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North Korea Has Sent Troops to Aid Russia. What Comes Next for NATO?

North Korean troops will gain much-needed battlefield experience in the Russia-Ukraine war, helping shape future military tactics and doctrine, say experts.

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In this pool photograph distributed by the Russian state agency Sputnik, Russian President Vladimir Putin and North Korean leader Kim Jong Un toast during a reception at the Mongnangwan Reception House in Pyongyang on June 19, 2024. Putin enjoyed a red carpet welcome, a military ceremony, and an embrace from North Korea's

Kim Jong Un during a state visit to Pyongyang where they both pledged to forge closer ties. Vladimir Smirnov/POOL/AFP via Getty Images

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11/5/2024

Updated: 11/5/2024

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Analysis

NATO will not enter East Asia soon despite North Korea sending troops to aid Russia in its war against Ukraine, according to experts.

North Korea's latest move to aid Russia is seen as a "significant escalation" and "dangerous expansion" of the conflict, according to NATO Secretary-General Mark Rutte.

"I can confirm that North Korean troops have been sent to Russia, and that North Korean military units have been deployed to the Kursk region," Rutte said in a [statement](#) on Oct. 28. "The deployment of North Korean troops represents: one, a significant escalation in the DPRK [North Korea]'s ongoing involvement in Russia's illegal war. Two, yet another breach of U.N. Security Council resolutions. And three, a dangerous expansion of Russia's war."

NATO is committed to supporting a free and democratic Ukraine, because "Ukraine's security is our security," he said.

"Today, we discussed the need to further strengthen military support to Ukraine. We are actively consulting within the Alliance, with Ukraine, and with our Indo-Pacific partners on these developments, and we continue to monitor the situation closely."

How Much Will North Korea Get Involved?

While Iran and China will likely not get involved other than supplying equipment such as drones and computer components, that is not the case with North Korea, said Carl Schuster, an instructor in the Department of History, Humanities, and International Studies at Hawaii Pacific University.

“North Korea’s involvement is driven by the Kim regime’s desperate need for cash and resources,” he told The Epoch Times in an email.

“Pyongyang literally is selling its troops to Russia for cash, oil and probably food as well as other raw materials the regime desperately needs. He has deployed approximately two brigades of troops.”

Schuster said that North Korean leader Kim Jong Un views the Russo-Ukraine War as a laboratory to study and update its doctrine and tactics, much like Germany used the Spanish Civil War in the 1930s.

“North Korea’s military has an outdated military doctrine that dates back to the 80s. Kim knows it needs updating but Pyongyang’s isolation limits its ability to acquire, practice, and adopt the procedures, tactics, and operational concepts of modern warfare. Participation in the Russo-Ukraine War will change that,” he wrote.

“The majority of North Korea’s military equipment is obsolete or obsolescent. Replacing that equipment and reforming its military to optimize the use of that new equipment will be expensive (hence the need for money and resources from Russia and possibly China).”



Russian President Vladimir Putin is welcomed by North Korean leader Kim Jong Un upon his arrival at an airport in Pyongyang, North Korea, in this image released by the Korean Central News Agency on June 19, 2024. KCNA via Reuters

Experts: NATO Will Not Enter East Asia

Despite North Korea's further involvement in the war, geopolitical experts do not see the prospect that NATO will enter East Asia as a response.

Schuster said he believes that NATO will not deploy forces to East Asia other than naval forces and an occasional deployment of aircraft for exercises.

“NATO member country leaders are too worried about Russia's next move than what is going on in East Asia,” he told The Epoch Times.

He listed several reasons.

First of all, after nearly 30 years of “almost ignoring their military forces and requirements,” most NATO member countries don't have the resources to do more than make a politically symbolic deployment to East Asia.

“NATO member countries lack the resources and will to assist the US in protecting shipping from al-Houthi attacks, so I don't [see] anything more than a small naval deployment and participation in naval exercises with countries like India, Philippines, and Japan,” he said.

In addition, naval exercises signal NATO's political interest in a region and provide a temporary presence but present a much lower risk of involvement in any conflicts. Similarly, temporary air force unit deployments offer the same benefits as a naval deployment, and they last as long as the planes are there.

“The majority of NATO members have long shown their reluctance to be involved in conflicts, employing very restrictive rules of

engagement that all but prohibited their involvement in anything other than a direct attack on their units,” he said.

Anders Corr, principal at Corr Analytics Inc. and publisher of the “Journal of Political Risk,” agreed that it’s unlikely that NATO forces will enter East Asia soon, “though NATO is strengthening relations with Japan, South Korea, Australia, and New Zealand.”

“These countries could at some point host a NATO office to better coordinate between U.S. allies in Asia and U.S. allies in Europe,” he told The Epoch Times.



NATO Secretary General Mark Rutte delivers a statement, after a meeting with a high level South Korean delegation including top intelligence and military officials as well as senior diplomats briefed NATO diplomats, at NATO headquarters in Brussels on Monday, Oct. 28, 2024. AP Photo/Virginia Mayo

Possibility of World War III?

In regards to the possibility of another world war by the new “[axis of evil](#),” namely, China, Russia, and Iran, Corr cited comments by JP Morgan CEO Jamie Dimon that we are already in World War III.

“There are certainly linkages between the conflicts in Ukraine, Iran, and with North Korea, though in Asia it is better described as a new Cold War,” said Corr.

“The key to keeping these conflicts separate and from spiraling into a much more damaging world war is to limit their geographic extent and the types of weapons used,” he said.

“No country wants war, but none want to back down or lose the territory of its allies either. So they threaten each other with escalation that could get out of control. Whichever country is more willing to endure the risk of escalation is more likely to win.”

Schuster, on the other hand, believes that there is very little chance of another world war at this time.

“Pyongyang is showing it has no interest in starting a war on the Korean Peninsula at this time. Kim is destroying border bridges, rails and roads. One does that to impede an attack, not launch one yourself,” he analyzed.

“China finds the Russo-Ukraine War too useful as a distraction from its aggression in Asia. Putin’s War is drawing U.S. and Western attention and resources away from Asia, limiting the deterrent actions the U.S. in particular can undertake.

“Israel has taught Iran that its military is not capable of fighting a determined modern opponent, so Iran itself will do little to provoke Israel into a repeat of last week’s strikes on a larger scale ... those conflicts are in their final 6-8 months.”

However, he added that the situation may change in two to four years.

“[The possibility] will be as dependent on Xi and Kim’s perception of Western military capabilities and likely response to their actions as it will be on their confidence in their own forces’ ability to achieve their assigned objectives,” he said.