

US defence secretary calls on military to be ready for war against North Korea

Peter Symonds
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In comments that underscore the advanced US preparations for war with North Korea, Defence Secretary James Mattis declared yesterday that the armed forces had “to be ready to ensure that we have military options that our president can employ if needed.”

Mattis’s remarks to the Association of the US Army Exposition on Building Readiness directly echoed President Trump’s instruction last Thursday to a meeting of his top military and intelligence chiefs, including Mattis. “I also expect you to provide me with a broad range of military options, when needed, at a much faster pace,” Trump stated.

The defence secretary yesterday emphasised that “the US army must stand ready.” He pointedly urged his military audience to read T.R. Fehrenbach’s “This Kind of War”—a history of the bloody US-led Korean War of 1950–53—to make clear that the army could well be flung into another devastating conflict in the near future.

In a chilling indication of what is being planned and what would be required of the army, Mattis quoted Fehrenbach: “You may fly over a nation forever, you may bomb it, atomise it, pulverise it and wipe it clean of life. But if you desire to defend it... you must do this on the ground the way the Roman legions did: by putting your young men in the mud.”

Speaking to the media at the same military gathering, US Army Chief of Staff General Mark Milley declared that the military was ready to act, warning that time was short. “It’s not an indefinite amount of time. And there will be a decision made, there is no question about it,” he said.

Like Mattis, Milley warned of what lay in store in a war on North Korea: “There are no good, easy, risk-free options here. This is extraordinarily difficult,

extraordinarily dangerous. No one should underestimate it.”

In his comments, Mattis maintained that the White House is engaged in “a diplomatically-led, economically sanction-buttressed effort to try to turn North Korea off this path [towards war].”

President Trump, however, has repeatedly and openly dismissed efforts to start talks with North Korea, declaring just last week that Secretary of State Rex Tillerson was “wasting his time” in putting out feelers for negotiations with Pyongyang.

Yesterday, Trump echoed his threatening tweet on Saturday that “only one thing will work” with North Korea—namely, a war of total destruction. On Monday, he tweeted: “Our country has been unsuccessfully dealing with North Korea for 25 years, giving billions of dollars & getting nothing. Policy didn’t work?”

Trump’s crude, ignorant and menacing threats evoke no significant opposition or criticism in the compliant American and international media, which once again serves as a propaganda arm for war, through its incessant demonisation of the Pyongyang regime. The real threat to the world is not North Korea and its limited nuclear arsenal, but US imperialism, which is on the brink of launching a war that could drag in all of the major nuclear-armed powers.

Over the past 25 years, successive US governments have pursued a policy of undisguised hostility towards Pyongyang and have never negotiated in good faith. In 1994, President Clinton was on the brink of launching an all-out war against North Korea. He only pulled back at the last moment when his generals made clear that there would be tens of thousands of US military casualties and nearly half a million South Korean military casualties in the first three months of a war.

The Clinton administration never carried out the

terms of the hastily reached 1994 Agreed Framework with North Korea, which was rapidly overturned by the incoming Bush administration. Bush himself only negotiated the 2007 denuclearisation agreement with Pyongyang because the American military was bogged down in wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. He effectively sabotaged the deal by unilaterally demanding a new, more intrusive inspection regime. Obama never attempted to resurrect talks.

Trump's declaration that "only one thing will work" in dealing with North Korea makes clear that nothing short of Pyongyang's complete capitulation to Washington's demands will halt the US drive to war.

The imminence of a war in North East Asia with incalculable consequences is generating tensions within Washington, including within the White House, as well as in capitals around the world.

Concerned about the danger of a broader conflict and the potential for an eruption of anti-war opposition, Mattis and Tillerson have both stressed the need to exhaust diplomatic avenues, while backing the so-called "military option."

Other longstanding establishment figures, none of whom are fundamentally opposed to a war on North Korea, have voiced similar concerns.

On CNN yesterday, former Director of National Intelligence James Clapper suggested that Trump should "cool" his statements, which North Korea "could easily construe... as a declaration or at least a threat of war." He warned that Trump's "bellicose rhetoric" only heightened the danger that Pyongyang would respond.

Speaking to an International Bar Association conference in Sydney on Monday, former US Defence Secretary Robert Gates stated that a pre-emptive US strike on North Korea would be a "big mistake" that risked triggering a devastating war. "At what point do the tweets become provocative and create a situation in which any incident could lead to a much broader conflict?" he asked.

In the wake of Trump's belligerent tweets, Russia and China yesterday called on all sides to pull back. Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov appealed for all parties "to exercise restraint and to avoid steps that would only worsen the situation." Chinese foreign ministry spokeswoman Hua Chunying described the situation as extremely complex and serious. While both

countries have opposed North Korea's nuclear programs, neither wants a major war on its doorstep.

At the same time, the US and its allies are preparing for conflict. South Korea's *Hankyoreh* reported last week that the aircraft carrier strike group led by the USS Ronald Reagan would be joining South Korean warships in mid-October for "high intensity joint exercises." The Australian navy is reportedly sending two navy frigates to South Korea later this month to participate in a week of military exercises.

In Britain, the *Daily Mail* reported that British officials are drawing up war plans that could involve the dispatch of the navy's new aircraft carrier, HMS Queen Elizabeth, and other warships to a US war in North East Asia.



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