

US Senate hearing exposes danger of nuclear war

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Tuesday's Senate Foreign Relations Committee hearing on the use of nuclear weapons highlighted the acute danger of the eruption of a war that could kill hundreds of millions or even billions of people.

The hearing was called amid a series of threats by the Trump administration to go to war with North Korea. In addition to Trump's threats to unleash "fire and fury like the world has never seen" against a country whose economy is one one-thousandth the size of America's, National Security Advisor H. R. McMaster, an active duty Army general, has made clear that the US is prepared to wage a "preventive," that is, unprovoked, war.

To back up this threat, the Trump administration has deployed a vast armada off of the Korean Peninsula, including three aircraft carrier battle groups and an array of nuclear-capable submarines and bombers. At the same time, Washington is moving to expand and modernize the US nuclear arsenal.

Speaking at Tuesday's hearing, Massachusetts Senator Ed Markey declared that plans could be in place "right now in the White House given to the president to launch a preemptive war against North Korea using American nuclear weapons without consulting with, informing Congress."

Senator Chris Murphy of Connecticut said Congress was "concerned that the president is so unstable, is so volatile, has a decision-making process that is so quixotic, that he might order a nuclear weapons strike" on a whim.

These statements are an acknowledgment that even the smallest incident, from a wayward test missile to a clash between Russia, China, North Korea or Iran and any of the tens of thousands of US troops, aircraft and warships operating on their borders, to one of the president's notorious late-night temper tantrums, could

lead to a full-scale nuclear attack by the United States.

Commenting on the hearing, Bruce Blair, a nuclear command and control expert at Princeton University, remarked to *Newsweek* that "this system gives one person the God-like power to end the world." The power to destroy human civilization is unilaterally wielded by one man, who happens to be a career con artist and reality TV star known for his impulsive petulance, short temper and even shorter attention span.

Called by Senator Bob Corker to consider "the conditions under which the president could order the use of nuclear weapons," the hearing was officially held for the purpose of discussing "the potential for legislation that would require congressional approval for the use of those weapons."

The outcome of the hearing was categorical: The president's power to order a nuclear holocaust is total and unquestionable, and no one in Congress is calling seriously for changing that state of affairs. Committee Chairman Corker, for all of his rhetorical attacks on Trump, including his comparison of the White House to an "adult day care center," made no proposal for limiting Trump's power to wage a preemptive nuclear war, declaring, "I do not see a legislative solution today."

The only possible deterrent raised at the hearing to Trump's power to unilaterally launch nuclear weapons was a mutiny by the military brass. "Action can be taken," said Gen. Robert Kehler, who testified before the committee. It would, however, pose a "very interesting constitutional situation." The action, in other words, would be a military coup.

This state of affairs, where the prospect of a seizure of power by the military is raised at a congressional hearing as the only means of blocking a nuclear holocaust, is the expression of a deeply diseased

society.

The source of the crisis is not the personality of Donald Trump. Rather, Trump embodies the criminality and corruption of the financial oligarchy of which he is a part.

If Trump were removed from office, who would replace him? His vice president, Mike Pence, is a notorious war hawk. If Trump were ousted by the Democrats, the result would be a major US escalation against Russia, the country with the world's second-largest nuclear arsenal. If it was the military, the nuclear arsenal would be in the hands of professional killers who have committed untold war crimes in Serbia, the Middle East, Northern Africa and Central Asia.

The United States' incendiary role on the world stage is the outward expression of its internal social relations. This a country dominated by colossal social tensions, in which three people—Bill Gates, Jeff Bezos and Warren Buffett—control as much wealth as the bottom half of the population. As with so many of its predecessors, this decadent and crisis-ridden ruling class is seeking to direct social tensions outward through war.

Congress, which has for decades rubber-stamped one illegal and criminal war after another, long ago abandoned its constitutionally mandated responsibility to check the war-making powers of the president.

Washington's threats against the world are the result of the collapse of the US-led post-World War II geopolitical order, at the center of which is the decline of US economic might and the rise of strategic competitors in Asia and Europe. Trump's 12-day tour of the Pacific was a case in point: blustering with protectionist rhetoric, Trump visited country after country with demands for more favorable trade deals and came up empty-handed.

Mired in geopolitical and domestic crisis, the United States has one final recourse: the threat to obliterate with nuclear weapons anyone who opposes it. Coming from the only country that has used nuclear weapons in war, it would be the height of folly to think this is merely a bluff. If the United States, at the height of its global power, destroyed two defenseless Japanese cities with nuclear weapons to send a message to the Soviet Union, how much greater is the threat now, when US global dominance is visibly eroding?

The looming danger of a new world war, this time

fought with nuclear weapons, raises the urgent need for the working class to intervene independently and build a mass international anti-war movement based on the socialist perspective of doing away with the root cause of war: the capitalist system.



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