

US will “compel” North Korea to denuclearise

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21 December 2017

US National Security Adviser H.R. McMaster has again threatened to attack North Korea to prevent it from developing its nuclear arsenal, and warned that time is short. This latest threat of a catastrophic war underscores the thuggish message of the Trump administration’s National Security Strategy released this week—the willingness of US imperialism to use military force to secure its dominant world position.

Speaking to CBS on Tuesday, McMaster declared that while the US was seeking a “peaceful solution” to the confrontation with North Korea, “all options are on the table,” as President Donald Trump had said.

“And we have to be prepared, if necessary, to compel the denuclearisation of North Korea without the cooperation of that regime,” McMaster warned. The national security adviser told PBS on Monday Trump had ordered him “to continue to refine a military option should we have to use it.”

By a peaceful solution, the Trump administration means nothing short of a complete capitulation by North Korea to US demands to abandon its nuclear arsenal and allow ever-more intrusive inspections. Washington is pressing for increasingly draconian sanctions to achieve this end.

“What we’re doing is really applying maximum pressure to North Korea to really convince [North Korean leader] Kim Jong Un that this is a dead end,” McMaster told CBS. The US is pushing for “all nations to cut off all trade,” he said, in effect mounting an economic blockade of North Korea, which is itself an act of war.

McMaster also ruled out talks with North Korea. Asked about US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson’s offer last week to meet with North Korean official without preconditions, he said: “The president has made very clear that on North Korea for example, now is not the time to talk.” Tillerson quickly backtracked last week, insisting that negotiations would begin only

if North Korea ended its “threatening behavior.”

The US has mounted a series of major joint military exercises with South Korea and other nations in what amount to rehearsals for war with North Korea. Last week, in another provocative show of force, hundreds of special forces troops took part in “Warrior Strike” to practice a US-led military intervention into North Korea to seize its nuclear weapons.

Under pressure from Washington, the UN has already banned virtually all exports from North Korea, and placed limits on the sale of oil to the Pyongyang regime. This week the Trump administration called for another 10 ships to be added to the UN’s blacklist for allegedly circumventing sanctions on North Korea. In addition, the US has imposed its own unilateral sanctions not only on Pyongyang, but also individuals and entities from other countries, including Russia and China.

These crippling sanctions are aimed at provoking an economic and political crisis in Pyongyang that the US and its allies could exploit to change the regime. The rehearsal of military interventions into North Korea is part of a broader joint strategic plan—OPLAN 5015—that envisages pre-emptive strikes on key targets and “decapitation raids” to assassinate North Korean leaders.

In an interview with NBC News on Tuesday, South Korean President Moon Jae-in, who has just returned from a trip last week to China, suggested that the US suspend joint military exercises in the lead-up to next February’s Winter Olympics in South Korea. In return, North Korea would have to be willing to pause its nuclear and missile testing. Such steps, Moon said, would “help in creating a conducive atmosphere towards inter-Korean as well as US-North Korean dialogue.”

The proposal is similar to the so-called freeze-for-freeze plan proposed by China—a halt to US-South

Korean war games in return for the suspension of North Korean tests. Washington has repeatedly rejected the proposal, which runs counter to its strategy of “maximum pressure” on North Korea. While Moon said the US was considering his suggestion, Tillerson declared he was not aware of any plans to halt joint military drills.

Far from cancelling its provocative war games ahead of the Winter Olympics, the US is considering not sending a US team to compete. US ambassador to the UN, Nikki Haley told Fox News earlier this month it was an “open question” whether American athletes would participate, citing security reasons.

Trump officials have warned that time is running out to prevent war. McMaster declared earlier this month that the likelihood of conflict between the US and North Korea was “increasing every day.” This week he said the US had to “act urgently” if trade sanctions were going to work.

Having delivered repeated ultimatums to North Korea, the Trump administration is impelled to carry out its threats. Not to do so would undermine US standing in the world and constitute a major political blow to Trump. McMaster declared this week: “We can’t tolerate that risk. If North Korea has a nuclear weapon, who are you going to try to prevent getting one?”

North Korea has already declared it has no intention of backing down. As reported in the *Washington Post*, UN undersecretary for political affairs Jeffrey Feltman, who visited North Korea from December 5 to 9, urged Pyongyang to reopen military-to-military channels cut off in 2009, signal a willingness to talk to the US and implement UN resolutions. His proposals were rejected or declared not appropriate at present.

The North Korean regime has obviously concluded that it has no option but to try to develop its nuclear arsenal as a means of preventing US aggression. It has previously pointed to the fate of the Libyan and Iraqi regimes, which were attacked despite reaching deals with the US on “weapons of mass destruction.”

Feltman apparently presented a copy of historian Christopher Clark’s book, *The Sleepwalkers: How Europe Went to War in 1914*, to North Korea’s Foreign Minister Ri Yong Ho to underline the danger of the situation. Leaving aside the limitations of Clark’s analysis, today, as in 1914, great power rivalry could

trigger a devastating war. The US determination to maintain its global dominance has put the Korean Peninsula on a hair trigger. Any incident could precipitate a conflict that would rapidly draw in major nuclear-armed powers such as Russia and China.



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