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European Languages

زبانهای اروپائی

25 May 2018

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26.05.2018

Trump calls off summit with North Korea

The White House announced yesterday it had called off the planned June 12 summit in Singapore between President Donald Trump and North Korean chairman Kim Jong-un. The cancellation is intended to ratchet up the military and economic pressure on North Korea.

The aim is to compel Kim's regime to submit to the main US pre-condition for a possible rapprochement—the destruction of its small arsenal of nuclear weapons and the shutdown of its nuclear facilities and programs.

Trump declared that the US military, backed by South Korea and Japan, was “ready if necessary” if North Korea retaliated by doing anything “foolish.”

The formal letter sent by Trump notifying Kim of the decision asserted that the cancellation was due to “the tremendous anger and open hostility displayed in your most recent statement.” Trump again threatened North Korea, saying US nuclear capabilities are “so massive and powerful that I pray to God they will never have to be used.”

The latest North Korea statement was published on May 24 in the name of Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs Choe Son Hui. He responded to comments by US Vice President Mike Pence in a Fox News interview on May 21.

Pence stated that if North Korea did not agree to “dismantle its nuclear weapons’ program,” the situation would “end like the Libyan model ended.”

In December 2003, Libya agreed to give up its nuclear and chemical weapons’ capabilities in exchange for diplomatic normalisation and an end to economic sanctions. Less than

eight years later, the US and European powers reneged on the agreement and attacked Libya with a massive air assault, killing thousands and devastating the country. American-backed Islamist rebels hunted down and murdered Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi on October 20, 2011.

The Pyongyang regime denounced Pence's implied threat of war and Kim's assassination. Its statement labelled Pence's remarks as "ignorant and stupid" and asserted that it had the military capacity to "make the US taste an appalling tragedy." Washington had to choose between "dialogue or encounter us in a nuclear-to-nuclear showdown." The foreign ministry said it would suggest that Kim "reconsider" the June 12 summit.

Before the North Korean statement, Trump had already foreshadowed calling off the summit. Standing alongside South Korean President Moon Jae-in on May 22, he told journalists:

"We're moving along and we'll see what happens. There are certain conditions that we want and I think we will get those conditions. And if we don't, then we don't have a meeting... If it doesn't happen, maybe it will happen later. Maybe it will happen at a different time."

According to CNBC, White House officials told journalists that a North Korean delegation failed to attend a pre-summit discussion in Singapore and communication "had basically ceased."

On several occasions, Trump has blamed China and Chinese President Xi Jinping for North Korea's shift on earlier statements by Kim that it would agree to denuclearise in exchange for security guarantees and a peace treaty to formally end the 1950–53 Korean War.

The broader US and South Korean offer to Pyongyang includes opening the north up to large-scale capitalist investment, while continuing the division of the peninsula into two states. North Korea would be transformed into a cheap labour export zone and tax haven for transnational corporations. The ruling clique around Kim could enrich itself by serving as "joint owners" of various enterprises.

The strategic objective of US imperialism is to flip North Korea from being a buffer for Beijing against American forces in East Asia, into a militarised US client state on China's northern border.

There is little question that the Chinese regime is applying all possible pressure on North Korea, including through offers of substantial economic assistance, for it to reject the US overtures and remain within Beijing's sphere of influence.

Substantial divisions may exist within the North Korean elite itself. Countries that have sought “deals” with US imperialism have, as one North Korean official stated, met a “miserable fate.”

Iraq was invaded in 2003 and its leader Saddam Hussein hung. Libya was destroyed in 2011. The same year, Syria was plunged into a murderous civil war that continues to rage. The North Korean regime may have concluded that its best chance of survival is to seek Chinese backing and defy the US.

The Trump administration, however, has clearly not given up on the possibility that it can draw North Korea into a rapprochement that drastically changes the balance of forces in East Asia to the detriment of China.

The ongoing effort is reflected in Trump’s letter to Kim yesterday. Alongside the implicit threat of nuclear destruction, Trump referred to the “wonderful dialogue” the two leaders had developed. He “very much looked forward to meeting you.” If Kim had a “change of mind,” he should “not hesitate to call me or write.”

On May 22, in the most sweeping overture yet made to North Korea, Trump had suggested that “denuclearisation” would not need to be a rapid process, but could take place over an “incremental” period of time. Under definite conditions, such as if North Korean missiles were aimed at China instead of South Korea, Japan and American targets, the US would not necessarily oppose the missiles’ existence.

The terrible alternative that has been posited by the White House, and for which the US military is preparing, is a catastrophic war on the Korean Peninsula that could see the use of nuclear weapons and cost millions of lives.

Pence blustered on May 21: “President Trump made it clear that the United States of America under his leadership is not going to tolerate the regime in North Korea possessing nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles that threaten the United States and our allies.” A “military option” to disarm North Korea, the vice president declared, “never came off” the table.