

Trump provokes North Korean counter-threats and heightens war danger

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In the wake of President Trump's bellicose and menacing speech at the United Nations this week, the war of words between the US and North Korea has intensified, heightening the danger of catastrophic military conflict.

North Korean leader Kim Jong-un in a televised statement yesterday warned that the US would "pay dearly" for Trump's threat to "totally destroy" North Korea. He branded Trump a "mentally deranged US dotard" who had "insulted me and my country in front of the eyes of the world."

Trump had crudely spoken of Kim as "Rocket Man" saying he was on a "suicide mission"—a direct personal threat given that the US and South Korea are training "decapitation squads" to kill top North Korean leaders.

Kim declared that Trump had made "the most ferocious declaration of a war in history" and threatened to respond by taking the "highest level of hardline countermeasure in history."

Shortly after Mr. Kim's statement was released, North Korean foreign minister, Ri Yong-ho, suggested that Pyongyang's response "could be the most powerful detonation of an H-bomb in the Pacific." However, he immediately added: "We have no idea about what actions could be taken as it will be ordered by leader Kim Jong-un."

Such a reckless action—the firing of a long-range missile and detonation of a nuclear weapon in the atmosphere over the Pacific Ocean—could easily be seized upon as the pretext for an all-out US military attack on North Korea, citing the potential of a malfunction and the threat posed to South Korea or Japan.

The chief responsibility of this dangerous brinkmanship rests with the Trump administration, which has boxed North Korea into a corner. Successive

UN resolutions have severely impacted on the country's trade—banning its exports of coal, seafood, textiles, iron and other minerals and slashing its import of vital oil supplies.

Unable to get the support of China and Russia for even tougher measures, the US announced on Thursday its own unilateral ban on any country or company having trade-related financial relations with North Korea. Trump has issued a sweeping executive order that would exclude any bank doing business with North Korea from the American banking and financial system.

"Our new executive order will cut off sources of revenue that fund North Korea's efforts to develop the deadliest weapons known to humankind," Trump said. In other words, the US is attempting to unilaterally impose a complete trade and financial embargo on North Korea—a step that is itself an act of war.

US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson declared that the US was continuing to push for a diplomatic solution to the dangerous stand-off with North Korea. Trump, however, again lashed out at Kim Jong-un with another belligerent tweet, declaring the North Korean leader was "a madman" who "will be tested like never before!"

Despite Tillerson's remarks, Trump has repeatedly declared that he has effectively ruled out negotiations with North Korea. Last weekend, the US ambassador to the UN, Nikki Haley declared that the US had exhausted all diplomatic options at the UN Security Council, adding: "I have no problem kicking it to [US Defence Secretary James] Mattis because I think he has plenty of [military] options."

North Korea has clearly concluded that the US is intent on destroying its government—either by provoking an economic and political crisis in

Pyongyang or through war—and is developing its nuclear arsenal in a desperate bid to counter the US threat.

In his statement yesterday, North Korean leader Kim declared that Trump's threats at the UN "convinced me, rather than frightening or stopping me, that the path I chose is correct and that it is the one I have to follow to the last."

Trump's bellicose remarks in the UN towards Tehran and US moves to undermine or abrogate the 2015 nuclear deal with Iran by demanding its revision will only have reinforced Pyongyang's determination to accelerate its nuclear program. North Korea can only conclude that any deal reached with Washington is worthless.

North Korea has reached two agreements with the US to denuclearise—in 1994 and 2007—only to have them sabotaged by Washington. The US and international media routinely accuse Pyongyang of bad faith, but the Bush administration scuttled the 1994 Agreed Framework on coming to office in 2001 and denounced North Korea in 2002 as part of an "axis of evil." It blew up the 2007 deal that it reached with Pyongyang by unilaterally insisting in 2008 on far tougher inspection measures than were written into the agreement.

The Pyongyang regime is well aware of the fate of governments that have capitulated to US demands to abandon their weapons programs and agree to ever-more intrusive inspections. In the case of both Iraq and Libya, the US intervened militarily to oust the regimes and kill their leaders.

Trump's speech at the UN has provoked a similar reaction in Iran. Speaking at a military parade yesterday, Iranian President Hassan Rouhani responded to Trump's attack on the 2015 nuclear deal by saying: "It will be a great pity if this agreement were to be destroyed by 'rogue' newcomers to the world of politics."

Rouhani strongly defended Iran's right to strengthen its military power as a deterrent. "We will strengthen our missile capabilities. We will not seek anyone's permission to defend our land. Not only will we fortify our missiles, but our ground, navy and air forces will always be supported by the people."

At the military parade, the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps unveiled a new ballistic missile with a

range of more than 2,000 kilometres and capable of hitting most of the Middle East, including Israel.

In making his warmongering threats against North Korea, Trump is also preparing to confront China and Russia—both of which have attempted to put a brake on the crippling economic sanctions against Pyongyang. By targeting any country doing business with North Korea with US sanctions, Trump is placing Washington on a collision course with Beijing and Moscow.

At the same time, by making moves to end the 2015 nuclear deal with Iran, the Trump administration is also further exacerbating already sharp tensions with major European powers that have expanded trade and investment with Tehran since the deal was signed. In the face of Washington's unilateralism, the major powers, including longtime allies of the United States, can only conclude they will have to defend their own economic and strategic interests, including through military means.

The spiraling geo-political tensions and danger of war are not simply the product of the individual Trump and his reckless politics but more fundamentally result from the worsening crisis of capitalism and its insoluble contradictions. By threatening to wage war against North Korea, Iran or any other country that is an obstacle to its world hegemony, US imperialism has created a tinderbox that could rapidly descend into a global conflagration.



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