

# US media airs pretexts for preemptive attack on North Korea

James Cogan  
3 March 2018

Over the past week, the *New York Times* and the *Wall Street Journal* have sought to manufacture justifications for the Trump administration to implement its threats to launch an illegal war of aggression to “totally destroy” North Korea.

On February 27, a lengthy *New York Times* article featured allegations by unnamed “United Nations’ experts” that North Korea “has been shipping supplies to the Syrian government that could be used in the production of chemical weapons.” It asserted that “possible chemical weapons components” were “part of at least 40 previously unreported shipments by North Korea to Syria between 2012 and 2017 of prohibited ballistic missile parts and materials that could be used for both military and civilian purposes.”

The article claims the newspaper “reviewed” a 200-page report by the purported UN experts. It admits that the document has not been officially released and, according to a UN official cited in the article, there are no plans to publish it. The article further concedes that “experts who viewed the report said the evidence it cited *did not prove definitively* that there was current, continuing collaboration between North Korea and Syria on chemical weapons” [emphasis added].

In other words, the *New York Times* chose to highlight assertions contained in an unpublished report, without any other substantiation. The credentials of its unnamed authors are not identified, but they are eight, hardly impartial, members of a UN panel appointed to investigate “possible” violations by North Korea of the sanctions imposed upon it. Moreover, even the “experts” who allegedly read the report concluded that it proved nothing at all.

None of this prevented the *New York Times* from headlining its article: “UN links North Korea to Syria’s chemical weapons program.” The newspaper repeats

entirely unproven allegations that the Russian-backed Syrian government has used chemical weapons against rebel-held areas of the country. The sole aim of the article is to have readers conclude that sinister North Korean assistance is facilitating horrific crimes against civilians in Syria.

The article obviously has one intended audience, in particular. An entire layer of ex-liberals and ex-lefts, who in 2003 voiced opposition to the US invasion of Iraq, are today at the forefront of demanding that Washington step up its military operations to overthrow the Syrian government (see: “A new ‘left’ appeal for imperialist intervention in Syria”). By linking North Korea to lurid claims of atrocities by the Syrian regime, the objective is to secure the complicity and support of this milieu for war against Pyongyang as well.

On February 28, the *Wall Street Journal* published a comment by former Bush administration official John Bolton that set out another rationale to justify a preemptive war.

North Korea, Bolton wrote, is an “imminent threat” to the United States because it possibly has the capability to arm an intercontinental ballistic missile with a nuclear warhead. He insisted it was a “necessity of self-defense” for US imperialism—with its 4,000 nuclear weapons, massive military apparatus and \$18 trillion economy—to attack North Korea. The US had to “strike first” and unleash “fire and fury” against a poverty-stricken nation of just 25 million people with a gross domestic product of barely \$25 billion.

A war crime of historic dimensions is being prepared. American imperialism is not concerned about, or threatened by, the crude North Korean weapons programs. Its aim is to undermine China, which it has identified as its “strategic competitor” in Asia and around the world. One objective behind the plans to

attack North Korea is to provide the US military with a testing ground for its newest hardware, including F-35 “fifth generation” fighters, conventional bombs such as the Massive Ordnance Air Blast, dropped for the first time last year in Afghanistan, and “tactical” nuclear weapons. A second objective is to turn the entire Korean peninsula into a US military staging base for a future war with China itself.

Preparations for war are very advanced. The day after publishing its claims about North Korea and Syrian chemical weapons, the *New York Times* reported on “a classified military exercise” held in late February in Hawaii. The exercise consisted of top military commanders brain-storming on how to “totally destroy” North Korea and reviewing the likely consequences of war.

According to the newspaper, the commanders were told the US military could expect 10,000 casualties in the first several days. Civilian casualties “would likely be in the thousands or hundreds of thousands.” Among issues the commanders considered were how many special forces troops would be needed to attack North Korean nuclear facilities; whether US airborne divisions could be relied upon to fight in the dozens of tunnels under the border between North and South Korea; and how to “take down” North Korea’s air defences, so the country was totally at the mercy of constant American air bombardment.

The exercise underscored the complicity of the South Korean capitalist class and government in facilitating what would be a catastrophic war. A US attack, the *New York Times* commented, “is almost wholly dependent on cooperation from South Korea—not only in committing its troops or other assets to the battle but also accepting the risk of widespread bloodshed on its civilian population if the North fires back.”

There is, on the part of the American military-intelligence apparatus and its media mouthpieces, a calculated and horrifying purpose behind the continuous reports on the enormous casualties likely in a “conventional” war with North Korea. It is intended to justify using nuclear weapons on the same grounds that the Truman administration adopted in destroying the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945: it was necessary to “save lives.”

Comments by top Republican senator and Trump confidante Jim Risch during last month’s Munich

security summit confirmed that a preemptive nuclear attack on North Korea is being not only contemplated, but actively planned.

Risch told a seminar that the Trump administration and US military had no plans for a “bloody nose” attack on North Korea—limited strikes intended to destroy only its purported nuclear weapons facilities and capabilities. Such an assault would enable North Korea to launch a counter-attack.

“And if you think about it,” the senator continued, “it absolutely makes sense. If this thing starts, it’s going to be probably one of the worst catastrophic events in the history of our civilisation. It is going to be very, very brief. The end of it is going to see mass casualties the likes of which the planet has never seen. It will be of biblical proportions.”

Risch was clearly referring to strikes with nuclear weapons, including on North Korea’s major cities, and the indiscriminate slaughter of millions of people. He told his audience: “Anyone who doubts that this president isn’t committed to that, I would suggest that they step back, take a breath, listen to what he has said, review the facts on the ground.”



To contact the WSWWS and the  
Socialist Equality Party visit:

**[wsws.org/contact](https://wsws.org/contact)**