

Trump rules out negotiations with North Korea

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In what amounts to a public slap in the face, US President Donald Trump yesterday tweeted that his Secretary of State Rex Tillerson was “wasting his time trying to negotiate with Little Rocket Man”—the president’s abusive term for North Korean leader Kim Jong-un. Flatly ruling out any deal with Pyongyang adds to the already high tensions and compounds the danger of war.

Trump’s tweet not only undercut his secretary of state. It also was a provocative shot at Chinese leaders, including President Xi Jinping, with whom Tillerson had just held talks. Beijing and Moscow have been pushing for a resumption of negotiations with North Korea on the basis of a so-called freeze-freeze—the US and South Korea would halt joint military exercises, in return for North Korea halting missile and nuclear tests.

While the White House has repeatedly rejected the Chinese proposal, Tillerson suggested on Saturday that the US was open to talks with North Korea and was sounding out the possibility. “We are probing, so stay tuned,” he told reporters travelling with him. “We ask: Would you like to talk? We have lines of communications to Pyongyang. We’re not in a dark situation.”

After he left his meeting with Xi, Tillerson said it was crucial that tensions be lowered. “The whole situation is a bit overheated right now,” he said. “If North Korea would stop firing its missiles, that would calm things down a lot.” When asked if that applied to Trump, who threatened North Korea at the UN with “total destruction,” Tillerson replied: “I think everyone would like for it to calm down.”

US State Department spokeswoman Heather Nauert immediately downplayed Tillerson’s remarks, saying North Korea had “shown no indication that they are interested in or are ready for talks regarding de-

nuclearisation.” The Trump administration is insisting that the only deal acceptable to the US is one in which North Korea completely dismantles its nuclear arsenal and facilities and abandons its nuclear and missile programs.

In his comments, Tillerson made clear that the US would not accept an agreement along the lines of the 2015 deal with Iran and would demand far harsher conditions. “We are not going to put together a nuclear deal in North Korea that is as flimsy as the one in Iran,” he said.

Trump’s tweet yesterday was another blunt warning that nothing short of the Pyongyang regime’s abject capitulation to US demands would halt the drive to war. “Save your energy Rex, we’ll do what has to be done,” he added. Later yesterday, Trump fired off another crude and ignorant tweet, declaring: “Being nice to Rocket Man hasn’t worked in 25 years, why would it work now? Clinton failed, Bush failed, Obama failed. I won’t fail.”

Kim Jong-un, of course, has been in power only since 2011, when his father Kim Jong-il died. As for the so-called failures of Clinton, Bush and Obama, all three US presidents took a menacing and provocative stance toward North Korea. Clinton and Bush effectively sabotaged the agreements reached with Pyongyang in 1994 and 2007 by not abiding by the terms.

The only difference between Trump and his predecessors is that he is openly threatening a catastrophic war against North Korea that could result in millions of deaths and drag the world into conflict. Trump’s bellicose and reckless threats are responsible for placing the Korean Peninsula in a precarious situation where a relatively minor incident, whether accidental or deliberate, could trigger an all-out conflict.

The Pyongyang regime can only conclude that it must prepare for an imminent US attack and that any move toward negotiations would be pointless. Any deal struck with Washington would lead only to further demands and, in any case, would not prevent US military aggression, as the killing of Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein and Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi has demonstrated.

Trump's countermanding of Tillerson as he was in Beijing underscores the fact that the US confrontation with North Korea is also aimed at China, which Washington regards as the chief obstacle to its dominance in Asia and the world. Xi and the Chinese leadership must assume from Trump's tweets that any understandings reached with Tillerson over North Korea are worthless. Tillerson was in China to prepare a visit by Trump in November.

Beijing not only has agreed to punitive UN sanctions on North Korea but imposed some of its own. Just days before Tillerson's visit, China's ministry of commerce announced further sanctions against North Korea, giving North Korean businesses and individuals located in China, as well as joint Chinese and North Korean companies outside North Korea, just 120 days to close down. Trump's tweets undermine any collaboration between China and the US.

An article in the *Washington Post* on Saturday revealed that Trump signed a secret executive directive to engage in a broad range of aggressive activities against North Korea soon after conducting a policy review in March. According to a senior administration official, the directive instructed diplomats to press every country to sever ties with Pyongyang and the US Treasury to prepare escalating sanctions. It also authorised the military to use its cyber-warfare capabilities against North Korea.

Having failed to bully North Korea into accepting US demands, Trump is preparing to launch a war of annihilation. He is carrying out one military provocation after another to goad Pyongyang into actions that could be exploited as a pretext. Over the past two weeks, the US military has flown two B1 strategic bomber missions close to North Korea. The first engaged in a live-fire exercise in South Korea. The second involved the most northerly flight along the North Korean coastline this century.

The Pentagon announced last week after holding talks

with South Korea's national security adviser Chung Eui-yong that the US military would send more "strategic assets" to South Korea on a rotational basis. The term "strategic assets" covers a range of military hardware, including nuclear-capable bombers, submarines and warships.



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