US Sends Drones, Assassination Squad to South Korea. Massive "War Games" Directed against DPRK Underway

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The Trump administration has further exacerbated the extremely tense standoff on the Korean Peninsula by dispatching attack drones to South Korea and sending special forces units to participate in massive war games already underway. The military build-up takes place as the White House considers launching strikes on North Korean nuclear and military sites.

US Forces Korea announced on Monday that the company of Gray Eagle Unmanned Aerial Systems (UAS) will be permanently stationed at Kunsan Air Base, south of Seoul. "The UAS adds significant intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance capability to US Forces Korea and our [South Korean] partners," it stated.

While the US announcement emphasized reconnaissance, the Gray Eagle drones can also carry up to four Hellfire missiles that have been used to carry out assassinations and strike military targets. The lethal drones can stay aloft for up to 24 hours.

The South Korean military was in no doubt as to the purpose of the deployment. An unnamed official told the Yonhap news agency: "In case of a war on the Korean Peninsula, the unmanned aircraft could infiltrate into the skies of North Korea and make a precision strike on the war command and other major military facilities."

The dispatch of attack drones to South Korea coincides with the involvement of US special forces in annual Foal Eagle war games, including SEAL Team 6, the highly-trained assassination squad that killed Osama bin Laden. The SEAL team will take part in the joint exercises in South Korea along with US Army Rangers, Delta Force and Green Berets, according to Yonhap.

A military official told the news agency that bigger numbers and more diverse US special operations forces were taking part, in order "to practice missions to infiltrate into the North, remove the North's war command and demolition of its key military facilities." The joint Foal Eagle drills are the biggest ever, involving more than 320,000 troops backed by a US aircraft carrier strike group, stealth fighters and strategic bombers.

Commenting on US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson's trip to Japan, South Korea and China later this week, State Department spokesman Mark Toner absurdly claimed that the US military was taking "defensive measures" against "an increasingly worrying, concerning

threat from North Korea."

Neither the drones nor the Terminal High Altitude Area Defence (THAAD) anti-ballistic missile system to which Toner was referring are "defensive" in character. The drones, along with the special forces units, are rehearsing for pre-emptive attacks on North Korean military sites and "decapitation raids" to kill North Korean leaders. This is in line with an aggressive new joint operational plan, OPLAN 5015, agreed to between the US and South Korea in late 2015.

The THAAD deployment is part of the Pentagon's broader build-up of anti-ballistic missile systems and military forces in Asia, primarily for war against China. Beijing has repeatedly voiced strenuous objections to the THAAD installation in South Korea, which has a powerful radar system capable of peering deep into the Chinese mainland and giving the US military much greater advance warning of Chinese missile launches in the event of war.

The Trump administration, which is currently reviewing US strategy towards North Korea, is exploiting North Korea's test launch of four ballistic missiles last week to advance longstanding military preparations on the Korean Peninsula. According to the *Wall Street Journal*, the White House is actively considering "regime change" in Pyongyang and military strikes on North Korea.

"We have to look at new ideas, new ways of dealing with North Korea," US State Department spokesman Toner blandly declared. "China understands that threat. They're not oblivious to what's happening in North Korea."

The reference to China underscores the aims of Tillerson's upcoming trip. Firstly, he intends to brief Washington's Japanese and South Korean allies on US plans and to encourage closer military cooperation in the event of conflict. Then he will fly to Beijing, where he will attempt to bully the Chinese government into taking tougher punitive action against Pyongyang.

The mounting US threats towards North Korea are also directed against China, which the Trump administration is targeting as the chief obstacle to maintaining US dominance in Asia and internationally. Tillerson has provocatively declared that the US should block Chinese access to islets under Beijing's administration in the South China Sea. The only way to carry out such a reckless plan would be through a US military blockade—an act of war that could provoke conflict between the two nuclear-armed powers.

Tensions in the South China Sea have been further strained by the decision of the Japanese military to dispatch its largest warship, the JS Izumo, for three months of operations, including in disputed waters. According to Reuters, the Izumo will make stops in Singapore, Indonesia, the Philippines and Sri Lanka before joining the Malabar joint naval exercise with Indian and US naval vessels in the Indian Ocean in July. It will also train with the US navy in the South China Sea.

Over the eight years of the Obama administration and its "pivot to Asia," the US has engaged in a systematic military expansion throughout the Asia Pacific, strengthened alliances and strategic partnerships and greatly aggravated dangerous regional flashpoints, including the Korean Peninsula and the South China Sea. The Trump administration, which has been critical of the "pivot" for not being sufficiently aggressive, is now embarking on a course that greatly heightens the danger of war.

The response of the North Korean regime to Washington's actions is reactionary through and through. Its nuclear and missile tests, along with its bloodcurdling threats and Korean chauvinism, in no way defend the Korean people, but do provide the US with a pretext for its military build-up in North East Asia. According to the 38north.org web site, affiliated with John Hopkins University, commercial satellite imagery indicates that Pyongyang could be preparing for another nuclear test.

Confronted with an intense political crisis in Washington, the Trump administration is not simply considering, but actively preparing for reckless provocations and military moves against North Korea that have the potential to trigger a cataclysmic war that draws in the entire world.

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