

US pushes for trilateral anti-missile cooperation in North East Asia

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As part of the 2015 National Defense Authorization Act, the US is pushing for greater co-operation between South Korea and Japan to expand a joint anti-ballistic missile system throughout North East Asia. While nominally aimed against North Korea, the anti-missile systems are part of the US military build-up throughout the region targeted against China and Russia.

The legislation, which passed the US Senate on December 12, provides \$585 billion in funding for the American military and its operations, including the renewed war in the Middle East. However, it contains a specific call for “an assessment to identify opportunities for increasing missile defense cooperation among the United States, Japan, and the Republic of Korea, and to evaluate options for enhanced short-range missile, rocket, and artillery defense capabilities to address threats from the Korean Peninsula.”

The US has long used the supposed threat from North Korea to justify its military bases in both South Korea and Japan. Now the Obama administration, as part of its “pivot to Asia,” has further exploited tensions on the Korean Peninsula as a pretext for military preparations that are primarily directed against China.

While Washington claims that its anti-missile systems are “defensive,” they form an essential component of the Pentagon’s plans for fighting an offensive nuclear war against China. Their chief purpose is to neutralise the Chinese military’s capacity to respond to a US nuclear first-strike.

Washington and Tokyo are working closely together to build a ballistic missile system that already features an X-Band radar system in the northern part of Japan and a second system recently delivered to Kyoto in October. The X-Band radar has a range of 2,000 km and is connected to both the US navy’s ship-based Aegis missile systems and ground-based Thermal High

Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) systems.

In May, it was revealed that Washington was pressing for the THAAD system’s deployment to South Korea. Concerned about its relations with China, Seoul initially attempted to distance itself from the US plan by claiming that no talks with Washington had taken place over the issue.

South Korea previously stated that it would not join the US ballistic missile system, instead choosing to develop its own indigenous Korean Air and Missile Defense system. In June, however, Kim Kwan-jin, defense minister at the time, declared that he would not oppose the THAAD system’s installation in South Korea.

Current Defense Minister Han Min-gu stated more directly in October: “While the assets that are available to cope with the North’s nuclear and missile threats are limited, the THAAD deployment would help ensure South Korea’s security and defense.”

In reality, South Korea, where approximately 28,500 US troops are based, would be on the front line of any US military conflict with China. The placement of a US anti-missile system in South Korea would ensure that it would be among the first sites to be targeted by the Chinese military in a war with the US.

China is deeply concerned over the US anti-missile systems. When the second X-Band radar was delivered to Japan in October, foreign ministry spokeswoman Hua Chunying declared: “The anti-missile deployment in the Asia-Pacific by a certain country in the pursuit of unilateral security goes against regional strategic stability and mutual trust, as well as peace and stability in Northeast Asia.”

Aside from deploying more weaponry to Northeast Asia, Washington has been calling for deeper trilateral military cooperation with Seoul and Tokyo ever since a

military intelligence-sharing agreement between the two US allies fell through in the summer of 2012.

Relations between the two countries only worsened after Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and South Korean President Park Geun-hye took office in December 2012 and February 2013 respectively. As part of the remilitarization of Japan, Abe has sought to whitewash the crimes of Japanese imperialism throughout Asia before and during World War II. Park has used Abe's historical revisionism to stir up anti-Japanese sentiment at home.

Abe and Park have not held a formal summit since coming to power. Aside from a brief meeting at the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation summit in Beijing on November 10, the only discussion between the two leaders occurred in March at The Hague when Obama forced them to appear with him during a meeting. The *Japan Times* reported on Saturday that Obama spoke to Abe on the sidelines of last month's G20 meeting in Australia to pressure him to do more to reconcile with South Korea.

Washington continues to press for military cooperation. The defense chiefs from the US, South Korea and Japan met in Singapore during May and reconfirmed their commitments to reaching a trilateral military intelligence agreement. This was followed by the first-ever joint meeting involving the US, South Korean and Japanese Joint Chiefs of Staff in Hawaii on July 1.

The chilly relations with Japan have not prevented the Park administration from lining up behind Obama's "pivot to Asia," despite its potential impact on the South Korean economy. China is South Korea's largest trading partner. In a bid to counter the US "pivot," Beijing is attempting to woo Seoul and other countries with economic concessions. Last month, the two countries reached tentative agreement on a free trade pact that would provide a boost for South Korean corporations.



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