

Trump Threatens North Korea with “Effective and Overwhelming” Military Force

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Global Research, September 17, 2017

[World Socialist Web Site](#) 16 September 2017

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In the wake of North Korea's missile launch, US President Trump and his top officials have once again threatened to use military force to end the supposed threat posed by the small, economically backward country and its limited nuclear arsenal.

Speaking at an Air Force installation outside Washington, Trump condemned North Korea and declared that the US would “defend our people, our nations, and our civilization, from all who dare to threaten our way of life.”

Against the backdrop of a nuclear-capable B-2 stealth bomber, Trump told the assembled Air Force personnel:

“After seeing your capabilities and commitment here today, I am more confident than ever that our options in addressing this threat are both effective and overwhelming.”

Trump and his top officials have repeatedly stressed that “all options are on the table” and hinted the US would use its vast nuclear capability against North Korea.

The UN Security Council has issued a statement after its emergency session on Friday condemning North Korea's latest test of an intermediate range missile that flew over Japan and into the Pacific Ocean as “highly provocative.”

Under pressure from Washington, the UN Security Council on Monday imposed its harshest sanctions yet on North Korea over its sixth nuclear test on September 3. The latest resolution banned the purchase of North Korean textile exports, restricted the hire of its guest workers and capped its oil imports.

Yesterday's statement called on all UN member states to “fully, comprehensively and immediately” implement all the sanctions. At the same time, it stressed the need to “reduce tension in the Korean Peninsula” and to promote “a peaceful and comprehensive solution.”

Trump, however, has already dismissed the latest UN sanctions. Speaking on Tuesday, he declared that the UN vote was “just another very small step, not a big deal,” adding that he did not know “if it has any impact.” He said that the sanctions would pale in comparison to “what ultimately will have to happen” to North Korea.

Yesterday, senior Trump officials warned that time was running out for any diplomatic solution.

At a White House briefing yesterday, national security adviser H.R. McMaster underscored the willingness of the US to use military force.

“For those who have said, and been commenting about a lack of a military option, there is a military option.”

While saying that “now it [military force] is not what we would prefer to do,” McMaster warned that time was short.

“We’ve been kicking the can down the road, and we’re out of road,” he said.

Speaking at the same briefing, US ambassador to the UN Nikki Haley suggested that the UN had run out of options and she would support the use of the military against North Korea.

“There is not a whole lot the Security Council is going to be able to do from here when you have cut 90 percent of the trade and 30 percent of the oil to [North Korea],” Haley said. “So, having said that, I have no problem with kicking it to [US Defense Secretary James] Mattis because I think he has plenty of options.”

The provocative US threats of war are also directed at putting even more pressure on China and also Russia to strong-arm the Pyongyang regime into capitulating to US demands to abandon its nuclear and missile programs.

US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson called on Beijing and Moscow to take “direct actions of their own.” He called on all countries to implement UN sanctions but singled out China saying that it supplied North Korea with “most of its oil” and Russia as the “largest employer of North Korean forced labour.”

“China and Russia must indicate their intolerance for these reckless missile launches by taking direct actions of their own,” Tillerson declared.

Earlier this week, US Assistant Treasury Secretary Marshall Billingslea accused China of circumventing UN sanctions and assisting in the trade of banned goods with North Korea. He claimed to have evidence of Chinese and Russian collusion in the smuggling of coal out of North Korea.

Billingslea said that the Trump administration had told China that if it wished to avoid further sanctions, the United States needs to “urgently” see action. The US has already imposed bans on a number of Chinese individuals and entities, including the Bank of Dandong, over their alleged business dealings with North Korea.

Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin told CNBC on that the US has “sent a message that anybody that wanted to trade with North Korea, we consider them not trading with us. We can put economic sanctions to stop people trading.”

Mnuchin's comments echo those of Trump who threatened to cut off trade with China if it did not end all business dealings with North Korea. The threats make clear that the Trump administration's reckless escalation of the confrontation with North Korea is part of a broader strategy aimed at undermining China, which is regarded by the US as the main obstacle to its regional and global hegemony.

China and Russia are caught in a bind. Both countries have opposed North Korea's nuclear and missile programs because the US has exploited them to justify its military build-up throughout Asia.

Beijing is also concerned that South Korea and Japan will use North Korea as a pretext to develop their own nuclear arsenal. South Korea's defence minister has already suggested that the US return tactical nuclear weapons to his country.

At the same time, China and Russia do not want to see either a war in their backyard on the Korean Peninsula or a political crisis in Pyongyang that could be exploited by Washington to install a pro-US regime.

The Russian foreign ministry yesterday joined with China in condemning North Korea's latest missile test over mainland Japan, but at the same time criticised the US for its "aggressive" role in the crisis.

"Regrettably, aggressive rhetoric is the only thing coming from Washington," a spokesman said.

China and Russia are continuing to push for a resumption of negotiations based on a halt by the US and South Korea on large joint military exercises, in return for North Korea suspending further nuclear and missile tests. The US has repeatedly dismissed any pause in its war games with South Korea.

In response to the latest North Korean missile test, the South Korean military fired a short-range ballistic missile into waters 250 kilometres off its east coast. The South Korean President Moon Jae-in bluntly warned North Korea that "we have the power to destroy North Korea and make it unable to recover."

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