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US media reports Trump preparing “preemptive strike” on North Korea

By James Cogan

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NBC News in the United States led its evening news on April 13 with an “exclusive” report that the Trump administration is prepared to carry out a “preemptive strike with conventional weapons” if it believes North Korea is about to conduct another nuclear weapons test.

NBC cited “multiple senior US intelligence officials” as the source of its report.

The US media is featuring satellite images that allegedly show the North Korean regime is in the advanced stages of preparing for a nuclear test at the Punggye-ri site, close to the country’s border with both China and Russia. The North Korean regime is this weekend celebrating the birthday of its founding dictator Kim Il-sung with major events. Such occasions have been marked in the past by long-range missile tests or the detonation of a nuclear device.

The dropping yesterday of a Massive Ordnance Air Blast (MOAB) weapon on an alleged cave network in Afghanistan was not only intended to test the effectiveness of the bomb, but to demonstrate that the US military does not need to use nuclear weapons to attack underground bunker complexes.

Trump stated Thursday after the dropping of the MOAB: “I don’t know if this sends a message to North Korea. It doesn’t make any difference if it does or not.” North Korea, he declared, “is a problem—the problem will be taken care of.”

The US military has positioned all the forces it would need to conduct a massive military strike on North Korea and then wage the full-scale war that such an action would almost certainly trigger.

Hundreds of thousands of South Korean troops, and some 30,000 Americans, are in a state of high readiness, using the annual Foal Eagle military exercises as the cover for their preparations. Among the American units in South Korea is the elite assassination squad that killed Osama bin Laden in 2011. “Decapitation” raids to assassinate North Korean dictator Kim Jong-un and other senior regime figures are an official part of US military planning.

Naval destroyers and an unknown number of nuclear submarines are hovering off the Korean coast, armed with the same Tomahawk cruise missiles used to attack a Syrian airbase one week ago. The aircraft carrier Carl Vinson and its strike group have been dispatched to join them. Dozens of US strike aircraft are based at airfields in Japan and South Korea, while B-1 strategic bombers are operating from Guam, where the Obama administration deployed them last year. A squadron of 12 F-22 “Stealth” fighters was quietly moved in February to northern Australia, from where they could deploy rapidly to the peninsula.

As well as South Korea, other US allies have joined the war preparations. Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe’s government has reportedly ordered several destroyers to join the Carl Vinson battle group. Tokyo is using the pretext of “collective self-defense,” a concept that Abe pushed through the Japanese parliament in 2015 to overcome the country’s post-World War II constitutional prohibition of aggressive military operations.

The key US-Australian satellite and communications interception base at Pine Gap, in central Australia, has reportedly been instructed to focus its attention on North Korea, identifying and drawing up the target lists for potential US strikes. At least one Australian warship was dispatched at the beginning of April for ostensibly routine operations in Asia.

In the event North Korea seeks to retaliate to a US attack by firing nuclear-armed missiles at South Korea, Japan, Guam or elsewhere, the US is relying on the Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) system that was installed in South Korea last month to shoot them down. Even if the North does not, or cannot, retaliate with nuclear weapons, Seoul, the South Korean capital with a population of over 10 million, is within range of an estimated 10,000 North Korean artillery pieces.

After 25 years of continuous war and intrigue by US imperialism, the events of the past week unquestionably mark a qualitative new stage. Even as Washington dramatically ratchets up tensions with Russia and threatens further attacks in Syria, it is actively plotting actions in North East Asia that could result in a direct clash with China. From the time of the 1950–53 Korean War, Beijing has viewed the Stalinist state in the North as an essential buffer between its own borders and the US forces in the South.

The Chinese regime understands that the real motive behind the US war drive against North Korea is the American ruling elite's determination to prevent China from becoming a rival strategic and economic centre of power in Asia.

China's response to the prospect of a US attack on North Korea is one of the most unpredictable aspects of the situation.

Editorials and comments in state-owned publications such as the *Global Times* and *People's Daily* indicate that Chinese President Xi Jinping and the Chinese military are, at the least, considering their own intervention into North Korea. A *Global Times* editorial on April 10 bluntly stated that, under certain conditions, the "People's Liberation Army (PLA) will launch attacks to DPRK [North Korean] nuclear facilities on its own."

On April 13 another *Global Times* editorial advised North Korea to abandon its nuclear weapons program. It stated: "Even if the United States does not launch military strikes on the DPRK, the long-term sanctions are not something that the DPRK can withstand. The DPRK might already become the most isolated country in the world and is almost 'fully blockaded.' No modern countries can survive in this way." China, it declared, could provide all the protection North Korea needed.

Beijing has intensified economic pressure on Pyongyang, cancelling all purchases of North Korean coal—one of the country's few exports and sources of foreign currency. North Korean ships were turned away this week from Chinese ports.

While the Chinese government has dismissed as "fabrications" the reports that some 150,000 Chinese troops are massing on the North Korean border, such claims continue to filter out.

What is certain is that the lives of tens of millions of people are at risk because of the ruthless and ever more reckless attempts by American imperialism to maintain its waning global dominance.