

Trump's Nuclear Threats Against North Korea and Iran Pose Existential Crisis for Humanity

October 1, 2017

U.S. President Donald Trump crossed to new stage in the annals of warmongering in his United Nations speech of September 19 when he declared, "The United States has great strength and patience, but if it is forced to defend itself or its allies, we will have no choice but to totally destroy North Korea." This threat to incinerate an entire nation of 25 million people amounts to nothing less than genocide. At the UN itself, the speech was met with stunned silence, with one major exception, vigorous applause from the militaristic Prime Minister of Israel, Benjamin Netanyahu.



During these same weeks, Trump has also been threatening to tear up the Iran nuclear agreement by refusing to certify that the Iranian regime is in compliance, even though it is. If he decertifies the agreement in October, as expected, this will open the door for the U.S. Congress to issue new sanctions against Iran. Congress, which is full of Netanyahu supporters, including virtually all Republicans plus many neocons in the Democratic Party like Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer, would likely vote for such sanctions. This would effectively end the Iran nuclear agreement, setting the stage for a military confrontation between the U.S. and Iran in the Persian Gulf.

What is noteworthy about this new stage of U.S. imperialism is its utterly degenerate character. The former talk of human rights, freedom, the community of nations, or other ideological fig leaves has vanished, replaced by that of America First and the open threat of genocide. As Marx wrote at the time of the Bonapartist coup in France of 1852, "it seems that the state has merely reverted to its oldest form, to the shameless, bare-faced rule of sword and cross." And while Trumpism shares many features with Bonapartism, not least its contempt for democracy, one key difference is that Trump heads a nuclear superpower that has the capacity to literally destroy the entire world.

As the U.S. economy continues its long decline since the 1970s, the appearance of Trump as president constitutes a marker in that decline. At the same time, his bellicose language seems aimed at compensating at a military-political level the ground that the U.S. has lost economically to China and other emerging powers. Of course, the U.S. remains the world's largest economy, plus its military power remains by far the strongest in the world, with one major rival, Russia, at least in terms of the number of nuclearly armed missiles at its disposal.

Still, the wild gyrations of Trump are not a sign of strength, but of fundamental weakness in a U.S. political system where the liberal wing of the ruling classes had so alienated large swaths of the population that a sexist, racist demagogue could squeak out a victory, also made possible by the opportunistic support of the conservative wing of those ruling classes. And of course, four decades of economic stagnation played a major part in alienating from the ruling elites much of the population, whether those who actually voted for Trump, or those who stayed home rather than vote for more of the same.

What of North Korea and Iran, their bellicosity and their repression of their citizens? North Korea fits and even exceeds the normal definition of a totalitarian state-capitalism. It is a regime where the working class is ruthlessly exploited, sometimes under direct state compulsion. It also denies even the slightest political or cultural freedom to its population. The Iranian regime is a reactionary theocracy that has been forced to loosen its authoritarian controls somewhat in the face of mass opposition. Yet it remains essentially a clerical dictatorship where labor activists, feminists, and all form of dissenters are regularly imprisoned, tortured, and subjected to medieval physical punishments like flogging.

Unlike the U.S., however, neither of these regimes has the capacity to destroy the world, or even its neighbors. Although it is true that North Korean artillery could probably level Seoul, the capital of U.S.-supported South Korea, North Korea's nuclear weapons do not yet have a delivery system, while Iran's nuclear program had not even been fully weaponized when it was frozen as part of the U.S.-UN nuclear agreement. Iran has, of course, intervened in Syria and Lebanon in support of some very reactionary forces, but that is not an existential threat to the region, let alone the world.

Both of these regimes, especially North Korea, have also engaged in incendiary rhetoric against the U.S. and its allies. However, the main difference between these threats and those of Trump is that neither North Korea nor Iran has the capacity to actually carry out its threats. Especially in the case of North Korea, the threats are part of the same rhetorical repertoire the regime has been using for decades as a negotiating ploy.

Another factor that links Iran and North Korea and that makes the situation so dire is that if Trump tears up the agreement with Iran, this would give North Korea little confidence that the U.S. would abide by any agreement it struck with the Trump administration. This only deepens the danger of war in East Asia.

Trump's threats and actions against North Korea and Iran may spin out of control, plunging the world into a conflict that could call our very existence into question. This is why we need to use all our strength to mobilize against these war threats, to stay the hand of a U.S imperial behemoth that is being led by a demagogue with neofascist inclinations, a man who expresses open admiration for war and violence.

In so doing, we need to call for the abolition of all nuclear weapons, starting with world and regional powers like the U.S., Russia, Britain, France, and Israel. We need also to abolish the capitalist system that gave rise to these weapons of mass destruction.

Stop Trump's War Threats against North Korea and Iran!

Abolish All Nuclear Weapons and the Capitalist System that Produced Them!

Approved as a Statement of the Steering Committee of the International Marxist-Humanist Organization