

Cross-border tensions rising on Korean Peninsula

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In recent weeks, tensions have risen between North and South Korea as cross-border disputes have grown amid a global escalation of war driven above all by the United States. It is a further indication that the conflicts that have erupted in Ukraine and the Middle East, far from being isolated from one another, are part of an unfolding third world war that threatens to erupt in the Asia-Pacific region.

The immediate issue on the Korean Peninsula is a September 21 landmine explosion in the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) that wounded three South Korean soldiers, two of them seriously. Both Seoul and Pyongyang have leveled accusations at one another over the event.

On Monday, North Korean state media reported that Pyongyang had the previous day sent a letter to the president of the UN Security Council, a position currently held by Greece, calling the landmine incident “fabricated.” South Korea has been trying to “impede” the North’s border fortification efforts, according to Pyongyang’s Korean Central News Agency.

Seoul sent its own letter to the UN Security Council last Thursday, demanding that Pyongyang take responsibility for the blast and apologize. The South claims to have discovered resin from North Korean landmines and says that several explosives were deliberately planted south of the Military Demarcation Line (MDL), the border between the two Koreas. Thus it ruled out that the landmine had been washed south across the border by summer rains, as is sometimes the case.

Seoul has accused Pyongyang of violating the 1953 Armistice Agreement that ended active fighting in the Korean War, though the conflict technically continues as no peace treaty was signed. The UN Command, which oversees the armistice in the South and is

controlled by the US military, also stated the North was in violation of the agreement, claiming to have later found an active North Korean mine south of the MDL.

Pyongyang, on the other hand, has stated that its actions along the border are a “legitimate and just exercise of its sovereignty going in strict conformity with the UN Charter and international law as it is a self-defensive measure to defend its territorial security from outside threat of aggression.” Since 2024, the North has been carrying out border reinforcement work.

Kim Yo-jong, the high-ranking sister of North Korean leader Kim Jong-un, accused Seoul of attempting to intimidate the North and that the military would deploy more tactical strike assets along the border, last week calling the situation “very unstable.” On Sunday, observers witnessed the North openly displaying a 122mm howitzer at the border pointing south, which is rare and interpreted as a rejection of any negotiations to ease tensions.

Kim also stated that the South’s military had fired 201 warning shots and issued 2,780 warning broadcasts towards the North between August 1 and October 17. She said that Pyongyang plans to resume propaganda loudspeaker broadcasts along the entire border after both sides last halted them in June 2025.

Seoul could similarly resume its own broadcasts, which have been a source of tensions in the past. Military tensions spiked in 2015 after another landmine incident injured South Korean soldiers. The South began broadcasts shortly after that, leading to the North reportedly targeting the propaganda speakers, resulting in an artillery exchange. No casualties resulted from the skirmish. However, the episode highlights just how rapidly the situation can escalate.

The rising tensions must be placed within the broader international context, amid an upsurge of militarism

around the globe driven above all by US imperialism. Washington has stoked a war with Russia in Ukraine, backed Israel's brutal genocide in Gaza, and launched an illegal war against Iran. US allies like Japan have also rapidly militarized, deploying long-range strike capabilities.

US imperialism's primary target is China, which Washington has been actively attempting to goad into war. Its main efforts have been fueling tensions over Taiwan, but it cannot be ruled out that war could be stoked on the Korean Peninsula, especially as the US continually increases its military threats in the region.

In an interview with the *Financial Times* published on October 18, General Ronald Clark, the commander of US Army forces in Asia, stated, "At no other point in my career have I seen the Army commit this level of resources and capability to the Pacific." This includes the deployment of a Typhon missile system to the Philippines, capable of striking China's coast with both SM-6 and Tomahawk missiles. Another Typhon missile system has been stationed in Okinawa, Japan.

The FT reported in the same article that the US has set a record this year for the number of allies taking part in joint military exercises, held in countries like the Philippines and Australia, as well as the scope of the drills. In other words, the US is surrounding China and North Korea in its system of alliances while ramping up war preparations.

South Korea has been an active participant in this war drive against China under both right-wing and so-called "progressive" administrations. Under current President Lee Jae-myung of the Democratic Party, Seoul has pledged to raise military spending to 3.5 percent of GDP and acquire nuclear-powered submarines.

Furthermore, Seoul has carried out its own provocations against the North. While investigating former President Yoon Suk-yeol and his December 2024 attempted coup, special prosecutor Cho Eun-seok said last December of Yoon and then-Defense Minister Kim Yong-hyeon, "To create justification for declaring martial law, they tried to lure North Korea into mounting an armed aggression, but failed as North Korea did not respond militarily."

North Korea has long been a target of US imperialism, from the Korean War, which erupted in 1950, to the present day. While Trump claims to have a good relationship with Kim Jong-un, he also threatened

to "totally destroy" the North in 2017.

Facing these threats, in 2024, Pyongyang and Moscow signed a comprehensive strategic partnership, pledging mutual assistance in the event of aggression against one of the other parties. The North has also dispatched troops to fight alongside Russia in Ukraine.

Now, after watching the attack on Venezuela at the beginning of this year, the threats against Cuba and the war on Iran, no doubt the calculations in Pyongyang include the fear that North Korea could be the next target.

As the crisis for the Trump administration deepens, the situation in Asia becomes ever more uncertain and dangerous. A miscalculation or mistake could be enough to set off a conflict on the Korean Peninsula or elsewhere in the Asia-Pacific region involving not only the Koreas, but the US, China and Russia, raising the real risk of a nuclear war.



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