

Obama uses nuclear summit to issue new threats against North Korea and Iran

By Peter Symonds
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US President Obama has used his trip to this week's nuclear security summit in South Korea to repeat his belligerent threats against Iran and North Korea and reiterate his administration's determination to play the dominant role in the Asian region. While the summit is supposedly about nuclear disarmament and peace, Obama is utilising it as a platform to prepare new wars of aggression in the Middle East and Asia.

Speaking at Hankuk University yesterday, Obama again warned Iran that "time is short" to resolve the confrontation over its nuclear programs diplomatically. Both the US and Israel have repeatedly threatened to take military action against Iran's nuclear facilities if Tehran does not bow to Washington's demands. The Pentagon has already built up its military presence in the Persian Gulf and now has two aircraft carriers in the region.

Obama claimed that the US had offered "to help Iran develop nuclear energy peacefully." He continued: "But time and again Iran has refused, instead taking the path of denial, deceit and deception."

In reality, Washington is preparing to launch an unprovoked military attack on Iran on the basis of deceit and deception. It has provided no evidence that Iran is building or is seeking to build nuclear weapons. Tehran has repeatedly declared that it does not intend to construct a nuclear device. At the same time, the US has collaborated with Israel in carrying out terrorist attacks within Iran, including the assassination of at least four Iranian nuclear scientists.

The hypocrisy of Obama's stance is underlined by Washington's strategic alliances and partnerships with Israel, India and Pakistan—all of which have a nuclear arsenal in breach of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. The dangers from these quarters will not be discussed at the nuclear summit in South Korea, which

is supposedly focussed on preventing terrorists from obtaining nuclear material.

Obama's posturing over nuclear disarmament is entirely cynical. Despite US gestures under the START agreement with Russia to reduce the total number of nuclear weapons, the American military has been upgrading its huge nuclear arsenal. In its dealings with Russia and offer of similar talks with China, the overriding US concern is to maintain an unchallenged superiority in nuclear weapons.

At a press conference with South Korean President Lee Myung-bak on Sunday, Obama warned North Korea against its planned satellite launch next month. The US president has already declared that Washington will end a deal to provide food aid to Pyongyang in return for freezing its nuclear and missile programs if the launch goes ahead. North Korea, he said, "will achieve nothing by threats or by provocations."

Obama's warning to North Korea was also aimed at bullying China to fall into line in condemning the planned satellite launch and further isolating Pyongyang. He directly called for China to toughen its approach to its North Korean ally, pointing out that Beijing has more influence on Pyongyang than any other country. "What I've said to them [the Chinese] consistently is rewarding bad behaviour, turning a blind eye to deliberate provocations... that's obviously not working," he said.

Obama hardly has any standing to denounce others for "bad behaviour." It is only days since the criminal character of his neo-colonial war against the Afghan people was demonstrated in the horrifying massacre of 17 civilians, including 11 children.

Obama also met with Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan in Seoul and agreed to further fuel the Syrian conflict by providing so-called "non-lethal aid"

to the pro-Western opponents of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad. The announcement is another step, following the war for regime-change in Libya, towards a new US-led military intervention aimed at consolidating US dominance in the oil-rich Middle East.

Everything the US is doing in the Middle East and Asia—stoking up civil war in Syria, waging economic warfare and staging terror attacks against Iran, maintaining brutal sanctions against North Korea—is in violation of international law.

The threat against North Korea is part of a broader US strategy of undermining Chinese influence throughout the Asian region. In his press conference with Lee, Obama declared that his visit to Korea signified that “the United States is leading again in the Asia Pacific... As I declared in Australia last year, the United States as a Pacific nation will play a larger and long-term role in shaping this region and its future.”

Since coming to office in 2009, Obama has shifted the US strategic focus to the Indo-Pacific region, strengthening alliances and strategic ties with countries throughout the region, including South Korea, Japan, India and Australia. He reaffirmed that any slowdown in US defence spending would “not come at the expense of the Asia Pacific.” In Canberra last November, Obama announced the stationing of US Marines in northern Australia and the extensive use of Australian military bases.

In North East Asia, Obama’s strategic “pivot” to Asia has encouraged US allies to take a more aggressive stance towards China. In 2010, Japan provoked a tense standoff with China by seizing a Chinese fishing vessel and its captain in waters off the disputed Diaoyu/Senkaku islands. In the course of the protracted row, the US pointedly declared that its military alliance with Japan meant it would side with Tokyo if a conflict erupted with Beijing over the islands.

The Obama administration has also fully backed the right-wing Lee administration in Seoul in its disputes with Pyongyang, greatly increasing tensions on the Korean Peninsula. Following artillery exchanges between North and South Korea in November 2010 involving South Korea’s Yeonpyeong Island, the US provocatively conducted joint naval exercises with South Korea, ignoring China’s objections to the

presence of US warships in strategically sensitive waters.

In response to North Korea’s planned satellite launch, both Japan and South Korea have warned that they will use their anti-ballistic missile systems—developed in conjunction with the US—to shoot down the launch vehicle if it strays into their territory. These threats, tacitly supported by Washington, only further inflame tension throughout the region and add to the pressure on China.

The greatest threat to peace is not Iran or North Korea, but the reckless militarism of US imperialism, which has intensified under the Obama administration. The driving force behind the US wars of aggression over the past decade has been Washington’s attempt to offset America’s economic decline through the use of military force. Obama’s turn to Asia and a confrontation with China raises the danger of a catastrophic conflict between two nuclear-armed powers.

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