

Pushing to brink of war: U.S. sends warships, jets to Korea

By [Deirdre Griswold](#)

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Scores of U.S. warships and fighter jets, carrying more than 6,000 crew members and reinforced by ships, planes and 70,000 soldiers of the armed forces of south Korea, began carrying out joint military “exercises” in the sea west of Korea on Nov. 28. They have brought the divided peninsula to the brink of war.

In July some 20 U.S. warships and 200 planes had carried out similar maneuvers with the armed forces of the south. So this is the second time in less than six months that Washington and the right-wing south Korean regime of Lee Myung-Bak have carried out a grave provocation against the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (socialist north Korea).

Nor can China, which lies just 200 miles to the northwest across the Yellow Sea, fail to be alarmed at such aggressive military moves by the U.S. Two days before the joint maneuvers began, the Chinese Foreign Ministry said: “We hold a consistent and clear-cut stance on the issue. We oppose any party to take any military acts in our exclusive economic zone without permission.” (Xinhua, Nov. 26) Nevertheless, the U.S. and south Korea went right ahead with the maneuvers.

Hostilities began with shells fired at DPRK

This time the south Korean forces went a step further than in July. Days before the joint exercises with the U.S. were scheduled to begin, they fired live shells into the waters right off the DPRK from the island of Yeonpyeong, which lies far west of the south Korean mainland and very close to the coast of the DPRK. Both the island and the waters are disputed territory. The U.S. had arbitrarily drawn a line on a map years ago claiming the island for south Korea, but the DPRK has never accepted that.

Thus, the military who ordered these shells fired at 1:00 p.m. on Nov. 23 knew full well that this was a brazen provocation against the DPRK – one that could easily lead to a response in kind, especially since the DPRK had already characterized the “exercises” as a simulated invasion of the north.

If south Korea and its huge sponsor, the U.S., had wanted to avoid confrontation with the DPRK, would they have fired shells into a disputed area? Especially since the DPRK had already declared that the military maneuvers were “simulating an invasion of the north”?

The provocation comes from the U.S. and the Lee Myung-bak regime, not the DPRK.

An hour and a half later, at 2:34 p.m. after making immediate verbal protests, the DPRK

retaliated by shelling the south's military base on Yeonpyeong. According to officials in Seoul, two soldiers were killed. They later claimed that two civilians had died as well.

Immediately, the propaganda mill in both the U.S. and south Korea went to ear-splitting levels, blaming the DPRK for "irrational" and "brutal" behavior. The Pentagon announced it would have to send the USS George Washington – a nuclear-powered carrier with 6,000 sailors and an air wing of 75 fighter jets that had taken part in the July "exercises" – plus five other warships to back up the forces of the Lee regime in joint naval maneuvers.

While the south Korean military ultimately takes its orders from the Pentagon, the U.S. claimed it had not been involved with the south Korean "exercises" at the time of the exchange of artillery. But the facts show otherwise. CNN.com on Nov. 23 reported that "Some U.S. forces had been helping the South Koreans in a military training exercise, but were not in the shelled area." Right. They were part of the provocation but stayed out of range. Like U.S. "advisers" in Vietnam in the early years of that war.

However, even with a media blitz focused on inventing reasons for north Korean "aggression," sometimes an article slips through that blows a hole in the fairy tales.

Thomas D. Farrell, a former U.S. Army Reserve intelligence officer who served in Korea and says he is "no apologist for North Korea," explains how these events were seen by the DPRK: "This attack occurred on an island in the West (Yellow) Sea. Although there is a clearly defined Military Line of Demarcation on land, there is no clearly defined line running into the ocean. The so-called Northern Limit Line has never been accepted by North Korea, and has been the subject of many skirmishes over the years. A look at a map shows that Yeonpyeong Island is rather close to North Korea. The ROK [south Korean] Navy was dropping shells in nearby waters as part of its annual Hoguk military exercises which, like all military exercises, are condemned by the North Koreans as a provocation and rehearsal for invasion. ...

"The point is that when one views this event from the mindset of the other side, it is perfectly understandable. The grand theories attempting to explain it are gaseous. The real story is that the North Koreans saw the ROK Navy's actions as a provocation and responded as they might well be expected to." (Honolulu Star Advertiser, Nov. 29)

China also feels threatened

The imperialist media today are saying that the DPRK's "belligerence" is trying the patience of China. China has been an ally of the DPRK since 1950, when U.S. forces under the command of Gen. Douglas MacArthur invaded north Korea, bombed all its cities, and threatened the new revolutionary government of China with nuclear war.

But while China is seeking a peaceful solution to the present crisis, there can be no doubt that it sees U.S. belligerence toward the DPRK as a threat to its own peaceful development.

Li Jie, a researcher with the Chinese navy's military academy, wrote about the U.S.-south Korean "exercises" scheduled for last July:

"A joint drill with the ROK [south Korea] in the key waters off its Asian military bases will help the U.S. realize multiple strategic goals in the Asia-Pacific region," said Li.

“First, the drill will help the U.S. maintain high-pressure against what it calls a restive DPRK regime. It is also believed to be an explicit indication of the U.S. stance that the world’s sole superpower would stand firmly behind the ROK and Japan in case of a military conflict between Pyongyang and Washington’s two traditional Asian allies.

“In addition, a well-deliberated military exercise in the Yellow Sea will also help the U.S. collect geographic and military information about some Asian countries [especially China—d.g.] bordering the vast waters.

“General Ma Xiaotian, deputy chief of general staff of the People’s Liberation Army, has expressed ‘firm opposition’ to the scheduled U.S.-ROK military maneuver.” (China Daily, July 12)

But the maneuvers took place anyway, and are now being repeated at an even higher level of provocation. China has called for an emergency meeting with the U.S., south Korea, the DPRK, Russia and Japan to defuse the situation. As of Nov. 29, this call has been ignored by the Obama and Lee administrations.

There is nothing “irrational” in either the response of the DPRK or the worries of the Chinese. U.S. imperialism waged a horrendous war against the Korean Revolution from 1950 to 1953, one that resulted in millions of deaths. It has occupied south Korea ever since, with a force that still numbers almost 30,000. It has refused to even discuss a peace treaty to formally end that war.

Should it be surprising, then, that the DPRK knows it has to be ready at any time to repel another invasion? If even a retired U.S. Army intelligence officer knows that the shelling by the south would force the north to respond, didn’t those who ordered the shelling know it too? Wasn’t it deliberately intended to provide the excuse for greater threats against the DPRK, with the intention of provoking “regime change”?

U.S. pundits are now openly talking about the “reunification” of Korea based on the south swallowing up the north – in other words, an invasion and counter-revolution that would allow capitalism and imperialism a free hand to exploit the workers and farmers there.

This is something that the DPRK leaders and masses will never allow.

Is it surprising that the Chinese leaders are also alarmed when U.S. imperialism, while making money off investments and trade there, nevertheless tries to encircle China militarily?

The chair of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, Adm. Michael Mullen, reveals the mindset of the Pentagon: “I don’t think this will be the last exercise,” he said. “This is a part of the world that we’ve exercised in for decades and we will continue.” (CNN, Nov. 28)

Instead of putting out anti-DPRK propaganda in the guise of psycho-analyzing its leaders, why don’t the media ask why the U.S. leaders do what they do? Why have they maintained a hostile policy against the DPRK for more than 60 years, ever since its anti-colonial and anti-capitalist revolution? Why won’t they sign a peace treaty with the DPRK so that the Korean people can work for real disarmament and reunification?

But that would be to acknowledge that the U.S. is ruled by a class of billionaires that has fattened itself on war and exploitation all over the world and has a long history of creating

excuses for the bloody expansion of its imperial reach. The media has been part of this inglorious history, ever since the Hearst papers invented an excuse for invading Cuba in 1898.

Let's not fall for another "Bay of Tonkin" or "weapons of mass destruction" lie. The enemy of the working class is right here, in the board rooms and banks of U.S. capitalism, that are destroying everything the people have won over generations of struggle and hard work.

No aggression against socialist Korea! End the war "games," lift the sanctions and bring U.S. troops and ships home!

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