# US completes anti-missile deployment in South Korea amid heightened war danger

**Ben McGrath**
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Despite residents' protests, United States Forces Korea (USFK) began installing four more Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) missile launchers early Thursday morning in the South Korean town of Seongju.

The deployment followed North Korea's sixth nuclear test on Sunday. It is is part of the escalating US military build-up in preparation for a war on the Korean Peninsula that could quickly draw in major powers like China and engulf the entire region.

In a phone call with US President Donald Trump on Monday, President Moon Jae-in pledged to proceed with the THAAD deployment as quickly as possible. In return, Trump agreed to scrap the limit on South Korean missile payloads contained in an agreement between the two countries and to sell South Korea billions of dollars of armaments.

The phone call came just a day after Trump accused Seoul in a tweet of "appeasement" in dealing with North Korea, a sign of continued differences between the two allies. Moon previously offered to open talks with Pyongyang as a means of defusing the dangerous and volatile situation on the Korean Peninsula.

The THAAD deployment has provoked significant opposition in South Korea. The national police mobilized 8,000 officers to deal with 400 protesters from Seongju who attempted to block THAAD installation, which was completed by midday. Seoul and USFK began the operation at night with little warning, in order to forestall larger protests.

Two launchers were previously installed in April, shortly before the presidential election, but the full deployment was delayed when Moon ordered an environmental impact assessment (EIA).

Seongju residents, as well as opponents from around South Korea, fear the THAAD battery will make the small town a military target, while intensifying the danger of war on the Korean Peninsula. "The current administration, like the former Park Geun-hye administration, is committing an illegal act," an unnamed local official said. "We cannot accept THAAD under any conditions."

Moon Jae-in, who postured as a THAAD opponent during his election campaign, ordered the full deployment in late July after North Korea tested a long-range Hwaseong-14 ballistic missile. The government still claims that the THAAD deployment is only temporary and subject to change pending the full-scale EIA. Yet there is no reason to believe the US will agree to dismantle the battery, even in the unlikely event Seoul orders its removal.

The claim that THAAD is meant to protect the South Korean people is a lie. A single battery consists of six, truck-mounted launchers, 48 interceptor missiles, a fire control and communications unit, and the AN/TPY-2 radar. However, THAAD's range is only 200 kilometers while Seongju is close to 300 kilometers southeast of the capital Seoul, with its metropolitan population of more than 25 million.

Washington's military buildup is not primarily aimed at North Korea, an impoverished country that was nearly entirely destroyed by the US in the 1950-1953 Korean War. THAAD's powerful AN/TPY-2 radar, with its separate 2,000 kilometer range, can be used to spy on Chinese territory, and the interceptors are designed to protect US bases and troops in the event of nuclear war with China or Russia. For that reason, both China and Russia have repeatedly condemned the deployment and demanded the removal of the THAAD batteries from South Korea.

The growing danger of war is exposing divisions within the South Korean government. The Moon

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administration's defense minister Song Young-mu, speaking at a National Assembly Defense Committee meeting on Monday, suggested that the US could redeploy tactical nuclear weapons to South Korea. He said such a move "differs from the [Moon] administration's policies, but should be considered as one of several alternatives for effectively deterring and responding to the North Korean nuclear threat."

The next day, however, Defense Ministry spokesman Moon Sang-gyun said there was no change in the administration's policy on the denuclearization for the Korean Peninsula. He sought to obscure the differences by stating that Song's comments "were meant in the sense of exploring every available option militarily and identifying a realistic approach amid the severe nuclear and missile threat, including North Korea's sixth nuclear test."

Lawmakers from the right-wing opposition Liberty Korea Party (LKP) are also pressuring the government to seek the redeployment of tactical nuclear weapons. LKP spokesman Jeong Tae-ok stated: "Tactical nuclear weapons are a proper countermeasure. We urge the administration to consider the proven measure—balance of terror."

The reintroduction of tactical nuclear weapons would greatly heighten the danger of nuclear war. In the extremely tense situation on the Korean Peninsula, the two militaries would have to take into account the possibility of a nuclear attack with just minutes of warning, exacerbating the risk of miscalculations or mistakes triggering a nuclear exchange.

Under pressure from Washington, President Moon has moved away from his previous calls for dialogue with North Korea and toward increasingly hawkish positions. The South Korean president told Russia's TASS news agency ahead of a summit with Russian leader Vladimir Putin on Wednesday: "I will not avoid any type of dialogue if it can help resolve the North Korean nuclear issue. But I believe the current conditions require us to strongly condemn North Korea's dangerous provocations and pressure the North, and that right now is not the time for dialogue."

During his meeting with Putin, Moon pressed the Russian leader to back a new UN Security Council resolution that would cut-off crude oil supplies to North Korea, which are crucial for the country's floundering economy. The Trump administration's goal is to ram through such a resolution by September 11, the enforcement of which would largely depend on China cutting exports to the North. "While the supply is unlikely to be cut off altogether, China is expected to be willing to cap the supply," a UN diplomatic source said.

Moon also met with Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe on Thursday on the sidelines of a regional economic forum in Vladivostok, Russia. He called for "close cooperation between South Korea and Japan," a sentiment that Abe echoed. Both expressed support for new UN sanctions.

Moon is attempting to strike a balance between his agenda and the aggressive plans of the Trump administration but this is becoming increasingly untenable. While the Moon government may seek ways to avoid the further militarization of the Korean Peninsula, Washington's ratcheting up of tensions is pushing the entire region toward a catastrophic war.

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