

# South Korea ramps up war preparations against China

Ben McGrath

2 December 2025

The US and South Korea are currently implementing plans to “modernize” their decades-long military alliance in line with US plans for war with China. These plans involve a significant increase in South Korea’s already substantial militarization and preparing the country as a base of operations for a future conflict.

Last Friday, the US acting ambassador to South Korea Kevin Kim delivered a speech at a forum in Seoul hosted by the Korea-US Alliance Foundation and Korea Defense Veterans Association where he discussed the meaning of “modernization.” He stated: “First and foremost, addressing the common challenges on the Korean Peninsula, as well as the Indo-Pacific region, starts with having a shared assessment of the threats that we face.

“Based on that combined assessment, which we all share between the United States and [South] Korea, we will address that moving forward, and ultimately what matters is that we strengthen deterrence on the Korean Peninsula and the Indo-Pacific region.”

In real terms, this means preparing to launch a war against China. To justify this, US Defense Pete Hegseth claimed without evidence in May that China was preparing to invade Taiwan by 2027. Kim hinted at the same on Friday, saying, “I can’t speak to the probabilities. All I know is that the Chinese military is in the middle of a historic buildup to strengthen its military capabilities.”

Yet under successive Republican and Democratic administrations, Washington has drastically escalated tensions with China, particularly over Taiwan, in order to stoke a war aimed at eliminating China as an economic competitor. Seoul, with its longstanding ties to the US military and its desire to profit from such a war, supports Washington’s agenda.

Washington has routinely undermined the One-China policy over Taiwan, which states that the island is a part of China. Washington and Seoul both formally adhere to this policy by only having official diplomatic relations with Beijing.

For Beijing, Taiwan is its most significant red line. Beijing considers the island a renegade province and is conscious that were Taipei to declare independence it would not only become a base for US military operations against the mainland, but set a precedent for the further dismemberment of Chinese territory. Beijing has repeatedly stated it would use force if Taiwan declared formal independence.

This has not prevented the US from routinely sailing warships through the Taiwan Strait; sending high-level diplomatic missions to the island; and supplying Taiwan with huge amounts of weaponry. It is currently deploying hundreds of military trainers to the island. Washington has also backed advocates of Taiwanese independence, including current Taiwanese President Lai Ching-te.

On November 14, Seoul released a fact sheet addressing its “modernization” efforts and detailing the results of President Lee Jae-myung’s meeting with US President Donald Trump on October 29 in Gyeongju, South Korea. The document stated that the two sides “emphasized the importance of preserving peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait.” Seoul, however, has pledged to increase military spending in line with Trump’s demands and continue building its military ties with Japan in what has become a de facto trilateral military alliance with the US.

The reference to Taiwan is a conscious provocation designed to question Beijing’s claims to the island and to falsely imply that China, rather than the US, has continually raised tensions over the status of Taiwan.

Under Democrat Moon Jae-in, references to Taiwan became commonplace in joint US-South Korean statements beginning in 2021 when the two countries mentioned it for the first time.

The Lee administration in Seoul is backing this agenda of provoking war with China over Taiwan. Acting US ambassador Kim praised the decisions reached between Trump and Lee, stating on November 20 that the fact sheet from their meeting is an “historic document [that] highlights the comprehensive nature of our relationship, touching on every facet of the US-ROK (Republic of Korea) alliance.”

The fact sheet also states that Seoul has agreed to increase military spending to 3.5 percent of GDP. This is approximately a one percent increase and is similar to NATO countries’ pledge to step up spending to 3.5 percent as well as 1.5 percent on related sectors. South Korea is the first US treaty ally outside of NATO to publicly announce that it would adhere to the Trump administration’s demands on spending though Japan is also in the process of increasing its military budget.

That this takes place in South Korea under Lee Jae-myung and the ruling Democratic Party demonstrates that there is no section of the ruling class that opposes war.

The Democrats have long postured as a “progressive” alternative to the openly right-wing faction of the ruling class, currently led by the People Power Party (PPP), with its longstanding connections to the military and to past dictatorships. Lee came to office in June claiming that he would pursue a policy of peace in the region. Undoubtedly, countless people voted for him for this reason.

However, the Democrats, no less than the PPP, back the US war drive in the region as well as the US/NATO-stoked conflict against Russia in Ukraine and Israel’s genocide in Gaza. When Lee came to office, he pledged to continue selling weaponry to European countries that have been arming Ukraine, such as Poland. In this manner, South Korea has been “indirectly” arming Kiev. In December 2023, a *Washington Post* report revealed that Seoul had become a major supplier of 155mm shells to Ukraine, outpacing all European countries combined.

Lee has made selling weaponry around the world a key component of his economic agenda as he seeks to turn South Korea into the world’s fourth-largest

supplier of military equipment. This builds on the country’s already flourishing military industry, which has enriched itself on the Ukraine war and other conflicts. In August, the *Chosun Ilbo* newspaper reported that South Korea’s four largest arms suppliers had for the first time surpassed 100 trillion won (\$US68 billion) this year in backlogged orders.

Lee is also pushing forward with plans to acquire nuclear-powered submarines. During his October meeting with Trump, the South Korean president requested the US lift a 2015 bilateral agreement that limits Seoul’s ability to acquire the highly-enriched uranium required to power the vessels, to which Trump has agreed.

Building the submarines would, according to Lee, “ease the burden on US forces” and improve Seoul’s “ability to track North Korean or Chinese submarines.” In addition to the military advantages, it would also potentially provide South Korea with weapons-grade enriched uranium.

The push for weaponry, such as nuclear-powered subs, is not new. Under Democrat Moon Jae-in, in office from 2017 to 2022, Seoul similarly pushed for acquiring the subs. His administration also carried out numerous provocations against both China and North Korea, including the deployment of a US THAAD missile battery to South Korea, as part of US planning for nuclear war with China, all while fraudulently posturing as a proponent of “peace” with Pyongyang.



To contact the WSWWS and the  
Socialist Equality Party visit:

**[wsws.org/contact](https://wsws.org/contact)**