

North Korea As Pretext: U.S. Builds Asian Military Alliance Against China And Russia

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Global Research, December 03, 2010
[Stop NATO](#) 3 December 2010

Region: [Asia](#)

Theme: [US NATO War Agenda](#)
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On December 1 the U.S. and its South Korean military ally completed four days of naval maneuvers in the Yellow Sea where China claims a 200-mile exclusive economic zone.

The U.S. dispatched the 97,000-ton USS George Washington nuclear-powered aircraft supercarrier for the exercise, accompanied by a carrier strike group consisting of a guided missile cruiser and three guided missile destroyers. The American deployment included 6,000 sailors and 75 aircraft. South Korea supplied destroyers, corvettes, frigates, support ships, anti-submarine aircraft and an undisclosed amount of military personnel.

The war games, which included live-fire shooting and bombing drills, were the latest in a series of U.S.-led military exercises in South Korea and the seas to its east and west beginning in July of this year:

From July 25-28 the U.S. conducted a joint military exercise with South Korea codenamed Invincible Spirit in the Sea of Japan/East Sea with the involvement of 20 warships including the USS George Washington supercarrier, 200 warplanes including F-22 Raptor stealth fighters and 8,000 troops.

In August the U.S. and South Korea conducted this year's Ulchi Freedom Guardian military exercise, the world's largest command and control simulation drill, in the latter country with 30,000 U.S. and 56,000 South Korean troops participating.

In early September Washington and Seoul held an anti-submarine warfare exercise in the Yellow Sea with two U.S. guided missile destroyers and a fast attack submarine and two South Korean destroyers.

Only the August exercise was a routine one, the latest in a series of Ulchi Freedom Guardian maneuvers held over several decades.

On the day the most recent military exercise ended, December 1, it was announced that the U.S. and South Korea will hold another military exercise this month. [1] The following day "South Korea...readied plans for more live-fire drills as a warning to North Korea and scheduled talks with the United States and Japan on dealing with [North Korea]...." [2] The armed forces of the Republic of Korea will begin five days of artillery drills on December 6 in 29 locations, including on border islands in the Yellow Sea.

On the same day Secretary of State Hillary Clinton will meet with the foreign ministers of South Korea and Japan in Washington, D.C., in a rebuff to China and Russia, which are partners in the six-party talks - along with the U.S., Japan, South Korea and North Korea -

that have been held since 2003 after North Korea withdrew from the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. This despite China calling for an emergency meeting of representatives to the six-nation negotiations and winning North Korea's agreement to rejoin the long-stalled process. On December 2 Russia announced it was ready to participate in emergency talks with the six-country group.

Just as Russia and China were excluded from the U.S.-led investigation of the Cheonan sinking earlier this year, so now they are being brushed aside in favor of a confrontational U.S.-Japan-South Korea initiative.

Two days after the American-led naval exercise in the Yellow Sea concluded, the U.S. began a week-long exercise with Japan off the second nation's islands near the South Korean coast. The war games, Keen Sword 2011, involve 60 warships, 400 aircraft and 44,000 troops and are the largest-ever joint U.S.-Japan military drills. Kyodo News disclosed that "The maneuvers will be carried out to practice for guarding against ballistic missile attacks and for defending remote Japanese islands," the latter an allusion to a Chinese-Japanese territorial dispute in the East China Sea. Standard Missile-3 interceptors on U.S. and Japanese Aegis class destroyers deployed in the Sea of Japan and Patriot Advanced Capability-3 anti-ballistic missiles currently stationed at bases from the north to the south of Japan, Hokkaido to Okinawa, will be employed.

In the words of an Air Force major assigned to U.S. Forces Japan headquarters: "There's going to be naval operations, air operations, land - pretty much the full spectrum of military activities. There is going to be a lot of flying, some movement involving the aircraft carrier George Washington." [3]

South Korea's military has been invited to attend the exercise as an observer, as Australian, British and French officers were on board USS George Washington for the exercise in the Yellow Sea that ended two days ago. In the words of Australian Minister Stephen Smith, "We had an official on board the USS George Washington as essentially a show of support." [4] Japanese military personnel observed the Invincible Spirit naval exercise in the Sea of Japan in July.

As a recent Russian commentary characterized the now constant American military activity in East Asia - exemplified by the deployment of the George Washington supercarrier in waters off China's and Russia's coasts and island possessions in the Sea of Japan in July, in the South China Sea in August, in the Yellow Sea in November and at the confluence of the Sea of Japan and East China Sea this month - "the Pentagon [is] flexing its muscles against both North Korea and China." [5]

And not only in respect to conventional forces. On November 22 South Korean Defense Minister Kim Tae-young responded to a question by one of his nation's members of parliament on "whether the government intends to consider the redeployment of US tactical nuclear weapons in South Korea...in the affirmative." [6]

Although the sinking of a South Korean corvette, Cheonan, in March has been used in the intervening nine months as the rationale for U.S.-led war games in the seas of East Asia, that incident in no manner accounts for joint American-Vietnamese naval drills in the South China Sea in August, visits to Australia and nine other Asia-Pacific nations by President

Barack Obama, Secretary of Defense Robert Gates, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and chairman of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff Admiral Michael Mullen early last month [7], and the overall diplomatic offensive and military maneuvers Washington is intensifying in the region with each passing day.

Three months after the sinking of the Cheonan, President Obama accused his counterpart, Chinese President Hu Jintao, of “willful blindness” in relation to North Korea in what was reported as a “blunt” conversation during the Group of 20 summit in Toronto on June 27. [8]

Since North Korea’s shelling of the South Korean island of Yeonpyeong on November 23, the U.S. has intensified pressure on China to rein in North Korea. Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Mullen recently told a Washington, D.C. think tank audience that “Beijing’s call for consultations will not be a substitute for action,” and, in reference to China’s military modernization program: “I am concerned about some of the high-end capabilities that they clearly are developing. I don’t underestimate them in terms of capability. Some of the specific capabilities are very clearly focused on and pointed at the United States of America, and they are anti-access capabilities.” [9] That is, China has the temerity to develop defensive capabilities in the face of U.S. military presence off its coasts.

The U.S. is exploiting North Korea as a decoy to target China and is supporting Japan in territorial conflicts with both China and Russia [10] as components of a broader strategy to renew, enlarge and integrate military alliances throughout the Asia-Pacific area. [11]

Washington recognizes the Senkaku/Diaoyu islands, administered by Japan, as Japanese, but also refers to the Southern Kuril Islands, which since 1945 have belonged to Russia (and its predecessor state, the Soviet Union) as Japanese territories.

Hillary Clinton’s visit to New Zealand last month resulted in the signing of the Wellington Declaration committing the two countries to a new strategic partnership, annual military consultations and a resumption of joint military exercises. In fact what Clinton secured was the revival of the Cold War-era Australia, New Zealand, United States (ANZUS) Security Treaty which was signed during the Korean War and invoked to recruit Australian and New Zealand troops for the Vietnam War.

An Indian commentator said of the top U.S. diplomat’s achievement: “Clinton was not only given a traditional New Zealand Maori’s welcome called Powhiri, the greatest gift that she could bring back to Washington was the release of the New Zealand Defense White Paper 2010 two days before her arrival. The White Paper envisaged Wellington’s greater presence in the South Pacific and strengthening the alliance with Washington and Canberra.” [12]

Kevin Rudd, until recently Australia’s prime minister and now its foreign minister, affirmed on November 28 that “Australia could be drawn in to any military conflict on the Korean peninsula under its alliance with the US.” In his own words, “I...simply state the obvious: that under our alliance with the United States, Article 4 of the ANZUS Treaty is clear about our requirements to act to meet the common danger....” [13]

Similarly, a briefing note prepared for Defence Minister Peter MacKay of Canada revealed that “If war breaks out on the Korean peninsula, Canada could become embroiled due to a half-century-old United Nations military alliance,” the United Nations Command formed by the U.S. and its allies in the Korean War after the armistice was signed in 1953. The memo states that although the main “fighting formation” that would lead military operations

against North Korea is the joint U.S.-South Korea Combined Forces Command, that joint command “includes under its strategic organizational umbrella the legacy United Nations Command.” [14]

Other members of the United Nations Command are Canada’s fellow NATO member states the U.S., Britain, France, the Netherlands, Belgium, Greece, Turkey and Luxembourg; ANZUS members Australia and New Zealand; the Philippines and Thailand, with which the U.S. has defense alliances – and military assistance obligations – comparable to those it has with Australia, Japan, New Zealand and South Korea.

As with the reactivation of trilateral ANZUS military obligations, so with the U.S.-Japanese mutual military assistance agreement. On October 27 Clinton held a press conference in Hawaii with Japanese Foreign Minister Seiji Maehara and when asked about an island chain contested by Japan and China – the Senkakus to Tokyo, the Diaoyus to Beijing – said, “the Senkakus fall within the scope of Article 5 of the 1960 U.S.-Japan Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security. This is part of the larger commitment that the United States has made to Japan’s security. We consider the Japanese-U.S. alliance one of the most important alliance partnerships we have anywhere in the world and we are committed to our obligations to protect the Japanese.”

She also said the Washington-Tokyo alliance “is the cornerstone of American strategic engagement in the Asia Pacific.” [15]

Two weeks later President Obama was in Yokohama, Japan for the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation summit and told Prime Minister Naoto Kan that the U.S.-Japan alliance is “the cornerstone of American strategic engagement in the Asia Pacific” and “the commitment of the United States to the defense of Japan is unshakable.” [16]

Clinton’s and Obama’s phraseology was identical.

In late October Clinton, flanked by her Japanese counterpart, said: “This year, we celebrate the 50th anniversary of our alliance, which was forged at the height of the Cold War,” in reference to the aforementioned Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security between the United States and Japan of 1960. [17]

In advance of the Keen Sword 2011 U.S.-Japan war games currently underway, Air Force Lieutenant General Hawk Carlisle, who is directing the exercise on the American side, stated in the middle of last month: “In 1960, Japan and the U.S. signed the Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security. Participation in Keen Sword further enhances the Japan-U.S. alliance, which remains a key strategic relationship in the Asia-Pacific region.” [18]

Clinton’s spokesman, the State Department’s Philip Crowley, backed Japan’s territorial claims on Russia’s Kuril Islands on November 2, even referring to them as the Northern Territories, the Japanese government’s designation. He didn’t go as far as Clinton had five days earlier in pledging adherence to Article 5 of the U.S.-Japan treaty – “Each Party recognizes that an armed attack against either Party in the territories under the administration of Japan would be dangerous to its own peace and safety and declares that it would act to meet the common danger” – but the prospect of Washington and Tokyo invoking the provision against Russia is not an unimaginable contingency.

On December 4 Japanese Foreign Minister Maehara will arrive at the northern island of

Hokkaido “to view four Russian-held islands claimed by Japan, known as the Northern Territories in Japan and the Southern Kurils in Russia.” [19] While in Hokkaido, Maehara will meet with former residents of the Kurils.

Decades-old and until of late seemingly dormant or discarded military blocs, treaties and military assistance clauses are being resuscitated and expanded in the Asia-Pacific region. Military alliances modeled after the North Atlantic Treaty Organization in the area in the 1950s and their 21st century equivalents are being integrated into an eastern version of and in many ways extension of NATO. At least eight Asia-Pacific nations – Australia, Kazakhstan, Malaysia, Mongolia, New Zealand, Singapore, South Korea and Tonga – have troops assigned to NATO’s International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan.

As part of the Afghan war effort, NATO maintains a military presence in five nations bordering western China: Afghanistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan and Tajikistan.

Last month Japan announced that it was deploying an initial contingent of troops “to its westernmost island in response to Chinese naval manoeuvres in the East China Sea.” The first 100 troops will be sent to Yonaguni, the southernmost of the Ryukyu/Nansei islands less than 100 miles from the Senkaku/Diaoyu island grouping. The Japanese Defense Ministry is “also considering sending troops to the islands of Miyako and Ishigaki west of Okinawa to beef up border security.” [20] Ishigaki is also about 100 miles from the Senkaku/Diaoyu islands.

Regarding last month’s flurry of visits to the Asia-Pacific region by major U.S. foreign policy and military officials, The Hindu reported: “US visitors...declared Washington’s resolve to expand its footprint in South-East Asia. Clinton called for beefing up US military presence in Singapore, which implies a firmer grip on the strategic Strait of Malacca, strengthening defence cooperation with Thailand and the Philippines...and stepping up interaction with Vietnam.” [21]

The most ambitious element of American plans to forge an Asian equivalent of NATO is the recruitment of India as the largest and most strategically essential partner in the development of an eastern military bloc. The U.S. is moving to supplant Russia as India’s main weapons supplier and historical military ally and employing the South Asian nation to counter China’s emergence as a regional and world power.

Washington is proceeding at a breakneck – an alarming – pace with plans to politically and militarily polarize East Asia, using the crisis on the Korean Peninsula to do so. Attempts by China and Russia to defuse the conflict and resume negotiations aimed at its peaceful resolution are being spurned by headstrong and reckless U.S. government and military officials.

Russia and China share borders with North Korea. The U.S. is a continent away. A new conflagration on the peninsula would directly affect the first two nations. America can exploit a renewal of hostilities to reinstall itself in the Asia-Pacific region and use proxies – Japan as much as South Korea – to accomplish that objective.

Notes

1) Vladimir Fedoruk, US and South Korea plan more war games, Voice of Russia, December

- 1, 2010
- 2) Radio Netherlands/Agence France-Presse, December 2, 2010
- 3) Voice of America News, December 2, 2010
- 4) Australian Associated Press, November 30, 2010
- 5) Konstantin Garibov, Pentagon flexes muscles in Korea, Voice of Russia, November 26, 2010
- 6) Itar-Tass, November 22, 2010
- 7) Obama, Gates And Clinton In Asia: U.S. Expands Military Build-Up In The East, Stop NATO, November 7, 2010

<http://rickrozoff.wordpress.com/2010/11/07/obama-gates-and-clinton-in-asia-u-s-expands-military-build-up-in-the-east>

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<http://rickrozoff.wordpress.com/2010/07/16/u-s-risks-military-clash-with-china-in-yellow-sea>

- 9) CNN, December 1, 2010

- 10) U.S. Supports Japan, Confronts China And Russia Over Island Disputes, Stop NATO, November 4, 2010

<http://rickrozoff.wordpress.com/2010/11/04/u-s-supports-japan-confronts-china-and-russia-over-island-disputes>

- 11) Asia: Pentagon Revives And Expands Cold War Military Blocs, Stop NATO, September 14, 2010

<http://rickrozoff.wordpress.com/2010/09/15/asia-pentagon-revives-and-expands-cold-war-military-blocs>

- U.S. Marshals Military Might To Challenge Asian Century, Stop NATO, August 21, 2010

<http://rickrozoff.wordpress.com/2010/08/21/u-s-marshals-military-might-to-challenge-asian-century>

- 12) Balaji Chandramohan, U.S. Strengthening Old Alliances in Asia Pacific to Contain the influence of China, Diplomatic Courier, November 30, 2010

- 13) The Australian, November 29, 2010

- 14) Mike Blanchfield, New Korean war could ensnare Canada, documents suggest, Canadian Press, November 26, 2010

- 15) U.S. Department of State, October 27, 2010

- 16) After NATO Summit, U.S. To Intensify Military Drive Into Asia, Stop NATO, November 17, 2010

<http://rickrozoff.wordpress.com/2010/11/17/after-nato-summit-u-s-to-intensify-military-drive-into-asia>

- 17) U.S. Department of State, October 27, 2010

- 18) Pacific Air Forces, November 15, 2010

- 19) Xinhua News Agency, November 30, 2010

- 20) Nikkei/Reuters, November 21, 2010

- 21) Vladimir Radyuhin, Indo-Russian ties: which way? The Hindu, November 27, 2010,

<http://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/tp-opinion/article916376.ece>

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