Trump under pressure from US intelligence agencies over North Korea

Peter Symonds
2 July 2018

US President Donald Trump declared yesterday in a Fox Business interview that it was possible that the agreement reached with North Korea last month to denuclearise might not materialise. He was under pressure after the publication of leaked US intelligence assessments claimed that Pyongyang was planning to keep its nuclear weapons.

Speaking of his summit with North Korean leader Kim Jong-un in Singapore, Trump declared: "I made a deal with him, I shook hands with him, I really believe he means it." He then added: "Now, is it possible? Have I been in deals, have you been in things where, people [it] didn't work out? It's possible."

Trump also played down the US decision to call off joint military exercises with South Korea. "They're dropping bombs all over the place every six months, it's unbelievably expensive to do that. The planes fly in from Guam, these massive bombers. It's crazy."

Trump's remarks are completely hypocritical given his threats over the past year to employ massive military force to completely destroy North Korea—threats that Washington is quite capable of carrying out if Pyongyang does not bow to its demands.

However, since the June 12 summit, Trump has come under increasing fire for conceding too much to North Korea. The public statement issued after the meeting in Singapore noted a general agreement to denuclearise the Korean Peninsula but left the details of the complex process to future negotiations.

The *Washington Post* intensified the pressure on Trump with a front-page article yesterday declaring that North Korea was "plotting" to keep its nuclear arsenal. The story is completely reliant on claims made by unnamed US intelligence officials and purported evidence and intelligence assessments that are not revealed.

The article stated: "The evidence, collected following the June 12 summit in Singapore, points to preparations to deceive the US about the number of nuclear warheads in North Korea's arsenal as well as the existence of undisclosed facilities to make fissile material for nuclear bombs, the officials said."

The *Washington Post* noted that US intelligence agencies have believed for at least a year that North Korea has 65 nuclear weapons—far more than Pyongyang has acknowledged. It also has a "secret underground uranium enrichment site known as Kangson"—of which US intelligence agencies became aware in 2010.

The article does not bother to explain the obvious contradiction: if US intelligence agencies have known about these weapons and facilities for months and years, how will North Korea be able to "deceive" American negotiators?

In fact, the *Washington Post* article is part of the bitter infighting in the US political establishment and military-intelligence apparatus stemming from unsubstantiated claims of Russian interference in the 2016 US presidential election. Behind the political warfare lie sharp tactical divisions over which major rival to confront first—Russia or China.

The Trump administration is hoping to use a deal to draw Pyongyang closer to Washington, in preparation for escalating its confrontation with Beijing.

The *Washington Post* article followed an NBC report last week claiming that "improvements to the infrastructure at North Korea's Yongbyon Nuclear Scientific Research Centre are continuing at a rapid place." The sole evidence of these improvements is a paper by the *38north* website with a satellite image showing a recently completed pipeline connecting new buildings and the main production site.

© World Socialist Web Site

However, negotiations over a detailed agreement between North Korea and the US, including denuclearisation, are yet to begin. The first face-to-face meeting since the Singapore summit between officials from the two countries only took place yesterday at Panmunjom in the demilitarised zone between the two countries.

The *38north* analysts cautioned that the new pipeline at Yongbyon "should not be seen as having any relationship to North Korea's pledge to denuclearise. The North's nuclear cadre can be expected to proceed with business as usual until specific orders are issued from Pyongyang."

The NBC report, however, immediately dismissed the comment, citing other analysts who claimed that North Korea had no intention of giving up its nuclear weapons. James Acton, from the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, declared: "There is a huge gulf between what the administration apparently thinks North Korea is going to do and what they intend to do… The Trump administration is lying to itself and to the American people."

The real question is not whether North Korea intends to deceive the US, but whether any trust at all can be placed in Washington to negotiate in good faith. The US has twice struck a deal with North Korea to denuclearise—in 1994 and in 2007. In both cases, the agreements placed onerous requirements on Pyongyang to end its nuclear programs while requiring very little from the US in return.

The constant refrain from the US media and establishment is that North Korea broke the agreements and cannot be trusted. In fact, the reverse is the case—both deals were sabotaged by Washington. Under the 1994 Agreed Framework, the Clinton administration pledged to construct two light water reactors in North Korea, which had barely begun when Clinton left office in 2001.

After effectively tearing up the Agreed Framework, the incoming Bush administration found it expedient, amid the disastrous US occupation of Iraq, to strike a new deal with North Korea in 2007. While the Pyongyang regime kept to the letter of the agreement, Bush, in the dying days of his administration, effectively destroyed the deal by demanding new intrusive inspections that had not been agreed. The Obama administration never attempted to revive the agreement.

The rank hypocrisy of the US in accusing North Korea of not keeping bargains is also underscored by the Trump administration's decision to abandon the 2015 nuclear agreement with Iran, deliberately stoking tensions in the Middle East.

At this stage, the Trump administration appears intent on pursuing a nuclear agreement with North Korea. Trump's national security adviser John Bolton told CBS's "Face the Nation" yesterday that he would not comment on the media allegations that North Korea did not intend to denuclearise.

Bolton said that "the overwhelming bulk" of North Korea's nuclear weapons program could be dismantled "within a year" if the regime chose to cooperate. "If they have the strategic decision already made to do that and they're cooperative, we can move very quickly," he said.

No-one should take Bolton at his word, however. He is notorious for his warmongering statements, particularly towards North Korea and Iran. Earlier this year, he dismissed the possibility of a negotiated agreement with Pyongyang and insisted that a pre-emptive military attack on North Korea was the only way of eliminating its supposed threat to the US.

In the lead-up to the Singapore summit, Bolton provocatively suggested that the "Libyan model" should be the basis for talks with North Korean leader Kim. Libya agreed to dismantle its nuclear programs in 2003 only to have the US and allies, eight years later, mount a military campaign to oust the regime and murder its leader Muammar Gaddafi.

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact

© World Socialist Web Site