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Trump in Asia: On the eve of war

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The conduct of Donald Trump in Japan, the first country visited in his tour of Asia, strongly suggests that he is preparing to launch a war against North Korea.

The US president flew into the Yokata Air Base near Tokyo. Instead of beginning his stay in Japan by meeting with the country's political leaders, he elected first to speak to an assembly of American military personnel, part of the force being readied to make good his threat to "totally destroy" North Korea with "fire and fury."

Amid chants of "USA, USA," he shed his suit jacket and put on an Air Force bomber jacket. He proceeded to deliver a nationalist rant. The United States, he blustered, deploys "the most fearsome fighting force in the history of the world."

"America's warriors," he continued, "are prepared to defend our nation using the full range of our unmatched capabilities. No one—no dictator, no regime and no nation—should underestimate, ever, American resolve."

In the manner of a mafia don, Trump gloated: "Every once in a while, in the past, they underestimated us. It was not pleasant for them, was it?" In Japan, this comment was widely interpreted as a reference to the dropping of atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki and the slaughter of tens of thousands of civilians.

With his statements and demeanour, Trump personifies the decay of American imperialism and the criminal calculation of its strategists that the destruction of yet another impoverished country will provide some respite from its mounting external and internal crises. In American strategic circles, war with North Korea is considered a way of pushing back against the growing influence of China in Asia and signalling that US capitalism will not give up its position as the dominant power in the region and internationally.

For over 25 years, since the dissolution of the Soviet Union, US foreign policy has consisted of continuous war, intrigue and conspiracy aimed at compelling the world to accept American dominance. Entire countries have been devastated and millions have been killed. This record leaves little doubt that the United States, having failed to date to reverse its waning fortunes, is prepared once again to use nuclear weapons.

War is also being discussed within the Trump White House as a way of diverting and containing the political warfare within the American ruling class itself, which threatens to unravel his presidency and tear the Republican Party apart. It is viewed as a means of projecting outward the immense class antagonisms within the United States and heading off an explosion of struggle against social inequality and the impossible conditions that face millions of American workers.

The sheer criminality and insanity of what is not only being contemplated, but actively planned and prepared, is demonstrated in a report requested by two US congressmen and sent on October 27 by Secretary of Defense James “Mad Dog” Mattis. The document, authored by Rear Admiral Mike Dumont, bluntly states: “The only way to locate and destroy—with complete certainty—all components of North Korea’s nuclear program is through a ground invasion.”

Dumont asserts that any estimate of casualties is “challenging” because a war would involve a massive application of military violence by the US and its allies and the potential use of nuclear weapons by both sides.

Organisations independent of the Pentagon have nevertheless provided estimates. The Congressional Research Service puts the death toll in just the first several days of a war against North Korea at 300,000, providing nuclear weapons are not used. At least 25 million people on both sides of the border—that is, the entire population of the North and half the population of the South—would be “affected.”

As the *World Socialist Web Site* commented in September, any notion that such a monumental war crime would enhance the status of the United States is deranged. It will, the WSWS noted, “turn the US into a pariah state the world over, reviled for crimes without precedent since Hitler’s Germany ... The political, economic and indeed moral fallout from such a war would unleash an internal crisis of unprecedented dimensions, calling into question the very existence of the United States.”

Various US allies are nevertheless facilitating the preparations for war and egging on Trump and the cabal of generals and billionaires in his administration. On Sunday, Shinzo Abe, the ultra-nationalist prime minister of Japan, called the fascist demagogue who heads up the US administration his “marvellous friend” and hailed the Japan-US alliance as “unshakeable.”

Japanese imperialism is exploiting the hysteria over North Korea's nuclear and missile programs to reassert itself as a military power.

Australian imperialism has likewise given unconditional support, with its prime minister vowing the country will participate in any war and dispatching forces to join the US naval armada of three aircraft carrier battle groups assembling off the Korean coast.

On Tuesday, it will be the turn of the South Korean ruling class to show its allegiance, allowing Trump to address its parliament and reiterate his threats to turn the peninsula into an inferno of death and destruction. If hostilities begin, the South Korean government of President Moon Jae-in will hand over to the Pentagon its 625,000-strong army and 3.1 million reserves for Washington's planned invasion and occupation of the North.

In his speech to the US troops in Tokyo, Trump used the term "Indo-Pacific region," saying Washington "will partner with friends and allies to pursue a free and open Indo-Pacific region." The new designation for East Asia is intended to underline the recruitment of India into the US-led line-up against China, joining with Japan, South Korea and Australia.

While the Chinese and Russian regimes have largely acquiesced to the US war preparations to avoid an eruption of tensions with Washington, they have their own strategic interests on the Korean peninsula and in Asia more broadly. A US-led attack on North Korea could well result in an intervention by China, Russia or both, posing the danger of world nuclear war.

Capitalism and the nation-state system threaten humanity with catastrophe. The International Committee of the Fourth International and its national sections are fighting for the development of a mass international anti-war movement based on the working class and the struggle for world socialism.

As we have explained, the same insoluble crisis of the capitalist system that drives the ruling elites on the road to world war impels the international working class onto the road of socialist revolution. What is required is the building of the revolutionary leadership needed to impart to this movement a conscious program and strategy. It is time for WSWS readers and supporters to make the decision to join the ICFI and build that leadership.