

US army chief urges greater “combat readiness” for war with North Korea

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US Army Chief of Staff, General Mark Milley, injected greater urgency into the US preparations for war with North Korea in a speech yesterday to a gathering of top military officers.

“Combat readiness is our no.1 priority,” Milley said in addressing the annual Association of the US Army conference. “Do not wait on orders and printed new regulations and manuals. Do not wait on force structure changes. You and you alone are responsible for the readiness of your unit. Put simply, I want you ready for what might come.”

“Why is it that we must be ready?” he asked rhetorically. “Well you don’t have to have access to top secret intelligence. All you have to do is pick up a newspaper or watch the news... It is on the Korean Peninsula where, in my view, we find the most dangerous near-term threat to the US.”

Speaking earlier to the media, the general warned: “A full-blown war on the Korean Peninsula will be horrific by any stretch of the imagination. No one has any doubts about that.” However, leaving no doubt that such a war is exactly what is being prepared, Milley declared that “there is a timeline on this.... It’s not an indefinite amount of time. And there will be decisions made, there’s no question about it.”

Milley’s speech underscored that of Defence Secretary James Mattis who told the same military gathering on Monday that the armed forces had “to ensure that we have military options that our president can employ if needed.” Over the past two weeks, President Trump has issued a series of belligerent tweets signalling that war on North Korea is imminent.

These preparations for conflict are being accompanied by a deluge of propaganda in the American and international media grossly inflating the supposed threat posed by North Korea and its limited

nuclear arsenal. In reality, what the US and its allies are planning is an illegal war of aggression against North Korea on a scale that would dwarf the military interventions into Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya and Syria.

The character of the US war plans was again highlighted by news reports today that North Korea hackers broke into a secure South Korean military server in September last year and copied some 235 gigabytes of military documents, including OPLAN 5015. While the media has focussed on North Korean hacking skills, it has ignored the fact that OPLAN 5015 is a detailed blueprint for a war of aggression to destroy the Pyongyang regime.

OPLAN 5015, adopted by South Korea and the US in November 2015 under the Obama administration, shifts the emphasis from a nominally defensive military posture to one that is overtly based on pre-emptive attacks. While details have not been released, the South Korean press last year made clear that OPLAN 5015 includes pre-emptive strikes on North Korea’s nuclear and missile sites and “decapitation raids” by special forces units to assassinate top figures in the Pyongyang regime, including leader Kim Jong-un.

Washington is not only fully implicated in these plans, but would direct them. In the event of war with North Korea, the US, which maintains 28,500 troops in South Korea, would automatically assume full operational control of South Korean military forces, including nearly half a million army troops backed by a heavily armed navy and air force.

Thus, the huge annual joint South Korean and US war games over the past two years under OPLAN 5015 are nothing less than rehearsals for a full-scale US-led attack on North Korea—a plan that the Trump administration is on the brink of setting in motion.

Any war with North Korea threatens to drag in other

nuclear-armed powers including China and Russia, which have repeatedly called for a lowering of tensions. The two countries have proposed a return to negotiations based on an end to joint US-South Korean exercises in return for a North Korean freeze on nuclear and missile tests. Washington has bluntly rejected the so-called freeze-for-freeze plan, while Trump has ruled out any negotiations with Pyongyang.

The danger of a US conflict with North Korea escalating into a war with China was openly canvassed in a new report released Tuesday by the Rand Corporation, a think tank closely connected to the US military and intelligence establishment. Entitled “Conflict with China Revisited,” it revised the estimates contained in a 2011 report and cautiously suggested a US war with China was more likely than six years ago.

The Rand Corporation identified Korea as “the most likely locus of conflict in Asia.” Blaming North Korea’s nuclear and missile tests, it warned of the increased potential “for a spiral of unintended escalation on the peninsula or even a pre-emptive American strike on North Korean nuclear assets.”

“In the event of such a conflict,” the report continued, “US and South Korean forces would likely push north at least far enough to force the North Korean military out of artillery range of Seoul. The further US or South Korean forces advance beyond that point, the more likely a Chinese intervention.”

The report pointed out that as South Korean military pushed further into North Korea, “substantial American support” would be needed. “Special operations forces and dedicated chemical, biological, radiological, nuclear, and high-yield explosives units would be insufficient to deal with the situation.

“The likelihood of confrontations, accidental or otherwise, between US and Chinese forces would be high, with significant potential for escalation,” the report warned.

Yet, it is such a war that the Trump administration is ready to unleash. When Trump threatened North Korea last month at the UN with “total destruction” that is exactly what he meant. Far from limiting military action against North Korea to a naval blockade or so-called surgical airstrikes, US imperialism is preparing an all-out assault, with conventional and/or nuclear weapons to destroy North Korea’s ability to retaliate.

The Rand Corporation report makes clear that a US-led war against North Korea could rapidly lead to conflict with China. What is said publicly by the Rand Corporation is undoubtedly being discussed in the Pentagon in far more concrete terms—how the US would wage a war with China.

In December 2015, just after OPLAN 5015 had been finalised, then US Joint Chiefs of Staff General Joseph Dunford declared that a new Korean war would not be like the last. In comments cited by the Brookings Institution, the Pentagon’s top general warned that any conflict with North Korea would not be confined to the Korean Peninsula and would inevitably be “trans-regional, multi-domain and multi-functional.”

Translated from military jargon, Dunford’s remarks signified that the Pentagon had to prepare to fight a “trans-regional” conflict—that is, a world war—in every domain (land, sea, air, space and cyberspace) with every available weapon, including nuclear ones. Less than two years on, the Trump administration is recklessly plunging the world towards such a catastrophe.



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