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### **Halt the U.S. Drive to War with North Korea!**

U.S. television news programs (CNN, MSNBC, and Fox) have been pounding the war drums in the last few weeks and days, since North Korea successfully launched a long- range missile. The long *drift* to war with North Korea<sup>1</sup> has seemingly become, overnight, a U.S. *drive* to war with North Korea.

With his usual bluster and saber-rattling, President Trump on his recent tour of Europe continued to threaten "severe action" against North Korea. Trump has made matters worse by devolving authority to battlefield commanders who inflame tensions with their own incendiary statements. Example: the U.S. commander in Korea, General Vincent Brooks, stated publicly "the only thing which separates armistice from war" with North Korea is "our self-restraint, which is a choice."

Anyone in the U.S. could conclude, quite reasonably, that the U.S. is the aggrieved and threatened party; that North Korea obviously wishes to harm the U.S. people; that the U.S. confronts a new danger; that North Korea is the aggressor; that an innocent and remarkably patient U.S. is the intended victim.

Such a conclusion — all of it — would be false. Almost nothing of what the U.S. mainstream media says about North Korea is true. Only a grasp of the history and the broader context can shed light on this Korea Crisis.

A few key facts:

- The U.S. refusal to accept the legitimacy of the North Korean government (DPRK) is part of its long-term policy that any state in the world that follows an independent course is subject to being overthrown by the United States. Economic independence and sovereignty are considered by the U.S. financial and corporate elite as an act of aggression. Therefore, the DPRK, Viet Nam, Cuba, the USSR and now Russia, Syria, Venezuela, China and others have all been targeted by the U.S. politically and militarily. U.S. policy insists that it has the right to curb independent states, to determine a country's political leaders and socioeconomic system, and to use whatever means it takes – economic sanctions, sabotage, assassination, war — to achieve those goals.
- North Korea acceded to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) in 1985.
- In 1994, the DPRK agreed to freeze its nuclear program in return for the U.S. providing energy materials and generating stations. In January of 2002, President George W. Bush announced that the DPRK was part of the "Axis of Evil," and subject to regime change and even nuclear annihilation by the US. By the end of 2002, the DPRK had essentially exited

the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and began to develop nuclear weapons as a deterrent.

- The notion that North Korea poses a threat to the U.S. is false and absurd. It would be national suicide for the DPRK to start a war with the U.S. or South Korea, which have massively superior military capabilities. The DPRK has never threatened to start such a war, rather it has always asserted that it developed weapons of mass destruction in order to deter the U.S. and its allies from an (often threatened) U.S. attack such as those that decapitated Iraq and Libya. The constant denigration and demonization of the North Korean leadership (they are portrayed invariably as madmen, or clowns, or both) is a strategy to make the Big Lie of a threat from North Korea believable to an ill-informed and fearful U.S. public.
- The DPRK has offered to freeze its nuclear weapons program if the U.S. freezes its war practices targeting that country, actions aimed to precede negotiations. Russia and China have endorsed this approach. The US, however, refuses.

### **The U.S. is Provoking the Crisis**

North Korea would not have a nuclear weapons program if it were not under increasing threat from the U.S., which has been trying to force regime change in the North since 1945 by war, subversion, diplomatic isolation, and economic strangulation.

A recent article noted that,

As University of Chicago history professor Bruce Cumings [a leading U.S. historian of the Korean War], writes, for North Korea the nuclear crisis began in late February 1993, when General Lee Butler, head of the new U.S. 'Strategic Command,' announced that he was retargeting strategic nuclear weapons (i.e., hydrogen bombs) meant for the old U.S.S.R, on North Korea (among other places.) At the same time, the new CIA chief, James Woolsey, testified that North Korea was 'our most grave current concern.' By mid-March 1993, tens of thousands of [US] soldiers were carrying out war games in Korea...and in came the B1-B bombers, B-52s from Guam, several naval vessels carrying cruise missiles, and the like: whereupon the North pulled out of the NPT."<sup>ii</sup>

It is the U.S. that has been provoking the DPRK with its stationing of THAAD missile ("Terminal High-Altitude Area Defense"), a first-strike weapon, in South Korea over the last year. The U.S. is now testing the THAAD missiles. US-South Korea practice military maneuvers, which used to recur several times a year, are now almost incessant.

Moreover, the U.S. is further militarizing South Korea. Residents of the South Korean island of Jeju have strongly object to the South Korean military setting up a base on the island, with the possible deployment of the U.S. Navy's newest Zumwalt-class destroyer "to deter North Korean aggression." At the end of World War II, after the Japanese Imperialists had been defeated, Jeju Islanders rose up against the US-installed colonial dictatorship of Syngman Rhee. The U.S.

responded by employing the former brutal Japanese military rulers to violently put down the protests.

It is the U.S. that, again and again, has refused talks with North Korea's leadership.

In January [2017], North Korea offered to "sit with the U.S. anytime" to discuss U.S. war games and its nuclear weapons and ballistic missile programs. Pyongyang proposed that the United States "contribute to easing tension on the Korean peninsula by temporarily suspending joint military exercises in south Korea and its vicinity this year, and said that in this case the DPRK is ready to take such responsive steps as temporarily suspending the nuclear test over which the U.S. is concerned."

The North Korean proposal was seconded by China and Russia and recently by South Korea's new president Moon Jae-in. But Washington peremptorily rejected the proposal, refusing to acknowledge any equivalency between US-led war games, which U.S. officials deem 'legitimate' and North Korea's missile and nuclear tests, which they label 'illegitimate.'" (Stephen Gowans, *ibid.*)

Having partitioned Korea in 1945, the U.S. permanently stationed about 40,000 of troops in South Korea after the end of 1950-1953 hostilities and the 1953 armistice. The U.S. still denies Korea a peace treaty, which the DPRK has insisted on. But peace was never the intention of U.S. imperialism. U.S. foreign policy sees Northeast Asia only through the lens of domination.

The permanent occupation of South Korea was aimed at geopolitical control of the region, including elimination of the DPRK and moving U.S. missile and military forces right up to the Chinese and Russian borders. The occupation was symbolized by the giant, yearly provocative military maneuvers by the U.S. and its regional allies, such as South Korea. Such rehearsals for real war with the DPRK have stepped up dramatically in recent months.

Few Americans grasp the enormity of the trauma suffered by millions of Koreans in the war of 1950-53. The war devastated dozens of Korean cities. The U.S. dropped over 428,000 bombs over the capital Pyongyang alone, and killed 1.2 million people. The U.S. war on Korea included the use of napalm. The U.S. war's brutal and blatant violations of international humanitarian law remain unpunished.

The real nature of U.S. policy to the Korean peninsula is neo-colonial domination, through occupation and partition. This has been so since 1945. The U.S. has stooped to employ the same quislings that had run Korea as a Japanese colony. Prof. Cumings wrote in the *London Review of Books*:

To shore up their [1945] occupation, the Americans employed every last hireling of the Japanese they could find, including former officers in the Japanese military like Park Chung Hee and Kim Chae-gyu, both of whom graduated from the American military academy in Seoul in 1946. (After a military takeover in 1961 Park became president of South Korea, lasting a decade and a half until his ex-classmate Kim, by then head of the Korean Central Intelligence Agency, shot him dead over

dinner one night.)

After the Americans left in 1948 the border area around the 38th parallel was under the command of Kim Sok-won, another ex-officer of the Imperial Army, and it was no surprise that after a series of South Korean incursions into the North, full-scale civil war broke out on 25 June 1950. Inside the South itself – whose leaders felt insecure and conscious of the threat from what they called 'the north wind' – there was an orgy of state violence against anyone who might somehow be associated with the left or with communism.

The historian Hun Joon Kim found that at least 300,000 people were detained and executed or simply disappeared by the South Korean government in the first few months after conventional war began. My own work and that of John Merrill indicates that somewhere between 100,000 and 200,000 people died as a result of political violence before June 1950, at the hands either of the South Korean government or the U.S. occupation forces. In her recent book *Korea's Grievous War*, which combines archival research, records of mass graves and interviews with relatives of the dead and escapees who fled to Osaka, Su-kyoung Hwang documents the mass killings in villages around the southern coast. In short, the Republic of Korea was one of the bloodiest dictatorships of the early Cold War period; many of the perpetrators of the massacres had served the Japanese in their dirty work – and were then put back into power by the Americans.

The most important new factor is the destabilizing THAAD missiles. According to the U.S. peace organization, Global Network, an authority on questions of war technology, the U.S. has recently deployed the THAAD "missile defense" system in Seongju, South Korea despite massive protests by South Koreans. It is claimed by U.S. authorities that THAAD is there to intercept missiles from North Korea. But many experts believe China and Russia are the real targets, given the enormous range of THAAD radar, which counterproductively intensifies unnecessary military tension in the region. The U.S. has also deployed other "missile defense" systems through the Asia-Pacific region, Europe and the Middle East to encircle Russia and China. "Missile defense" is a key element in Pentagon first-strike attack planning.

### **De-escalate Tensions Now!**

The U.S. Peace Council joins with other U.S. antiwar organizations in demanding that

- The U.S. must reverse course. De-escalate tension now. No more provocations from the US. The United States and South Korea must immediately cease military maneuvers in the region, providing North Korea with an opportunity to reciprocate. The THAAD missiles near the North Korea-South Korea border must be de-activated and removed.
- The United States must engage in good faith, direct talks with North Korea. Such talks should include the perspective of a peace treaty to end the Korean War. A commitment to denuclearization should not be a precondition for talks with North Korea.
- The United States and all states in the region must stop military actions that could be

interpreted as provocative, including such actions as forward deployment of additional military forces by the United States, and the testing or assertion of territorial claims by deploying of military forces in contested areas by any state. Withdrawing U.S. naval forces newly concentrated near the Korean peninsula would be an important confidence-building step.

Korea — all of it — has a right to its sovereignty and independence. The recently elected South Korean leader, Moon Jae-in, represents a break with the repressive and reactionary leaders of the past. He campaigned on a number of progressive ideas -- more independence from the US; more engagement with the North. But he has had to contend with bullying by a U.S. Administration bent on heightening tensions. The U.S. has no right to enforce the partition of the Korean peninsula and to block steps to unity and social progress desired by the people of Korea, North and South. War can still be prevented, but only if the antiwar movement compels the U.S. to reverse course.

i More properly, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, the DPRK. Here the terms will be used interchangeably.

ii Stephen Gowans in "The Real Reason Washington is Worried about North Korea's ICBM Test" (*What's Left*, July 5, 2017 <https://gowans.wordpress.com>)