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The war of words between the U.S. and North Korea continues to intensify, with North Korea threatening to strike the U.S. territory of Guam, while Defense Secretary General Mattis warned North Korea's actions could result in the "destruction of its people." This came after Trump vowed to strike at North Korea with "fire and fury." Meanwhile, the U.N. Security Council recently imposed a new round of sanctions against North Korea over its test launches of two intercontinental ballistic missiles last month. We speak with journalist Tim Shorrock, who recently returned from South Korea.

NERMEEN SHAIKH: We turn now to escalating tensions between North Korea and the United States. On Wednesday, U.S. Defense Secretary James Mattis warned North Korea not to take any action that could result in the, quote, "end of its regime" and the, quote, "destruction of its people." Mattis's warning came one day after President Trump startled the world, hinting the U.S. could carry out a nuclear strike on North Korea.

PRESIDENT DONALD TRUMP: North Korea best not make any more threats to the United States. They will be met with fire and fury like the world has never seen. He has been very threatening, beyond a normal statement. And as I said, they will be met with fire, fury and, frankly, power, the likes of which this world has never seen before. Thank you.

NERMEEN SHAIKH: Hours after he spoke, North Korea threatened to strike the U.S. territory of Guam in the western Pacific. Guam is home to 163,000 people as well as several major U.S. military bases. A statement issued by the North Korea state media said of Trump, quote, "Sound dialogue is not possible with such a guy bereft of reason and only absolute force can work [on] him."

AMY GOODMAN: Tension has been rising over North Korea in recent weeks. The U.N. Security Council recently imposed a new round of sanctions against North Korea over its test launches of two intercontinental ballistic missiles last month. The sanctions ban North Korean exports of coal, iron, lead and seafood, which would slash up to a third of North Korea's export revenue.

Meanwhile, China is warning a war of words between the U.S. and North Korea could spiral out of hand. On Wednesday, Secretary of State Rex Tillerson attempted to defuse the situation. He spoke on Guam at a stopover on his way back to Washington.

SECRETARY OF STATE REX TILLERSON: I think Americans should sleep well at night, have no concerns about this particular rhetoric of the last few days.

AMY GOODMAN: We're joined now by Tim Shorrock, a Washington-based investigative journalist, who grew up in Tokyo and Seoul and has been writing about the U.S. role in Korea since the late '70s, a correspondent for *The Nation* and the Korea Center for Investigative Journalism in Seoul. He spent April and May in South Korea, where he interviewed South Korea's new president, Moon Jae-in.

So, you return from Korea, Tim. This tension escalates to a level we have not seen before this week, with President Trump promising "fire and fury." Your response, and how people in South Korea and, as your reading of all the press, in North Korea are responding to this?

TIM SHORROCK: Well, I thought Trump's statement was astonishing and, frankly, frightening. It was reminiscent of the statements that President Truman made before he dropped the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. And basically, he was threatening North Korea with nuclear strikes. And this is an extremely dangerous position for an American president to take, especially when there is no immediate threat to what they call the homeland.

North Korea has definitely built rockets that can go for thousands of miles. It's not clear if they actually have an ICBM that can reach the United States. The DIA, the Defense Intelligence Agency, put out a report this week. They actually leaked a report this week to *The Washington Post* saying they should have the capability to put a nuclear weapon on an ICBM

by next year. It's not clear if that's going to happen. There are clearly forces within the administration, within the military-industrial complex and within the think tank industry here in Washington that are driving towards war with North Korea.

As far as people in South Korea go, when I was there in April and May, you know, the tensions were pretty high. That's when Trump sent this armada of ships and carriers and also, later, submarines to Korean waters. People in South Korea were a lot more concerned about what Trump might do than anything that North Korea might do. And I think that's still the feeling today. I think that people in South Korea have, you know, heard similar kinds of statements from North Korea for years and see it as—often see it as kind of, you know, bluffing and just making strong words just to scare people. But what Trump said raised it to a whole other level, and I think there is a deep concern there that Trump and the U.S. military could do some kind of preemptive strike on North Korea's missile sites, as was reported last night on NBC News. So I think it's a very, very serious situation.

NERMEEN SHAIKH: And what do you think the significance is, Tim, of North Korea saying that its plan to fire four missiles near Guam, which is, of course, a U.S. territory, will be ready soon? And they denounced Trump, his remark, saying that he is "bereft of reason."

TIM SHORROCK: Well, you know, starting in the Obama administration, when tensions became high with North Korea, the U.S. began routinely flying B-1—B-2B bombers from Guam to the Korean airspace. Sometimes they've been accompanied by Japanese fighters on the way, and then they're picked up by South Korean fighters as they enter Korean airspace. And, you know, these bombers, while not nuclear-capable, they are capable of widespread destruction. They have incredible amounts of ordnance inside that could probably destroy half of North Korea. And the U.S. has been sending these planes over routinely from Guam, and they did it as recently as two days ago. And so, I think North Korea's statement was, you know, a warning to the United States that it's very aware of the base where these planes fly out of and that they may have the capability to shoot missiles at this base.

NERMEEN SHAIKH: Well, let's go to that statement made on North Korean state media.

KCTV NEWSREADER: [translated] The North Korean army will complete its plan to hit Guam before mid-August, reporting it to our nation's nuclear forces commander-in-chief. And we'll stay ready for his order of proceed.

NERMEEN SHAIKH: So that was a statement made on North Korean state media earlier

today. So, Tim, can you talk about what was said in that statement and whether this is unprecedented in terms of remarks that the North Korean state has issued before?

TIM SHORROCK: It's unprecedented in a very—in saying they're going to go after a specific U.S. base or, in this case, territory, as well. But they've made statements like this before. You know, during the 1990s crisis, they talked about—when they pulled out of the nuclear proliferation treaty, they talked about turning Seoul into a sea of fire. And that scared people in South Korea, for sure.

But, you know, their statement is—they talk about a plan and that they—they say that they would be carried out on the order of, you know, Kim Jong-un. And they have made this kind of statement before. Earlier in the year, they said they were prepared to test another nuclear weapon, and they're just waiting for the order to do it. So, it's a threat saying that they have the capability, and they're just waiting for, you know, the dear leader, the great leader, whatever they call him now, to make this—give them the order to do this. So it's not—they're not saying they're going to do it tomorrow. They're saying they're prepared to do it.

And I think it was a clear statement of recognition that, you know, these planes that the U.S. is talking about launching a preemptive strike with, you know, come from Guam. So, it shows you how high the military preparations are on both sides, North Korea and the United States.

AMY GOODMAN: Can you tell us, from North Korea's perspective or from the president's perspective there, why he's tested the last two ICBMs? And then, President Trump was responding, when he said "fire and fury," to a question at his vacation resort, the golf club, his golf club in Bedminster, to the question about a news report that North Korea had successfully miniaturized nuclear warheads, which could theoretically strike the U.S. mainland.

TIM SHORROCK: Well, that was the DIA report I was talking about earlier. And it's—you know, that report is from someone in the DIA. It was reported in *The Washington Post*, and it was—then it was reported more widely. But it's not a standard intelligence community report where all the various agencies sign on to it. So it wasn't a complete report, not definitive. And I think it was put out there for a reason. And, you know, Trump was definitely asked about that report, and then, apparently, that's when he made these statements.

But, you know, North Korea has been building missiles and, you know, building slowly its nuclear capability, after a series of negotiations that—with the United States, that some were completed, went on for a while, and then they fell apart for various reasons. And, you know, they fell apart during the Bush administration, in particular. And then, Bush, President Bush, tried to reinvigorate the talks toward the end of his term. And they actually had six-party talks, involving China and Russia and Japan and South Korea, later in Bush's term. And they made—they were close to a six-party agreement at that time, where North Korea would end its nuclear program and put a moratorium on its missiles, when Obama came in.

And Obama—President Obama's policy was basically to ratchet up the tension. I mean, he—they looked at negotiations and direct talks with North Korea for a while but rejected that. And early on in Obama's administration, North Korea fired a rocket that they claimed—and I think accurately claimed—that they were trying to put a satellite in space. And that was grounds for Obama taking North Korea to the United Nations, and they were condemned in the United Nations for this, and sanctions were slapped on them. And they began proceeding, you know, to test more nuclear weapons after that and proceeding on their missile campaign. And the Obama administration was very—you know, their policy was basically they hoped that North Korea was going to collapse and that that would end the problem. And they took on this policy of cyberwar, basically. They tried to use cyberattacks to weaken or—weaken North Korea's missile program and try to damage it in some ways, like they did with Iran in Stuxnet, and their nuclear program. And they also had, you know, lots of information operations directed at—directed at North Korea.

And for North Korea, its most important goal in all of this, throughout, has been wanting an end to the United States' hostile policy. That's what they say in almost every statement. They want an end to the American hostile policy. And they saw what Obama was doing and also what Bush was doing as no—it was clearly a hostile policy. And I think the grounds for talks now are to take their desire for an end to the hostile policy and our desire for a denuclearization and try to use that as a basis to begin talks.

And, you know, it was mentioned earlier about this idea for a freeze for freeze, North Korea freeze its nuclear development and missile tests in return for a freeze of these massive U.S.-South Korean military exercises that take place at least twice a year. And that's a starting point that both China and Russia have very strongly endorsed and actually talked about at length at the U.N. Security Council last weekend and also at the meetings in Manila this week of the foreign ministers, where Secretary of State Tillerson was. But the U.S. has rejected, so far, this freeze-for-freeze idea, although Tillerson the other day said he would open talks with North Korea if they would suspend their missile tests for a while. So, I think the door is slightly

open there for diplomacy, but this war talk is raising it to a—raising tensions to a very dangerous level.

NERMEEN SHAIKH: Well, let's go to yesterday's State Department press briefing. This is State Department spokesperson Heather Nauert.

HEATHER NAUERT: It was a good week for diplomacy. I know you all want to obsess over statements and all of that and try to—want to make a lot of noise out of that. ...

MATTHEW LEE: Can I just take issue—

HEATHER NAUERT: Yeah.

MATTHEW LEE: —with your choice of the word "obsess"? I mean, we're not obsessing about this. This is the president of the United States threatening a nuclear-armed country, whether you want to accept it or not, a country that is armed with nuclear weapons, with "fire and fury the likes of which the world has never seen." I don't think that it's obsessing to want to know what the—you know, to have a further clarification of exactly what that means and whether or not it means that you're preparing to send "fire and fury" raining down on the North Korean regime.

HEATHER NAUERT: And I'll let the president's statement stand for itself.

MATTHEW LEE: OK.

HEATHER NAUERT: OK?

MATTHEW LEE: But, I mean, it's not obsessing to want to know more about what that means.

NERMEEN SHAIKH: So that's State Department spokesperson Heather Nauert responding to questions about North Korea and accusing people of needlessly obsessing about statements that Trump has made. So, Tim, can you respond to that? And also, experts, analysts, many of whom suggest that actually nothing is going to happen, this is all bluster, because neither the statements of the leader of the United States or North Korea—neither of them and their statements can be taken seriously. And what you think needs to be done?

TIM SHORROCK: First of all, kudos to that reporter for pushing back on the State Department spokesperson, because, you know, generally, here, the media, particularly the broadcast media, has been all focused on war, war, war and the possibility of war. And I think this is particularly true at CNN. It's almost like they're craving a war with North Korea. And I think it's very good for reporters to be asking about negotiations. After all, you know, Secretary of State Tillerson and Secretary of Defense Mattis have been stressing diplomacy throughout, until the statement yesterday by Mattis. Mattis, in fact, has been, you know, a voice of reason within the administration, has been saying all along, you know, throughout the last few months, that the Trump administration is going to go for a diplomatic solution, not for war. And the statements he made yesterday—I guess, was on the orders of his commander-in-chief—went in the opposite direction. So I think it's very appropriate to ask about the diplomatic solution.

You know, why are we going to war, why are we threatening war, when we haven't even attempted talks with North Korea? And I think, you know, you talk to anybody who is an expert, who's been around the region, who's actually negotiated with North Koreans, there is plenty of room, plenty of flexibility, to talk to North Korea. And there are certainly, you know, proposals that North Korea itself has made, as recently as 2015, two years ago, when they said they would put a moratorium on their program if the United States would start opening talks about a peace treaty to end the Korean War, which is still an armistice. The Korean War has never formally ended. And so, I think, you know, that's why people, reporters, are pushing back against the State Department, because, after all, you know, here you have the top two national security leaders of the Trump administration have been stressing diplomacy, and suddenly they're talking nuclear war. And, you know, it's about time reporters started pushing back on

that.

AMY GOODMAN: Very quickly, before we wrap up, Tim Shorrock, when you were in South Korea, you interviewed the South Korean president. Talk about his perspective? He was—he was opposed to the THAAD missiles that the U.S. put on South Korean soil, even complained, most recently, that he didn't know when the last pieces were brought into South Korea. He, as president, was not informed. What is his view on what has to happen?

TIM SHORROCK: Well, his view is that, you know, he wants to start talking directly with North Korea and having a negotiated settlement to the North-South issues, and also to bring back what his predecessors, Kim Dae-jung and Roh Moo-hyun called the Sunshine Policy, where tensions were greatly eased in the late '90s and early 2000s between North and South Korea, where there was, you know, economic and cultural exchanges and, actually, economic developments, South Korean investment in the North Korean economy through this Kaesong Industrial Zone, that was closed during the Lee Moo-hyun—during the days of the last—one of the last South Korean presidents. And one of the things he stressed to me was, you know—I mean, I asked him, like, "You know, a lot of people in America, in the national defense area, are critical of you because of your—they think, you know, this Sunshine Policy won't work." And he said, "Well, you know, if this—if South Korea can help bring peace with North Korea, that's good for the United States, and, you know, Trump should be happy about that."

But he also said that while, you know, Trump criticizes his own predecessors, President Obama and President Bush, in bringing us to the situation, he, himself, President Moon, said, you know, previous South Korean presidents, such as Park Geun-hye, who was just impeached and thrown out, and Lee Myung-bak, who was her predecessor, were very, very right-wing, very militaristic. In fact, they brought South and North Korean relations way backwards and helped create the current crisis. And so, he wanted to have a different policy than that.

So, you know, he's kind of caught between a rock and a hard place, because the U.S. has an enormous military presence there, and U.S. pressure on South Korea is very, very strong. And so, you know, when these—North Korea fired these—tested these ICBM rockets, so-called ICBMs, recently, you know, he agreed to hasten the delivery of more—of more THAAD

antimissile batteries. But he—even, you know, two days ago, two or—this week, he stressed the fact, after having an hour-long conversation with President Trump, that war is out of the question. There cannot be a military solution. And he's repeated—the South Korean government repeated this again today. And also, he also said today in Seoul that the door to

negotiation and diplomacy with North Korea is still open. So, they are very concerned about this ratcheting up of the tensions, and you will not hear this kind of statement from President Moon and his administration like you've heard from President Trump and his administration.

AMY GOODMAN: Tim Shorrock, we want to thank you for being with us, Washington-based investigative journalist who's spent decades reporting on the Korean Peninsula.