

# Statement on the Korean crisis

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**This statement was adopted by the Executive Bureau of the Fourth International on 15 October 2017.**

**I.** Before the outbreak of the present Korean crisis, political and military tensions were already high in East Asia between China, Japan and the United States. With the Washington/Pyongyang conflict they have reached a level that has not been equaled for many years and already have profound implications in the region. They strengthen the dynamics of militarization, encourage the currents and regimes of the nationalist right (particularly in Japan), reduce the autonomous diplomatic capacity of the new South Korean presidency, and put the anti-militarist and pacifist grassroots movements under increasing pressure

US imperialism has been able to retake the initiative in East Asia against China. It is thus sending a message to all countries in the region. In particular, it is reminding Manila that alliances are not changed like shirts, while the Pentagon, in accord with the existing agreements, has provided multifaceted support to the Philippine army in the conflict with jihadist groups in Marawi.

The three major powers (the United States, China and Russia) are directly concerned by the Korean crisis, which has also given a new boost to the nuclear arms race. US imperialism is affirming its intention to re-establish its hegemony in this part of the world.

**II.** The United States bears a historical and recurring major responsibility for this state of crisis. The Korean War (1950-1953) aimed primarily at breaking the Korean popular movement and countering Maoist China. By refusing to sign a peace agreement, the US is holding a permanent threat of reconquest over North Korea. When agreements to freeze the North Korean nuclear program were signed with Pyongyang, Washington did not respect them.

From cyber war to economic sanctions and joint military manoeuvres with Seoul, Washington has pursued a very aggressive policy against North Korea.

Donald Trump's apocalyptic statements are contributing to growing tensions. At the UN he even threatened to "totally destroy" North Korea. There is more to this than the excessive language specific to the President. The Korean crisis is helping the US Army demand a significant increase in its budget. The goal is not only to re-establish US hegemony in East Asia. As the established great power, the United States also wants to block the rise of the emerging power of China. The Washington / Pyongyang conflict has a global dimension.

**III.** Kim Jong-un's policy has disastrous consequences. It is true that the country is under threat and that the North Korean regime wants to guard against this threat. Seeing the fate of Saddam Hussein or Gaddafi, it concluded that only the possession of an operational nuclear weapon could guarantee its survival. In doing so, however, it has become an active factor fueling the never-ending spiral of militarization in the region and nuclear escalation.

Pyongyang could have chosen another policy: to respond to the offer of dialogue from the new

president of South Korea, Moon Jae-in; oppose US diplomacy on the international level; rely on the pacifist sentiments of the Japanese or South Korean population and on the existence in Asia of numerous antimilitarist and antinuclear movements; thus avoiding being isolated by Washington.

Instead, Kim Jong-un chose the policy of the test of strength and a confrontation Pyongyang / Washington. This choice has contributed to its own isolation and the need to mobilize increasing resources in order to finance its armaments program at the expense of North Korea's working population.

These political choices come from the nature of the North Korean regime, hyper-repressive, ethno-nationalist, dynastic and dictatorial. Its foreign policy reflects its domestic policy. It is very difficult for this regime to conceive of an international diplomatic battle or to appeal to popular mobilizations of solidarity.

**IV.** Experts fear that the escalation of "provocations" and "counter-provocations" may result in more or less controlled real acts of war involving the great powers. However, the evolution of the situation is very difficult to predict due to several unknowns.

Donald Trump has received sufficient support to carry out his policy up to the current level of tension. But in the United States, important sectors of the bourgeoisie also seem to favour diplomatic action to initiate de-escalation. What policy will be needed tomorrow?

The North Korean regime has shown much more resilience than Washington expected, but will it resist the pressure, notably the economic duress of the new series of sanctions?

How will the Chinese leadership try to retake the initiative in East Asia at a time when its influence on Pyongyang is very weak?

In any event, the situation is already so critical that progressive forces must mobilize on this issue.

**V.** There is an urgent need to block the spiral of tensions and initiate de-escalation. Washington must put an end to its threats and its military operations, including the US-South Korean naval manoeuvres. Pyongyang must suspend nuclear tests and missile launches. Talks must begin to ensure continued de-escalation.

**VI.** The responsibilities of the anti-war movement are great. From South Korea to Pakistan, Asian movements are now on the front line, but they need support from their sister organizations in the rest of the world. The Korean crisis must be put on the agenda of all.

The same applies to movements fighting specifically for the abolition of nuclear weapons. The arms race is resuming. China, for example, wants to respond to the installation of the Thaad anti-missile missiles in South Korea by deploying a fleet of strategic submarines which, unlike Russia, it does not yet possess. The nuclear non-proliferation treaty is a failure. The alternative is simple: either nuclear disarmament will be imposed, or nuclear weapons will be used again, as they were in 1945 against the populations of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and as the Pentagon envisaged doing during the Korean War of 1950-1953.

The UN's adoption of a treaty banning nuclear weapons at the initiative of 122 countries shows that this struggle can be waged, as does the awarding of the Noble Prize to the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN).

Based in particular on this rise in consciousness, all "normalization" of nuclear weapons must be opposed. A mass preventive political rejection of the use of these weapons must confront all

countries that envisage using them.

In some countries, radical left-wing currents, including from the Fourth International, are already heavily involved in nuclear disarmament movements (India, Pakistan, Japan, the Philippines, and elsewhere). Strengthening these movements is definitely a task of the hour that concerns all progressive forces.

**Executive Bureau of the Fourth International**, 15 October 2017

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\* <http://www.internationalviewpoint.org/spip.php?article5199>