

US, South Korea, and Japan stage joint air force drills

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The US, South Korea and Japan on Sunday held their first trilateral air force drill. These exercises are part of Washington-led efforts to increase cooperation between the three militaries. Even as it threatens to unleash a broader war throughout the Middle East while backing Israel's genocidal destruction of Gaza, the US is making clear that there will be no let-up in the plans for war against China.

Sunday's exercise took place south of the Korean Peninsula involving both a US B-52H strategic bomber and fighter jets from the three countries. The B-52 is capable of carrying nuclear payloads as well as various types of conventional weaponry. The bomber previously landed at a South Korean airbase on October 17 while conducting fly-overs of the peninsula alongside South Korean aircraft. It was the first time a B-52 has landed in South Korea.

The three sides claim that such shows of force are necessary to deter a supposed attack from North Korea. The South Korean Air Force stated, "This exercise was designed to follow through on the defense agreements discussed in the Camp David summit in August and expand the three countries' response capabilities against North Korea's advancing nuclear and missile threats."

In reality, the exercise is another orchestrated provocation, staged on China's doorstep and meant to threaten Beijing. Such drills are increasing following the April summit between US President Joe Biden and South Korean President Yoon Suk-yeol, where the two leaders pledged to increase the presence and visibility of US strategic assets on the Korean Peninsula while increasing joint cooperation over the potential use of US nuclear weapons.

In addition to the recent B-52 visit, the US also dispatched the USS *Kentucky*, an Ohio-class nuclear-

armed ballistic missile submarine, to South Korea in July—the first time in four decades a submarine of this class had visited the country. More recently, Washington deployed the USS *Carl Vinson* aircraft carrier to the Indo-Pacific region, joining the USS *Ronald Reagan* aircraft carrier in the region. The latter recently conducted joint drills with South Korea and Japan while docking at Busan for five days.

These provocative moves take place as the US surges its forces into the Middle East to back the Israeli genocide of Palestinians, threatening a much larger conflict against Iran. In increasing its military presence in East Asia, Washington is preparing for a war with China, which it regards as the chief threat to its global hegemony.

The global character of the US war plans was made clear in Biden's recent demand for \$US105 billion to fund not only the US proxy war in Ukraine against Russia and to arm Israel, but also to increase military aid for Taiwan, further challenging the "One China" policy. This is a red line for Beijing, which is unwilling to allow the island to become a base for future US war operations.

Seoul and Tokyo are not hesitating to back Washington's war drive. Seoul in particular has seized on Hamas's "surprise" attack on Israel to claim that North Korea is preparing a similar assault on the South, thereby justifying the further military build-up in East Asia and cooperation with Japan.

The US has been pressing Japan and South Korea to overcome historical tension stemming from Japan's brutal colonization of Korea between 1910 and 1945. Their close military collaboration is essential to Washington's preparations for war with China. Earlier this year, Seoul "normalized" an intelligence sharing agreement with Tokyo. Yoon also essentially declared

that Seoul would no longer pursue legal claims against Japan for the latter's past crimes in Korea. This has led to the improved relations and military collaboration.

This cooperation was taken to another level during Washington's war planning summit in August at Camp David, attended by both Yoon and Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida. Establishing what is essentially a trilateral alliance, they pledged to increase their number of joint war games, consolidate supply chains and further expand military intelligence sharing.

The three countries recently established a three-way hotline, another pledge coming out of the summit. Citing a senior government official in Seoul, South Korea's Yonhap News Agency reported the hotline was completed on October 16.

A US National Security Council spokesperson stated the previous week that the hotline would provide "regular, timely and redundant access to secure lines of voice and video communication." In addition, the line will also "ensure secure connectivity between other senior members of government, including our respective national security advisers."

Japan is also using the pretext of a North Korean "threat" and alleged Chinese "assertiveness" to justify remilitarization and further undermine constitutional bans on maintaining a military. In December Japan announced that it was effectively doubling its military budget by 2027.

Japan is expanding the capabilities of its armed forces. Tokyo recently announced that it would increase the presence of its Self-Defense Forces (SDF) in Kyushu, which includes establishing an F-35B fighter jet air base and a surface-to-ship missile unit. The units are scheduled to be established in the 2024 fiscal year, beginning next April.

The units cover the Ryukyu (or Nansei) Island chain that runs from Kyushu down through Okinawa Prefecture towards Taiwan, which a senior Defense Ministry official called "a single theater of operations." The proximity of the southernmost islands to Taiwan is exploited by Tokyo to justify military build-up in that area and its integration into US war plans against China—all in the name of "self-defense."

Tokyo is planning to acquire cruise missiles in fiscal year 2025, a year earlier than previously scheduled. Defense Minister Minoru Kihara made the announcement while meeting with US Defense

Secretary Lloyd Austin earlier this month in Washington. Tokyo will purchase 200 Tomahawk Block-4 missiles from the US between 2025 and 2027. It will then purchase an additional 200 Tomahawk Block-5 variant giving Japan the ability to strike targets in China and North Korea.

The advanced preparations for war against China by the US and its allies only underscore the fact that American imperialism will stop at nothing to maintain its world dominance even as it hurtles towards a catastrophic global conflict between nuclear-armed powers.



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