

North Korean troops in Russia as US/NATO escalates Ukraine war

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According to Ukrainian, South Korean, US and European officials, North Korea has sent up to 12,000 troops to Russia to bolster its military forces in the war against Ukraine. Following training in the Russian far east, thousands have now been transported to the war zone in the Kursk region of Russia, parts of which remain occupied by Ukrainian troops following an offensive in August backed by Washington and its NATO allies.

Andriy Kovalenko, Ukraine's top counter-disinformation official, claimed on Monday that their forces had fired on North Korean soldiers in Kursk for the first time. The *Financial Times* reported that an unnamed senior Ukrainian intelligence official had confirmed the military engagement but declined to provide any details.

Where exactly the North Korean troops are, their numbers, what their military role might be, and whether they have indeed come under fire is the subject of a lack of evidence, widespread speculation and no doubt a heavy dose of disinformation. There appears little doubt, however, that numbers of North Korean troops are in Russia. Russian officials have largely dropped their initial denials while stopping short of confirming the North Korean deployment.

Russian President Vladimir Putin indirectly confirmed the troop presence. Questioned about a video released by South Korean intelligence purportedly showing North Korean soldiers training in the Russian far east, he stated that "he never doubted at all that the North Korean leadership takes our agreements seriously." During his visit to North Korea in June, Putin reached a "comprehensive strategic partnership" with Pyongyang providing for "mutual assistance in the event of aggression against one of the parties."

The US has seized on the North Korean deployment

to ratchet up their denunciations of Russia. US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin branded the North Korean presence in the war a "very serious" escalation that had ramifications in Europe and Asia. John Kirby, White House national security spokesman, declared that North Korean troops were "fair game" if deployed in fighting against Ukrainian forces.

In the UN Security Council on Monday, US ambassador to the UN Robert Wood demanded to know whether North Korean troops were present in Russia. "We're not in a court here," Russian deputy ambassador Anna Evstigneeva responded, "and the question of the United States, in the spirit of an interrogation, is not something I intend to answer."

Washington's accusations of "escalation" are entirely hypocritical given that the US and NATO have systematically crossed their own "red lines" in providing main battle tanks, artillery, war planes and missiles in a war that is increasingly planned and directed in the Pentagon and NATO headquarters.

Ukraine has exploited the North Korean troop presence to once again demand further military assistance and support from its US and European allies. President Volodymyr Zelenskyy claimed on Monday that 11,000 North Korean troops were now stationed in the Kursk region. "We see an increase in North Korean forces, but, unfortunately, we do not see an increase in response from our partners," he said.

South Korea is also being further drawn into the US/NATO conflict with Russia. South Korean Foreign Minister Cho Tae-yul and EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell met on Monday in Seoul and issued a joint statement condemning the North Korean troop deployment in the "strongest possible terms" and voicing concerns that Russia may assist in boosting North Korea's military capacity, particularly through

the provision of nuclear- or ballistic missile-related technology.

A comment on the European Council on Foreign Affairs website declared that “North Korea’s troop deployment to the Russian front represents a fundamental shift in Europe’s security relations with east Asia.” The Europeans should respond by “not only bolstering support for Ukraine but also strengthening security ties with South Korea,” building on Borrell’s visit to Seoul.

Such security ties with South Korea “must begin with enhanced intelligence cooperation,” but for Europeans, “the big prize remains persuading South Korea to arm Ukraine.” In reality, South Korea is already providing lethal military aid to Ukraine.

While condemning North Korea for providing missiles, shells and other armaments to Russia, South Korea has been replenishing depleted US stockpiles of 155mm shells and thus indirectly arming Ukraine. Under South Korea’s foreign trade legislation, it is prohibited from sending lethal weapons to live conflict zones.

As the US and its allies escalate the war against Russia in Ukraine, the global dimensions of the conflict become ever clearer. Far from being an isolated war in Eastern Europe, it is one front in an emerging world war. The second front is already underway in the Middle East, targeting Iran in particular. The integration of US allies such as South Korea and Japan into the Ukraine conflict takes place as the US escalates its economic war against Beijing and preparations for military hostilities against China.

In foreign policy and strategic circles in Washington, there is an increasingly open discussion about the needs to prepare for World War III against the so-called “axis of upheaval”—Russia, China, Iran and North Korea.

A comment in the *Washington Post* on October 27, entitled “North Korean troops in Russia bring a ‘World-Island’ conflict a step closer,” based itself on the central strategic importance of Eurasia—the World Island—as elaborated by British 19th century geo-strategic thinker Halford Mackinder.

The author Nicholas Eberstadt, an analyst at the right-wing American Enterprise Institute, declared: “There is now a coordinated challenge to the existing US-led security order that stretches from the Middle East through Eurasia, all the way to the Far East... We must

come to understand that, for all intents and purpose, the war in Gaza and Lebanon against Israel by Iranian proxies is the war by Russia against Ukraine, as would be the war in Taiwan that China may unleash, at a time of Beijing’s own choosing. All one.”

In reality, it is US imperialism that is above all responsible for provoking and escalating the war in Ukraine against Russia; arming and backing Israel’s genocidal war in Gaza and encouraging its expansion in the West Bank, Lebanon and Iran, and deliberately inflaming dangerous flashpoints in Asia, above all Taiwan, to goad China into war in the Indo-Pacific.

The US is engaged in an utterly reckless effort to offset its historic decline and defend its global hegemony—“the existing US-led security order”—that is plunging humanity towards a catastrophic conflict between nuclear-armed powers. Only the political intervention of the working class can end the danger of nuclear Armageddon by building a unified international anti-war movement to abolish the capitalist system that is the root cause of geo-political tensions and war.



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