

UN General Assembly Convenes Under Shadow of War

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President Donald Trump delivers his first speech to the United Nations today as the 72nd session of its General Assembly convenes in New York City under the shadow of war.

Little more than a week ago, UN General Secretary Antonio Guterres warned that the escalating conflict on the Korean peninsula resembled the events that led to the outbreak of the First World War over a century ago, implicitly raising the prospect of the world sliding into a nuclear third world war.

The American president, who during his “America First” presidential election campaign pointedly denounced the United Nations, appeared briefly at UN headquarters Monday for a forum on “reforming” the international body. He introduced his prepared remarks, which derided the UN for “bureaucracy and mismanagement,” by touting one of his real estate projects, the Trump World Tower, located across the street from the UN, saying that the building’s proximity to the UN had made it more profitable.

By “reform,” Trump means slashing spending. Earlier this year, administration officials suggested reducing the US contribution to the UN by half. The US president complained in his remarks about having to shoulder “a disproportionate share of the burden.” Washington’s annual contribution to the UN is roughly one-tenth of what it spent last year on its 16-year neocolonial war in Afghanistan.

The United Nations was established 72 years ago largely at the initiative of the United States, which emerged from the Second World War as the indisputably dominant imperialist power. At the time, this dominance was based not merely on military might, but above all on American capitalism’s unrivaled industrial strength and Wall Street’s unquestioned dominance over the affairs of world finance capital.

The UN was created as part of a global system designed to further American imperialist hegemony, which included the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank and various global and regional alliances and trade organizations.

Written into the UN’s Charter were the so-called Nuremberg principles derived from the post-World War II trials of the surviving leaders of Hitler’s Third Reich, which made “crimes against peace,” i.e., aggressive war, the greatest war crime. The first sentence of the founding document of the UN declares that its purpose is “to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war.”

That principle has been reduced to rhetorical window-dressing by Washington’s uninterrupted wars of aggression carried out over the past quarter-century, as the American

ruling class increasingly relied on its military supremacy to offset the erosion of its global economic position.

In the person of Donald Trump, the ugly end product of American capitalism's protracted decline—the rise of financial parasitism and the criminality of American militarism—is rising to the General Assembly's podium on Tuesday. Trump will address the body under conditions where US imperialism is literally holding a gun to the head of humanity.

In advance of his appearance at the UN, his top aides issued multiple statements affirming that Washington is prepared to make good on the US president's threat to unleash "fire and fury like the world has never seen" against North Korea. The US ambassador to the United Nations, Nikki Haley, warned in a television interview Sunday that "North Korea will be destroyed" if the US has "to defend itself or defend its allies in any way."

She affirmed that Washington had "exhausted all the things we could do at the [UN] Security Council," adding:

"We wanted to be responsible and go through all diplomatic means to get their attention first. If that doesn't work, General Mattis will take care of it."

She was referring to the US defense secretary, Gen. James "Mad Dog" Mattis, who has threatened North Korea with "total annihilation."

Similarly, US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson stated Sunday that

"If our diplomatic efforts fail... our military option will be the only one left."

And Trump's national security advisor, Gen. H.R. McMaster, asked whether the US president "will strike" North Korea if it fails to give up its nuclear weapons, replied, "He's been very clear about that, that all options are on the table."

Amid these bellicose threats, American warplanes have carried out their most provocative exercises yet, with B-1B nuclear bombers and F-35 fighter jets flying Monday from Guam and Japan to drop bombs near North Korea's border.

While placing the threat of a nuclear confrontation on the Korean peninsula on a hair trigger, Washington is also seeking to ratchet up tensions with Iran, with the aim of provoking a military confrontation with a country it sees as the main regional obstacle to its drive for hegemony in the oil-rich Middle East.

Trump and top administration officials have made repeated statements in recent days indicating that the US administration will refuse to certify that Iran is in compliance with the 2015 nuclear deal (the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action), with the October 15 deadline for it to report to Congress approaching. Such a refusal would open the door to new rounds of unilateral American sanctions against Tehran. Prior to agreeing to the deal, Trump's predecessor Barack Obama warned that the only alternative to the agreement was war.

While the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and the other major powers that are signatories to the agreement have all acknowledged that Iran is in full compliance with its

restrictions on its nuclear program and the IAEA's intrusive inspections regime, US officials have asserted that Tehran is violating the "spirit" of the agreement. By this they mean that Iran has failed to submit to the undisputed dominance of US imperialism over the entire Middle East.

Notably absent from the opening of the UN General Assembly are both Russian President Vladimir Putin and President Xi Jinping of China. Whether they chose not to make the trip to New York because they believed there was nothing to be gained in a face-to-face meeting with Trump, or because they feared that it would be dangerous to leave their capitals given the state of global tensions, is not known.

The US confrontation with North Korea is bound up with far broader strategic aims of US imperialism for domination of the Eurasian land mass, in which Washington regards both China and Russia as obstacles.

Even as US warplanes were carrying out their provocative bombing runs near the North Korean border, China and Russia were conducting naval exercises off the Russian far eastern port of Vladivostok, not far from the Russia-North Korea border.

In Eastern Europe, Russia, on the one hand, and NATO and Sweden—acting together with the US, France and other countries—on the other, are staging rival war games in Belarus, Ukraine and the Baltics in preparation for a potential military confrontation between the world's two largest nuclear powers.

Meanwhile, in Syria, Syrian government forces backed by Russian air power and Iranian-backed militias, and US-backed Kurdish-dominated militias have advanced on the strategic eastern city of Deir Ezzor from opposite sides of the Euphrates River, heightening the threat of a military confrontation that could draw in both Washington and Moscow.

The UN General Assembly proceedings this week will only heighten the danger of one or more of these regional conflicts triggering a global conflagration. There exists no means of ending war outside of the overthrow of the profit system that is its source.

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