

US continues to inflame tensions on Korean Peninsula

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22 November 2022

The US is continuing to ramp up tensions in Northeast Asia following North Korea's launch last week of an intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM). Washington intends to exploit the situation to further demonize China and Russia and justify its rapidly expanding militarization of the Indo-Pacific region.

On Monday, the 15-member UN Security Council met in New York at Washington's insistence, which used the platform to denounce Beijing and Moscow while proposing further measures to isolate Pyongyang. In addition to the five permanent and 10 non-permanent members, South Korea, which is not among the latter, also participated in the meeting.

The US ambassador to the UN, Linda Thomas-Greenfield, called for the council to pass a formal presidential statement condemning Pyongyang, a draft of which a spokesperson for the US mission said would be presented soon. After the meeting, 14 countries led by the US, including eight Security Council members, issued their own joint statement condemning the latest missile launch as an "unequivocal threat to international peace and security."

During the meeting, Thomas-Greenfield referred to Beijing and Moscow, claiming that the "two veto-wielding members of the council are enabling and emboldening the DPRK [North Korea]." She continued, "They have allowed the regime to launch this latest reckless missile test, which endangered the lives of Japanese civilians and needlessly raises tensions in the region. These two members' blatant obstructionism put the Northeast Asian region and the entire world at risk."

North Korea launched what is reported to be a Hwasong-17 ICBM last Friday with Japan claiming it landed in its exclusive economic zone in the Sea of Japan, west of Hokkaido. According to Japanese

Defense Minister Yasukazu Hamada, the missile, fired on a lofted trajectory, had the potential to strike the US mainland.

In recent weeks, Washington has been increasingly goading North Korea into taking bellicose actions as a means of putting pressure on Russia, and in particular, China. The US is now seizing on the launch to step up military exercises while pushing the lie that Beijing and Moscow are ultimately responsible for unilaterally upending the "rule of law" around the world. US State Department Deputy Spokesman Vedant Patel said last Friday that China "has a responsibility to make clear to the DPRK that Pyongyang should not engage in unlawful nuclear or ballistic missile tests."

In response, China's UN ambassador Zhang Jun stated Monday, "All parties should remain calm, exercise restraint, act and speak with caution, and avoid any actions that may escalate tensions and lead to miscalculations so as to prevent the situation from falling into a vicious cycle." He called on Washington to take the initiative to "positively respond to the legitimate concerns of the DPRK" over security. Having witnessed numerous US regime-change operations in countries like Iraq and Libya, Pyongyang legitimately fears falling victim to similar imperialist machinations.

The US claims it is ready "to meet without preconditions" while calling on Pyongyang "to engage in serious and sustained diplomacy," in Thomas-Greenfield's words Monday. This echoed language from US Vice President Kamala Harris last Friday on the sidelines of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum in Thailand where she called on Pyongyang to "to commit to serious and sustained diplomacy."

However, Washington demonstrated on Saturday

exactly what it means by “diplomacy,” by sending two B-1B Lancer bombers for air drills over the Korean Peninsula as part of joint US-South Korea exercises. The B1-Bs were escorted by US F-16 and South Korean F-35A fighter jets, with the latter launching attacks on mock North Korean military targets the previous day as well. The bombers also participated in separate joint air drills with five F-2 fighter jets from the Japanese Air Self-Defense Force to the northwest of the Japanese island of Kyushu.

The B-1B bombers are capable of carrying the largest payload of conventional weapons in the US Air Force. While the US military claims the B-1B is no longer capable of carrying nuclear weapons, there is no reason to take the Pentagon’s word at face value. Washington is making clear that its most destructive weaponry is in a position to intimidate and, if called upon, destroying North Korea, an impoverished country of 26 million people.

This is what Washington means by “managing” its relationship with Beijing, as the White House stated following President Joe Biden’s meeting last week with Chinese President Xi Jinping. While appearing to scale back the rhetoric against China, the US is stepping up pressure in other areas, seeking to further isolate North Korea by driving a wedge between Beijing and Pyongyang. By doing so, Washington may hope to potentially remove North Korea as an additional opponent in a future war with China, the prime target of the military build-up in the region.

Backed by Japan and South Korea, Washington bears chief responsibility for these tensions in the Asia-Pacific. In the past year, it has junked the de facto agreement between previous President Donald Trump and Pyongyang to scale down joint military drills with Seoul in exchange for North Korea’s moratorium on long-range ballistic missile and nuclear tests. Pyongyang hoped this would lead to economic aid or an easing of economic and diplomatic sanctions. This never happened.

Instead, Washington allowed North Korea to languish under brutal sanctions even as the world has been gripped by the COVID-19 pandemic, compounding its economic crisis. In addition, Washington has now not only increased joint military drills with Seoul, but Tokyo as well, exploiting the situation and goading Pyongyang into taking action so as not to appear weak.

At the same time, the US offers no serious path for North Korea of this situation short of complete capitulation.

Washington also recently agreed with Seoul for the de facto permanent stationing of US nuclear-capable assets in South Korea for the first time since 1991. At the same time, Seoul and Tokyo, alongside the US, have agreed to step up trilateral intelligence sharing to include real-time information. Washington considers this a crucial aspect of its anti-ballistic missile system in the region, aimed at China.

Ultimately, the US is working to surround China with weaponry and military alliances, using North Korea as a pretext. All of this is pushing the region dangerously close to open conflict.



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