

# China and Russia to counter US anti-missile systems in Asia

Peter Symonds  
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China and Russia have agreed to take unspecified “countermeasures” against US plans to install a sophisticated anti-ballistic missile system in South Korea. While nominally directed against North Korea, Washington’s Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) deployment is part of an expanding US network of anti-missile systems in Asia aimed at preparing for war against China and Russia.

The two countries issued a joint statement following a meeting co-chaired by Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Igor Morgulov and Chinese Assistant Foreign Minister Kong Xuanyou. The countermeasures, the statement declared, “will be aimed at safeguarding interests of China and Russia and the strategic balance in the region.”

Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Lu Kang said yesterday that the US decision to deploy the THAAD anti-missile system “seriously threatened China’s security interest” and also undermined the regional strategic balance. “China and other countries have to address our own legitimate security concerns and take necessary measures to safeguard our security interest,” he said.

Russian Deputy Defence Minister Anatoly Antonov also expressed concern in October over the continued build-up by “the US and its allies of the Asia Pacific segment of their global missile system, which will inevitably lead to disruption of established strategic balances both in the Asia Pacific and beyond.”

Antonov said the “deployment of US missile defense systems in South Korea clearly goes beyond the tasks of deterring ‘the North Korean threat’.”

Moscow and Beijing are fearful that the continual expansion of US anti-missile systems is aimed at laying the groundwork for a devastating first nuclear strike by the United States. The THAAD and other anti-missile

systems are being installed to neutralise any retaliatory strikes by Russia or China.

This year’s US National Defence Authorisation Act significantly expanded the scope of the American anti-missile program by amending the 1999 National Missile Defence Act. It now calls for “robust” defences against complex threats, rather than anti-missile measures to counter a “limited” threat.

The US has currently deployed a THAAD battery in Guam, as well as two associated X-band radar systems in Japan. The high-altitude inceptor system is part of a more extensive network involving shorter range land-based and ship-based anti-missile systems.

The presidency of Trump, who has called for a major expansion of US nuclear forces and the military more generally, will greatly heighten tensions in Asia and internationally. Trump has already threatened trade war measures against China, denounced its land reclamation in the South China Sea and criticised Beijing for failing to rein in North Korea’s nuclear and missile programs.

In his confirmation hearing on Thursday, Trump’s nominee for Secretary of State, Rex Tillerson went far further, declaring that the US would not allow China to access the islets it controls in the South China Sea—implying that US warships and aircraft would block Chinese ships and planes, which would be an act of war.

At the same time, Tillerson ramped up the pressure on China over North Korea, saying the US could not continue to accept “empty promises” from Beijing about putting pressure on Pyongyang. He said his approach to North Korea would involve a long-term plan based on further sanctions and their proper implementation.

Asked if Washington should consider imposing “secondary sanctions” on Chinese entities found to be

violating existing sanctions on North Korea, Tillerson said: “If China is not going to comply with those UN sanctions, then it’s appropriate ... for the United States to consider actions to compel them to comply.”

Trump has already indicated that North Korea will be at the top of his foreign policy agenda when he assumes office amid continuing speculation, particularly in the American media, that Pyongyang will soon have a nuclear-armed intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM).

Trump has emphatically tweeted that a North Korean ICBM test launch “won’t happen”—a menacing threat not only to Pyongyang, but also Beijing. Neither Trump nor Tillerson has indicated how they would strong-arm China into preventing a North Korean missile launch or pressuring Pyongyang to disarm. But any punitive measures will only compound an already tense situation.

A Russian foreign ministry statement yesterday declared that the situation around the Korean Peninsula was “exhibiting a high likelihood of becoming volatile.” Without naming Washington, it criticised “the counter-productiveness of the line being taken by certain governments in exacerbating these tensions and instigating an arms race in the sub-region, as well as the increase in the scale of military drills.”

As well as the installation of THAAD battery, the US is restructuring its bases in South Korea and has adopted an aggressive operational plan—OPLAN 5015—in the event of war with North Korea that includes pre-emptive strikes and the assassination of top North Korean leaders. This year the US and South Korea held their largest-ever joint military exercises, involving 300,000 South Korean troops and 17,000 US personnel, backed by sophisticated armour and artillery, as well as air and sea power.

China and Russia have given no indication as to what countermeasures they will adopt to the installation of the THAAD system in South Korea. The two countries held a joint anti-missile drill last May after Washington and Seoul began discussions about deploying a battery. They have announced a second drill will take place in October this year.

South Korea has complained that China is taking “retaliatory measures” over the THAAD decision. Seoul has pointed to a partial ban on South Korean television broadcasts as well as some pop singers.

China has also launched an investigation into South Korean retail giant Lotte, which does business in China.

This week South Korean Trade Minister Joo Hyung-hwan told parliament that he planned to raise the issue again during a meeting with Chinese officials yesterday over a free trade agreement.

The determination of the Trump administration to confront China across the board—diplomatically, economically and militarily—including on dangerous flashpoints such as the Korean Peninsula and the South China Sea, will only intensify the danger of an accelerating arms race in the region and a plunge into war.



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