

As US threatens war against North Korea, China appeals to European powers

By Alex Lantier
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China protested US military escalation in the Korean Peninsula yesterday and sought European mediation. Chinese President Xi Jinping contacted both German Chancellor Angela Merkel and French President Emmanuel Macron to coordinate sanctions against North Korea after its nuclear tests, and ask them to help prevent the crisis from escalating into all-out war.

Beijing formally protested the deployment of the US THAAD radar and missile system in South Korea, saying it could be used to monitor, identify, and attack targets inside Russia and China. “I strongly urge the US and South Korea to value the security interests of China and other regional countries and immediately halt the deployment and remove the relevant equipment. China has lodged stern representations with South Korea,” said Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Geng Shuang.

While his remarks were couched in diplomatic jargon, Geng was making quite clear that Beijing views THAAD as a major threat that could lead to direct war between the major powers. Speaking to China’s state-run *Global Times*, Zheng Jiyong of Shanghai’s Fudan University attacked the THAAD deployment, saying it was as dangerous as the North Korean regime’s testing of a hydrogen bomb on Sunday.

“The deployment, which is similar in nature to North Korea’s missile tests, cannot solve the Korean Peninsula issue, but would merely exacerbate the already chaotic situation and drive the Peninsula closer to war,” Zheng said. “China has done a lot to denuclearize the peninsula, and it’s the US who does not want to see a peaceful peninsula, because a chaotic situation gives it an excuse to deploy strategic weapons in the region.”

The Chinese protest came as Trump and US defense officials again threatened North Korea with war. At a

press conference Thursday, Trump declared, “I would prefer not going the route of the military, but it’s something certainly that could happen.” Pentagon officials have said they are preparing cyber-attacks and other operations against North Korea.

Significantly, Beijing reacted by seeking out and obtaining support from Washington’s European allies to contain growing military tensions and prevent a US escalation.

The German chancellery announced yesterday that Merkel and Xi had organized a phone call late Thursday to discuss the Korean crisis. The chancellery published a statement saying Xi and Merkel “were very preoccupied by the current situation in North Korea. [The North Korean nuclear test] represents a considerable danger for the entire region and a violation of international law. ... The two speakers agreed to reinforce sanctions against North Korea in order to find a peaceful solution” to the crisis.

Yesterday, Xi called Macron and subsequently issued a statement about their telephone call on Chinese television. “China hopes that France, as a permanent member of the UN Security Council, will play a constructive role to calm the situation and restart dialog,” Xi said on CCTV. “The Korean crisis cannot be resolved except by peaceful means, by dialog and consultation,” Xi said, adding that his government was seeking “the de-nuclearisation of the Korean Peninsula.”

Chinese state media reported that Macron responded positively to Xi’s phone call. He reportedly said that China and France are “comprehensive strategic partners,” He added that France “attaches importance to China’s peaceful approach to solving the issue” and promised “cooperation with China to push for a proper settlement of the Korean Peninsula nuclear issue.”

The Chinese outreach toward Europe and the positive response from Berlin and Paris reflect the extraordinarily sharp military tensions and danger of war, as well as the crisis of the traditional post-World War II alliances between Europe and America. Relations between the major European powers and Washington have collapsed since Trump's election, amid growing US-European trade tensions and moves by the European powers to ratchet up defense spending to build up their armed forces.

The 68-year-old NATO military alliance between Washington and the European powers is rapidly fraying after Trump declared it was obsolete during his 2016 presidential campaign. US and European positions during the Korean crisis have repeatedly clashed. Already in August, after Trump threatened North Korea with "fire and fury like the world has never seen," Merkel publicly declared that she did "not see a military solution to this conflict." Trump responded by declaring that the US military was "locked and loaded" for combat in Korea.

Earlier this week, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres warned that the conflict over North Korea could escalate into world war. Daniel Davis, a retired US military officer formerly stationed in Korea, published an article in *The National Interest* that gives a picture of what officers on the ground in Korea are expecting.

Warning that the "situation on the Korean Peninsula is now at the brink of major—and potentially nuclear—war," Davis wrote: "If a war were started now, it could quickly get out of anyone's control and escalate into a nuclear exchange. The dead could quickly climb into the millions. Though North Korea doesn't yet have the ability to strike the American mainland, any use of nuclear weapons that resulted from a US attack could have profoundly negative consequences for American national security."

Tacitly referring to US national security adviser H.R. McMaster's call for a "preventive war" with North Korea, Davis said advocates of "preventive war" risk starting a war with China: "Beijing has publicly stated that if North Korea were to start a war, China would not come to its aid. If, however, an external power started a war against North Korea, Beijing would then come to Pyongyang's aid. Thus, use of a so-called 'preventative war' against North Korea has the distinct

possibility of equaling war with China."

The working class cannot leave the task of opposing the US war drive to the European imperialists, acting in concert with the Stalinist business oligarchy in Beijing.

The European powers, fearing that a US conflict with North Korea would likely escalate into one with North Korea's neighbors, China and Russia, are well aware that this would entail war fought between US and Russian forces in Europe. Their countries would rapidly be devastated. They are pursuing a two-track policy, agreeing to US demands for sanctions against North Korea, but indicating their growing support for China's position against Washington.

In the short term, insofar as this policy coincides with Washington's call to isolate North Korea with sanctions, it serves to hide the growing danger of war with North Korea and among the major powers. More broadly, however, this effort does not represent a peace policy by European imperialism. Not only have Berlin and Paris participated in numerous US-led wars from the former Yugoslavia to Libya, Syria, and Afghanistan, but they are all moving to spend billions more on building up their military machines and pursue an ever more independent and aggressive imperialist policy of their own.

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