

North Korean leader meets Putin in Russian Far East

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In one of his rare international visits, North Korean leader Kim Jong-un travelled by armoured train to meet with Russian President Vladimir Putin in Siberia where the two held a series of meetings this week. Since coming to power 12 years ago, Kim has made just seven trips abroad, four of which were to China.

The two leaders are being driven together by US imperialism's aggressive methods. Pyongyang has been under crippling US and UN economic sanctions and bans for decades over its nuclear and missile programs. Also heavily sanctioned, Moscow confronts the US and NATO in the escalating war in Ukraine aimed at destabilizing and subordinating Russia as Washington prepares for military conflict with China.

Putin laid out the red carpet for Kim on Wednesday at the Vostochny space centre, a rocket launch facility. The two leaders met for several hours before reaching what North Korea described as “a satisfactory agreement?” on “the immediate cooperation matters?”

No details were released amid intense speculation in the Western press that Putin was seeking to replenish Russian stocks of munitions from North Korea's large stockpiles in return for Russian aid and technological assistance.

Asked if military-technical cooperation had been discussed with Kim, Putin said that there were certain limitations in place—a reference to UN sanctions on North Korea—but indicated that there were areas open for discussion. At a state banquet for Kim on Wednesday, Putin suggested that Russia might help North Korea develop its space and satellite program.

Kim pledged at the banquet to establish “a new era of 100-year friendship” between the two countries. Referring to the war in Ukraine, he declared North Korea's “full and unconditional support” for what he described as “Russia's sacred fight.” He said that

North Korea would always stand with Russia on the “anti-imperialist” front.

Despite the effusive rhetoric, neither regime is waging a struggle against imperialism. Both are steeped in reactionary nationalism. Far from opposing imperialism, both are looking for a deal with Washington to advance their economic and strategic interests.

Putin's invasion of Ukraine, in response to Washington's deliberate goading by provocatively pushing NATO towards Russia's borders, was based on the fatal illusion that US imperialism could be pressured to make concessions. Putin represents the interests of the Russia oligarchs who amassed their fortunes by plundering the resources of the Soviet Union following its dissolution in 1991.

Kim's posturing in opposition to “hegemonic forces,” along with his blustering threats and missile tests, amount to a desperate appeal for negotiations with US imperialism to end the country's longstanding economic isolation. Far from being “socialist” or “communist,” Pyongyang wants to open up the country as a source of ultra-cheap labour for global corporations.

Moreover, relations between the two countries have been far from close. Putin has accepted an invitation to visit North Korea, but last did so in 2000, more than two decades ago. Relations soured after Moscow backed sanctions by the UN Security Council following North Korea's testing of nuclear weapons.

The US and its allies have issued warnings against any military co-operation between Russia and North Korea. White House National Security Council spokesperson John Kirby expressed Washington's concerns, declaring: “No nation on the planet, nobody, should be helping Mr Putin kill innocent Ukrainians.”

In reality, the US bears the chief responsibility for provoking the war and the mounting casualties on both sides. Along with its NATO allies, Washington has funnelled tens of billions of dollars in advanced weaponry into the Ukrainian military in an effort to inflict a decisive defeat on Russia, with complete disregard for the impact on the Ukrainian population.

Significantly, the national security advisers of the US, South Korea and Japan issued a joint statement, warning against violations of sanctions by North Korea and Russia. The statement threatened “clear consequences” if either country were to breach their obligations under UN sanctions, particularly those related to arms and military cooperation.

“All three countries expressed grave concerns over the discussions between the two leaders, which included topics related to military cooperation, including the development of intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs), despite repeated warnings from the international community,” it declared.

The joint statement is the first of its kind. It follows the Camp David summit held last month between Biden, Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida and South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol that established close military and strategic collaboration between the three countries. While the US has military alliances with Japan and South Korea, Tokyo and Seoul put aside their longstanding antagonism amid Washington’s accelerating war drive against China.

Significantly, even as it denounces Russia for seeking military supplies from North Korea, the US has been buying armaments from South Korea to replenish stockpiles depleted by arms shipments to Ukraine. The *New York Times* reported that “South Korea has been shipping large amounts of artillery shells to the United States for months.” The deals have been kept quiet, as Seoul insists it is not providing lethal weapons directly to Ukraine.

The turn by Russia and the US to North and South Korea respectively for supplies of armaments highlights the fact that the Korean Peninsula is one of the most heavily militarised regions of the world. A peace treaty was never signed to end the brutal 1950-53 Korean War waged by US imperialism and its allies. The state of war formally continues. Both Koreas have military forces and reservists numbering in the millions, large military stockpiles and extensive

military industries.

The North Korean leader continued his trip to Russia with a visit to the country’s largest aviation manufacturing plant in the eastern city of Komsomolsk-on-Amur. The plant builds and develops fighter jets, including the SU-35S. Putin told Russian media that Kim would also travel to the port city of Vladivostok where Russia’s Pacific Fleet is stationed.

Based on the South Korean intelligence service, the *Financial Times* reported earlier this month that Russian defence minister Sergei Shoigu proposed joint military exercises with North Korea and China at a meeting with Kim during a visit to Pyongyang in July.

Whether or not that is the case, the accelerating war drive by US imperialism against Russia and China is leading to the formation of economic and military blocs akin to those in the 1930s that led to World War II.



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