South Korea joins US-Japan intelligence link

Ben McGrath
1 February 2016

South Korea has taken a step toward joining the United States' anti-ballistic missile system in the Asia-Pacific region. Seoul will set up a data link allowing its military to share information with not only the US, but also Japan. The agreement is part of a Washington-encouraged cooling of tensions between Seoul and Tokyo that is now being utilized to further align the US allies in war preparations against China.

South Korea's Defense Ministry announced on January 22 that it will establish a connection to Link 16, an exchange network used by the United States, Japan, as well as NATO and other nations. This will allow Seoul's military to share and receive intelligence from the US and Japan in real-time. The date gathered by ships, aircrafts and satellites includes information on enemy positions, altitudes, and speed. The link will be established by the end of the year.

This is another step in Washington's plan for an anti-ballistic missile system throughout Asia. There is nothing defensive about this system. It is designed to protect US bases in South Korea, Japan and Guam from counter-attack by China, or Russia, were Washington to launch a nuclear first strike on either one.

The United States has been pushing for this type of integration by South Korea into its systems, without which, US war plans and the "pivot to Asia," both aimed against China, are incomplete.

The announcement came just three days after the Washington-based Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) published a report in which it complained of intelligence gaps between Tokyo and Seoul. The report—which amounts to a blueprint for war with China—stated in relation to Washington's plans for a ballistic missile system: "A lack of information sharing between Japan and South Korea, however, limits the benefits of leveraging each country's capabilities into a more effective whole."

While touted as a measure to deter North Korea, the data link will allow increased information sharing on China, which is crucial for the US ballistic missile system in the eyes of both Washington and Tokyo. One Japanese official said of Seoul's decision: "There will be significant benefits to Japan if we can get information from South Korea, which is geographically closer to North Korea and China."

The CSIS report added that the US lacked the necessary interceptor missiles within its Pacific Command to deal with the number of missiles that China has and "would require, at minimum, an equal number of interceptors from the United States, Japan, and South Korea."

In other words, regardless of whatever comments are made in the media in regard to North Korea, China is the true target of the US missile program.

The Link 16 network includes the PATRIOT system of surface-to-air missiles and the Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) system. Washington has also been pressing for the deployment of a THAAD battery to South Korea. The THAAD system consists of interceptor missiles, as well as the AN/TPY-2 X-band radar used to detect the incoming targets. Japan has two such radars stationed on its soil, at Shariki in the north and Kyogamisaki in the south. Tokyo is currently considering stationing THAAD batteries alongside them.

Other interceptor missiles also rely on the AN/TPY-2 radars, including SM-3s that can be launched from land or sea, but differ from THAAD in that they are designed to destroy ballistic missiles in ascent. Japan and the United States are currently jointly producing a new version of the SM-3 with a longer range.

South Korea's President Park Geun-hye stated in a televised address on January 13: "Taking the North's nuclear and missile threats into consideration, I will review the issue of deploying THAAD here based on security and national interests. That is the bottom line." Defense Minister Han Min-gu made similar comments on January 25.

Far from being opposed to a THAAD deployment, the South Korean government has previously accepted US statements that a battery would be sent to the peninsula in the event of an emergency. However, the US wants a

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more permanent deployment as the “THAAD provides a valuable capability,” according to the CSIS report. This would also allow additional radar coverage of China.

So far, the US military has deployed only one THAAD battery, currently located on Guam. Three more operational units are being kept at Fort Bliss, Texas. The military plans to have another battery available next year. Funds have been allocated for seven in all.

The United States first encouraged Seoul and Tokyo to sign a military intelligence sharing agreement in 2012 under the previous South Korean government of President Lee Myung-bak, who tried to push the deal through without notifying the National Assembly. The deal was postponed after the opposition Democrats objected, on the basis of chauvinistic anti-Japanese sentiment, not because of any anti-war stance.

A different intelligence sharing deal was signed in December 2014, in which the US would serve as a go-between for sharing information between Seoul and Tokyo. Seoul’s decision to connect to Link 16 is meant to close the gap between the concluded agreement in 2014 and Washington’s demands.

David Shear, the US Assistant Secretary of Defense for Asian and Pacific security affairs, stated in November: “It’s most important that the trilateral partnership between the US, Japan and the Republic of Korea [South Korea] continue to progress.”

This latest development in the military collaboration between Seoul and Tokyo also highlights the nature of their recent agreement over the Japanese military’s use of South Korean women as “comfort women” before and during World War II. While that agreement has been largely unpopular in South Korea, it served a definite political purpose, paving the way for renewed military cooperation between Seoul and Tokyo. The two sides are likely to only intensify this relationship as Washington deepens its war drive against Beijing.

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