

# COMPARATIVE

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## CONNECTIONS

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RELATIONS IN THE INDO-PACIFIC

### US-KOREA RELATIONS

## SPLIT IMAGES

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Lopsided: such was the state of US relations with the two Koreas during May-August 2022. The Washington-Seoul axis mostly flourished on the military/security, diplomatic, economic, and cultural fronts, while Washington and Pyongyang deepened doldrums whose depths had been plumbed in prior reporting periods. For the former, the most significant items included the May inauguration of conservative South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol and quick follow-on summit with US President Joe Biden, increasing trilateral US-South Korea-Japan cooperation, a raft of announcements on US-South Korea economic and technology cooperation, the resumption of field maneuvers in US-South Korea joint military exercises, and South Korea's continuing growth as a serious middle power player in foreign policy, including stepped-up engagement with NATO. In US-North Korea relations, a COVID-19 outbreak failed to lead the Kim Jung Un regime to open up to outside humanitarian assistance, as Pyongyang remained content to keep borders mostly closed and allow the virus to course through the population with only basic prophylactic measures. On the positive side, Pyongyang's hyperactive missile testing in spring slowed during summer, and a feared (yet still expected) seventh nuclear test failed to materialize.

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## US-South Korea: The Yoon also Rises

Following his March 2022 general election victory over progressive Lee Jae-myung, President Yoon Suk Yeol [assumed office](#) on May 10. An [unusually rocky](#) transition period marked the caesura between election victory and inauguration, and was especially worrisome due to a speedily scheduled May summit between Yoon and US President Joe Biden, who was in the Indo-Pacific region soon after Yoon took office. [Planning and logistical challenges](#) were overcome, and the summit was widely considered a success, as was the 2021 summit between Biden and Yoon's progressive predecessor, Moon Jae-in.



Figure 1 South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol of the People Power Party celebrates with supporters at the party's headquarters in Seoul on March 10, 2022. Photo: Chung Sung-jun/Getty Images

To begin, the [summit joint statement](#) contained all the standard US-South Korea alliance boilerplate about Washington-Seoul relations as a “linchpin” for the East Asia region and an important bilateral partnership upholding the rules-based international order. Biden and Yoon underlined the traditional role the alliance plays in both deterring North Korea and warfighting if necessary. To those ends, the US and South Korea announced the re-start (after a pause under the Moon administration) of the Extended Deterrence Strategy and Consultation Group (EDSCG) and of live-action field maneuvers during annual late summer combined military exercises (also suspended for several years, partially due to COVID-19 and partially due to disinterest by both Presidents Moon and Donald Trump). Also reiterated were typical statements signaling openness to dialogue with Pyongyang regarding North Korean denuclearization, supporting international sanctions against the Kim regime (absent said denuclearization), and

promising better diplomatic relations and economic opportunities if Pyongyang denuclearizes. North Korea's horrific human rights situation received mention as well.

The Biden-Yoon summit also delivered both real change vis-à-vis the proclivities of Moon and important groundwork on nascent, future areas of US-South Korea cooperation, notably in the economic and technology domains. Concerning the former, Yoon's new foreign and security policy team—Foreign Minister Park Jin, National Security Advisor Kim Sung-han, Deputy National Security Advisor Kim Tae-hyo, and Defense Minister Lee Jong-sup—carried through on Yoon's campaign promise to improve relations with Japan, not only as a part of the effort to check North Korea, but also as a part of trilateral US-South Korea-Japan alignment to shore up allied strength against an increasingly powerful China and [support](#) a rules-based, like-minded order regionally in the Indo-Pacific and globally.

The Biden-Yoon summit joint statement featured a lengthy description of a growing US-South Korea economic and technology partnership in semiconductors, electric vehicle (EV) batteries, artificial intelligence and quantum computing, advanced robotics, and biotechnology. Some of this cooperation—indeed the underlying technology—is clearly aspirational, but the US is motivated to make it happen as part of strengthening supply-chain security and resilience in sectors critical to Washington's efforts to outcompete China. A cornerstone of this effort is the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF), which received a boost at the Biden-Yoon summit, as South Korea [indicated willingness to join](#) as a [founding member](#) despite the unclear nature of its four pillars. Yoon [joined virtually](#) the IPEF leader-level launch in Japan, immediately following Biden's trip to South Korea. Advances in cooperative space exploration, cybersecurity, and the balance of nuclear power export commercialization and nonproliferation found their way into the summit readout.

The Yoon campaign centered its foreign policy on the intent to become a “[global pivotal state](#),” with one of its chief tasks the upgrading of the US-South Korea relationship to a “global, comprehensive” alliance that looks beyond the Korean Peninsula and Northeast Asia. This was underway during the Moon administration, but the May 2022 summit language underlined the

Yoon administration's commitment to its campaign rhetoric. There were the typical bromides on the alliance's support for freedom, prosperity, peace, and democratic values, but also practical follow-up on institutionalization of COVID-19 vaccination cooperation as well as commitment to climate change goals. On the diplomatic front, hard cases such as support for Taiwan and human rights in Myanmar were evoked. Seoul and Washington vowed greater coordination on the "free and open Indo-Pacific" concept (with Seoul's [forthcoming](#) Indo-Pacific Strategy a potential litmus test), although Washington merely "acknowledged" Seoul's interest in an expanded Quad, [indicating](#) US hesitance to grow the minilateral, Japan's reluctance to institutionalize security cooperation with South Korea, and South Korea's caution in proactively pushing to work with the Quad in a Quad+ arrangement.

Finally, the Biden-Yoon summit marked a departure—even if invisible at first—from the Moon administration vis-à-vis the Russia-Ukraine war. To be sure, the joint statement condemned Russian aggression and violation of Ukrainian sovereignty, and called both for continued punitive measures against Moscow and humanitarian and diplomatic support for Kyiv. None of this was different from the approach taken by the Moon administration in coordination with Washington. Behind the scenes, however, Biden and Yoon security and defense officials were negotiating (even prior to the summit) the possibility of South Korea backfilling Poland with lethal weapons as a way of replenishing and modernizing Warsaw's armaments as it continued (and continues) to supply Ukraine with arms to counter Russia. The Moon administration, by contrast, had assiduously avoided becoming involved in lethal arms sales connected with the Russia-Ukraine war. As the summer continued, the Seoul-Warsaw [lethal weapons deal](#) grew into a major arms agreement covering tanks, artillery, and light combat aircraft potentially worth \$14.5 billion to be fully delivered by 2026 (with a technology transfer component and Poland-located production for some systems).

The Biden-Yoon summit was not the only meaningful engagement between the two leaders. In a first, South Korea was invited to—[and participated in](#)—the 2022 NATO summit in Madrid, where Yoon again met Biden both formally and on the sidelines. Beyond the [symbolic importance](#) of South Korea—an Indo-

Pacific US ally—joining a NATO meeting due to increasing recognition that countering Russian and Chinese revisionism requires a global response from like-minded democracies, Seoul's attendance at the NATO summit was important because (a) it occurred in coordination with other US Indo-Pacific allies, and (b) it marked a first chance for an anticipated trilateral meeting among Presidents Biden and Yoon and Japanese Prime Minister Kishida Fumio.



Figure 2 Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese, Japan's Prime Minister Kishida Fumio, NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg, New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern and South Korea's President Yoon Suk Yeol pose for a group photograph at the Ifema congress center in Madrid on June 29, 2022. Photo: Pierre-Philippe Marco/AFP

South Korea was a part of the so-called [Asia-Pacific Four \(AP4\)](#)—along with New Zealand, Japan, and Australia—invited to the Madrid NATO summit on the strength of their longstanding status as NATO "global partners" and potential to contribute to inter-regional security challenges, notably those involving China and Russia. Time will tell if this minilateral grouping will survive and become meaningful, but prior to the NATO summit, Seoul, Wellington, Tokyo, and Canberra were in discussion about potential value that they can provide NATO and vice-versa. South Korea seems serious about ramped up NATO engagement, as it has [announced](#) that it will establish a permanent mission to NATO. The trilateral, leader-level meeting among the US, South Korea, and Japan was the first in nearly five years (since one at the September 2017 United Nations General Assembly), partly because of the indifference of President Trump to such niceties as alliances and partly because of abysmal Seoul-Tokyo relations under Moon and Prime Minister Abe Shinzo. As such, merely holding the Madrid trilateral was an important

accomplishment for the Biden administration. Even if [the readout](#) was short and mostly focused on generalities of regional Indo-Pacific trilateral cooperation and defense and deterrence against North Korea, the meeting capped a June with substantive Washington-Seoul-Tokyo defense cooperation and [set the tone](#) for the rest of the summer.

In part as a response to a spate of North Korean missile launches, the defense ministers of the US, South Korea, and Japan [announced](#) “combined security exercises, including missile warning drills,” which the South Korean defense minister later [reiterated separately](#) in calling for trilateral cooperation to deal with North Korea’s missile and nuclear programs. In July, the G20 foreign ministers meeting provided another occasion for Washington-Seoul-Tokyo relations to grow, as Foreign Ministers Tony Blinken, Park Jin, and Hayashi Yoshimasa [discussed issues](#) ranging from North Korea to trilateral cooperation on security and prosperity in the Indo-Pacific. South Korea’s presidential office [hinted](#) in July at South Korea’s nascent coordination with Washington and Japan (as well as Taiwan) on semiconductors, which by early August morphed into South Korea’s [expressed intent](#) to join the “Chip 4 alliance.” August continued the torrid pace of Washington-Seoul-Tokyo relations, as South Korea joined Japan (and other states) at the [RIMPAC](#), [Pacific Vanguard](#), [Fortune Guard](#), and [Pacific Dragon](#) military and security exercises, the latter of which included trilateral missile defense exercises (a small step toward breaching one of China’s “Three Nos” promulgated during the Moon administration). The month wrapped up with the US [announcing a trilateral meeting](#) of US, South Korean, and Japanese national security advisors slated for early September.

Beyond focus on trilateral security and defense cooperation, the US and South Korea also fortified their military alliance during spring and summer. The Biden-Yoon summit in May [occasioned talk](#) of a return to suspended US-South Korea live-fire, field-maneuver joint military exercises, and that idea [percolated in June and July](#) before [definitive announcement](#) in late July. This was increasingly seen as necessary in Washington, USINDOPACOM, and Seoul, as several years of suspended/cancelled/downsized exercises had eroded combined forces warfighting readiness, with negative knock-on effects regarding

deterrence of Pyongyang as the Kim regime was ramping up missile testing and possibly [preparing](#) for a seventh nuclear test. The [Ulchi Freedom Shield](#) joint exercises—from mid-August to early September—included live-action field maneuvers, command-post training, and civil society resilience components responding to scenarios of both blunting North Korean invasion and mounting a counterattack. Ulchi Freedom Shield also contained scenarios designed to allow South Korea to [test Full Operational Control during wartime](#), the successful achievement of which is one of the criteria for re-taking wartime Operational Control (wartime OPCON transfer). As a part of that, a South Korean general—Ahn Byung-seok—commanded major US-South Korea joint military field exercises for the first time.



*Figure 3 US Forces Korea commander Gen. Paul LaCamera, center, talks with South Korean Defense Minister Lee Jong-sup, right, during the 11-day Ulchi Freedom Shield exercise at Command Post Tango in Seongnam, South Korea on Aug. 23, 2022. Photo: South Korean Ministry of National Defense*

Beyond the capstone return to live-fire, combined forces field maneuvers during Ulchi Freedom Shield, other, less flashy US-South Korea military cooperation was in evidence during the May-July period. The US and South Korea held combined [air power drills](#)—including F35s—over the Yellow Sea, as well as [coordinated missile launches](#) into the East Sea/Sea of Japan, both as responses to North Korea’s continued missile testing in June. Additional air power demonstrations took place in [June](#) and [July](#) (also involving F35s), while USFK [reported](#) live-fire combined US-South Korea special commando training in the Pilsung range in August. Washington and Seoul laid foundations for future military cooperation as well, including South Korean [approval](#) of the procurement of upgraded *Patriot* (PAC-3) interceptors and launchers worth \$605 million (with delivery by 2027). Meanwhile, South Korean aerospace firm KAI [signed an agreement](#)



with Lockheed Martin to increase sales of Korea-produced FA-50 fighter trainer sales in the US. Washington and Seoul also [held the regular](#) Korea-US Integrated Defense Dialogue in mid-August, and [announced](#) the resumption of the Extended Deterrence Strategy and Consultation Group slated for September.

Arguably the most consistent element of US-South Korea relations in spring and summer was the drumbeat of news related to (mostly) cooperation on economic security, technology security, and supply chain resilience, especially for critical industrial goods/commodities, semiconductors, and emerging high-tech. IPEF featured at the May Biden-Yoon summit, as did a [Biden tour](#) of a Samsung chip fabrication plant in Pyongtaek and repeated mention of the launch of US-South Korea [ministerial-level dialogue](#) on supply chains. During the summit Hyundai [announced](#) \$10 billion investment in the US for production of EVs and development of robotics and autonomous driving capabilities.

From May to June there were no less than 15 major discussions—most in the form of official delegation visits, with some video calls—between US and South Korea business and government parties related to economic security, technological security, and supply chain cooperation. In a sign of how important these issues have become, these meetings included at various points both the US and [South Korean](#) presidents; South Korea’s prime minister; US Speaker of the House of Representatives Nancy Pelosi; [delegations of senior US senators](#); [foreign, finance, and trade/commerce](#) ministers and [representatives](#) from both Washington and Seoul; the [leadership of major Korean conglomerates](#); and the [heads of both US and South Korea business groups](#). Meanwhile the aforementioned Chip 4 alliance marked an area in which Washington brought together Seoul and Tokyo (along with Taiwan) in a nascent effort at tighter semiconductor manufacturing security and cooperation. South Korea [approached the issue cautiously](#), and only signed on after going through significant rhetorical gymnastics stating that the Chip 4 alliance is not designed to exclude China—whether Beijing believes this is another matter.

Washington-Seoul diplomatic coordination went well beyond economic concerns during the May-August reporting period, with the tone being set by the long-awaited May [Senate confirmation](#) of Philip Goldberg as US

Ambassador to South Korea. Ambassador Goldberg arrived on station in July, just a few weeks after his South Korean counterpart, Cho Tae-yong, [arrived](#) in Washington to take his post. Lockstep US-South Korea response to various North Korean risks was a focus of [senior officials](#) with [foreign, security, defense, intelligence, and area/region](#) policy portfolios. US and South Korean [foreign ministry officials](#) ran point on [diplomatic statements](#) condemning Pyongyang’s missile and nuclear programs and [human rights abuses](#) (and [offering incentives for better behavior](#) by the Kim regime), while [defense and security officials](#) worked out details of [re-starting](#) the EDSCG.



Figure 4 Ambassador Philip Goldberg is officially sworn in at the US Department of State. Photo: [Twitter/@USEmbassySeoul](#)

Consistent with the Yoon administration’s emphasis on a more “comprehensive, global,” outward-facing alliance, which Yoon’s foreign policy team hopes to use as springboard to making South Korea a more influential middle power, Seoul engaged Washington on issues outside the traditional scope of the alliance. COVID-19 vaccine development was on the agenda, along with a broader discussion of cooperation in several areas of biotechnology/biopharmaceuticals and global public health. Senior officials also met on numerous occasions to [discuss regional](#) Indo-Pacific security issues (often code for problematic issues related to China), and signed a [joint statement](#) condemning Myanmar’s human rights situation. Finally, the Russia-Ukraine war occasioned significant Washington-Seoul [discussion](#) on the role that South Korea could/should take both rhetorically/diplomatically as well as more practically in terms of [weapons deals](#) to support Ukraine (like the previously mentioned Seoul-Warsaw arms deal).

Not everything in the US-South Korea alliance was easy—or positive—during the May-August

period. Seoul's tricky position between Washington and Beijing was evident. The return of [Chinese pressure over THAAD](#) was a test of the Yoon administration's claim to take a clearer and more pro-US-South Korea alliance position than that of its predecessor. Yoon's foreign, security, and defense policy team largely stood up to China's [mildly threatening rhetoric](#), essentially [arguing](#) that Yoon is not bound to honor the Moon administration's agreement to the "[Three Nos](#)" demanded by Beijing, and will instead do what is in South Korea's national interest. As a pro-alliance president, Yoon broadcast his intent to tilt further toward the US on security and defense, but China will surely test this line again, perhaps with more than threatening rhetoric to make painful South Korea's move away from hedging.

US-China regional rivalry presented South Korea with a dilemma on the occasion of the visit to Taiwan of US Speaker of the House of Representatives Nancy Pelosi. Pelosi followed her Taiwan visit—which enraged Beijing—with a [stopover](#) in Seoul, leading to speculation as to whether Yoon would meet her. Doing so was assumed to indicate support for the Taiwan visit, potentially drawing further ire from China; not doing so was assumed to indicate acquiescence to Chinese pressure, which would undermine US-South Korea relations on a key regional issue. During the days prior to Pelosi's arrival in Seoul, South Korea's presidential office gave confusing and conflicting reports of Yoon's intentions, and finally settled on a half-measure—a [phone call](#) between Yoon and Pelosi—ostensibly because Yoon was on vacation. This "reason" looked absurd since Yoon was "staycationing" in Seoul and was the only leader not to meet Pelosi personally during her swing through the region. Moreover South Korea was the only major US ally [not to publish a statement criticizing](#) China for its aggression against Taiwan following Pelosi's visit. The South Korean president was [duly criticized](#) both in South Korea and [abroad](#) for indecision, incompetence, and perhaps subservience to China ahead of a China-South Korea foreign ministers meeting in Beijing.

Finally, during the final weeks of the May-August period, a potentially significant rift opened in the US-South Korea economic relationship. The Inflation Reduction Act—major US legislation passed in August—contains discriminatory subsidies for EV batteries, and Hyundai is one of the primary automobile

manufacturers that will have EV sales negatively affected. Reaction from the South Korea [business community](#) was [sharp and immediate](#), and put the onus on the Yoon administration to [convince the US](#) to [find solutions](#) that will restore a level playing field. If this does not happen, there is potential for real discord in the alliance. As the discriminatory EV battery subsidies do not conform with the KORUS FTA and are likely a violation of WTO rules, South Korea has indicated willingness to bring its case [before the WTO](#). Regardless of the outcome, some damage has been done: in off-the-record comments, Yoon administration officials referred to US discrimination on the EV batteries as a "[betrayal](#)," especially after South Korea took economic risks vis-à-vis China to sign on to IPEF and the "Chip 4" alliance.

#### **US-North Korea: The Electric Yoon Aid Acid Test**

No one following recent trimesters in US-Korea relations will be surprised at the lack of diplomatic interaction between Washington and Pyongyang during the May-August period. As has been essentially the case since Donald Trump met Kim Jong Un at Panmunjom in 2019, there were no official meetings between the US and North Korea, and mutual recriminations in public statements were the extent of "discussions."

Despite North Korea's continued misbehavior, the Yoon administration did make an effort at persuading Pyongyang to re-enter a diplomatic pathway, promising an "audacious" economic aid and support package for the North in exchange for denuclearization. Washington chimed in with full-throated support for the offer, but the Kim regime responded predictably, most notably via a fiery, contemptuous [dismissal](#) of the proposal by Kim Yo Jong. All this leaves the US and regional partners in a holding pattern regarding the North—"committed" (in their own words) to engaging with North Korea in serious dialogue toward the complete denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula and [supportive](#) of the Yoon administration's outreach, yet aware that such statements have not impressed Pyongyang, given Kim Jong Un's continued [calls](#) for stronger "self-defense" measures and [lambasting](#) of South Korean, Japanese, and US efforts at boosting trilateral cooperation on defense matters. Humanitarian assistance based on COVID-19 response has also gone nowhere, as

the regime has chosen to [handle](#) the virus in its own way (although the country seemingly admitted between the lines that Kim Jong Un contracted the virus at some point this year).

On the bright side, Pyongyang, for unknown reasons, did not take advantage of the US' and its allies' preoccupation with Ukraine—and, to a lesser extent, Taiwan—by escalating its missile tests or carrying out a seventh nuclear test (which would have been its first in five years). However, activity at nuclear sites suggests that North Korea is prepared for a nuclear test at any time, remarks coming out of Pyongyang indicate that it is in no mood to negotiate with the US or South Korea, and nothing short of a new nuclear test (or other major provocation) will turn the US focus away from other domestic and foreign policy matters.

The reporting period began with Washington, and its new partners in the Yoon administration, dealing with the (figurative) fallout from the [spring](#), when the North probably failed to launch a *Hwasong-17*, then probably did successfully launch a *Hwasong-15* disguised as a *Hwasong-17*, then seemingly test-fired a tactical guided weapon. In early May, the US [announced](#) plans for a draft UN Security Council resolution condemning North Korea's missile activities, as well as [plans](#) to boost deterrence against Pyongyang (and Beijing), partly by increasing its “prepositioned stocks” of military supplies in the Indo-Pacific.

Then, on May 4, North Korea continued its trend by [launching](#) a ballistic missile into the East Sea. The missile's especially high apogee of 484 miles (780 km) led some observers to speculate that the missile could have been a *Hwasong-17*, although also possibly a completely new missile. The [firing](#) of what South Korean military experts believe was a mini-submarine-launched ballistic missile (SLBM) came just four days later. With this launch, North Korea's fifteenth of the year, the US [called](#) an emergency meeting of the UN Security Council, but as in spring ultimately [failed](#) to overcome the veto of fellow P-5 members Beijing and Moscow, and thus failed to produce any concrete international measures. This was followed on May 25 by the test launch of [three ballistic missiles](#) toward the East Sea. One bore resemblance to the much-discussed *Hwasong-17*, yet South Korea's military [said](#) it traveled just 224 miles, and that the Pyongyang authorities may have intentionally undershot its range given

President Biden's presence in the region at the time.

By recent standards, the rest of the period was relatively calm on the testing front: on June 5 the North [fired](#) another eight ballistic missiles, all of them short-range, toward the East Sea just one day after South Korea and the US wrapped up their joint drills near the peninsula. Additional artillery shots followed on [June 12](#) and on [July 10](#), with the [test-firing](#) of two cruise missiles in the direction of the Yellow Sea in August (as President Yoon marked his 100<sup>th</sup> day in office). All of these missile tests and demonstrations occasioned the usual diplomatic meetings and statements by officials in Seoul, Washington, and Tokyo. North Korea is likely continuing to make steady progress on missiles, although the head of the US Missile Defense Agency [said](#) that the North likely does not have hypersonic capability yet. Nonetheless, Pyongyang's tests to acquire such capability (see the January–April chapter) are worrying. It is also worth noting that activity at the North's Yongbyon Nuclear Scientific Center [shows](#) signs of continuing plutonium production.



Figure 5 A news program reports on a North Korean missile launch at a railway station in Seoul, January 2022. Photo: Ahn Young-joon/AP

North Korean cyber activities remain an area of concern, with US federal investigators stating that Pyongyang's [ever-evolving efforts](#) to acquire illicit revenue include [stealing](#) billions from cryptocurrency exchanges, and that the regime has planted operatives in tech jobs throughout the industry. It is no surprise then that the US is leading a multinational exercise on cyber operations in October, and that South Korea, frequently the target of such actions, is expected to [join](#). Any slim chance of North Korea engaging in dialogue is made slimmer by their success in keeping the regime's inner circle

happy by funding their lifestyles through illicitly acquired currency.

### **Conclusion: Cold Comfort Farm**

There is little to suggest change in the Washington-Pyongyang dynamic, as the North appears uninterested in, and at points disdainful toward, US and South Korean efforts to break the ice. North Korea has had only [critical things](#) to say about the good working relationship between the Yoon and Biden administrations, increasing US-South Korea trilateralism, and the US [role](#) in the region's other contest for legitimacy (in the Taiwan Strait). The North also remains largely shut off from the rest of the world due to COVID-19. However, there is perhaps some cold comfort: whatever has prevented a seventh nuclear test so far—Beijing's disapproval, internal matters such as COVID-19, or technical issues related to the testing site at Punggye-ri—*may* continue to do so between September and January. No matter which party holds power in US Congress after the November 2022 elections, there appears little appetite for risking political capital on rapprochement with the North, and only a major provocation that focuses minds in Washington is likely to change that.

Interactions between the US and South Korea are expected to continue apace and at multiple levels/fora in coming months, despite challenges such as Seoul's navigating between Washington and Beijing, and the need for the US to do right by South Korea on EV batteries. Yoon's approval ratings have dropped precipitously since his inauguration due to self-inflicted political wounds, but his party's strong performance in the June local elections and the South Korean public's continued [warm feelings](#) for the United are strong foundations for cooperation. Doubts could creep in should the November midterm elections suggest a return to the "America First" politics that tested the alliance before Biden's election, but that outcome is [far from assured](#).



# CHRONOLOGY OF US-KOREA RELATIONS

## MAY—AUGUST 2022

**May 2, 2022:** US–South Korea alliance is an incredibly important relationship that is vital to many issues in the region and around the world, a White House spokesperson [says](#) regarding President Joe Biden's planned trip to Seoul.

**May 3, 2022:** President-elect Yoon Suk Yeol [meets](#) with Australia's ambassador to Seoul and asks for his country's support for cooperation between South Korea and working groups under the Quad security partnership, says his spokesperson.

**May 3, 2022:** US plans to move forward with a US-drafted UN Security Council resolution condemning North Korea's recent missile activities, [says](#) US Ambassador to the UN Linda Thomas-Greenfield.

**May 3, 2022:** US [plans](#) to boost deterrence against China and North Korea, partly by increasing "prepositioned stocks" of military supplies in the Indo-Pacific according to Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin.

**May 4, 2022:** North Korea [launches](#) a ballistic missile into the East Sea. Some experts say it could have been a *Hwasong-17* intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) or a completely new missile.

**May 5, 2022:** US Senate [votes](#) unanimously to approve the nomination of Philip Goldberg, a career diplomat, as new US ambassador to South Korea.

**May 6, 2022:** US [imposes](#) sanctions on virtual currency mixer Blender for helping North Korea launder stolen virtual currency, the first time the US has imposed sanctions on a virtual currency mixer, according to the Treasury department.

**May 7, 2022:** North Korea [fires](#) a submarine-launched ballistic missile four days after conducting a ballistic missile test.

**May 9, 2022:** Japanese Prime Minister Kishida Fumio [underscores](#) need to resolve his country's longstanding diplomatic standoffs with South Korea as his foreign minister arrived in Seoul for the inauguration of Yoon Suk Yeol. He emphasizes the importance of cooperation between Seoul and Tokyo as well as trilateral partnerships involving Washington, citing Russia's invasion of Ukraine that "could shake up the foundation of an international order."

**May 10, 2022:** US [calls](#) for an emergency meeting of the UN Security Council to discuss North Korea's latest missile provocation.

**May 10, 2022:** President Yoon [says](#) the alliance between South Korea and the US is a "linchpin" of regional peace and prosperity, during a meeting with US second gentleman Douglas Emhoff and other members of a delegation sent by Biden to attend Yoon's inauguration ceremony.

**May 11, 2022:** UNSC [convenes](#) an emergency meeting to discuss North Korea's recent missile provocations but fails to produce a tangible outcome due to opposition from China and Russia.

**May 13, 2022:** Top diplomats of South Korea and the United States [express](#) concerns over recent COVID-19 outbreaks in North Korea and agree to continue consultations on humanitarian aid to the reclusive country during video talks.

**May 13, 2022:** North Korea [fires](#) three short-range ballistic missiles toward the East Sea, its first missile launch since the inauguration of the Yoon administration.

**May 18, 2022:** North Korea does not appear to have developed a hypersonic missile, but its tests to develop such a system warrant US concerns, [says](#) the head of the US Missile Defense Agency.

**May 19, 2022:** US military has flown a reconnaissance plane toward the East Sea, an aviation tracker [says](#), amid concerns about the possibility of another ICBM launch by North Korea.

**May 19, 2022:** US [commits](#) to engaging with North Korea in serious dialogue and is willing to take "action for action" with North Korea toward the complete denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula, says National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan.

**May 19, 2022:** Chief nuclear envoys of South Korea and Russia [hold](#) phone talks to discuss the security situation on the Korean Peninsula following North Korea's COVID-19 outbreak and missile tests.

**May 20, 2022:** North Korea [reports](#) over 260,000 new suspected COVID-19 cases, with the total number of such cases surpassing 2 million, eight days after it first confirmed the virus outbreak.

**May 20, 2022:** Presidents Yoon and Biden [tour](#) a Samsung Electronics chip plant, demonstrating their commitment to expanding their alliance beyond the security sphere to global supply chains and other key areas.

**May 21, 2022:** South Korea and the United States [agree](#) to launch a ministerial-level dialogue to discuss cooperation on supply chains of key industry items and other economic security issues.

**May 21, 2022:** Presidents Yoon Biden [agree](#) to begin discussions on expanding joint military exercises between the two countries amid growing nuclear and missile threats from North Korea.

**May 22, 2022:** South Korea's Hyundai Motor Group [says](#) it will invest an additional \$5 billion in the United States for robotics and autonomous driving software development, just a day after announcing a similar size investment to build an electric vehicle plant in the US.

**May 22, 2022:** US [is not considering](#) adding South Korea to Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, says a senior US official.

**May 23, 2022:** Yoon [says](#) South Korea will contribute to the newly launched Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF) across all sectors

and propose ways to cooperate on supply chain resilience, the transition to a digital economy, and clean energy and decarbonization.

**May 25, 2022:** North Korea [fires](#) three ballistic missiles toward the East Sea, including an apparent ICBM, just a day after Biden wrapped up an Asia trip highlighting the US security commitment to Seoul and Tokyo.

**May 25, 2022:** Chinese and Russian warplanes [enter](#) South Korea's air defense identification zone (Kadiz) on two separate occasions without notice, prompting the Air Force to scramble fighters to the scene, according to the Seoul's Joint Chiefs of Staff.

**May 27, 2022:** China and Russia [veto](#) a US-drafted UNSC resolution to strengthen sanctions on North Korea over a spate of missile launches, the first time that the five permanent members of the Council have been divided on the issue since they began punishing Pyongyang in 2006.

**May 27, 2022:** South Korean government [expresses](#) "deep regret" about an unprecedented rejection of a proposed UNSC resolution imposing sanctions on North Korea for its provocation.

**May 30, 2022:** South Korea [approves](#) a 750 billion won (\$605 million) project to upgrade its *Patriot* missile defense system by 2027, according to the state arms procurement agency, in the wake of North Korea's recent missile provocations.

**May 30, 2022:** South Korea's foreign ministry [launches](#) in-house economic security center to better handle global supply chain issues following months of preparatory work.

**June 1, 2022:** South Korean supergroup BTS [highlights](#) the need to respect one another as they made their first visit to the White House for a rare meeting with President Biden.

**June 3, 2022:** Philip Goldberg [is sworn in](#) as US ambassador to South Korea.

**June 3, 2022:** US [says](#) it is set to adjust its military posture to counter North Korea's continued provocations and threats.

**June 3, 2022:** South Korean Trade Minister Ahn Duk-geun [drums](#) up support from the US Congress to expand bilateral trade and

investment. Ahn made the request during a meeting with Sen. Tammy Duckworth (D-IL), where the two noted the achievements of the May summit between Yoon and Biden, and discussed ways to deepen their economic ties.

**June 5, 2022:** Top South Korean and US nuclear envoys [hold](#) an emergency meeting in Seoul, hours after North Korea test-fired another salvo of ballistic missiles into the East Sea.

**June 5, 2022:** North Korea [fires](#) eight short-range ballistic missiles toward the East Sea, a day after South Korea and the US wrapped up joint drills near the peninsula involving a US aircraft carrier, according to the South's military.

**June 6, 2022:** South Korea and the United States [fire](#) eight ballistic missiles into the East Sea in response to North Korea's missile launches the previous day, according to the South's military.

**June 7, 2022:** South Korea and the United States [conduct](#) a combined air power demonstration involving 20 warplanes, including F-35A stealth fighters, over the Yellow Sea, Seoul officials said, in another display of readiness following North Korea's weekend missile launches.

**June 10, 2022:** Yoon [gives](#) credentials to new ambassador to the United States Cho Tae-yong. Cho says he will focus on expanding the scope of the bilateral alliance to entail broad elements for economic security by facilitating strategic communication efforts.

**June 11, 2022:** North Korean state media reports that leader Kim Jong Un [calls](#) for stronger "self-defense" measures to tackle "very serious" security challenges while presiding over a key ruling party session earlier in the week.

**June 11, 2022:** Defense Secretary Austin [reaffirms](#) US commitment to reinforcing "extended deterrence" against North Korea's nuclear and missile threats during the annual Shangri-La Dialogue in Singapore.

**June 11, 2022:** Defense chiefs of South Korea, the United States, and Japan [agrees](#) to step up cooperation to counter North Korea's missile threats through combined regular security exercises, including missile warning drills.

**June 12, 2022:** Korea Aerospace Industries Co., South Korea's sole aircraft manufacturer, [says](#) it has signed an agreement with the US defense firm Lockheed Martin to boost sales of advanced trainer jets in the United States.

**June 12, 2022:** South Korea [seeks](#) to "normalize" security cooperation with Japan and strengthen trilateral collaboration involving the United States to address North Korea's nuclear and missile threats, according to the Seoul's defense minister.

**June 12, 2022:** North Korea [fires](#) artillery shots, presumably from multiple rocket launchers, according to the South Korea's military, in another show of force by the reclusive regime.

**June 12, 2022:** In response to North Korea's recent ballistic missile launches, South Korean Defense Minister Lee Jong-sup and US and Japanese counterparts Lloyd Austin and Kishi Nobuo [agree](#) to hold tripartite military exercises on a [consistent](#) and more public basis.

**June 13, 2022:** Secretary Antony Blinken and South Korean Foreign Minister Park Jin [hold](#) a joint press conference. Park [states](#) that any North Korean provocations will be met with a "united and firm response" from the bilateral alliance and the international community.

**June 15, 2022:** South Korean Second Vice Foreign Minister Lee Do-hoon and US Undersecretary of State for Economic Growth, Energy, and the Environment Jose W. Fernandez [meet](#) on the sidelines of the Minerals Security Partnership (MSP). They agree to bolster coordination for economic security issues and in industries such as semiconductors and batteries.

**June 16, 2022:** After meeting with US Commerce Secretary Gina Raimondo, South Korean Foreign Minister Park Jin [states](#) that South Korea and the United States will continue to hold ministerial-level dialogue to implement the outcome of their leaders' summit last month.

**June 16, 2022:** South Korea's Vice Defense Minister Shin Beom-chul [attends](#) a US-led forum on support for Ukraine.

**June 17, 2022:** South Korea's top nuclear envoy Kim Gunn [meets](#) senior State Department officials for updates on North Korea policies amid concerns of a DPRK nuclear test.

**June 17, 2022:** South Korea's Defense Minister Lee Jong-sup [meets](#) members of the American Foreign Policy Council (AFPC) to discuss regional security, the US-ROK alliance, and strengthening security coordination.

**June 20, 2022:** South Korea and the US tentatively [agree](#) to hold biannual Korea-US Integrated Defense Dialogue (KIDD) in July. Agenda items include Seoul's push to strengthen the enforceability of US extended deterrence and expansion of combined military exercises.

**June 21, 2022:** South Korea successfully [fires](#) Nuri, its first domestically developed rocket, into space as part of the country's goals to establish an independent space program. Nuri is [topped](#) with five satellites that will carry out Earth observation missions for up to two years.

**June 22, 2022:** North Korean state media [publishes](#) photo of Kim Jong Un directing a meeting of military officials. A photo in the background, of South Korea's east coast, triggers concerns of tactical nuclear weapons deployment.

**June 22, 2022:** South Korea will establish a mission to NATO in Brussels, officials [say](#), and President Yoon will focus on three purposes: strengthening the "value alliance" with NATO states and partner nations, building a foundation for a "comprehensive security network" with NATO, and holding a series of bilateral summits to focus on economic and security issues.

**June 22, 2022:** South Korean satellite [makes](#) two-way communication with ground station at the Korea Aerospace Research Institute (KARI), confirming Nuri's satellite deployment capability.

**June 23, 2022:** During a major party meeting, Kim Jong Un and top officials [discussed](#) adding missions and revising organizational and operational plans of front-line military units of the Korean People's Army (KPA).

**June 23, 2022:** South Korea [establishes](#) a task force composed of key industry sectors such as semiconductors, cars, steel, and renewable energy resources for discussion with experts and the private sector on its strategy on the newly launched, US-led IPEF.

**June 23, 2022:** Delegation of South Korean businessmen, led by chief of Korea International Trade Association (KITA) Koo Ja-yeol, [meets](#) US members of Congress and White House officials to discuss bilateral economic cooperation.

**June 23, 2022:** In a show of readiness against North Korea security threats, South Korea and the US [conduct](#) a combined patrol flight over key former battle sites.

**June 23, 2022:** Top military officers of South Korea and the US, Won In-choul and Gen. Mark Milley, [hold](#) virtual talks on North Korea's military threats and agreed that the allies' combined defense posture is "more solid than at any other time."

**June 24, 2022:** US House Armed Services Committee [endorsed](#) annual defense policy bill for fiscal year 2023 that will maintain the current level of around 28,500 US troops in South Korea.

**June 27, 2022:** South Korea's top nuclear envoy Kim Gunn [meets](#) senior Treasury Department official Brian Nelson to discuss North Korea's development of a nuclear and missile program. Both sides agreed that the North will face tougher international sanctions and isolation if it "refuses to accept dialogue offers and continues provocative acts."

**June 27, 2022:** Amid growing security threats from North Korea, South Korea's military [plans](#) to participate in a Cyber Flag exercise, a US-led multinational exercise on cyber operations, in October, officials say.

**June 28, 2022:** President Yoon [talks](#) briefly with Japanese Prime Minister Kishida Fumio during a gala dinner for NATO summit participants and expressed hope for future-oriented development of bilateral relations.

**June 28, 2022:** JCS Chairman Gen. Won In-choul and US Indo-Pacific Command Chief Adm. John Aquilino [hold](#) virtual talks to discuss stepping up security cooperation amid concerns about the possibility of North Korea carrying out its seventh nuclear test.

**June 29, 2022:** President Yoon, President Biden, and Japanese Prime Minister Kishida Fumio [hold](#) a trilateral meeting on the sidelines of the NATO summit, largely to [discuss](#) security



cooperation against the evolving threat posed by the DPRK.

**June 30, 2022:** During an address at the NATO summit, Yoon [calls](#) on the international community to show resolve to denuclearize North Korea and stated that ROK will fulfill a bigger role and responsibility, especially in economic and cyber security areas.

**July 3, 2022:** In response to trilateral talks held on the sidelines of the NATO summit last month, North Korea [criticizes](#) South Korea, Japan, and the United States for pushing to boost trilateral military cooperation targeting the North.

**July 4, 2022:** South Korea and the US [hold](#) first session of their economic security dialogue, a channel established as part of a summit agreement between Presidents Yoon and Biden in May. South Korean Presidential Secretary for Economic Security Wang Yun-jong will soon meet with senior director for technology and national security on the White House NSC Tarun Chhabra.

**July 4, 2022:** South Korea Defense Minister Lee Jong-sup [discuss](#) issues related to regional security and the bilateral alliance with Sen. Rick Scott. Lee asked for US Congress' support for the development of a "global comprehensive strategic alliance."

**July 8, 2022:** South Korean Foreign Minister Park Jin, Secretary of State Blinken, and Japanese Minister of Foreign Affairs Hayashi Yoshimasa [hold](#) tripartite meeting to bolster cooperation on North Korea and pursue "future-oriented cooperation" to promote regional prosperity.

**July 8, 2022:** During a G20 meeting in Indonesia, South Korean Foreign Minister Park Jin [calls](#) for efforts to strengthen "rules-based multilateralism" and shared South Korea's vision to play a greater role for global freedom. Park encouraged G-20 members to cooperate to assist Ukraine.

**July 10, 2022:** According to South Korea's military, North Korea [fires](#) artillery shots from multiple rocket launchers.

**July 10, 2022:** At a G20 meeting, chief nuclear envoys of South Korea, Japan, and the US [reaffirm](#) their commitment to stronger trilateral

cooperation against North Korea security threats.

**July 10, 2022:** North Korean government-based hackers have [stolen](#) billions of dollars by raiding cryptocurrency exchanges and have also been planting operatives in tech jobs throughout the industry, as part of an evolving effort by the DPRK to gain revenue.

**July 10, 2022:** Philip Goldberg, new US ambassador to South Korea, [arrives](#) in Seoul to fill a position that has been vacant for one and a half years.

**July 11, 2022:** Amid concerns that North Korea may conduct its seventh nuclear test, Department of State Counselor Derek Chollet [visits](#) Seoul to discuss ways to strengthen the US-ROK alliance.

**July 11, 2022:** South Korea and the US [consider](#) the resumption of combined field training during their regular military exercise set for the next month.

**July 12, 2022:** Commercial satellite imagery of North Korea's Yongbyon Nuclear Scientific Center [shows](#) the 5 MWe Reactor continues to produce plutonium for the country's nuclear weapons program.

**July 13, 2022:** Ambassador to South Korea Goldberg [speaks](#) on evolving the bilateral relationship into a "comprehensive strategic one."

**July 14, 2022:** Ambassador Goldberg [stresses](#) expanding bilateral relations in the face of global challenges such as interrupted supply chains, COVID-19, and Russia's war in Ukraine.

**July 14, 2022:** South Korea presidential official [says](#) Seoul and the US are using various channels to strengthen cooperation on semiconductors. This endeavor would also involve Japan and Taiwan.

**July 11-14, 2022:** South Korea and the US [conduct](#) their first combined air drills, officials say, in an apparent show of force against North Korea's growing military threats.

**July 16, 2022:** In a recently passed defense budget bill, the US House of Representatives

[stresses](#) the need to maintain and possibly strengthen US military presence in South Korea.

**July 16, 2022:** C.S. Eliot Kang, assistant secretary at the Bureau of International Security and Nonproliferation, [warns](#) industry and government officials of North Korean IT workers posing as third-country citizens.

**July 19, 2022:** President Yoon [meets](#) Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen to discuss rising inflation, stabilizing global energy prices, resolving supply chain disruptions, and strengthening the economic security alliance. Yellen [advocated](#) for bilateral “friend-shoring” to build more stable supply chains to reduce economic dependence on China.

**July 20, 2022:** South Korea’s National Intelligence Service Director Kim Kyou-hyun [makes](#) an unannounced visit to the US amid concerns over the possibility of a North Korean nuclear test.

**July 20, 2022:** In its annual human trafficking report, US State Department [downgrades](#) South Korea to Tier 2 from its position of Tier 1 which it has held since 2002. South Korea’s foreign ministry vowed more efforts to combat human trafficking.

**July 20, 2022:** South Korean National Security Advisor Kim Sung-han [meets](#) US Ambassador Goldberg to discuss the global comprehensive strategic alliance agreed by both presidents.

**July 20, 2022:** South Korean Foreign and Trade Ministers Park Jin and Ahn Duk-geun [participate](#) in a virtual two-day Supply Chain Ministerial Forum co-hosted by Secretary of State Blinken and Secretary of Commerce Gina Raimondo. Participants discuss ways to reduce short-term bottlenecks and solutions to longer-term supply chain challenges.

**July 20, 2022:** South Korean ICT Minister Lee Jong-ho [states](#) that South Korea should be cautious in deciding whether to participate in a US-proposed chip alliance known as Chip 4 or Fab 4. The proposal puts South Korea in a delicate balancing act between the US and China.

**July 21, 2022:** South Korean Defense Minister Lee Jong-sup [discusses](#) regional security with US Ambassador Goldberg.

**July 22, 2022:** To better handle North Korea’s missile threats, South Korea and the US [plan](#) to establish the Counter Missile Working Group (CMWG) and resume regiment-level or larger-scale combined field training programs, which were suspended in 2018. The summer allied training set for Aug. 22 to Sept. 1 will be [called](#) Ulchi Freedom Shield and will stage 11 combined field training sessions. In the first half of next year, both nations plan to conduct 21 combined training programs.

**July 22, 2022:** During a policy briefing to President Yoon, Defense Minister Lee Jong-sup [outlines](#) defense priorities, including resuming larger-scale ROK-US field training and accelerating efforts to build the “[three-axis](#)” system against North Korea.

**July 23, 2022:** Kim Gunn, Special Representative for Korean Peninsula Peace and Security Affairs, and Sung Kim, US Special Representative for North Korea, [meet](#) in Indonesia to craft a North Korea policy road map that will include economic incentives and security guarantees.

**July 25, 2022:** A 14-member delegation from the American Chamber of Commerce in Korea (AMCHAM) [meets](#) more than 25 senior officials of the Biden administration to discuss the new US-led Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF). The delegation [prioritizes](#) South Korea as a key ally in the IPEF, identifies supply chains as important for US-ROK dialogue, and states that AMCHAM plans to create an IPEF working group to work on bilateral relations. AMCHAM proposes “concrete and strategic ways” that the US could deepen its economic ties with Seoul.

**July 25, 2022:** South Korea [seeks](#) to coordinate with the US and other countries before announcing details of its “audacious plan” to revive North Korea’s economy in the event it accepts denuclearization.

**July 26, 2022:** President Biden [talks](#) virtually with Chey Tae-won, chairman of South Korea’s SK Group, and Gina Raimondo, US secretary of Commerce. They [discuss](#) SK Group’s investments in US manufacturing and jobs. This meeting is part of Biden’s goal to boost foreign investment in the US, especially in the semiconductor industry.

**July 26, 2022:** South Korea [issues](#) a joint statement with the US and seven other countries

condemning the recent [executions](#) of pro-democracy leaders in Myanmar.

**July 26, 2022:** Around 800 bereaved family members [visit](#) the [Wall of Remembrance](#), a new Korean War monument in Washington D.C. The monument is open to family members of troops who went missing or were killed during the Korean War before its official unveiling this week.

**July 27, 2022:** President Biden [calls](#) on Americans to honor those who sacrificed “everything to defend freedom and democracy” during the Korean War.

**July 27, 2022:** NSC coordinator for strategic communications John Kirby [states](#) that the US and allies will take appropriate steps to hold North Korea accountable should it conduct a nuclear test.

**July 27, 2022:** US military [discloses](#) photos of last week’s combined Marine Exercise Program (KMEP) drills with South Korean troops. This disclosure marks a shift from the allies’ low-key stance on the drills during the Moon administration.

**July 27, 2022:** A ceremony for the Wall of Remembrance, a new Korean War monument in Washington, [hosts](#) around 3,000 people, including government [officials](#), Korean War veterans and families, and other South Korean and US citizens. President Yoon [celebrates](#) the unveiling of this monument, saying that it represents the “firmness of the South Korea-US alliance.”

**July 27, 2022:** US Undersecretary of State for Politics Affairs Victoria Nuland and First Vice Foreign Minister Cho Hyun-dong [discuss](#) the Extended Deterrence Strategy and Consultation Group ([EDSCG](#)). Nuland also meets South Korea’s top nuclear envoy Kim Gunn, Second Vice Foreign Minister Lee Do-hoon, and Foreign Minister Park Jin to discuss North Korea policy, global supply chain disruptions, and the war in Ukraine.

**July 28, 2022:** President Biden [receives](#) honorary Korean name of Bae Ji-sung by the ROK-US Alliance Friendship Association, as part of a weeklong commemoration to mark the end of the Korean War.

**July 28, 2022:** Poland [buys](#) almost 100 [tanks](#), more than 600 pieces of artillery, and dozens of fighter [jets](#) from South Korea in part to replace equipment donated to Ukraine. This reflects South Korea’s vision of taking a greater role in sharing the “burden for defense of the international order.”

**July 28, 2022:** Anne Neuberger, US Deputy National Security Advisor for Cyber and Emerging Technologies, [visits](#) Seoul to discuss ways to enhance bilateral cooperation in countering [cybercrimes](#), particularly those committed by North Korea.

**July 28, 2022:** North Korean leader Kim Jong Un [warns](#) that the Yoon administration and its “military gangsters” will face annihilation should it make any “dangerous attempt” like a preemptive strike. Kim stresses that his regime is “fully prepared” for any military confrontation with the US, referencing to the increasing frequency of US-ROK joint military exercises. This is the first time that Kim officially launched his position on the Yoon government.

**July 29, 2022:** In response to North Korean leader Kim Jong Un’s warning, State Department spokesperson Ned Price [reaffirms](#) that the US is firmly committed to the defense of South Korea and dismisses Kim’s threat as nothing new.

**July 29, 2022:** President Yoon [receives](#) credentials of Philip Goldberg, newly appointed US Ambassador to Seoul.

**July 29, 2022:** US Forces Korea (USFK) Commander Gen. Paul LaCamera [stresses](#) importance of strengthening the US-ROK alliance and notes that the Korean War has not ended and DPRK continues to be a threat.

**July 31, 2022:** South Korean Defense Minister Lee Jong-sup and US counterpart Austin [decide](#) to restart the allies’ Extended Deterrence Strategy and Consultation Group (EDSCG) in September and strengthen the Table Top Exercise (TTX).

**July 31, 2022:** South Korean Chief of Naval Operations Adm. Lee Jong-ho [visits](#) US to discuss how to bolster military cooperation and ocean security with Secretary of Navy Carlos del Toro, Commander of US Indo-Pacific Command

John Aquilino, and other senior military officials. A Korean fleet of warships, maritime aircraft, and around 1000 troops [join](#) the US-led Rim of Pacific Exercise (RIMPAC).

**Aug. 1, 2022:** South Korean Foreign Minister Park Jin [affirms](#) that the US-led [Chip 4](#) alliance “is not designed to exclude China.” Jin states that the US has noted the importance of close economic ties between South Korea and China.

**Aug. 2, 2022:** South Korean Minister of Science and ICT Lee Jong-ho [meets](#) Alondra Nelson, acting director of the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy, to discuss ways to strengthen the countries’ technology alliance, such as through semiconductor and space exploration.

**Aug. 2, 2022:** Amid fears of a potential North Korean nuclear test, Secretary of State Blinken [highlights](#) the importance of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty during his address at the 10<sup>th</sup> NPT Review Conference at UN headquarters.

**Aug. 2, 2022:** South Korea’s foreign ministry [refuses](#) to comment on Nancy Pelosi’s expected visit to Taiwan but reaffirms position on the importance of “stability and peace” in the Taiwan Strait.

**Aug. 3, 2022:** North Korea strongly [denounces](#) US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi’s visit to Taiwan and calls it an “impudent interference of the US in internal affairs of other countries” and that Washington is the root cause of “harassed peace and security in the region.”

**Aug. 4, 2022:** South Korea [participates](#) in the [Global Sentinel](#) exercise, a US-led multinational space security exercise.

**Aug. 4, 2022:** National Assembly Speaker Kim Jin-pyo [meets](#) Speaker Pelosi. Kim and Pelosi agree to support efforts to denuclearize North Korea and expand ties between the allies in other areas such as defense security, the economy, and technology. Rep. Kweon Seong-dong of the ruling People Power Party and Rep. Park Hong-geun of the main opposition Democratic Party also [attend](#) the meeting.

**Aug. 4, 2022:** President Yoon [calls](#) Speaker Pelosi to reaffirm his efforts to deepen the bilateral alliance and states that Pelosi’s visit is a sign of deterrence against North Korea.

**Aug. 5, 2022:** Pelosi [states](#) that her visit to South Korea reaffirmed the “strong bond formed for security and forged by decades of warm friendship” between the two countries. Pelosi also [visited](#) the DMZ/JSA and Osan Air Base.

**Aug. 5, 2022:** South Korean Foreign Minister Park Jin and Secretary Blinken [discuss](#) Indo-Pacific strategy on the sidelines of ASEAN-hosted annual sessions.

**Aug. 5, 2022:** US Ambassador Goldberg [calls](#) on North Korea to respond to Washington’s dialogue offers and stresses the firm goal of denuclearizing Korea through diplomacy.

**Aug. 5, 2022:** Unification Minister Kwon Young-se [meets](#) Ambassador Goldberg to discuss North Korea. Kwon also discusses ways to improve human rights in North Korea with Damon Wilson, president of the US-based National Endowment for Democracy.

**Aug. 8, 2022:** South Korean Defense Minister Lee Jong-sup [visits](#) a US military base south of Seoul to highlight the “solid” US-ROK alliance and the need for thorough preparations for the upcoming Ulchi Freedom Shield (UFS) exercise.

**Aug. 8, 2022:** US Forces Korea (USFK) [reveals](#) that South Korean and US special commandos conducted combined military drills at Pilsung Range in an apparent show of firepower against evolving North Korean threats.

**Aug. 9, 2022:** South Korean Foreign Minister Park Jin and his Chinese counterpart Wang Yi [agree](#) that disputes over the US THAAD system should no longer hamper Seoul-Beijing relations. The ministers also discuss the supply chain issue and Park notifies Wang of Seoul’s decision to join the US-led Chip 4 alliance “purely” in consideration of national interest.

**Aug. 9, 2022:** US [imposes](#) sanctions on virtual currency mixer Tornado Cash for its involvement in laundering over \$455 million in virtual currency stolen by North Korea’s state-sponsored hacking group known as the Lazarus Group.

**Aug. 9, 2022:** South Korea, the US, and 19 other countries [conduct](#) five-day, US-hosted Fortune Guard 22 [exercise](#) in Hawaii with an aim to prevent the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD). This exercise is part of the



Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI) Asia-Pacific Exercise Rotation [series](#).

**Aug. 11, 2022:** Yoon's presidential office [states](#) that deployment of the US THAAD anti-missile system is not subject to negotiation after China [claims](#) Seoul promised to limit its operation during the Moon administration.

**Aug. 11, 2022:** President Yoon [hosts](#) a dinner for US Ambassador Goldberg and US Forces Korea Commander Gen. Paul LaCamera to welcome the new ambassador to Korea and evaluate the security situation on the Korean peninsula.

**Aug. 11, 2022:** North Korean leader Kim Jong Un [declares](#) victory over COVID-19 at a national meeting where his sister, Kim Yo Jong, gives a speech stating her brother suffered a fever and blames the North Korean COVID-19 outbreak on leaflets flown across the border from South Korea.

**Aug. 12, 2022:** President Yoon [meets](#) with Sen. Ed Markey to discuss strengthening the bilateral alliance. Markey expresses confidence the relationship will grow stronger with the [CHIPS and Science Act](#), which focuses on the semiconductor industry.

**Aug. 12, 2022:** Korea Automobile Manufacturers Association [sends](#) letter to the US House of Representatives with concerns regarding the tax breaks in the recently passed [Inflation Reduction Act](#) and requests changes in proposed tax credits for EV purchases.

**Aug. 12, 2022:** Defense officials Park Nam-hee and Kelly Fletcher of South Korea and the US respectively, [discuss](#) cooperation in the area of defense-related information and communication technologies (ICT). Park and Fletcher exchange assessments of current trends regarding 5G networks and cloud computing.

**Aug. 16, 2022:** South Korea, Japan, Australia, Canada, and the US [finish](#) biennial Pacific Dragon exercise, [reflecting](#) desires to step up security cooperation amid tensions caused by North Korea's recent missile launches.

**Aug. 16, 2022:** Secretary of State Blinken [highlights](#) the importance of the US-South Korea alliance on South Korea's Liberation Day.

**Aug. 16, 2022:** Poll by the Pew Research Center [finds](#) that nine out of 10 South Koreans hold a favorable view of the US and that 89% of South Koreans think the US is a "reliable partner."

**Aug. 16, 2022:** President Yoon [meets](#) with Microsoft co-founder Bill Gates to discuss cooperation on vaccine development and other health issues. The South Korean government and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation sign a memorandum of understanding to expand international health partnerships and to enhance biotechnology manpower in low- and middle-income countries.

**Aug. 17, 2022:** North Korea [test-fires](#) two cruise missiles toward the Yellow Sea as President Yoon holds a press conference to mark the 100<sup>th</sup> day since taking office.

**Aug. 17, 2022:** Principal deputy spokesperson for the State Department [states](#) the US is concerned by North Korea's "strengthened rhetoric" and is preparing for all contingencies amid signs North Korea is preparing for its seventh nuclear test. He also expresses concerns over the health of North Korean people during the pandemic.

**Aug. 17, 2022:** South Korea and the US [hold](#) regular defense talks on North Korea and a range of alliance issues such as THAAD during two-day Korea-US Integrated Defense Dialogue (KIDD). They agree to expand the size and scope of the combined Ulchi Freedom Shield exercise.

**Aug. 18, 2022:** In light of North Korea's recent [firing](#) of cruise missiles, State Department Press Secretary Price [reaffirms](#) the US commitment to the defense of South Korea and the maintenance of strong sanctions against North Korea. Price states the US [supports](#) President Yoon's initiative to engage with North Korea.

**Aug. 18, 2022:** South Korean Defense Minister Lee Jong-sup [meets](#) Gen. Paul Nakasone, commander of the US Cyber Command, to discuss cyber threats and ways to bolster the allies' response capabilities.

**Aug. 18, 2022:** Major South Korean automakers, including Hyundai Motor Co. and Kia Corp. [voice](#) concerns over the newly implemented Inflation reduction Act in Washington, which would provide tax incentives for electric vehicles solely manufactured in North America.

**Aug. 19, 2022:** South Korea's People Power Party (PPP) [calls](#) on the government to negotiate with the US to get South Korean-made electric vehicles eligible for tax benefits under the newly legislated Inflation Reduction Act. The PPP argues that Korea-made electric cars should receive equal tax benefits as those produced in the States in accordance with the free trade agreement between the two countries.

**Aug. 19, 2022:** South Korean Foreign Minister Park Jin and US counterpart Blinken [discuss](#) the dismissal from Kim Yo Jong, the sister of North Korean leader Kim Jong Un, of President Yoon's "audacious" initiative as the "height of absurdity." They "expressed regret" over her statement.

**Aug. 19, 2022:** First Vice Foreign Minister Cho Hyun-dong [conducts](#) separate phone conversations with US Special Envoy for Iran Robert Malley and EU mediator Enrique Mora to share the latest progress in negotiations to revive the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), which is aimed at restoring a 2015 Iran nuclear deal.

**Aug. 19, 2022:** South Korean National Assembly speaker Kim Jin-pyo [meets](#) US Ambassador Goldberg to discuss ROK-US relations.

**Aug. 19, 2022:** Department Press Secretary Price states that the US [sees](#) the need to take "incremental steps" with North Korea to completely denuclearize the Korean Peninsula.

**Aug. 22, 2022:** South Korea and the US [begin](#) Ulchi Freedom Shield (UFS) exercise. The first segment involves drills on repelling North Korean attacks and deafening the greater Seoul area while the second focuses on counterattack operations. The exercise also includes operational capability (FOC) assessment, a procedure for the envisioned transfer of wartime operational control (OPCON) from Washington to Seoul.

**Aug. 22, 2022:** South Korea [reviews](#) whether to file a complaint with the World Trade Organization over the Inflation Reduction Act.

**Aug. 23, 2022:** US State Department spokesperson Price [urges](#) Pyongyang to respond positively to Seoul's offer to help North Korea in exchange for denuclearization. The remarks come after Kim Yo Jong, North Korean leader

Kim Jong Un's sister, rejected South Korea's offers.

**Aug. 24, 2022:** South Korea [leads](#) Ulchi Freedom Shield exercise for the first time, a sign of progress in the plan for the transition of wartime operational control (OPCON). South Korean Gen. Ahn Byung-Seok takes the commanding role as the two countries conduct the full operational capability (FOC) assessment, the second part of the three-stage program to assess the South's capabilities to lead combined forces.

**Aug. 25, 2022:** Korea Automobile Manufacturers Association [seeks](#) a joint response with the European Union over the US Inflation Reduction Act that excludes electric vehicles assembled outside of North America from tax incentives.

**Aug. 25, 2022:** Seoul [pushes](#) for discussion with Washington over its new Chips and Science Act. South Korea's industry ministry sets up a joint response team with private firms to review related trade regulations, boost communications with the US, and enhance monitoring of major nations' moves regarding the law. Industry Minister Lee Chang-yang meets with related firms in the semiconductor, car, and battery sectors including Samsung, SK, LG, Hyundai, and Kia.

**Aug. 25, 2022:** Vedant Patel, US Principal Deputy Spokesperson for the State Department, [reaffirms](#) US commitment to the defense of South Korea and Japan.

**Aug. 26, 2022:** South Korean Defense Minister Lee Jong-sup [meets](#) troops at the Ground Component command, a wartime unit formed to conduct South Korea and the US's Ulchi Freedom Shield exercise.

**Aug. 26, 2022:** Daniel Kritenbrink, US assistant secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs, [meets](#) South Korean counterpart Yeo Seung-bae and makes courtesy calls on Foreign Minister Park Jin and Second Vice Foreign Minister Lee Do-hoon. Park raises concerns of Washington's discriminatory treatment of Korean companies under the Inflation Reduction Act and Kritenbrink states that Washington is well aware of Seoul's concerns and will continue consultations between the two governments. Kritenbrink reaffirms Washington's "strong support" for Seoul's "audacious" plan.

**Aug. 29, 2022:** South Korea [launches](#) government-civilian body tasked with an environmental impact assessment of the THAAD battery unit in Seongju. It consists of officials from provincial governments, environment and defense ministries, representatives of local residents, and experts in relevant private sectors. The Yoon administration has been pushing normalization of the battery.

**Aug. 30, 2022:** Vedant Patel, principal deputy spokesperson for the State Department, [insists](#) that THAAD is a “purely defensive measure to protect ROK” from North Korea threats. Criticism or pressure on South Korea to abandon its self-defense is inappropriate, states Patel.

**Aug. 30, 2022:** Washington [agrees](#) to launch formal talks with Seoul to minimize the adverse effects of the Inflation Reduction Act on South Korean electric vehicles.

**Aug. 30, 2022:** South Korea [participates](#) in Pacific Vanguard exercise, a US-led multinational maritime exercise, involving Australia, Canada, and Japan.

**Aug. 30, 2022:** South Korea [waits](#) for a ruling from the International Centre for Settlement of Investment Disputes on the multibillion dollar damages suit that US private equity firm Lone Star filed against the country more than a decade ago.

**Aug. 30, 2022:** Seoul’s armed forces [reveal](#) that the ROK Navy joined a US-led multinational maritime exercise in waters off Guam earlier in August to enhance combined operational capabilities.

**Aug. 31, 2022:** Seoul [announces](#) that the national security advisors of South Korea, Japan, and the United States will meet in Hawaii to discuss North Korea’s nuclear program and other issues of potential cooperation. The meeting [takes place](#) Sept. 1 at the US Indo-Pacific Command in Honolulu.

*Chronology prepared by Pacific Forum research interns Su Hyun Lee and Kaylin Kim*

