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Fears of nuclear war grow after Trump's threat to annihilate North Korea

By Alex Lantier

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US President Donald Trump's fascistic tirade at the UN General Assembly in New York on Tuesday, in which he declared Washington "ready, willing and able" to "totally destroy North Korea," shocked and horrified people around the world yesterday.

The North Korean regime's Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) warned that it might now attack US targets if it detects that US forces are preparing to destroy it. The KCNA said Pyongyang would prepare a "resolute and pre-emptive strike if they show any slight sign of provocation. In case the US opts for confrontation and war at last... it will meet horrible nuclear strike and miserable and final ruin."

As UN officials and the world's other major powers react to Trump's speech, it is ever clearer that the ruling elite internationally is politically bankrupt, in a state of perplexity, terror and denial in the face of the danger that Washington will launch or provoke a nuclear war. None of them have any way to stop military escalation by the imperialist hegemon at the center of the world capitalist system. They are silent on the barbaric nature of Trump's remarks and the danger of a nuclear war that could destroy humanity.

At the UN General Assembly in New York, where Trump had delivered his genocidal threats against the North Korean people the day before, dozens of countries signed a Treaty on the

Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons. Brazilian President Michel Temer was the first head of state to sign the treaty. UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres hailed it as “an important step toward the universally held goal of a world free of nuclear weapons.”

In fact, the treaty was an elaborate and impotent charade. It was boycotted by the United States, Britain, and France, all of which have nuclear weapons. Since each of these powers can veto adoption of the treaty at the UN Security Council, the treaty is dead on arrival. The NATO alliance also issued a statement that was silent on Trump’s threats against North Korea, but denounced the treaty, saying it “disregards the realities of the increasingly challenging security environment.”

In one of the few comments addressing the scope of the war that is being prepared, China’s state-run *Global Times* warned that the initial US attack on North Korea could claim hundreds of millions of lives in densely-populated areas of Northeast Asia. However, it said nothing on what would occur after the initial US strike, and sought to soften its criticisms of Trump by dividing the blame equally between Trump and North Korea.

It wrote, “‘Totally destroying North Korea’ would bring an unbearable ecological disaster to Northeast Asia. Northeast China, the Shandong peninsula and South Korea would all be engulfed by nuclear fallout. Thus the US president, instead of boasting of military strength, should try to avoid such a war... If a nuclear war broke out, that would be a crime against Chinese and South Koreans by Pyongyang and Washington.”

While the *Global Times* did not say how the Chinese regime might respond to such an attack, it is well known that its nuclear missiles can reach the entire continental United States. As China and Russia hold a joint naval exercise between Vladivostok and the Sea of Okhotsk, north of the Korean Peninsula, it is clear that Beijing and Moscow are preparing retaliatory action that could rapidly spiral into a global war with US forces in Asia, Europe, the Middle East, and throughout the world.

Russia is currently carrying out its Zapad military exercise, and yesterday the TASS news agency reported that Russian forces had successfully tested RS-24 strategic nuclear missiles, which hit their targets in Russia’s Kamchatka peninsula.

Trump’s threats have also exposed the deep rift between the United States and the European powers, particularly Germany and France. Without addressing or condemning Trump’s threat of a genocidal attack on North Korea, European officials and media made clear that they are moving into overt opposition to US foreign policy across a range of issues and military conflicts worldwide.

The French daily *Le Monde* commented, “For the rest of the international community, [Trump’s] speech is a terrible challenge. This is particularly the case for Europe, the privileged partner and ally of the United States, now opposed to Washington on numerous issues like the climate, Iran, multilateralism. President Emmanuel Macron’s speech two hours later was a striking contradiction to Trump. The Atlantic alliance is losing its meaning.”

German Chancellor Angela Merkel warned that in North Korea, “only a peaceful, diplomatic solution to this conflict is possible. Anything else would lead to catastrophe, I am deeply convinced of that.” She added that she would fight “with all my strength” for a peaceful solution.

German Foreign Minister Sigmar Gabriel blandly called Trump’s genocidal threats “inappropriate,” adding: “Such warlike rhetoric does not get us a single step further.”

French President Emmanuel Macron had already spoken at the UN just after Trump’s speech, which Macron pointedly did not attend. He said that France “will oppose any escalation” in Korea, as well as against other regimes around the world threatened by Trump. Macron said a unilateral attempt to scupper the 2015 Iranian nuclear treaty, as Trump is threatening, would be “irresponsible” and added that he had warned Tehran and Washington that a “deadly spiral” into war was possible.

There is little doubt that the European governments will respond to the growing threat of war by accelerating their multi-billion-euro defense spending increases, led by Germany and its now three-year-old campaign to re-militarize its foreign policy.

Like Trump’s UN speech itself, the reaction of the European and international powers is the product of a long evolution. In the quarter century since the Stalinist bureaucracy dissolved the Soviet Union, removing the military counterweight to Washington, US imperialism sought to counteract its growing economic weakness by resorting to escalating aggressive war in the Middle East and across the globe. It continued to serve as the financial and military linchpin of world capitalism, however, and a model for the increasingly militaristic and austerity policies of its European rivals.

The lack of any international condemnation of Trump’s threat to murder 25 million North Koreans is a measure of the political degeneration of the ruling class worldwide. They are saying nothing because—after a quarter century in which the European powers and other US allies joined US-led wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, or Libya, Syria, and Ukraine—they themselves are prepared to resort to war and horrific levels of violence.

The bankruptcy of the ruling elite underscores that the only force that can oppose the drive to war is the international working class, acting on a socialist and revolutionary program. This points to the significance of Trump’s vitriolic denunciation of socialism in his speech to the UN, which politicians and the media passed over in virtually total silence. The political representatives of a corrupt and super-rich ruling class, well aware that they are on the verge of a horrific nuclear conflagration, fear that a war crisis could provoke a rapid political shift in the population and the complete discrediting of world capitalism.

Instead, the European powers as well as China and Russia are moving into ever sharper diplomatic and strategic conflict with the United States. At the UN Security Council yesterday, Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko requested OSCE monitors be dispatched to the disputed Russophone Donbass region, where Kiev has faced opposition from Russian-backed militias since the 2014 NATO-backed coup in Ukraine.

There are continuing calls in Washington to arm the Ukrainian regime against Moscow—a policy which pushed Germany and France to warn of the danger of “total war” with Russia and conclude a separate peace deal with Ukraine and Russia in 2015 in Minsk. Yesterday, Macron announced that France would seek a new meeting with Germany, Russia and Ukraine to “continue, in the context of the Minsk accords, the de-escalation of violence and reforms in Ukraine.”