

Rising Tensions on the Korean Peninsula. Clash in US-China Relations. Can War Be Avoided?

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Region: [Asia](#)

Theme: [US NATO War Agenda](#)

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On Wednesday, [addressing State Department staff](#), Rex Tillerson stressed “leaning hard” on China to pressure Pyongyang on denuclearizing the Korean peninsula “backed up by very strong (US) resolve...”

“So it’s a pressure campaign...to lean into people” to go along with Washington’s agenda. “We’ve told them we’re watching what you’re doing.” Punishment will be administered to non-compliers by sanctions and other means, he said.

His message was meant mainly for Beijing – on North Korea, trade and South China Sea issues. Friendly bilateral relations depend on playing ball with America was his message.

If Beijing doesn’t come down hard on Pyongyang, Washington could sanction its banks, commerce and industry dealing with the DPRK, he warned, adding:

“(W)e’ve got a lot of work left to do to keep that pressure on.”

Major Sino/US differences remain unresolved – notably on North Korea, trade and Beijing’s South China Sea activities.



Rex Tillerson shaking hands with President Xi Jinping

During his confirmation hearing as Trump’s ambassador to China, former Iowa Governor Terry Branstad said he intends raising tough issues with Beijing.

Asked if he considers China an ally or enemy, he said “it’s a tough question,” stressing its government’s obligation “to play by the rules” – US ones, he failed to explain.

On Monday, Commerce Secretary Wilbur Ross said China’s help on North Korea “trumps trade.” On Monday, he infamously called Trump’s April 7 aggression on Syria “after-dinner entertainment,” adding “it didn’t cost the president anything” – other than mostly civilian lives lost and flagrantly breaching international law, he didn’t explain.

Separately on Wednesday, Pyongyang’s Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) published a [commentary](#) titled “Refrain from making reckless remarks undermining the DPRK-China relations,” criticizing Beijing for what it called “a wanton violation of (the DPRK’s)

independent and legitimate rights, dignity and supreme interests.”

It defended the nation’s nuclear program as its right to self-defense. It criticized “ignorant (Chinese) politicians and media persons” for their views on this issue.

“(T)he DPRK(’s) strategic interests have been repeatedly violated due to insincerity and betrayal on the part of its partner,” Beijing, it said.

Uncharacteristic tough talk about its most important ally!

It said

“China should acknowledge in an honest manner that the DPRK has just contributed to protecting peace and security of China, foiling the US scheme for aggression by waging a hard fight in the frontline of the showdown with the US for more than seven decades, and thank the DPRK for it,” adding:

“China had better ponder over the grave consequences to be entailed by its reckless act of chopping down the pillar of the DPRK-China relations.”

Pyongyang feels threatened by possible US aggression. It relies heavily on China as its most important strategic, political and economic partner.

For its part, Beijing wants war on the Korean peninsula avoided. It wants normal relations with all nations.

It’s treading a delicate balance in dealings with Washington, Pyongyang and other regional countries – a major test for its diplomatic skills.

Can war on the Korean peninsula be avoided? Trump’s rage for belligerent confrontations isn’t reassuring.

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