the United States and South Korea.”

The Japanese prime minister continued: “I firmly support the United States position that ‘all options are on the table.’” The phrase, which has become shorthand for warning that the US will use military force to impose its demands, has taken on an even more sinister meaning under the Trump administration.

Trump threatened last month to engulf North Korea in “fire and fury like the world has never seen.” This was reinforced by his speech to the United Nations yesterday, in which he warned that the US might have to “totally destroy” the country. These comments can only mean that the US is preparing the nuclear annihilation of North Korea.

In backing a US war against North Korea, Abe emphatically ruled out any negotiated end to the escalating confrontation. “Prioritising diplomacy and emphasising the importance of dialogue will not work with North Korea. History shows that concerted pressure by the entire international community is essential,” he wrote.

What followed falsified the history of Washington’s aggressive stance towards Pyongyang after the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, which amounted to a barely disguised strategy of regime change.

The US pulled its tactical nuclear weapons out of South Korea and demanded that North Korea

denuclearise. After referring to North Korea’s decision to withdraw from the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, Abe cited the so-called Agreed Framework reached in 1994 as an example of a failed deal.

“We know what happened next: Several years after the heavy fuel oil was delivered and construction started on the light-water reactors, North Korea admitted to having a uranium enrichment program in violation of the agreement,” Abe declared.

Abe omitted the fact that in 1994 the US under President Clinton was on the verge of waging an all-out war on North Korea on the pretext of its “nuclear threat,” only to pull back at the last minute when faced with the scale of the likely casualties. By 2000, the building of lightwater reactors had barely begun and the US had fulfilled none of its other promises—above all, easing the decades-long diplomatic and economic blockade of North Korea.

Abe blamed North Korea for the breakdown of the Agreed Framework but it was the coming to power of President Bush in 2001 that was responsible. Bush immediately called for a revision of US policy towards Pyongyang and in 2002 branded North Korea as part of an “axis of evil” along with Iraq and Iran.

Likewise, Abe blamed Pyongyang for the collapse of a second agreement in 2007 to denuclearise. In reality, the Bush administration only agreed to the deal as the US military was hard pressed in maintaining its military occupation of Iraq, and never had any intention of keeping to it. Even though North Korea kept its side of the deal, Bush demanded a more stringent inspection regime, effectively nullifying the agreement. Obama made no attempt to revive it and pursued a policy of tightening the noose of sanctions around North Korea.

Abe’s tendentious account of “failed negotiations” parrots that which is endlessly recycled in the American

and international media. His conclusion that “dialogue will not work with North Korea” amounts to a menacing threat to deal with Pyongyang either through regime change or war.

While praising the latest UN sanctions following North Korea’s sixth nuclear test this month, Abe declared that the world “must not be simply complacent with the adoption of these sanctions.” He insisted: “Now is the time to exert the utmost pressure on the North. There should be no more delays.”

What is the point, however, of more sanctions if negotiations are ruled out? Abe, like the Trump administration, is pushing for a crippling economic and financial blockade of North Korea that would generate a massive political crisis in Pyongyang and open the way for the US to intervene to oust the regime.

At the same time, Abe is exploiting the standoff with North Korea to put pressure on China, its formal ally and largest trading partner by far, as well as Russia. That is the import of his accusation that “there are countries, mainly in Asia, that continue trading with North Korea; and for some, as recently as in 2016, their trade even exceeded that of the previous year.”

Until last year, UN bans focused on North Korean missile and nuclear programs. Even the resolutions of the past year do not exclude all trade and business with North Korea. What Abe is pressing for is a complete trade embargo—an act of war that could precipitate rash action by the unstable regime in Pyongyang and trigger a conflict.

While marching “in lock-step” with the Trump administration, Abe is exploiting the supposed threat from North Korea to whip up an atmosphere of fear and panic at home, in order to push the government’s agenda of remilitarisation.

Abe has already pushed through unconstitutional laws to legitimise so-called collective self-defence—that is, Japanese military participation in US-led wars. He wants to create the political climate in which he can ram through a full revision of the constitution to remove all constraints on the use of the military to pursue the predatory interests of Japanese imperialism.

On Sunday, the US staged its most provocative military exercise to date against North Korea, sending two B-1B Lancer strategic bombers from Guam and four stealth fighters to release live weapons on a South Korean training range close to the demilitarised zone

dividing the two Koreas.

South Korean war planes accompanied the US aircraft across the Korean Peninsula while Japanese fighter aircraft joined them over waters near Japan—underscoring Abe’s commitment to any US war against North Korea.



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