

No to war, Trump and Kim - A principled stand

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There are two things rulers typically do when they want to make a mark on the world. They build something big or they go to war writes Andy Stowe.

The US Department of Homeland Security has already begun seeking firms willing to build Trump's massive wall [1] and in the last few days he has authorised attacks on Syria and Afghanistan and has begun deploying ships and troops against North Korea [2]. The pretext is that Kim Jong-un's regime may be about to test another nuclear device. Such displays of enthusiasm for nuclear disarmament are not offered to the Israeli state which has repeatedly shown an appetite for murdering a large number of innocent people, or to Russia, Britain or France. It virtually goes without saying that this is about consolidating Trump's presidency after a disastrous start and, more importantly, demonstrating that this new American administration intends to be belligerent and use its military superiority to offset its relative economic decline by increasing spending on troops and weaponry.

There's no denying that the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) is a deeply unpleasant state. On April 15th its official news agency shared with the world the fact that "Supreme Leader Kim Jong Un sent a congratulatory message to the Syrian president on the occasion of the 70th founding anniversary of the Syria's Baath Arab Socialist Party." [3] It went on to add a rather unrealistic assessment of the actual balance of military forces: "The Trump administration had better stop going reckless, bearing deep in mind that it is in its supreme interests to face up to the strategic position of the DPRK and the trend of the times and behave with prudence and self-control."

The DRKP's public stance is that it is trying to build socialism. However, since 2003 its fundamental strategic orientation has been "Military First Ideology is an Ever-Victorious, Invincible Banner for Our Era's Cause of Independence". This followed failed attempts at economic reform and diplomatic overtures to Japan in the years before, and in effect it means that the needs of the armed forces come before those of the working class.

What this means in practice is that one of the poorest countries in the world is diverting much of its national income into maintaining armed forces that are estimated to number between 1 and 1.2 million troops plus an estimated 4 million citizens are in the Militia of Worker Peasant Red Guards. The regime's Juche ideology [4] is an admixture of 1940s Stalinism and nationalist mysticism which allows no place for mass involvement in politics beyond taking part in rigidly controlled demonstrations and which serves to maintain a small bureaucratic elite in what for the rest of the immiserated population would look like actually existing communism. It's a regime, which like Assad's, is responsible for horrendous crimes against its own citizens ranging from torture, large scale starvation and running concentration camps.

Uniquely among organisations with pretensions to socialism, the Workers' Party of Korea (WPK) has an "eternal" chairperson, though most other people just refer to Kim Jong-il as "dead". It's a party which has no progressive mission and which is absolutely unsupportable. Any campaign to oppose

imperialist aggression against the DPRK cannot be predicated on support for a murderous, Stalinist, bureaucratic cult.

The Military First strategy is how the WPK is keeping control of society. Unable to provide little more than the bare essentials for survival to its people, it allocates resources to its armed forces and has developed a world view which puts it in constant conflict with the outside world. The contrast with the Cuban state is instructive. It retains its legitimacy at home by spending on education and healthcare and permits a limited degree of mass participation in politics. It is also attractive internationally in a way the DPRK has never been and has never sought to be.

As in Syria, where we must support the overthrow of Assad by popular uprising, so too in North Korea, we are for the overthrow of the WPK by the country's working class. At this distance there isn't an obvious mechanism for that before a section of the ruling élite overthrows Kim, having formed a realistic opinion of the state's chances of surviving an armed conflict with the United States.

However, our starting point is that we absolutely oppose all foreign aggression against North Korea. If the Americans want a world free from nuclear weapons they can lead by example and then persuade the Israelis, French and British to get rid of theirs. Yet while there is a paranoid rationality in the North Korean regime developing nuclear weapons, this programme is not in the interests of the people of that country. It's a massive waste of material, financial and intellectual resources which could be used to feed, clothe and house its people.

Labour Party members, environmentalists and peace activists need to stand up to Trump's aggression in Afghanistan, Syria and North Korea. We are on the side of the North Korean people against Trump and Kim Jong-il's regime.

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P.S.

* <http://socialistresistance.org/no-to-war-trump-and-kim/9959>

Footnotes

[1] <http://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/dhs-draft-report-outlines-plans-border-wall-n745831>

[2] <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2017/04/12/world/asia/north-korea-nuclear-test.html>

[3] <http://www.naenara.com.kp/en/news/?19+7951>

[4] http://www.korea-dpr.com/juche_ideology.html