

Original article in Korean:

<https://www.voakorea.com/korea/korea-politics/experts-us-korea-alliance>

US Experts: “South Korean Officials Should Refrain From Making Derogatory Remarks On The Alliance... Damage To The Defense Treaty”

Reporter: Baik Sung-Won 2020.11.3 2:45



Last month on the 6th, 4 foreign ministers of the ‘QUAD’ pose for a picture with Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga of Japan. From the left, Foreign Minister Subrahmanyam Jaishankar of India, Foreign Minister Toshimitsu Motegi of Japan, Prime Minister Suga, Foreign Minister Marise Payne of Australia, and Secretary of State Mike Pompeo of the United States.

###

A statement by a South Korean official is causing controversy in Washington, D.C., whereby the official said that “If South Korea participates in an anti-China military alliance, it can be regarded as an enemy of China.’ There are criticisms that during the acute strife between the US and China, this statement puts a burden on the Asia strategy of the US, and that statements that degrade the alliance must be refrained from being uttered.

US-based Korea experts are viewing the statement by Moon Chung-in, Special Advisor to President Moon Jae-in of South Korea for Foreign Affairs and National Security, as an official opposition to expanding the 'QUAD' of the US, an ally of South Korea.

Special Advisor Moon said on the 27th of last month in a virtual event hosted by the Atlantic Council and the East Asia Foundation of South Korea, that if South Korea participates in America's 'anti-China military exercises,' China will consider South Korea as an enemy.

Furthermore, Moon mentioned that in case South Korea places more THAAD units or other mid-range missile systems that targets China, or participates in military exercises in the South China Sea, China will aim its Dongfeng missiles at South Korea, and will initiate military provocations not only in South Korea's 'Air defense identification zone', but also in the Yellow Sea as well, and will strengthen its Northern Tripartite Alliance System with Russia and North Korea.

The experts however analyzed Moon's statement as a danger that will shake the foundation of the US-ROK military alliance.

[Bruce W. Bennett, Adjunct international/defense researcher, RAND Corp.] "I think Moon Chung-in is like many national security experts in Korea: They are focused on ROK security, and forget that the US/ROK alliance was established by a 'Mutual Defense Treaty.' 'Mutual' means that both sides agree to help protect the other."

[Bruce W. Bennett, Adjunct international/defense researcher, RAND Corp.] Because North Korea has threatened the ROK for 70 years, the US has provided substantial military support to the ROK over that period. Now the United States is saying that China is not just threatening the U.S.—China is carrying out an active Cold War against the United States. From a US perspective, the ROK owes the United States substantially, and it is time to meet some of that debt."

[Ralph A. Cossa, President Emeritus and WSD-Handa Chair in Peace Studies, Pacific Forum] "Professor Moon is wrong in describing the Quad as a military alliance; it is not an alliance of any sort at the present time but a gathering of like-minded democracies to promote a free and open Indo-Pacific guided by the rule of law and freedom of navigation. It is curious if Professor Moon objects to those principles, or perhaps he just objects to anything that the US government endorses."

[Ralph A. Cossa, President Emeritus and WSD-Handa Chair in Peace Studies, Pacific Forum] "Perhaps Professor Moon should be asked about President Xi's recent celebration of China's patriotic efforts to free the Korean Peninsula by intervening against the US "aggression" during the Korean War. His inability or refusal to speak out about such Chinese insults to the ROC and US are astonishing to me."

[David Maxwell, Senior Fellow, FDD] "Moon Chung-in's comments are not helpful to the alliance, and as we have seen, China loves them. And that should be a real

indicator that, you know, what China wants. Those kinds of comments damage the alliance and really indicate Moon Chung-in is no friend of the ROK-US Alliance. Xinhua News of China explaining Moon's comments in detail shows exactly what China wants."

[David Maxwell, Senior Fellow, FDD] "South Korea, by aligning with the quad, is simply aligning with its values of liberal democracy, free market economy, rule of law and human rights, and of course, China stands in opposition to those."

[David Maxwell, Senior Fellow, FDD] "I don't think that the quad will cause that to happen. It's obvious that relations between China and North Korea are again strengthening...I think that China will continue to provide support to North Korea. It has certainly been helping evade sanctions and that simple act allows North Korea to commit resources to advancing its military capabilities and developing nuclear weapons and missiles. Those actions are contrary to South Korean security, and they're happening because of China's policy decisions, not because of South Korea's potential decision to align with the quad and other like-minded freedom loving democracies."

[Bruce Klingner, Senior Research Fellow, Northeast Asia, The Heritage Foundation] "Moon also commented that South Korea would find itself on the front line of the new Cold War if it joined an anti-China coalition. The reality is that South Korea has been on the front line of the Cold War since June 1950 when North Korea invaded."

[Bruce Klingner, Senior Research Fellow, Northeast Asia, The Heritage Foundation] "There is strong bipartisan anger in the United States for the dire societal and economic impact of China covering up the COVID disease. That has brought to the forefront many longstanding areas of concern with Chinese misbehavior -- illegal business procedures, incursions into the South and East China Seas, and human rights violations."

[Bruce W. Bennett, Adjunct international/defense researcher, RAND Corp.] "Now, I will be the first to admit that the Mutual Defense Treaty refers specifically to armed attacks by adversaries. China has decided that for now, it is not ready to carry out armed attacks on the United States, but is carrying out economic and cyber and espionage and political attacks on the US which have been very damaging. It has taken the United States some time to recognize this, but now the United States is attempting to organize to counter China's action. How the ROK acts in this time of conflict may well determine the US willingness to continue to support the ROK militarily."

US-based Korea experts also said that the greatest victim of China's threatening world-wide strategy is South Korea, and analyzed that South Korea proactively participating in an anti-China alliance with the US at the center, as having the best short and long term national benefit.

[Bruce W. Bennett, Adjunct international/defense researcher, RAND Corp.] "I also realize that the ROK has allowed its economy to become substantially dependent upon trade with China. The ROK should recognize that China has also been practicing the

Cold War against the ROK for decades. China has sought to make the ROK economically dependent on China in order to gain leverage over the ROK, and Moon Chung-in's statements reflect his recognition that China has substantial leverage on the ROK."

[Bruce W. Bennett, Adjunct international/defense researcher, RAND Corp.] "To be fair, the ROK has also been the victim of Chinese economic warfare, and in particular suffered considerable damage from the Chinese response to the THAAD deployment. Unfortunately, the United States failed to respond to those economic attacks like an ally should—I have been disappointed in the US lack of support for the ROK against Chinese economic warfare. And as best as I can tell, some of the Chinese economic warfare is ongoing. The United States needs to take this more seriously and support the ROK against these Chinese economic attacks."

[David Maxwell, Senior Fellow, FDD] "Even though China is a South Korea's largest trading partner, South Korea must be very concerned with Chinese malign activities. You know security is paramount."

[Bruce Klingner, Senior Research Fellow, Northeast Asia, The Heritage Foundation] "There can be reasonable debate about how the international community should respond to Chinese misbehavior, such as how formal to make such a coalition. South Korea and other Asian nations don't accept the Trump administration's call for formal institutions and severing economic engagement. But there should be stronger South Korean criticism of Chinese actions."

[Robert A. Manning, Resident Senior Fellow, The Atlantic Council] "The Quad is, like a lot of intra-Asian security cooperation, a direct response to China's increasing imperious, obnoxious behavior. At present, the Quad is still vague of purpose and aspirational. Each of its participants have differing notions of what it is and where it might go. It is a long way from an Asian NATO, which I seriously doubt is a realistic possibility."

[Robert A. Manning, Resident Senior Fellow, The Atlantic Council] "But the issue should be framed as: how to counter-balance and push back against Chinese behavior? I think the form it takes should follow the function it seeks to create. China's reaction is predictable, and disturbing: It should not like an unrestrained great power, and then act like a 5 year old, pouting and whining because some are not nice to it. That said, some of the concrete actions – like sharing geospatial intelligence information – appear similar to the broader regional trend of informal security cooperation networks – Japan-Vietnam, India-Vietnam, Japan-Philippines, ASEAN maritime cooperation. Broadly, I would say that all such activities should cause China to think twice, and can over time, give counter-China coalitions more leverage to push back."

Baik Sung-Won, reporting for VOA News.