

South Korea expresses its desire to join the anti-China AUKUS alliance

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12 May 2024

During recent talks between the foreign and defence ministers from South Korea and Australia, Seoul acknowledged publicly for the first time that it was actively seeking to join the AUKUS military alliance, currently comprised of Australia, the United Kingdom and the United States. The move is part of US-led plans throughout the Indo-Pacific region for war against China.

South Korean Foreign Minister Jo Tae-yeol and Defense Minister Sin Won-sik met with their respective counterparts Penny Wong and Richard Marles in Melbourne, Australia on May 1 for the sixth iteration of the “two plus two” talks between the two US allies. A joint statement released afterwards stated, “The ROK (Republic of Korea) welcomed that the AUKUS countries are considering cooperation with additional partners on Pillar II advanced capability projects.”

Sin made clear after the talks that this meant the possibility of Seoul joining the anti-China alliance, saying, “During today’s meeting, we also discussed the possibility of partnering with AUKUS Pillar II.” Not stopping there, the joint statement also noted that the South Korean ministers “expressed the ROK’s interest in the Quad.” The Quad, or Quadrilateral Security Dialogue comprised of the US, Australia, Japan and India, is a quasi-military alliance also meant to surround and threaten China.

Indicating that cooperation with other countries will expand, Marles stated, “As AUKUS Pillar II develops, there will be opportunities in the future, and we’re seeing that play out in relation to Japan as well.” The announcement comes after the three AUKUS countries announced last month in connection with Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida’s visit to Washington that they were planning to bring Japan into Pillar II as well.

AUKUS was launched in September 2021 and includes two “pillars.” The first involves the transfer of nuclear-powered submarines to Australia while the second deals with military technology sharing, cooperation and development. While Pillar I is currently not open to additional members, Pillar II is provocatively being expanded to incorporate other allies, such as South Korea and Japan, but potentially New Zealand and Canada as well.

South Korea is likely to provide its allies assistance in the development of advanced hypersonic weaponry. Seoul is currently working on a hypersonic cruise missile that it will begin testing this year called Hycore. The missile is expected to reach speeds of up to Mach 6.2 and enter service early in the next decade.

The US reportedly cancelled the development of its own AGM-183A hypersonic missile in March 2023 after repeated test failures. The missile, the US’s first air-launched hypersonic weapon, is designed for use on a B-52 bomber. Despite the cancellation, developer Lockheed Martin is still working on its production.

Cooperation on hypersonic weapons is considered vital for the US-led war effort against both China and Russia. Malcolm Davis of the US-funded Australian Strategic Policy Institute think tank stated that both China and Russia “are more advanced in their development and deployment of such technologies,” giving them tactical benefits. He added that it was “absolutely vital” for AUKUS members, as well as South Korea and Japan, to develop hypersonic systems in order to combat China.

Liu Pengyu, a spokesman for China’s embassy in Washington, expressed concerns over the latest AUKUS developments without directly naming South Korea on May 6. “Despite being called a ‘trilateral security partnership,’ AUKUS is essentially about

fuelling military confrontation through military collaboration,” he said. “It creates additional nuclear proliferation risks, exacerbates the arms race in the Asia-Pacific and hurts regional peace and stability. China is deeply concerned and firmly opposed to it.”

These dangers are being hidden from the working class in South Korea and throughout the region as Seoul expands its participation in US anti-China war preparations. South Korea is already part of a de-facto trilateral military alliance with the US and Japan, formally established during a summit between the countries’ leaders last August at Camp David near Washington. This received praise from Wong and Marles during the recent “two plus two” talks.

Notably, the growing danger of a catastrophic war with China was entirely absent from the campaigns of South Korea’s ruling People Power Party and main opposition Democratic Party during last month’s general election, demonstrating that both support the war efforts. Neither party was willing to raise the issue lest it spark the latent anti-war sentiment that exists in the South Korean working class.

US imperialism is not only strengthening alliances bilaterally but drawing its allies into a web of alliances that surround China in preparation for war.

The South Korean and Australian ministers emphasized this in their joint statement, stating that both “warmly welcomed the strengthening of our respective alliances with the United States.” They also declared that “active participation in exercises and activities bilaterally, as well as multilaterally, with countries such as the United States and Japan, will contribute to peace and stability in the region.”

For all the talk of “peace and stability,” the statement then noted dangerous flashpoints in the Indo-Pacific that the US has deliberately inflamed. It “reaffirmed the importance of preserving peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait as an indispensable element of security and prosperity in the region” as well as “freedom of navigation and overflight in and above the South China Sea and East China Sea.

The statement simply parrots the propaganda emanating from Washington which is provocatively undermining the “One China” policy that has formed the bedrock of relations with China since 1979. Virtually every country in the world, including the US, acknowledges de facto that Taiwan is part of China by

having only formal diplomatic relations with Beijing.

Washington is boosting diplomatic and military ties with Taipei with the aim of goading Beijing into a war. The US knows full well that China will not allow a precedent to be set for the carving up of its territory and its return to the semi-colonial status it suffered during the 19th and early 20th centuries.

The US and its allies are also expanding military exercises throughout the Indo-Pacific region on Beijing’s doorstep, in which Seoul and Canberra participate. South Korea, for example, took part in the Talisman Sabre war games in Australia for the first time in 2021. Seoul also plans to send observers to Australia’s Exercise Southern Jackaroo this June for the first time. Both exercises are conducted alongside the US military. Australia also takes part in the massive US and South Korean war games Ulchi Freedom Shield and Freedom Shield that take place annually on the Korean Peninsula.



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