

US and South Korea agree on THAAD anti-missile system

Ben McGrath
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The United States and South Korea formally announced on Friday that a Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) system would be deployed to the Asian country. The anti-ballistic missile system is a key part of Washington's preparations for war against China as well as Russia, and will lead to sharper tensions in the region. Washington and Seoul aim to have the THAAD system operational by the end of 2017.

Lt. General Thomas Vandal, chief of staff for US Forces Korea (USFK), and Deputy Defense Minister for Policy Yoo Jeh-seung made the announcement at a news conference. "South Korea and the US have made the joint decision to deploy the THAAD system with US Forces Korea as part of a defensive action to guarantee the security of the Republic of Korea and our people from North Korea's nuclear weapons, weapons of mass destruction and ballistic missile threats," Yoo stated.

Japan welcomed the decision, but China and Russia both voiced their sharp displeasure. "The THAAD system does not help achieve the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula and also hurts peace and stability in the region," the Chinese foreign ministry stated. Beijing previously warned South Korea that allowing a THAAD installation on its soil would seriously harm relations between the two countries.

A Russian foreign ministry statement said the US-South Korean decision would "undermine the existing strategic balance in the Asia-Pacific region and beyond" and "have the most negative impact on global strategic stability, which Washington so likes to discuss a commitment to."

Yevgeny Serebrennikov, the deputy chairman of the Russian upper house's arms committee, said Moscow could deploy missile units to the eastern part of the

country in response to THAAD, indicating the strong potential for an arms race developing quickly in East Asia.

The THAAD anti-ballistic missile system is vital to Washington's "pivot to Asia," aimed at militarily surrounding and economically undercutting China. The US has bolstered its ballistic missile capabilities throughout the region.

A THAAD battery includes interceptor missiles and the AN/TPY-2 X-band radar system. THAAD is designed to knock out incoming missiles in their terminal phase, that is, as they are falling to earth. At present, there is only one deployed battery, which is on Guam, but Japan currently hosts two X-band radars, one in the north at Shariki and the other in the south at Kyogamisaki, and is considering deploying a THAAD battery as well.

As part of its "pivot," Washington has inflamed tensions in the East and South China Seas by exploiting longstanding, yet previously minor, territorial disputes and turning them into dangerous flashpoints. The US has already carried out three provocative "freedom of navigation" operations in waters claimed by Beijing and stated it would back allies like Japan militarily over their claims.

The US and South Korea began formal discussions in March, using North Korea's fourth nuclear test in January and a ballistic missile launch in February as the pretext. On Saturday, North Korea conducted a submarine-based missile launch, likely in response to the THAAD announcement and additional sanctions imposed on leader Kim Jong-un last week. According to Seoul, the projectile left the submarine successfully, but exploded after a short flight. Such North Korean actions serve only reactionary ends, playing right into the hands of Washington.

Both US and South Korean officials claim the THAAD system is aimed solely at North Korea. These claims, however, are completely contradicted by US plans and actions. Washington's strategy for war with China, known as AirSea Battle, includes large-scale, possibly even nuclear, strikes on Chinese military positions. The THAAD system would be used to prevent a retaliatory strike from hitting US bases in South Korea or Japan, which would be on the front lines of any war in Asia.

Moreover, according to the *New York Times*, after formal THAAD discussions between the US and South Korea began earlier this year, Beijing requested through South Korean President Park Geun-hye that the X-band radar be adjusted so as not to penetrate so deeply into Chinese territory. The request was rejected.

THAAD will also help integrate South Korean forces not only with the US but also with the Japanese military. In January, Seoul's defense ministry announced that it would establish a connection to Link 16, an intelligence network used by the US, Japan and NATO nations to share information on enemy positions in real-time and includes THAAD. A Japanese official made clear at the time the connection was indeed aimed at China, saying: "There will be significant benefits to Japan if we can get information from South Korea, which is geographically closer to North Korea and China."

North Korea is simply a convenient excuse for US military activity in East Asia. The Pentagon regularly holds large war exercises with allies like South Korea and Japan, which are clearly aimed at China, not the backward North Korean military. The scope of firepower the US could direct against the North in any conflict would dwarf the horrific death and destruction inflicted upon the country during the 1950–1953 Korean War.

The planned location of THAAD has yet to be announced. The exact spot, in fact, will be kept concealed from the population so it does not become a focus of anti-war sentiment in South Korea. Proposed sites include Pyeongtaek, where USFK headquarters is located, Wonju, near the North-South border, and Chilgok, near Daegu in North Gyeongsang Province.

None of the so-called progressive parties in South Korea is opposed to Washington's and Seoul's war preparations. The main opposition Minjoo Party of

Korea (MPK) did not oppose the THAAD deployment but stated: "We would like to express discontent with the decision not having gone through enough public discussion." The MPK refused to take a clear stand on the issue during last April's general election, concealing the escalating war preparations from the public.

The People's Party and the Justice Party, the third and fourth largest parties in the National Assembly respectively, opposed Friday's announcement on economic grounds and the potential impact on trade with China, rather than opposition to war.



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