

# US deployment of stealth bombers escalates military standoff in Korea

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On Thursday, US officials announced that B-2 stealth bombers had flown from Whiteman Air Force Base in the United States to South Korea. They dropped dummy bombs on a bombing range on the island of Jik Do.

The B-2 flight was a threat to the North Korean regime in Pyongyang that Washington can launch nuclear strikes on its territory at any time. A small, poor state dependent on China for critical food and fuel supplies, it is massively outclassed militarily by the United States and its allies in the region, South Korea and Japan.

The American command in South Korea issued a statement declaring that the exercise showed the United States' ability to "conduct long-range, precision strikes quickly and at will" and "provide extended deterrence to our allies in the Asia-Pacific region." As was widely reported, the B-2 warplanes can carry nuclear missiles.

The action came only 10 days after the US announced that it had sent nuclear-capable B-52 bombers to participate in US-South Korean military exercises. While describing the mission as "routine," Pentagon spokesman George Little made clear that its purpose was to highlight nuclear as well as conventional weapons: "The mission highlights the extended deterrence and conventional capabilities of the B-52 Stratofortress."

Amid a continuing international standoff over its nuclear program, the Stalinist regime in Pyongyang has cut off military hotlines connecting it to South Korea and made inflammatory threats, including of pre-emptive nuclear strikes on the US.

Military experts have dismissed these threats as empty, however, as Pyongyang's missiles do not have the range to reach the US or Hawaii. James Hardy of *Jane's Defense Weekly* said, "North Korea does not

have the capability to carry out this latest threat to attack US bases in Hawaii, the US mainland, or Guam using long-range missiles."

These events underscore the incendiary character of the "pivot to Asia" announced by the Obama administration last year, aiming to assemble a US-led alliance to isolate China and preserve US military pre-eminence in East Asia.

Over the last year, the US stoked a confrontation between Japan and China over the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands. It also announced that it would build a ballistic missile shield in Asia, aimed mainly at China, but presented as a measure against North Korea. It has held repeated military and naval exercises with South Korea, as well as with Southeast Asian countries in the South China Sea. The aggressive pursuit of US interests has brought the Korean peninsula to the brink of war.

At a press conference yesterday discussing the B-2 exercises, US Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel said, "I don't think we're doing anything extraordinary or provocative, or out of the orbit of what nations do to protect their own interests."

The Chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Martin Dempsey, said, "The reaction to the B-2 that we are most concerned about is not necessarily the reaction it might provoke in North Korea, but rather among our Japanese and [South] Korean allies. Those exercises are mostly to assure our allies that they can count on us to be prepared and to help them deter conflict."

Dempsey added that he saw no abnormal threat from North Korea. Its military deployments are not out of the ordinary, he explained: "We haven't seen anything that would cause us to believe they are movements other than consistent with historic patterns and training exercises."

Dempsey's comments highlight the fraudulent character of Washington's campaign against North Korea. It is not based so much on any threat from North Korea, as on tightening the alliance between the US, Japan, and South Korea directed against China.

The issue of North Korea is particularly valuable for Washington, in that it allows the United States to constantly pressure the Chinese regime to cut off its support for Pyongyang and conform more broadly to the needs of US foreign policy.

According to diplomatic materials published by WikiLeaks in 2010, sections of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) consider North Korea to be a "spoiled child" and believe Korea should be re-unified under South Korean control. Such a course of action would also have significant support in Pyongyang. The North Korean regime has called for an official peace treaty with Seoul and the reunification of Korea. It hopes to develop as an exporting power like China, based on the super-exploitation of North Korean workers producing directly for world markets.

Beijing has not ultimately chosen to cut off Pyongyang, however, and China remains the most powerful obstacle to the global operations of US imperialism. Beijing has vetoed UN resolutions presented by the United States and its European allies to justify military intervention against Syria, and it continues to trade with Iran—another key Middle Eastern country targeted for regime change by Washington.

These developments are currently pressing China into a closer alliance with Russia, which also sees US Middle East policy as a threat to its interests. (See, "Chinese president's "historic visit" to Russia")

China is also the United States' largest creditor, holding approximately \$2 trillion of US debt. It has the potential to do significant damage to the world financial system, in the event of a serious conflict with Washington.

It is such interests, and not any supposed threat posed from Pyongyang, that are driving Washington to escalate its nuclear threats against North Korea.

To the extent that there is concern in Washington over the military risks posed by the Korean peninsula itself, these risks arise more from the instability and aggressiveness of its own allies.

Japanese Premier Shinzo Abe and South Korean

President Park Geun-hye both head right-wing, nationalistic governments. The export industries of both countries are being undermined by the global economic crisis, and the ruling classes are preparing deep attacks on the working class. Park, the daughter of former military dictator Park Chung-hee, has quickly collapsed in the polls. (See also: "Former dictator's daughter takes over South Korean presidency")

There is the risk that Seoul might seek for its own purposes to escalate a confrontation that began with a provocation from Pyongyang, which the latter has often carried out after the inauguration of new South Korean presidents.

One intelligence official told the *Christian Science Monitor*: "You may see some shelling of South Korean islands that are very close to the North Korean coast. They've done that in the past, they killed four people the last time they did this."

On their face, the comments of Hagel and Dempsey also suggest that Washington wants to use the crisis with North Korea to prove to Seoul and Tokyo that they can still rely on American nuclear guarantees. In South Korea, in particular, sections of the press and of Park's own Saenuri party have begun calling for Seoul to develop its own nuclear weapon.

Washington opposes this, from the standpoint that it could cause wider proliferation of nuclear weapons and lessen South Korean and Japanese dependency on the United States.



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