

US masses ships and aircraft outside North Korea

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US Defence Secretary James Mattis has again warned North Korea that the United States military is ready and able to obliterate the country of 25 million people unless it abandons its nuclear arsenal. The threat, backed by an unprecedented US military build-up in North East Asia, places the region and the world on the brink of a catastrophic war.

“I cannot imagine a condition under which the US would accept North Korea as a nuclear power,” he told reporters in Seoul on Saturday. “Make no mistake any attack on the United States or our allies will be defeated, and any use of nuclear weapons by the North will be met with a massive military response that is effective and overwhelming.”

US war plans are offensive, not defensive, in character. Asked about the possibility of a pre-emptive US attack on North Korea to prevent a hypothetical attack on Seoul, Mattis confirmed, “yes, we do have those options”. Under OPLAN 5015, US and South Korean forces are primed for massive offensive strikes against North Korean nuclear, military and industrial facilities as well as “decapitation raids” by special forces to kill its top leaders.

While Mattis insisted that “our goal is not war”, US President Trump has effectively ruled out any other option, short of North Korea’s total capitulation to Washington’s demands. Trump publically rebuked Secretary of State Rex Tillerson earlier this month for “wasting his time” in putting out diplomatic feelers for talks with North Korea.

Trump is about to begin his first official trip to Asia this week, including to Japan, South Korea and China. Having threatened in the UN to “totally destroy” North Korea, he will undoubtedly use this incendiary threat not only to menace the Pyongyang regime but the entire region, particularly China which the US regards as its

chief obstacle to global hegemony.

Trump’s trip will take place amid a massive show of US military force near the Korean Peninsula, including:

- * Three US nuclear-powered aircraft carriers—the USS Ronald Reagan, the USS Nimitz and USS Theodore Roosevelt—which are in the region and preparing for joint exercises along with their associated strike groups. Each carrier is accompanied by between six to 10 warships, including cruisers, destroyers and nuclear submarines, and has an air wing of dozens of fighter jets and other military aircraft.

- * The USS Michigan, a nuclear-powered submarine armed with more than 150 Tomahawk missiles, which docked in South Korea on October 17 ahead of joint exercises with the USS Ronald Reagan. The submarine also carries Navy SEALs, which in an earlier port call in April reportedly included the notorious SEAL Team Six that murdered Osama bin Laden.

- * All US military bases throughout the region, particularly in South Korea, Japan, Guam and Australia are without doubt on a high state of alert. The Pentagon has 28,500 military personnel in South Korea, around 54,000 in Japan and about 4,000 in Guam, along with a large number of naval vessels and warplanes. Australia acts as a de facto rear base for US Marines, warships and aircraft as well as housing key spy and communications bases. Two Australian frigates are due to arrive this week in South Korea for joint drills.

- * The Pentagon is set to deploy, for the first time, a squadron of F-35A Joint Strike Fighter jets and 300 personnel to the US base on the Japanese island of Okinawa. The advanced fifth-generation stealth fighters could well be used as part of a first wave to destroy North Korean air defences, opening the way for a massive air assault.

- * The US Air Force has carried out one military

provocation after another—flying B-52 and B1-B strategic bombers close to North Korea. Yesterday, US Strategic Command, in charge of the nuclear arsenal, reported that it had flown a B-2 stealth bomber from the US to the Pacific to “familiarise aircrew” and to ensure “a high state of readiness and proficiency.” Unlike the B1-B, the state-of-the-art B-2 is nuclear capable.

The flight underscores the ominous comments of US Vice President Mike Pence during a visit last Friday to Minot Air Force Base in North Dakota, which houses 26 nuclear-capable B-52 bombers and 150 nuclear intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) sites. Referring to North Korea, Pence declared: “Now more than ever your commander in chief [Trump] is depending on you to be ready. Stay sharp, mind your mission.”

The Trump administration is preparing a war not just with conventional weapons, but with nuclear bombs—directed against North Korea and any other powers such as China and Russia that join the conflict. Last week, the Air Force announced that it was preparing to put its B-52 nuclear bombers back on 24-hour alert. At the same time, as reported by the *Guardian* yesterday, the Trump administration is drawing up a new Nuclear Posture Review, which will open the door for a range of new nuclear weapons and change the rules governing their use.

The only conclusion that the North Korean regime can reach is that the country confronts the imminent threat of a US military onslaught, using conventional and/or nuclear weapons. The South Korean-based NKNews reported over the weekend that North Korea has been carrying out mass evacuation drills in cities and towns along the east coast.

The world may be closer to the brink of nuclear war than at any time in history. During the extremely tense stand-off between the United States and Russia during the 1962 Cuban missile crisis, both the American and Russian leaders worked to prevent a nuclear exchange that would have devastated the world.

Trump, however, driven by the irresolvable contradictions of American and global capitalism, is proceeding with an unprecedented degree of recklessness to deliberately inflame flash points in Asia, as well as the Middle East and Eastern Europe. Embroiled in one political crisis after another at home,

and facing mounting public hostility to his agenda of austerity and war, Trump is being propelled towards launching war as a means of diverting acute social tensions outwards against a foreign enemy.

These same tensions are driving workers and youth in the United States and around the world into struggle to defend their living conditions, basic democratic rights and to prevent a conflict that would plunge the world into barbarism. That movement must find conscious expression in the program of socialist internationalism fought for by the International Committee of the Fourth International to put an end to the bankrupt capitalist system that engenders war and social misery.



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