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US military declares “time is running out” before war with North Korea

By James Cogan

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Ominous statements over the past 48 hours by top American military commanders underscore how close the world is to a devastating war on the Korean Peninsula, which, for the first time since 1945, could involve the use of nuclear weapons.

The propaganda pretext for war is the claim of US imperialism and its allies that the isolated North Korean regime is on the verge of developing a nuclear-armed inter-continental ballistic missile (ICBM) capable of destroying major cities on the American mainland.

General Mark Milley, the Chief of Staff of the Army, told a conference at the National Press Club in Washington yesterday: “War in the Korean Peninsula would be terrible, however, a nuclear weapon detonating in Los Angeles would be terrible.”

Pointing to the preparations for a pre-emptive US attack, Milley declared that “time is running out” for a “non-military solution” to US demands that North Korea end its nuclear and missile weapons programs. The Trump administration, he stated, was “at a point in time where [the] choice will have to be made one way or the other.”

The general gloated that the US “would utterly destroy the North Korean military.” There would be “a high cost in terms of human life, in terms of infrastructure.”

Milley's statements follow those made last weekend by General Joseph Dunford, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. He told a security forum that a war with North Korea was "not unimaginable." Proceeding to imagine the consequences, he declared a war would cause "a loss of life unlike any we have experienced in our lifetimes." Dunford insisted that "negotiations" would only take place for "a few more months."

Passed over by the establishment media, which breathlessly reported such assertions, is the obvious question as to why North Korea—an economically backward state with a gross domestic product of barely \$25 billion—would risk annihilation in a war with the planet's greatest military power.

The North Korean regime in Pyongyang headed by Kim Jong-un is without question a brutal and reactionary dictatorship, but it is not irrational. Its senior officials have repeatedly said their refusal to end the weapons programs is a response to what happened to Iraq and Libya after the governments of those countries submitted to US dictates.

Iraq was invaded in 2003 and its top leadership and hundreds of thousands of its citizens slaughtered. Libya was plunged into an imperialist-instigated civil war in 2011, which was used to justify a massive US-led bombardment that killed thousands of civilians. Its leader, Muammar Gaddafi, was murdered by an Islamist lynch mob.

The Korean people know all too well the carnage that US imperialism can and will inflict in pursuit of its geo-strategic objectives. The day Milley made his statements, July 27, was the 64th anniversary of the end of the 1950–53 Korean War. The most conservative estimate is that three million people were killed or wounded—two million in what is now North Korea.

The US air bombardment of the North was murderous. The US Air Force noted in an assessment: "Eighteen of twenty-two major cities in North Korea had been at least half obliterated." US general Curtis LeMay later recalled: "We burned down just about every city in North Korea and South Korea both. We killed off over a million civilian Koreans and drove several million more from their homes." By the end of the conflict, pilots were reportedly dropping their payloads in the sea because there were no buildings left for them to level.

American imperialism has never accepted the outcome of the Korean War, which left North Korea intact to function as a buffer between the US military forces in South Korea and both China and Russia, which border the peninsula. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991—which was North Korea's main economic partner—successive US administrations have pursued the barely concealed policy of regime-change in Pyongyang. The objective is to incorporate the North into South Korea and fundamentally alter the strategic balance of forces in North East Asia.

The rhetoric and threats of war over North Korea's nuclear program are unfolding in the context of ever-mounting antagonisms between the US and China. China is viewed in Washington as an unacceptable challenge to American dominance due to its development into the world's second largest economy and its increasing strategic influence. The greatest fear in American ruling circles is that the logic of global economic integration will result in a geopolitical partnership

consolidating across the vast Eurasian landmass, involving the German-dominated European bloc, Russia and China, and ultimately drawing in Japan and other key US allies in Asia.

US imperialist strategy, in every part of the world, is driven by a determination to disrupt this process and prevent it becoming a reality. The threat of war with North Korea is a disruption of immense proportions. China and Russia have rejected US-led attempts to subject North Korea to complete economic isolation and opposed any military action on the peninsula. There are reports of major Chinese military deployments on its Korean border. Encounters between Chinese or Russian aircraft with American or Japanese aircraft occur daily. US allies in both Europe and Asia, even as they seek closer trade relations with China, are under pressure to fall in behind Washington.

The situation is rendered even more volatile and dangerous by the besieged character of the Trump presidency. The administration is descending into in-fighting and turmoil over the investigations underway into claims by the intelligence agencies that Trump won office due to Russian “interference.” The possibility cannot be excluded that Trump’s administration will respond to its crisis by attempting to divert tensions outward by launching a major war.

The US military thinks this is entirely possible. Hence its reported response to a Trump tweet yesterday morning which read: “After consultation with my Generals and military experts, please be advised that the United States Government will not accept or allow...”

For nine minutes, before Trump sent the second part of the message declaring he was banning transgender people from military service, the Pentagon allegedly believed the president was about to announce the start of hostilities via Twitter. If true, it is not difficult to imagine the phone calls that went out to American military commanders in South Korea, Japan and around the world. It can be assumed that the North Korean, Chinese and Russian militaries were also on a knife edge.

For the best part of a decade, the American military has been actively planning and preparing for a war with China, which could be sparked by an attack on North Korea and rapidly escalate. Asked yesterday in Australia if he would launch nuclear weapons at China if ordered to do so by Trump, Admiral Scott Swift, the commander of the US Seventh Fleet, bluntly replied: “The answer would be yes.”