

US imperialism and the threat of nuclear war against North Korea

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The world is poised on the brink of a war on the Korean Peninsula that could rapidly escalate into a global nuclear conflict.

US President Donald Trump has doubled down on his inflammatory threat to engulf North Korea in “fire and fury like the world has never seen.” Yesterday he commented that his words were “maybe not tough enough” and warned that the US response to any attack “will be an event the likes of which no one has seen.” He added that the US nuclear arsenal was in “tip top shape.”

Asked whether he would carry out a “pre-emptive strike” against North Korea, Trump said he would not talk about military options, but did not rule it out. That a strike is under active consideration in American ruling circles was underscored by an article in the *New York Times* entitled “If US attacks North Korea first, is that self-defence?” The commentary treated a unilateral, aggressive attack on North Korea as a legitimate option, debating whether it would meet the legal standard for a pre-emptive strike.

A chilling article in the *Washington Post* went further to examine how Washington could launch a pre-emptive nuclear strike attack on North Korea. It concluded that Trump could order a nuclear first strike without securing the agreement of his advisers, and that neither the military nor Congress could overrule his order.

Whether Trump is seeking to goad the highly unstable Pyongyang regime into a desperate act to which the US would respond with overwhelming force, or creating the conditions to launch pre-emptive strikes on North Korea, the US is preparing a monstrous crime “like the world has never seen.”

Even if the war were confined to the Korean Peninsula and restricted to conventional weapons, the death and destruction would run into the millions, as it

did during the Korean War of 1950–53. Defence Secretary Gen. James Mattis threatened this week that if North Korea failed to bow to Washington’s dictates, Washington would bring about “the end of the regime and the destruction of its people,” i.e., the annihilation of a country of 25 million people. If other nuclear powers such as China and Russia were drawn in, the global consequences would be incalculable.

Who is responsible for this crisis? The US media uniformly blames it on North Korean “aggression.” This is a lie, in keeping with the role of the American media as a conduit for state propaganda.

The current crisis is the outcome of a policy of naked aggression pursued by US imperialism for the past quarter-century in the Middle East, North Africa, Central Asia and the Balkans. In the wake of the 1991 dissolution of the Soviet Union, which had acted as an impediment to Washington’s global ambitions, the Pentagon drafted defence guidelines stating that the fundamental US strategy must “focus on precluding the emergence of any potential future global competitor.”

The doctrine of “pre-emptive war” now being invoked by Trump and his advisers to justify an attack, even a nuclear strike, on North Korea was first enunciated by President George W. Bush as the pretext for the invasion and occupation of Iraq. President Barack Obama expanded the Bush doctrine to declare any threat to American “values and interests” sufficient cause for the US to militarily attack another country. This new doctrine is a gross violation of international law. Waging a war of aggression was the chief crime for which the Nazi leaders were charged and convicted at the Nuremberg trials after World War II.

Taking its cue from the Trump administration, there is now a blitz in the American and international media to demonise North Korean leader Kim Jong-un as a madman and to grossly inflate the “weapons of mass

destruction” threat posed by his regime. This follows a well-worn modus operandi that was used to try to stampede public opinion behind the US-led wars against Serbia, Iraq, Libya and Syria.

Behind this barrage of propaganda, what is the fundamental character of this looming war? It is a conflict between the world’s most heavily armed imperialist power and an oppressed and impoverished country, whose social and political character is the product of relentless colonialist and imperialist oppression throughout the twentieth century.

After more than forty years of brutal colonial rule by Japan, the US installed a military dictatorship in Seoul and waged a near-genocidal war in the early 1950s to preserve the artificial division of the Korean Peninsula into North and South. Since the end of the war, North Korea has been subjected to a US-led economic blockade, accompanied by repeated provocations and military threats.

The chief target of the Trump administration’s threats of war is not North Korea, but China, which the US regards as the principal obstacle to its regional and global dominance. The US military build-up throughout the Asia Pacific did not begin with the fascist billionaire Trump, but is a continuation of the “pivot to Asia” developed by the Obama administration. In handing this geo-strategic initiative over to Trump, Obama identified North Korea as the chief military challenge facing the new administration and advised that the North Korean “threat” be used as the pretext for ratcheting up the US confrontation with China.

The fact that Trump’s bellicose statements come in the immediate wake of a unanimous vote in the UN Security Council for harsh new sanctions against Pyongyang demonstrates that Washington interpreted China’s vote in support of the sanctions resolution as a sign of weakness and a green light to immediately escalate the confrontation. The threat of “fire and fury” against North Korea is an implicit warning to China, Russia and any other power that poses a challenge to US hegemony.

Any US attack on North Korea could rapidly escalate into a war with China, as already occurred in 1950. US control of the strategically-placed Korean Peninsula could become the springboard for provocations and interventions into northern China, as it was for

Japanese imperialism in the 1930s. China, which fought 67 years ago to prevent a US takeover of North Korea and still maintains a mutual defense treaty with Pyongyang, is very conscious of the danger and has been militarily reinforcing its northern border.

Only the independent revolutionary mobilisation of the working class internationally can disarm the war-mongers and halt the imperialist drive to a new world war.

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