

# US open to diplomacy with North Korea “until the first bomb drops”

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US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson told CNN’s “State of the Union” that US diplomatic efforts to end the dangerous confrontation with North Korea would continue “until the first bomb drops.” Far from offering any reassurance of a peaceful solution, Tillerson’s remarks underscore the advanced state of US preparations for, in Trump’s words, the “total destruction” of North Korea, a country of 25 million people.

Tillerson played down Trump’s bellicose comments and tweets as well as the president’s public rebuke last month. When Tillerson announced that initial diplomatic contacts were underway with North Korea to feel out the possibility of talks, Trump emphatically declared that the secretary of state was “wasting his time.”

In his comments to CNN, Tillerson claimed that Trump’s aggressive tweets were to “motivate action,” not to undermine diplomatic efforts. He added: “The president has also made clear to me that he wants this solved diplomatically. He is not seeking to go to war.”

None of these comments can be taken at face value, not least because Trump has made clear that any so-called diplomatic solution would involve the complete capitulation of the Pyongyang regime. It would not only be compelled to abandon its nuclear weapons program, but to submit to ongoing demands to toe the US line on all matters.

Just last Friday, Trump took the first steps toward tearing up the 2015 agreement with Iran to severely limit its nuclear program, despite opposition from all five other signatories to the deal—Britain, France, Germany, Russia and China. The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) has repeatedly certified that Tehran has abided by the terms of the agreement.

Asked about North Korea, he told reporters that he

was “open” to talks. However, by repudiating the deal with Iran, Trump has effectively ruled out such an agreement for North Korea and made clear that any talks would be strictly on US terms.

At the same time, Trump emphasised the US was ready to take military action. “If it’s going to be something other than negotiation, believe me, we are ready—more so than we have ever been,” he said.

Speaking yesterday on “Fox News Sunday,” Trump’s national security adviser, H. R. McMaster, stressed that the president was “willing to do anything necessary” to prevent North Korea from having nuclear weapons capable of reaching the US. “What [North Korean leader] Kim Jong Un should recognise is that if he thinks the development of this nuclear capability is keeping him safer, it’s actually the opposite,” he said.

In a press briefing last Thursday, White House chief of staff John Kelly indicated that North Korea was reaching the point when the US would take military action. He said that it already has “a pretty good ICBM [intercontinental ballistic missile] capability and is developing a pretty good nuclear re-entry vehicle.”

Kelly warned: “I think I speak for the administration, that that state simply cannot have the ability to reach the homeland.”

The Trump administration is further exacerbating tensions with North Korea with the beginning of major joint naval exercises in waters off the Korean Peninsula today. The USS Ronald Reagan, a nuclear-powered aircraft carrier, along with its full strike group of destroyers and a cruiser, will take part in five days of war games involving more than 40 US and South Korean warships as well as aircraft from both countries.

On Saturday, North Korean state media branded the coming drill as “a reckless act of war” that “only drives the tense situation on the peninsula into the point of

explosion.” Despite US and South Korean attempts to portray the drills as “routine” and “defensive,” it is clear that the military exercises are a rehearsal for war with North Korea.

According to South Korea’s Yonhap newsagency, the joint Maritime Counter Special Operations Exercise will take place in waters off both the east and west coasts of the Korean Peninsula. The US has also deployed a Joint Surveillance Target Attack Radar System to closely monitor North Korea’s ground and naval forces.

Citing a defence source, Yonhap reported that a US special forces unit tasked with carrying out “decapitation” operations is aboard a nuclear-powered submarine attached to the carrier strike group. Decapitation operations—that is, the assassination of top North Korean leaders—are part of US-South Korean OPLAN 5015, formally adopted in late 2015, for pre-emptive attacks on North Korea.

Two US nuclear-powered submarines are already in the region. USS Michigan, an Ohio-class submarine, arrived in the South Korean port of Busan on Saturday to take part in the joint naval exercises.

The USS Tucson, a Los Angeles-class attack submarine, capable of anti-submarine warfare, anti-surface ship warfare, strike, surveillance and reconnaissance, docked in the South Korean port of Jinhae on the previous Saturday. It left last Wednesday for waters south of North Korea, according to military officials cited by UPI.

At the same time, the US Air Force has sent hi-tech war planes to take part in this week’s Seoul International Aerospace and Defence Exhibition, including B-1B strategic bombers and F-22 Raptor stealth fighters. B-1B bombers have recently engaged in several provocative military exercises close to the North Korean border, including most recently the first night-time joint drills with South Korean and Japanese fighters.

The combination of escalating war games and aggressive threats by Trump and his top officials greatly heightens the danger of war and all but rules out a peaceful resolution to the standoff. The Pyongyang regime can only assume that the US is on the brink of a massive attack that would wipe out the country’s military and industrial capacity, along with its leadership.

Given the fate of the 2015 agreement with Iran, North Korea has no reason to suppose that the US is seeking talks in good faith or would keep its side of any agreement that was reached. The brutal end to the Iraqi and Libya leaders, who agreed to give up their so-called weapons of mass destruction and whose countries were attacked by the US nevertheless, only strengthens Pyongyang’s determination not to follow the same path.



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