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CHINA MOVE PUTS ONUS ON U.S. IN NORTH KOREA IMPASSE

February 22, 2017 spacedaily.com reported: "China's snap decision to halt North Korean coal imports — a key economic lifeline for Pyongyang — has a broader motive aimed at shaping Donald Trump's as yet undefined policy towards the North's rogue nuclear arms programme, experts say.

North Korea defied the world a week ago with a missile test and is suspected of orchestrating the stunning assassination a day later of supreme leader Kim Jong-Un's half-brother in Malaysia, provocative acts that followed a nuclear test in September.

China is often the target of US criticism for not doing enough to rein in its irascible neighbour. But analysts said China's ban on North Korean coal imports for the rest of this year could be an attempt by Beijing to defuse such criticisms while nudging North Korea and the United States toward negotiations.

'If China is squeezing North Korea, it is for one purpose and one purpose only: to offer a cooperative gesture to the incoming Trump administration in return for an initiative on negotiations,' Steven Haggard, of Peterson Institute for International Economics, wrote in a blog post.

Under the Obama administration, Washington pursued a policy of 'strategic patience' toward North Korea in hopes that sanctions would bring Pyongyang to heel and force it to abandon its nukes.

The incoming Trump administration has stepped up the rhetoric, with the US leader saying after the February 12 missile launch that Pyongyang was a 'big, big problem' and would be dealt with 'very strongly'..."

US 'NUCLEAR SNIFFER' PLANE FLIES TO NORWAY - WHERE RADIATION ACROSS EUROPE FIRST DETECTED

February 22, 2017 dailymail.co.uk reported: "A US Air Force 'sniffer' plane which took off from Sussex today was on a mission to find evidence of nuclear activity or explosion, according to strong rumours. The WC-135 Constant Phoenix, which is specially modified to collect atmospheric samples, flew out of RAF Mildenhall on operational sorties.

The specialist equipment enables the crew to detect radioactive debris 'clouds' in real time is believed to be heading towards northern Europe and the Barents Sea.

News of the deployment comes amid claims Russia may be testing nuclear weapons, either to the east or in the arctic, after a spike in radioactivity was reported. According to spotters a second 'spy' plane was also deployed from Mildenhall. It is not the first time the Constant Phoenix has visited the British airbase, but the latest deployment reflects growing concern about an alleged spike in iodine levels recorded in northern Europe. This has fueled speculation that the WC-135 has been called in to investigate the cause of the higher-than-normal levels of Iodine-131.



Air quality stations across the continent detected traces of radioactive Iodine-131 in January and February, which seem to have come from eastern Europe. The high levels of Iodine-131 has led some to suggest Putin is testing nuclear weapons in Novaya Zemlya near the Arctic."..."

ROBOTS POISED TO TAKE OVER WIDE RANGE OF MILITARY JOBS

February 21, 2017 The San Diego Union Tribune reported: "The wave of automation that swept away tens of thousands of American manufacturing and office jobs during the past two decades is now washing over the armed forces, putting both rear-echelon and front-line positions in jeopardy.

"Just as in the civilian economy, automation will likely have a big impact on military organizations in logistics and manufacturing," said Michael Horowitz, a University of Pennsylvania professor and one of the globe's foremost experts on weaponized robots.

"The U.S. military is very likely to pursue forms of automation that reduce 'back-office' costs over time, as well as remove soldiers from non-combat deployments where they might face risk from adversaries on fluid battlefields, such as in transportation."

Driver-less vehicles poised to take taxi, train and truck driver jobs in the civilian sector also could nab many combat-support slots in the Army.

Warehouse robots that scoot goods to delivery vans could run the same chores inside Air Force ordnance and supply units. New machines that can scan, collate and analyze hundreds of thousands of pages of legal documents in a day might outperform Navy legal researchers. Nurses, physicians and corpsmen could face competition from computers designed to diagnose diseases and assist in the operating room. Frogmen might no longer need to rip out sea mines by hand — robots could do that for them.

"Robots will continue to replace the dirty, dull and dangerous jobs, and this will affect typically more uneducated and unskilled workers," said Henrik Christensen, director of the Institute for Contextual Robotics at UC San Diego. "You need to look at the mundane things. Logistics tasks will not be solved by people driving around in trucks. Instead, you will have fewer drivers. The lead driver in a convoy might be human, but every truck following behind will not be. The jobs that are the most boring will be the ones that get replaced because they're the easiest to automate."

As for warships, Horowitz said because of economic and personnel reasons, they're increasingly designed to "reduce the number of sailors required for operations."

The highly automated guided-missile destroyer Zumwalt that arrived in San Diego in December carries 147 sailors — half the crew that runs similar warships — and deploys up to three drone MQ-8 Fire Scout helicopters to find targets, map terrain and sniff out bad weather. The Office of Naval Research and the Pentagon's Strategic Capabilities Office continue to experiment with what futurists call a "ghost fleet" of unmanned but networked surface and underwater boats — and their flying drone cousins overhead."..."

ISIS RELEASES NEW VIDEO CALLING FOR SLAUGHTER OF EGYPTIAN CHRISTIANS

February 20, 2017 christiantoday.com reported: "ISIS released a video yesterday which called for the slaughter of Egyptian Christians, and showed the last statement from the man allegedly responsible for the Cairo church bombing in December. The 20 minute video, titled 'Kill all the Kuffar' (Kuffar is Arabic for 'unbeliever') encourages fellow militants to attack and kill Christians across the country, as AMN reports.

The video also features footage a masked man the group named as Abu Abdallah al-Masri and the perpetrator of the Cairo church bombing in December that killed 28 and wounded over 40. Most of the victims were women and children. ISIS previously claimed responsibility for the attack, calling it a 'martyrdom operation' targeted at 'infidels' and 'apostates'.

Egypt's president Abdel Fattah al-Sisi previously identified the bomber as 22-year-old student Mahmoud Shafik, whose assumed name was believed to have been Abu Abdallah al-Masri.

In the video Al-Masri encourages fellow jihadists not to give up, and promises those jailed in Egypt that they will soon be freed. 'Finally, to my brothers in captivity: rejoice, you believers, do not falter or grieve. I swear to God we will very soon liberate Cairo and free you from captivity. We will come bearing explosives, I swear we will, so rejoice you believers,' he said..."

SAUDI ARABIA, ISRAEL PRESENT DE FACTO UNITED FRONT AGAINST IRAN

February 19, 2017 jpost.com reported: "Saudi Arabia and Israel both called on Sunday for a new push against Iran, signaling a growing alignment in their interests, while US lawmakers promised to seek new sanctions on the Shi'ite Muslim power.

Turkey also joined the de facto united front against Tehran as Saudi and Israeli ministers rejected an appeal from Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif for Sunni Gulf Arab states to work with Tehran to reduce violence across the region.

While Saudi Arabia remains historically at odds with Israel, their ministers demanded at the Munich Security Conference that Tehran be punished for propping up the Syrian government, developing ballistic missiles and funding separatists in Yemen.

International sanctions on Iran were lifted a year ago, under a nuclear deal with world powers, but Republican senators said at the conference they would press for new U.S. measures over the missiles issue and Tehran's actions to 'destabilize' the Middle East.

Saudi Foreign Minister Adel al-Jubeir called Tehran the main sponsor of global terrorism and a destabilizing force in the Middle East..."

GERMANY WARNS US OFF HURTING EUROPE, FAVOURING RUSSIA

February 17, 2017 spacedaily.com reported: "Germany on Friday fired a salvo of warnings against Washington, cautioning it against hurting European cohesion, abandoning core Western values and seeking a rapprochement with Russia behind the backs of its allies.

In a hard-hitting speech at the Munich Security Conference against President Donald Trump's administration, German Defence Minister Ursula von der Leyen urged the United States not to take transatlantic ties for granted.

"Our American friends know well that your tone on Europe and NATO has a direct impact on the cohesion of our continent," the German minister told the Munich Security Conference.

"A stable European Union is also in America's interest, as is a strong and unified NATO," she said.

Trump's praise for Britain's decision to quit the EU, his criticism of NATO, and his softer approach towards Russia have rattled allies, prompting them to seek assurances from his lieutenants on whether long-standing American policies have indeed been scrapped.

In a bid to calm jittery partners, the White House has dispatched top generals to Europe this week. Vice President Mike Pence is due to address the Munich conference Saturday, a day after US Defense Secretary Jim Mattis affirmed to the same forum that the bond between Europe and America is the "strongest bulwark" against instability and violence.

"I am confident that we will strengthen our partnerships, confronting those who choose to attack innocent people or our democratic processes and freedoms," he told the gathering of security and defence experts..."

U.S. PLEDGES NUCLEAR DEFENCE FOR JAPAN, SOUTH KOREA AFTER NORTH KOREA MISSILE LAUNCH

February 17, 2017 SpaceDaily.com reported: "US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson on Thursday pledged that Washington would use the full range of its arsenal, including nuclear weapons, to defend allies Japan and South Korea against North Korea if needed.

'The United States remains steadfast in its defence commitments to its allies, the Republic of Korea and Japan, including the commitment to provide extended deterrence, backed by the full range of its nuclear and conventional defence capabilities,' Tillerson said in a joint statement after meeting the foreign ministers in Bonn.

North Korea has carried out repeated missile launches despite UN sanctions and last year conducted two nuclear tests in a bid to develop a weapons system capable of hitting the US mainland.

Pyongyang said the latest missile tested on Sunday could carry a nuclear warhead.

Seoul said the rocket travelled some 500 kilometres (300 miles) before it came down in the Sea of Japan (East Sea).

The joint statement said Tillerson, South Korea's Yun Byung-Se and Japan's Fumio Kishida 'condemned in the strongest terms' the test which was carried out in 'flagrant disregard' for multiple UN Security Council resolutions.

The three countries would work together to ensure that further violations would be 'met with an even stronger international response,' it said, demanding that Pyongyang abandon its nuclear and missile programmes..."



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