

US military aggression: is Trump risking war?

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It did not take long for Donald Trump to play the strong man internationally. The man who criticised the wars in Afghanistan, Iraq and the US role as a world policeman is already acting as the world's Chief of Police.

First, he surprised the world with a military strike in Syria against the Assad regime in response to the alleged use of chemical weapons in Idlib province. This was the first military clash between the US and Syrian state forces. Then, he sent the aircraft carrier USS Carl Vinson to the Korean Peninsula and declared that all options were on the table to stop North Korea's nuclear weapons programme. A similar attack could not be excluded. Then followed the dropping of the largest non-nuclear bomb on an Islamic State base in Afghanistan.

The bourgeois media see all this as evidence of his unpredictable personality and, indeed, the billionaire businessman does not appear to be a master political strategist. Nonetheless, developments in the global political and economic arena are much more decisive than an individual's particular character traits. The US is a major imperialist power and as such is fighting for resources, markets and optimum conditions for exploitation around the world and in this fight it must be led by its new president.

From this global perspective, sudden political twists in response to dramatic events can certainly be surprising, but they are by no means arbitrary. The world's Great Powers pursue global strategies and these do not change from one day to the next. They are based on the profit interests of their most important and influential blocks of capital and on relations between the different imperialist powers and their allies. This is the background against which differences over strategy and interests within government and state apparatus take place.

A U-turn on Syria?

Trump was no fan of military intervention in Syria, as he made clear even before his election campaign. He would have left Syria alone because there are bigger problems than Assad. On the other hand, he accused Obama of reacting too softly and giving Russia too much room for manoeuvre. He would, however, have bombed Islamic State decisions. In his view, Obama's position was not integrated and had no long-term perspective.

Under Obama, Syria was not a priority for the US and that does not seem to have changed under Trump. The military strike on Syria therefore was undertaken for different reasons.

First, Trump is not exactly popular, let alone successful, after his first 100 days. The left and liberals are mobilising on the streets, the media are full of scepticism, there are clearly power struggles within his government's own ranks, links between his inner circle and Russia are a source of scandals, the proposed ban on immigration was blocked by the courts and the first attempt at health reform was opposed even by

many Republicans.

Second, Trump had criticised Obama sharply in the past for making the use of chemical weapons in Syria a "red line" but, when the Assad regime did use chemical weapons, he did not deliver on his threats. Thus the Democratic president had, on the one hand, manoeuvred himself into a disadvantageous position and, on the other, showed weakness at the crucial moment.

Trump needed to prove that he could act more decisively than Obama and not only for the benefit of US observers. In the eyes of US imperialism as a whole, restraint would have sent a fatal signal to Assad, Russia and the rest of the world. At least in the short term, his actions worked well for him. In the US Congress, he was applauded by both Republicans and Democrats and France, Germany, Great Britain and Turkey also responded positively and ensured that this violation of international law was not condemned.

Hands off North Korea!

At the same time, the Trump government is systematically re-arming itself. Soon after the election, the decision was taken to increase the military budget by a further \$54 billion. However, the strategic focus of US imperialism is not on Syria but on Asia, where China has been investing heavily in expanding its trade links.

Unlike the military strike on Syria, recent sabre rattling against North Korea is not a response to an unexpected event. The North Korean nuclear programme has long been a thorn in the side of US imperialism. Equally, if necessary, the isolated country is capable of defending itself through its development of long-range missiles. The strategists in Trump's cabinet now want to take a harder line; in the words of US vice president, Mike Pence, North Korea is the, "most dangerous and acute threat to peace and security" in the Asia-Pacific region.

According to US government officials, a nuclear device was already in position within the tunnel system of the North Korean test area. It was expected that another nuclear test would take place on the "Day of the Sun", that is, the birthday of Kim Il-sung, or on the 85th anniversary of the founding of the People's Army. On the "Day of the Sun", Kim opened a shopping centre but the next day a rocket was launched, although it exploded shortly after take-off.

According to various estimates, North Korea has up to 20 nuclear warheads, as well as missiles that could reach South Korea or Japan, but not the US. At the beginning of February, 2016, the country successfully launched a long-range rocket which put a satellite into orbit. Since then, there have been further tests of ballistic missiles.

For the ultra Stalinist country, one of the last remaining degenerate workers' states, a nuclear weapon is its only means of military deterrence. Although the country does have a huge military apparatus, its aircraft, tanks and other military equipment are obsolete. In a conventional military confrontation the People's Army would soon collapse and the "Party of Labour" fall from power. The US and its allies, however, are not only concerned with the elimination of a dictatorship but with the destruction of the planned economy in North Korea and the reintroduction of capitalism.

While the United States has about 6,800 atomic bombs with which to intimidate the world, it wants as few other states as possible to have such a capacity, and least of all those regimes which do not fit into its plans. For decades, North Korea has been forced to its knees by economic, diplomatic and military pressure. The US has imposed an embargo and since 2006 numerous sanctions have been passed by the

UN Security Council.

The North Korean state bureaucracy is undoubtedly a particularly repugnant example of Stalinist rule, a bizarre form of "socialism in one country". However, it must not be forgotten that the country has been effectively besieged by the US and its South Korean puppet regime for decades. In the light of US wars against states like Afghanistan, the North Korean regime's commitment to the development of nuclear weapons is anything but irrational. It is perhaps the main reason why it has never been attacked by the USA and its allies.

For the US, opposition to the nuclear weapon programme is also a pretext for stationing US troops and material in South Korea, not far from the Chinese border. For China, it is not just the presence of a 30,000 strong US military force in South Korea that is a provocation, even greater is the proposed deployment of the THAAD missile defence system in the south of the peninsula.

Now, the mobilisation of a naval force is aimed not only at North Korea but also at putting pressure on China to bring the regime "to see reason" and give up the nuclear-weapons programme. And this is having some effect; since February, China has not been accepting coal supplies from North Korea.

As revolutionaries, we oppose North Korea being made a pawn in the game between competing imperialist interests. Neither the US nor China, nor the UN, have any right to determine what weapon systems North Korea can use to defend itself or to blackmail the country. We reject any military threat, demand the immediate withdrawal of US troops and the abolition of all sanctions and embargoes against country.

Down with militarism and war!

With the recent military strike in Syria, increased militarisation of the south Korean peninsula and the dispatch of additional warships to the Pacific, Trump is playing with fire. In the case of Syria, Russia was informed in advance about the attack, but further such actions could lead to a confrontation with Russian imperialism and thus to an escalation of conflict between the two most dangerous powers. On the Korean peninsula, a war against the North is by no means excluded and this could lead to a military confrontation with China.

Since the global economic crisis of 2008, it is clear that the capitalist world order has become more and more unstable as new crisis centres emerge in Syria, Ukraine and Yemen. In recent years, power blocs such as the US and the EU have lost influence whilst China has gained and Russia is trying to exploit the new situation.

The aggressive, militarised foreign policy of US imperialism under Trump is intended to safeguard its own zones of influence and to hold back rivals like Russia and China. At the same time, the EU and Japan, as allies, are to be put in their place. All the powers are driven by the profit and exploitation interests of their most important industries and capital blocks. The current shifts in the global balance of power are part of the struggle for the redivision of the world. The workers, young people, peasants and farmers of all countries have no interest in opposing each other for such goals. Their interest lies in their joint struggle against imperialism and war.

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