

As Trump threatens North Korea, most Americans oppose war

Peter Symonds
25 September 2017

Amid the Trump administration's continuing bellicose threats against Pyongyang, an opinion poll released yesterday confirmed that the overwhelming majority of the population in the United States is opposed to a war against North Korea and fearful of its catastrophic consequences.

The *Washington Post*-ABC News poll found that 67 percent of respondents opposed pre-emptive US strikes on North Korea and agree to military action only if Pyongyang were to attack the United States or one of its allies. Even among those who "strongly approve" of Trump's job performance—a shrinking minority—nearly 60 percent opposed a pre-emptive attack on North Korea.

The poll also revealed a broad understanding and fears that a US attack could quickly mushroom into a far wider war. "If the United States did first launch a military strike on North Korea, 82 percent of Americans say it would risk starting a larger war in East Asia, including 69 percent citing a 'a major risk,'" the *Washington Post* reported.

In his fascistic rant at the United Nations last week, President Trump warned that the US would "totally destroy" North Korea—a threat that can only mean the nuclear annihilation of the small, economically backward country. In response to the UN speech by North Korean Foreign Minister Ri Young-ho yesterday, Trump tweeted that he and his leader Kim Jong-un "won't be around much longer."

The broad opposition to a US war on North Korea is despite a concerted campaign by the Trump administration and the political and media establishment as a whole to vilify Kim Jong-un and his regime, grossly exaggerate the threats posed by Pyongyang's nuclear arsenal and openly canvass the "military option" to obliterate North Korea.

Trump is broadly distrusted at home. The opinion poll found that more than 60 percent of respondents trusted Trump "not at all" to responsibly handle the dangerous stand-off with North Korea. This compared to 37 percent who declared that they trusted Trump "a great deal" to manage the confrontation.

Amid a concerted effort in the American media to present the military top brass as a brake on Trump's reckless warmongering, 72 percent of adults said that they trusted US military leaders. However, while its tone might not be quite as belligerent and reckless as Trump's, the Pentagon's provocative actions speak louder than words.

In a blunt threat to Pyongyang, Pentagon spokeswoman Dana White reported that on Saturday, US B1-B strategic bombers accompanied by fighters flew in international airspace near the east coast of North Korea. "This is the farthest north of the Demilitarised Zone [separating the two Koreas] any US fighter or bomber aircraft has flown off North Korea's coast in the 21st century," she said.

White menacingly declared: "This mission is a demonstration of US resolve and a clear message that the president has many military options to defeat any threat." After repeating the mantra that North Korea poses "a grave threat" to the world, she warned: "We are prepared to use the full range of military capabilities to defend the US homeland and our allies."

In reality, it is US imperialism that has demonstrated its criminality and lawlessness time and again over the past quarter century. Washington has repeatedly waged wars of aggression that have destroyed entire societies in the Middle East, northern Africa and Central Asia in pursuit of global dominance.

Now with utter recklessness, the US has deliberately pushed the confrontation with Pyongyang to the brink

of war—a situation in which a relatively minor incident could become the pretext for a massive attack on North Korea that could rapidly involve other nuclear powers, including China and Russia.

The bomber mission near the North Korean coast came less than a week after two B1-Bs along with four of the Pentagon's hi-tech stealth fighters conducted a live fire exercise at a South Korean training range close to the Demilitarised Zone. The US has rejected Chinese and Russian calls for a suspension of its huge annual military drills with South Korea as a quid pro quo for North Korea to halt its weapons' testing and lay the basis for negotiations.

Under the Trump administration, what has become a standard military threat “all options are on the table,” has taken on new meaning. All options include the nuclear option—that is, nuclear strikes on North Korea—as Trump made clear last month when he threatened North Korea with “fire and fury like the world has never seen.”

Speaking yesterday on ABC News, US Treasury Secretary Steve Mnuchin sought to wind back the threat of nuclear war but in doing so acknowledged that it is being openly discussed in the White House. Asked if nuclear war was possible, Mnuchin, who sits on Trump's national security committee, declared that the president did not want a nuclear war, but then added: “On the other hand, the president will protect the American people and our allies.”

Mnuchin also made clear that the US confrontation with North Korea is being exploited by the Trump administration to advance a far broader agenda aimed at undermining and blocking any rival or group of rivals from global supremacy. Speaking of Trump's executive order last week, he said it allowed him to impose “the strongest sanctions that have ever been done. I can cut off financial institutions anywhere in the world that support North Korea.”

These so-called secondary sanctions are aimed in the first instance against China and Russia. Such measures could also be used against Washington's allies in Europe if they do business with North Korea or other targets of US aggression such as Iran. Already, deep divisions are emerging with European powers over Trump's threat to end the 2015 deal with Iran to denuclearise, and adopt a far more aggressive stance towards Tehran.

Confronted with escalating threats from the US, North Korea has replied in kind, greatly heightening the danger of war. In his UN speech, Foreign Minister Ri denounced Trump as “a mentally deranged person” and warned that his threat to totally destroy North Korea made the prospect of “our rockets' visit to the US mainland all the more inevitable.”

While such threats do nothing to protect the North Korean people, Pyongyang has clearly concluded that it has no other option than to escalate its own bluster and accelerate its nuclear program. “What else could be a bigger threat than the violent remarks ... coming from the top authority of the world's biggest nuclear power?” Ri declared.

The danger of nuclear war cannot be halted, however, by reactionary threats to annihilate American cities which can only sow divisions in the international working class—the only social force capable of ending the US war drive.

The *Washington Post*-ABC opinion poll gives a glimpse of the deep-seated opposition to war among working people in the US, which finds no expression within any faction of the political establishment, including among the various pseudo-left organisations. Those sentiments, which exist in every country, must be given conscious political expression through the building of a unified movement of the international working class to put an end to the profit system that is the root cause of war.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact