

United States, “the greatest purveyor of violence in the world”: Trump’s Dangerous Saber-Rattling

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During the presidential election campaign, both Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump favored a stepped-up military component of foreign policy. They differed on what the main target should be. Clinton aimed at Russia, while Trump singled out China.

Clinton not only wanted to continue the policy of both Republican and Democratic administrations since the collapse of the Soviet Union of steadily expanding NATO up to Russia’s borders in Europe, she proposed to challenge Russia in Syria.

With the cruise missile strike in Syria, Trump has adopted Clinton’s position. While the strike was ostensibly aimed at Syrian President Assad, it has quickly become apparent that its real target was Russia. Russian leaders have characterized relations with the United States as having reached a new low, and Trump has publicly said the same thing.

At the same time, Trump has ratcheted up the U.S. confrontation with North Korea, but the larger target is China. Trump was having dessert of chocolate cake with Chinese premier Xi at Trump’s second White House in Florida, when he casually mentioned to Xi the cruise missile attack against Syria after the fact. The implicit threat was clear.

Subsequently, Trump has publically demanded that China force North Korea to give up its nuclear program, or the U.S. would “solve the problem” unilaterally, leaving military action on the table.

Further flexing his military muscle, Trump then dropped the MOAB super-bomb on Afghanistan, aimed at the small ISIS forces in that country.

The cruise missile strike against a Syrian military airport did not affect the actual military struggle in that country. The civil war in Afghanistan is between the Taliban and the equally reactionary forces around the current government, not with ISIS. So far, the threats against North Korea and China are verbal, not actual.

But all this saber-rattling is very dangerous. The U.S., Russia, China and North Korea are nuclear powers. Any actual military confrontation on any front could get out of hand. Trump has openly expressed that nuclear weapons are “useable” in any potential conflict.

Both Democratic and Republican politicians and the capitalist media have rallied around Trump’s ratcheting up of military threats against Russia and east Asia, and the increase of U.S. troops in the Mideast and Afghanistan. His new belligerence against Russia has muted Democratic charges that he is a puppet of Putin.

In the context of Trump’s failure to coral the Republican Party to deliver on repealing Obamacare, his difficulties in getting support in both parties to rewrite the tax code, exactly no progress on “bringing jobs back to the USA”, he is using the time-honored tactic of military aggressiveness to

refurbish his image as a strongman.

But the bipartisan support he is getting has deeper roots. The U.S.-dominated “world order” is weakening. The European Union, part of the structure of the U.S. empire, is wobbling. Russia is fighting back against NATO’s aggressiveness. In Asia, China is rising and threatens U.S. economic dominance and even military dominance in the South China Sea. At the same time, the U.S. military remains more powerful than the militaries of all other countries combined.

This situation creates frustration: “If we are so dominating militarily, why is our ‘world order’ weakening?” The powerful wounded beast is tempted to lash out with its main strength – its military. This is what makes it dangerous, as warmongering and maybe more war will not reverse the decline of the U.S. empire. The wars the U.S. has launched in the Mideast and Afghanistan, grinding on for years, destroying countries, are a case in point. There is no realistic path out of this morass for the U.S. short of ignoble retreat from the Mideast, and so far it keeps plunging in deeper.

Very little is widely known in the U.S. about Washington’s history with and imperialist aggression against Korea. With the defeat of Japan, the U.S. sought to take over Japan’s former colony. It was able to occupy only the southern part of the country, as the USSR opposed having U.S. troops near its border. The U.S. imposed military rule until 1948, when it organized “elections” to establish the new country. This installed a South Korean dictator, and the country was ruled by U.S.-backed dictators for most of its existence. In 1950 the U.S. invaded Korea to back South Korea in the civil war with the North.

Korea never invaded the United States, the United States invaded Korea.

When U.S. forces drove deep into North Korea, China, which was being transformed by revolution since 1949, intervened because the U.S. threatened to keep going into China to reverse the revolution. The Chinese and North Korean forces then drove the U.S. out of the North, and the war ended in a stalemate. This resulted in a ceasefire, but not a peace treaty. The U.S. and South Korea remain legally still at war with North Korea.

The U.S. has remained hostile ever since, seeking to finally win the Korean war. In a recent Democracy Now program, the new threats were discussed by Bruce Cumings, professor of history at the University of Chicago, and Christine Hong, associate professor at the University of California Santa Cruz campus.

Hong made these observations: Vice President Pence and Secretary of State Tillerson “made comments that Obama’s policy of strategic patience [with North Korea] is a thing of the past. I think that fundamentally misconstrues what the nature of strategic patience was.... Obama waged a campaign of cyberwarfare against North Korea. Far from being a kinder, gentler or even softer policy, Obama’s policy was, in point of fact, warfare....

“Even the policy of military action against North Korea would be inconceivable if the Obama administration hadn’t made the militarization of the larger Asia-Pacific region one of its topmost foreign policy objectives. Under the Obama strategic pivot to the region, the U.S. concentrated its naval forces to a tune of 60 percent ... in the Pacific region.”

She went on to say, “I want to remind your listeners and viewers that the United States performs the largest war game in the world with its South Korean ally twice annually.... It rehearses the decapitation of the North Korean leadership, the invasion and occupation of North Korea. It rehearses a nuclear first strike against North Korea with dummy munitions.”

There have been many crises between the U.S. and North Korea over the years. One in 1994 caused

then President Bill Clinton to threaten a preemptive strike on Yongbin plutonium facility. These crises are always treated in the media as separate and apart from previous crises. Cumings adds, "each crisis is treated as if it has no background. The fact is that American nuclear intimidation of North Korea goes back to the Korean War.

"After the Korean War, in 1958, we installed hundreds of nuclear weapons in the south, the first country to bring nuclear weapons onto the peninsula. North Korea has, since the late 1950s, had to find a way to deter the U.S. from using those weapons. For decades, they built underground. They have something like 15,000 underground facilities of a national security nature.

"But it was inevitable that when threatened with nuclear weapons - and Chris is right: President Obama threatened North Korea with nuclear weapons many times by sending B-2 bombers over the south, dropping dummy bombs on islands, and so on. It was just inevitable that North Korea would seek a deterrent."

China is extremely worried about the present crisis. It opposes any attempt by the U.S. to overthrow the North Korean government, as this would result in a unified Korea under the U.S. military umbrella right on China's borders.

During his recent provocative visit to South Korea, Pence not only went to the demilitarized zone separating the two Koreas to glare across into North Korea for the cameras, he reiterated that a military option was on the table, and that the U.S. would go ahead with building a missile defense system in South Korea, which China correctly claims is really aimed at China.

In this volatile situation, any miscalculation or U.S. military action could swiftly get out of hand, renewing the Korean War with extremely dangerous consequences.

The whole situation could be solved by the U.S. signing a peace treaty with North Korea, finally end the Korean War, and ending the provocative twice yearly war games aimed at the North. North Korea has repeatedly pledged that if those steps were taken, they would have no need for nuclear weapons and would destroy those they have. All this could be negotiated in setting up the peace treaty, but Washington rejects this out of hand.

With regard to Russia, the U.S. continues to expand NATO toward Russia. In Ukraine, the fighting between the Kiev government in the west and the Russian-speaking east smolders. The U.S. supports Kiev, and Russia supports the east.

A flash point is Syria. The cruise missile attack has caused the Russians to dig in their support for the Syrian regime - but not necessarily Assad as an individual in the future. The Russians want to keep their long-standing military bases in Syria, which give them access to the eastern Mediterranean. With both Russian and U.S. air forces bombing Sunnis, further fostering Sunni extremism, a clash can happen.

For example, the U.S.-led coalition is fighting to retake Raqqa from ISIS. So is the coalition of Russia, Iran and the Syrian regime. These forces, including their air forces, could clash, leading to a new crisis.

In his historic 1967 speech denouncing the Vietnam War, Martin Luther King said that the U.S. was the greatest purveyor of violence in the world. This remains true. We must oppose U.S. military adventures and threats, and all governments which support them, in these dangerous times.

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