

# US military continues build-up in North East Asia

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The United States and South Korea concluded annual war games last Friday with a massive display of fire power meant to intimidate North Korea and send a message to China. In a related move, Washington announced on August 19 that it would send B-2 bombers to Guam. Despite the recent decision by the two Koreas to temporarily ease tensions, the danger of a minor incident leading to conflict remains high.

Friday's military display exercises, open to the public and viewed by some 3,000 spectators including President Park Geun-hye, brought to an end the Ulchi Freedom Guardian drills that began on August 17. Conducted just 20 kilometers from the Demilitarized Zone separating North Korea and South Korea, Friday's live drill between the two countries simulated an assault on the North following a "provocation" by Pyongyang.

"In terms of ammunition and personnel mobilized, this is the biggest live-fire exercise South Korean troops have ever staged independently or jointly with US troops," said a South Korean defense ministry official.

The US and South Korea conducted the exercises as a trial of their new war plan for attacking North Korea, known as OPLAN 5015, drawn up in June. The strategy allows for a more aggressive response to so-called North Korean provocations, including preemptive attacks against North Korea such as a "decapitation strike" against the Pyongyang leadership.

"It is the first time that the OPLAN has dealt with the concept of a preemptive strike," an anonymous South Korean military source told the media. Supposedly, such a strike would only be launched in the event of an imminent nuclear, biological, or chemical attack being detected. However, the US has previously used phony claims of weapons of mass destruction to launch

aggression against countries like Iraq and Syria.

In another move, ostensibly linked to tensions on the Korean Peninsula, three nuclear-capable stealth B-2 bombers and 225 airmen from the 13th Bomb Squadron began deploying to the US territory of Guam on August 7. The B-2 bombers will be stationed at the Andersen Air Force Base, the largest base on the island. Andersen AFB was established in 1944 and was used by aircraft making bombing runs against Japan in World War II and later for attacking targets during the Korean and Vietnam wars.

"We are in the process right now of deploying three B-2s on a scheduled rotation to Andersen Air Base in Guam. We continue to have airmen stationed on the Korean Peninsula who are there full time [and] who are ready for whatever might happen," US Air Force Chief of Staff, General Mark Welsh, told the media.

The US Air Force stated that the airmen would engage in "familiarization training activities in the Indo-Asia-Pacific region." Squadron leader Lieutenant Colonel Robert Makros stated, "The objectives I outlined are simple. I want everyone to come back better and more lethal than before they left." The B-2s were also deployed to Guam last August.

The Guam air base typically hosts B-1 and B-52 bombers and has taken on more significance for the US as it boosts its military presence in Asia. The Pentagon and US Defense Department often refer to the island as an important "strategic hub," given its location in the Pacific and proximity to China. Guam is also home to the Apra Naval Base which can host US aircraft carriers.

Washington's primary goal is to increase pressure on China. Lieutenant Colonel Makros stated that the B-2 bombers could attack "at the time and place of leadership's choosing, any target set on the globe with

precision, range, stealth and a massive payload, conventional or nuclear.”

The deployment of the B-2s was planned in advance, prior to the ramping up of tensions on the Korean Peninsula. On August 10, Seoul first accused Pyongyang of involvement in an August 4 landmine explosion along the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) that maimed two South Korean soldiers. The US has exploited the subsequent standoff to justify its military build-up in North East Asia.

A Congressional Research Service report released last November commented: “Guam is critical to enhancing the forward presence, strengthening alliances, and shaping China’s rise.” In May 2008, Defense Secretary Robert Gates said that the military buildup, which first began on Guam in 2000, would be “one of the largest movements of military assets in decades.”

Guam has only gained in significance since President Obama came to office and declared the US’s “pivot to Asia” aimed at undercutting China throughout the region and encircling it militarily. The US territory plays a key role in the Pentagon’s Air-Sea Battle strategy for war with China.

The Chinese regime is well aware that it is the main target of the US military build-up. According to *Want China Times*, Beijing has adopted countermeasures to the B-2s’ deployment. The paper cited the Chinese state-owned *Global Times* which called the US move a psychological threat designed to force Beijing to divert resources.

During the recent tensions, South Korea’s state-backed Yonhap news agency reported that the US was considering additional steps to boost its military presence in South Korea, including a B-52 bomber as well as a nuclear-powered submarine currently stationed at Yokosuka in Japan.

During a tense confrontation on the Korean Peninsula in 2013, the Pentagon provocatively sent B-52 bombers to South Korea, which, as the US media revealed, was in accordance with aggressive responses mapped out in a pre-planned “playbook.”

Last weekend, a joint US/South Korean air maneuver involving F-16 and F-15 fighter jets took place along the border that was intended to “alarm North Korea.” Although denied by Beijing, social media reports in China, including pictures, claimed that the Chinese military had amassed tanks along its border with North

Korea, following Pyongyang’s threat to attack South Korea.

The US military build-up in Asia and provocative actions on the Korean Peninsula only heighten that danger of a conflict that would rapidly draw in China as well as American allies such as Japan and Australia.



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