

North Korean troops deployed to Russia, as US/NATO ramps up Ukraine war

Peter Symonds
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Amid claims by Ukraine and South Korea that North Korean soldiers had been sent to Russia to fight Ukrainian forces, Russian President Vladimir Putin indirectly acknowledged their presence in comments to the media last Thursday.

When questioned about a video released by South Korean intelligence purportedly showing North Korean soldiers training in the Russian far east, Putin stated that “he never doubted at all that the North Korean leadership takes our agreements seriously.”

Putin was referring to the “comprehensive strategic partnership” agreed during his visit to North Korea in June that provides for “mutual assistance in the event of aggression against one of the parties.” An article in the treaty obligates North Korea and Russia to provide “military and other assistance without delay by mobilizing all means in its possession” in the event that the other is invaded.

The agreement was ratified on Thursday by Russian lawmakers. Commenting on the mutual assistance clause, Putin said: “What and how we will do is our business within the framework of this article.”

The terms of the treaty have led to speculation that North Korea troops will be deployed to the Kursk region of Russia as part of a counter-offensive effort to dislodge Ukrainian forces that seized a part of the region in an offensive beginning in August.

Putin provided no details concerning the presence of North Korean troops in Russia, nor did he attempt to refute the various claims by South Korea, Ukraine and the US that up to 12,000 North Korean special forces troops have been shipped to the Russian far east for training and that several thousand have already been moved to the battle zone in Kursk.

On Friday Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy claimed that the North Korean soldiers were expected

to be sent to “combat zones” as soon as October 27 or 28. He branded the move as “a clear escalation by Russia” and called on Ukraine’s backers to put pressure on Moscow and Pyongyang with a “strong response” to “North Korea’s actual involvement in combat.”

US Defence Secretary Lloyd Austin weighed in, declaring the involvement of North Korean troops was “a very, very serious issue” if they are co-belligerents, “if their intention is to participate in this war on Russia’s behalf.” He warned that “it will have impacts not only in Europe, it will also impact things in the Indo-Pacific.”

John Kirby, White House national security spokesman, commenting on the dispatch of North Korean soldiers, declared: “We do not yet know whether these soldiers will enter into combat alongside the Russian military, but this is certainly a highly concerning probability.” He then warned, however, that North Korean troops were “fair game” if deployed in fighting against Ukrainian forces.

The condemnations of North Korea’s deployment of troops to Russia are entirely hypocritical. Over the past two years, the US and its NATO allies have been waging war against Russia, supplying Ukraine with tens of billions of dollars of increasingly sophisticated and deadly military hardware along with training and intelligence. The Ukrainian invasion of Kursk was undoubtedly planned and prepared with the direct assistance of NATO and the US in particular.

While there is nothing progressive in the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine, the primary responsibility for the war rests with US imperialism that deliberately goaded the Putin regime into acting by threatening to incorporate Ukraine into the NATO military pact. Washington has recklessly proceeded to escalate the

war, crossing all of its own “red lines,” as it seeks to fracture and subordinate the Russian Federation to its economic and strategic interests.

US and NATO advisers, intelligence agents and special forces troops are undoubtedly already present in Ukraine. In his comments, Putin declared that NATO officers and instructors were directly involved in the Ukraine war. “We know who is present there, from which European NATO countries, and how they carry out this work,” Putin said.

The presence of North Korean troops in Russia is already being used as the pretext to push ahead with plans to openly deploy NATO troops to Ukraine. Lithuanian Foreign Minister Gabrielius Landsbergis told the POLITICO website on Sunday that it was time for European countries to revisit French President Emmanuel Macron’s idea of sending troops to Ukraine first mooted in February.

“If information about Russia’s killing squads being equipped with North Korean ammunition and military personnel is confirmed, we have to get back to ‘boots on the ground’ and other ideas proposed by Macron,” Landsbergis declared.

In an interview published on October 1 in the German newspaper *Berliner Zeitung*, Benjamin Haddad, the French minister for European affairs, declared: “President Macron has said on several occasions that we must not exclude anything.” Asked if “the French position remains that the deployment of ground troops to Ukraine is not ruled out,” Haddad replied “Yes.”

The condemnation of North Korea’s deployment of troops is accompanied by denunciations of its provision of weaponry for Russian forces. South Korean intelligence claims that North Korea had sent 13,000 containers worth of artillery shells, antitank rockets and missiles to Russia as the war has dragged on.

Even if true, North Korean munitions pale alongside the provision of not only munitions, but main battle tanks, long range missiles, drones and fighter aircraft by the US and NATO to Ukraine. As part of his recent European trip, US Defence Secretary Austin made an unannounced visit to Kyiv, his fourth, where he announced another \$400 million package of US weapons for Ukraine.

It should also be noted that while South Korean intelligence tracks North Korean military assistance to Russia, South Korea itself is providing large quantities

of munitions indirectly to Ukraine via the US. Last December, South Korea’s *Hankyoreh* newspaper reported that Seoul had sent at least 500,000 155mm shells to the US to restock Washington’s supplies that had been seriously depleted as a result of shells sent to Ukraine. A *Washington Post* article reported that the Pentagon was seeking a further 330,000 shells as Ukraine was expending around “90,000 or more a month.”

The potential involvement of North Korean troops in fighting against Ukrainian forces again underscores the fact that the US/NATO war against Russia, as well as the US-backed Israeli genocide in Gaza and widening war in the Middle East, are two fronts in what is rapidly emerging as a world war between nuclear-armed powers.

Austin’s warning that the North Korean deployment will not only affect Europe, but “impact things in the Indo-Pacific,” simply reflects the growing discussion in US strategic and military circles of the global character of the unfolding wars. Indeed, US imperialism is seeking to bring Russia to its knees as it wages an economic war against China and escalates its military provocations and preparations for conflict with what it regards as the chief threat to its global hegemony.

The reckless plunge by US imperialism and its allies towards nuclear oblivion can and must be stopped. The only social force capable of doing so is a unified movement of the international working class based on a socialist program to abolish capitalism and its reactionary division of the world into rival nation states.



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