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JAPAN-KOREA RELATIONS

JAPAN AND SOUTH KOREA AS LIKE- MINDED PARTNERS IN THE INDO- PACIFIC

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The last four months of 2022 saw a flurry of bilateral diplomatic activities between Japan and South Korea in both nations' capitals and around the world. They focused on 1) North Korea, 2) the issue of wartime forced labor, and 3) the future of Seoul-Tokyo cooperation in the Indo-Pacific region. Despite mutual mistrust and the low approval ratings of Prime Minister Kishida Fumio and President Yoon Suk Yeol, both leaders had the political will to see a breakthrough in bilateral relations. Another signal came in the form of new strategy documents in which Seoul and Tokyo explained their foreign and security policy directions and goals. On Dec. 16, the Kishida government [published](#) three national security-related documents—the *National Security Strategy (NSS)*, the *National Defense Strategy (NDS)*, and the Defense Buildup program. On Dec. 28, the Yoon government [unveiled](#) South Korea's *Strategy for a Free, Peaceful, Prosperous Indo-Pacific Region*, its first ever Indo-Pacific strategy. Although each document serves a somewhat different purpose, it is now possible to gauge how similarly or differently Japan and South Korea assess challenges in the international security environment, and how they plan to respond to them.

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Importantly, they signal the other, the United States, and the world that they acknowledge the strategic and economic importance of their partner in their vision of the future. When one considers the future of Japan-South Korea relations, what are some of the most important take-aways?

South Korea's Indo-Pacific Strategy and Japan's Security Documents

To understand the significance of the mutual recognition in these documents, it is necessary to situate the plans in the broader context, particularly in comparison to prior policies.

First, when it comes to North Korea's nuclear and missile capabilities, overall, there is considerable convergence between Seoul and Tokyo in terms of threat perceptions and the emphasis on deterrence. This is an area where one may expect to see an even further tightening of Seoul-Tokyo cooperation, especially together with Washington. Japan's National Security Strategy [notes](#) that North Korea has conducted missile launches "with an unprecedented frequency and in new ways," estimating that Pyongyang's intention is "to bolster its nuclear capabilities both in quality and in quantity at the maximum speed." It assesses that "North Korea's military activities pose an even more grave and imminent threat to Japan's national security than ever before." South Korea's *Indo-Pacific Strategy* similarly [views](#) North Korea's growing nuclear and missile capabilities as "a serious threat to peace and stability not only on the Korean Peninsula and in the Indo-Pacific region, but also across the globe."

In addressing these threats, both Japan and South Korea consider the other an important partner. South Korea's *Indo-Pacific Strategy* says, "Based on the ROK-US Alliance, we will maintain and strengthen our robust combined defense posture against North Korea's nuclear threats, while expanding ROK-US-Japan trilateral security cooperation to reinforce our capability to safeguard peace." Japan's National Security Strategy similarly writes, "with the response to North Korea and other issues in mind, Japan will enhance Japan-ROK and Japan-US-ROK strategic coordination, including in the area of security."



Figure 1 President Yoon Suk Yeol attends a trilateral summit with President Joe Biden and Japanese Prime Minister Kishida Fumio in Phnom Penh, Cambodia. Photo: Office of the President (South Korea)

Second, there is an acknowledgement on both sides that they can be like-minded partners in the Indo-Pacific region, in terms of navigating shifts in the regional balance of power, growing geopolitical competition, and the resulting economic risks, such as supply chain disruptions. Sharing an emphasis on such values as "freedom," "democracy," "human rights," and the "rule of law," both Seoul and Tokyo have repeatedly signaled their interest in improving bilateral relations, while positioning themselves as global actors. South Korea, branding itself a "Global Pivotal State," acknowledges Japan as "our closest neighbor." It [reads](#), "we will seek a forward-looking partnership that supports our common interests and values. Improved relations with Japan is essential for fostering cooperation and solidarity among like-minded Indo-Pacific nations; we are thus continuing our diplomatic efforts to restore mutual trust and advance relations." Japan, viewing itself as a "major global actor," calls South Korea "a highly important neighboring country to Japan in a geopolitical context and in regard to Japan's security." It goes on to [state](#), "Japan will communicate closely with the ROK in order to develop Japan-ROK relations based on the foundation of friendly and cooperative relations that have developed since the normalization of diplomatic relations in 1965."

While some assert that South Korea's *Indo-Pacific Strategy* did not elaborate enough on China, there are important differences in South Korea's tone and signaling. On the one hand, compared to the previous Moon administration's reluctance to even talk about China, President Yoon is willing to articulate his vision for the regional order as being a "free, peaceful, and

prosperous Indo-Pacific,” referencing the issues of the South China Sea and the Taiwan Strait. His *Indo-Pacific Strategy* [states](#), “in this regard, peace, stability and freedom of navigation and overflight in the South China Sea, which constitutes strategically important sea lines of communication, must be respected. We also affirm the importance of peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait for the peace and stability of the Korean Peninsula and for the security and prosperity of the Indo-Pacific.” On the other hand, South Korea’s use of the word “inclusive” in describing its Indo-Pacific Strategy as one that “neither targets nor excludes any specific nation” is perhaps in consideration of its relations with Beijing.

Compared to South Korea, Japan viewed China as a threat in unequivocal terms and described it as an “unprecedented and the greatest strategic challenge” to the peace and security of Japan. Seoul and Tokyo included the expression that they oppose unilateral changes to the status quo by force. However, there is a difference. Japan pointedly described its first defense objective as shaping a “security environment not accepting unilateral changes to the status quo by force.” Japan’s *National Security Strategy* and *National Defense Strategy* list in detail intensifying Chinese activities in the region around Japan, and around Taiwan, calling it a “matter of serious concern.”

Japan’s national security documents drew much attention because of two things: 1) a concrete plan to [double](#) defense spending to 2% of GDP by 2027—breaking with decades-long tradition of a 1% cap—and 2) inclusion of the use of counterstrike capabilities—the capability for Japan to strike into an opponent’s territory. This represents what Japan calls a “major turning point” for its postwar defense policy. Japan’s intent to acquire counterstrike capabilities has raised questions among its neighbors, including South Korea. Japan’s *National Security Strategy* [elaborates](#) the circumstances of such use as when “detering invasion against Japan,” “missile attacks by an opponent,” and “preventing further attacks while defending against incoming missiles by means of the missile defense network.” South Korea’s government and military [are said](#) to have paid a great deal of attention to this inclusion as they regard it as relevant for possible contingencies on the Korean Peninsula.

For example, in the NDS Tokyo lays out seven key “functions and capabilities” to fundamentally

reinforce its defense capabilities, including 1) stand-off defense, 2) integrated air and missile defense, 3) unmanned defense, 4) cross-domain, 5) command and control and intelligence-related functions, 6) mobile deployment and 7) sustainability and resiliency. In terms of acquiring new capabilities, the more than \$2.4 billion (\$1.6 billion for buying and \$832 million for training) earmarked in its new record defense budget (\$51.4 billion) approved in December 2022 to buy hundreds of US *Tomahawk* missiles for its *Aegis* destroyers made headlines. Acquisitions like this will complement homegrown capabilities described within the NDS to bring about real material changes to Japan’s defense capability for the decade to come. Some of these new capabilities include standoff missiles such as hypervelocity gliding projectiles (HVGP), *Aegis*-equipped vessels (sea-based ballistic missile defense), unmanned underwater vehicles (UUV), a Space Domain Awareness system, and many more. Furthermore, in a nod to a lesson learned from the conflict in Ukraine, the NDS promises to resolve its current shortage of ammunition and missiles by 2027.

Expressing concern about the inclusion of counterstrike capabilities and their implications for the Korean Peninsula, a South Korean foreign ministry official [said](#), “it is necessary to have close consultation with us and seek out approval in advance on issues that have a significant impact on the security of the Korean peninsula and out national interest.” “It is desirable that related discussions will be carried out transparently in a way that contributes to regional peace and stability, while upholding the spirit of the Peace Constitution.” In response, a Japanese government official [said](#) that Japan would not need permission from other countries when exercising counterstrike capabilities and “decide on its own.”

Bilateral Diplomacy On: North Korea, Forced Labor Issue, and Security Cooperation

The last four months of 2022 saw a flurry of bilateral visits, meetings, and phone calls between Korea and Japan. This includes two leader meetings and a phone call between Yoon and Kishida, visits to Seoul by an 18-member delegation of Japanese Diet lawmakers, two former Japanese prime ministers, and the leader of Komeito, and visits to Tokyo by the South Korean prime minister and health minister. There were also numerous working-level consultations on critical bilateral issues held in

both capitals. On the table for bilateral diplomacy are 1) North Korea, 2) the issue of wartime forced labor, and 3) the future of Seoul-Tokyo cooperation in the Indo-Pacific region.

In early September, Japanese Foreign Minister Hayashi Yoshimasa and South Korean Foreign Minister Park Jin discussed the need for improving bilateral relations at a forum. Park said “a starting point for improving South Korea-Japan relations is being created,” while Hayashi believed “there has never been a time when progress in Japan-South Korea, Japan-US-South Korea cooperation is more important than now.” South Korean Prime Minister Han Duck-soo [visited](#) Japan to attend the state funeral of former Prime Minister Abe Shinzo. During his meeting with Kishida the day after the funeral, the two sides agreed to discuss the issues of wartime forced labor and the so-called comfort women. In response to Han’s offer of condolences extended on behalf of President Yoon and South Korea, Kishida [said](#) that Japan “received numerous polite condolences from many Koreans, including President Yoon and the Prime Minister.” South Korea’s Deputy National Assembly Speaker Chung Jin-suk on the South Korean delegation to the state funeral similarly [called for](#) two-track efforts to resolve difficult history issues and expand exchanges between two countries, “as the younger generation wishes for.”

Prime Minister Kishida and President Yoon met twice in late 2022—in September on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly in New York, and in November on the sidelines of ASEAN-related summit meetings in Phnom Penh. The brouhaha behind their September meeting mirrors the current state of bilateral relations where both sides feel the need to improve relations but are unable to make a clear breakthrough due in large part to mutual mistrust combined with domestic politics. With the issue of wartime forced labor still pending, both Kishida and Yoon had to navigate domestic opposition amid their low approval ratings.



Figure 2 South Korean President Yoon and Japanese Prime Minister Kishida pose for a photo prior to their talks in New York. Photo: Yonhap

Leading up to the Sept. 21 meeting, South Korea’s Presidential Office announced that Seoul and Tokyo planned to hold a summit in New York. The remark by Kim Tae-hyo, deputy national security adviser, was widely [reported](#) in South Korean media outlets. The Japanese Prime Minister’s Office denied this, with Chief Cabinet Secretary Matsuno Hirokazu [responding](#) that Kishida’s schedule has not been determined. Amid South Korean media reports that Kishida was unhappy with South Korea’s announcement, Kishida and Yoon did [meet](#) for 30 minutes on Sept. 21. South Korean Foreign Minister Park and Japanese Foreign Minister Hayashi also met for 50 minutes in New York to discuss bilateral relations. South Korean politicians in the opposition criticized Yoon’s meeting with Kishida as a “[disgrace](#),” and “[humiliating](#),” questioning why Yoon had to go to the building where Kishida was holding his official function to meet.

Regardless of how one characterizes the September meeting -- an official summit or not -- Kishida and Yoon [met](#) longer for 45 minutes on Nov. 13, which was acknowledged as an official summit. During these two meetings, the two leaders confirmed three things. First, they would work closely to deal with North Korea’s nuclear and missiles threats bilaterally and trilaterally with the United States. Indeed, the North Korean threat was the unifier for which the need for Korea-Japan bilateral cooperation was repeatedly reconfirmed. North Korea in the last four months continued to up the ante on provocations, shooting missiles on 19 different days and launching almost 60 missiles in the process, including a record-breaking 23 (or 25) missiles in a single day in early November. Overall in 2022, North Korea has [shattered](#) all

provocation metrics, conducting missile tests on 37 different occasions, and launching over 90 missiles of all types, including two North Korean missiles that flew over Japan for the first time since 2017. North Korea is no longer just shooting missiles: it is increasingly [conducting](#) hybrid provocations, including airplane exercises and drones (UAVs), and doing them on land, water, and air. As the year ends, the 7th nuclear test has not been conducted, but all indications point to preparations being ready and timing now solely up to the discretion of Kim Jong Un.

Second, Kishida and Yoon promised that they would endeavor to resolve the issue of wartime forced laborers. After the November summit, an official from South Korea's Presidential Office [said](#), "the overall tone was that we should move more quickly, and that the two leaders should pay closer attention and lend further support to induce not only a resolution of the forced labor issue but also an improvement in South Korea-Japan relations." Despite the two sides' desire to make headway and put this issue of forced labor to rest by the end of 2022, the year ended without a breakthrough. A proposal that emerged in South Korea in the final months of 2022 entails a plan that does not involve compensations by Japanese companies, Mitsubishi Heavy Industries Inc. or Nippon Steel Corp., and will instead use South Korean corporate donations. Many in South Korea including the forced labor victims [oppose](#) this proposed plan. There [remain](#) concerns that the Yoon government will push for a compromise with Japan. In Japan, there is no guarantee that a South Korean proposal will be accepted by members of the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) who are skeptical of a deal with South Korea. Perhaps it is in this context that Aso Taro, vice president of the ruling LDP and a former prime minister, [visited](#) Seoul prior to the Kishida-Yoon summit on Nov. 2, and met President Yoon for 85 minutes on bilateral issues, including forced labor. According to *Nikkei*, Kishida [wanted](#) Aso's visit to enable a bilateral summit between Japan and South Korea.



Figure 3 Members of a civic group seeking compensation from Japanese firms over forced labor during World War II and opposition lawmakers stage a rally to oppose the government's reported resolution to the issue outside the National Assembly in Seoul. Photo: AP Photo/Ahn Young-joon

Third, Kishida and Yoon support each other's vision for the Indo-Pacific region. Kishida shared Japan's plan to announce a new "Free and Open Indo-Pacific" Plan in early 2023, to which Yoon responded by explaining to Kishida his own "Indo-Pacific Strategy of Free, Peace, and Prosperity." Japan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs [reported](#) that "the two leaders welcomed each other's vision for the Indo-Pacific and concurred on aligning their collective efforts in pursuit of a free and open Indo-Pacific, that is inclusive, resilient, and secure."

It remains to be seen what "like-minded partners" will mean and how they will materialize in policy settings. However, it seems clear that both the Kishida and Yoon governments are willing to view each other as partners more than ever before, even in national security-related matters. For the first time since September 2016, South Korea and Japan [began](#) to normalize defense cooperation, with Japanese Vice Defense Minister for International Oka Masami participating in a vice defense minister-level talk with Korean counterpart Shin Beom-chul in Seoul. South Korea's decision in late October to join Japan's international fleet review -- its first in 20 years to celebrate the 70th anniversary of its MSDF - wasn't a guarantee, despite the increased tempo of trilateral cooperation and military exercises this year. Seoul initially missed the Oct. 12 deadline to indicate their participation; Tokyo [confirmed](#) on Oct. 25 that Seoul had not responded. Less than 10 days before the fleet review, South Korea decided to participate, citing the "grave security situation surrounding the Korean peninsula."

In the end, South Korea [sent](#) a logistics support ship, the *Soyang* to participate, the first time the South Korean navy has participated in seven years (2015), and the second time since 2002. It's important to note that South Korea was not [invited](#) to participate in a smaller fleet review in 2019, after conflict over the alleged December 2018 locked fire-control incident – the review was later cancelled due to a typhoon. Kishida during the fleet review on Nov. 6 [said](#), “We absolutely cannot allow nuclear and missile development by North Korea.”

As the year 2022 came to a close Yamaguchi Natsuo of Komeito, the junior party of Japan's ruling coalition, visited South Korea and met with President Yoon. Yoon [acknowledged](#) the party's efforts for improving bilateral relations including the issue of voting rights for ethnic Koreans residing in Japan and requested continued support. Yamaguchi [emphasized](#) the importance of trilateral cooperation among Seoul, Tokyo, and Washington to address North Korea's missile and nuclear capabilities, adding that the party would make efforts to ensure that subsequent discussions of Japan's national security strategies contribute to peace in the region.

Trilateral Cooperation

The year 2022 ended on a strong note for Seoul-Tokyo-Washington trilateral cooperation. The US, South Korea, and Japan issued a comprehensive trilateral cooperation document on the sidelines of the East Asia Summit on Nov. 13. The Phnom Penh statement [outlined](#) ways to “forge still-closer trilateral links, in the security realm and beyond” at “all levels of government.” It was unequivocal in reaffirming that a North Korean nuclear test would be “met with a strong and resolute response,” and that the three will work to strengthen deterrence, including sharing real-time North Korean missile warning data. The statement also reiterated the importance of trilateral cooperation on economic security, including launching a new trilateral dialogue on this critical issue. Lastly, in a veiled reference to China, the three countries also announced they will “stand as one against economic coercion.”

The three partners are coordinating trilaterally in other areas, including on sanctions on North Korea. On Dec. 2, the US [lauded](#) “synchronized action” by the three to designate officials and entities associated with the North Korean nuclear and missile program as a demonstration

of the “increased strength” of the trilateral relationship. The [US](#), [South Korea](#) and [Japan](#) sequentially announced unilateral sanctions against North Korea on the same day, targeting different entities and actors.

Poor Popular Support

The Kishida administration's approval ratings in the final stretch of the year were not strong, falling to 25% in mid-December from 31% in mid-November, [according to](#) the *Mainichi Shimbun*. *Mainichi Shimbun* polls on Nov. 19 and 20 [show](#) that 43% of respondents wanted Kishida to “step down soon,” while only 14% said that they hoped he “stayed in office as long as possible.” Against the backdrop of revelations of LDP lawmakers' connections with the Unification Church, by the end of December, Kishida [witnessed](#) four of his Cabinet members—Internal Affairs Minister Terada Minoru, Justice Minister Hanashi Yasuhiro, Economic Minister Yamagiwa Daishiro, and Reconstruction Minister Akiba Kenya—forced to resign their ministerial positions over scandals. The Constitutional Democratic Party of Japan—the largest opposition party—[criticized](#) the Kishida administration as “having almost collapsed.”

For the Yoon administration, his popularity has remained in the 30s for much of his presidency, but it slowly but gradually rebounded from [24%](#) in early August to [41.1%](#) in mid-December. Domestic politics remains too volatile for his administration to pursue a decisive Japan policy. Opposition party leader Lee Jae-myung of the Democratic Party [called](#) trilateral naval drills among South Korea, Japan, and the United States on Oct. 7, “an extreme pro-Japanese act.” Urging the Yoon administration to apologize for conducting the exercises, he claimed that “holding joint military exercises between South Korea, the US, and Japan can be interpreted as acknowledging Japan's Self-Defense Forces as an official military.”

Japan finally [lifted](#) border restrictions after 2 years and 7 months in October 2022, and as many as 5,000 South Koreans traveled to Japan on the first day of lifted restrictions. South Korean airlines were quick to announce expansion of flights to Japan, including to Tokyo, Nagoya, Osaka, Fukuoka and other cities. Regular ferry service between Fukuoka and Busan [resumed](#) in early November, creating more travel options and opportunities for people-to-people exchange.

Looking Ahead to 2023

In early 2023, as the Yoon government's proposal for the wartime forced labor issue takes shape, South Korea-Japan relations will have an important window of opportunity to improve bilateral ties. Both Yoon and Kishida have key dates in early 2023 – such as the G7 in Hiroshima in May 2023 (and [maybe](#) the World Baseball Classic in Japan in March) to showcase a breakthrough in this difficult, emotional, and politically unpopular issue. Judging from the gestures and signals in late 2022, there seems to be enough political will on both sides – Kishida and Yoon – to come to an arrangement that is acceptable for both. But domestic politics remains a big factor as both leaders struggle with low approval ratings. We are hopeful that the two countries will celebrate the 25th anniversary of the Korea-Japan Joint Declaration of 1998 in October 2023 in some meaningful way, especially as they strive to be global actors as well as closest neighbors.

CHRONOLOGY OF JAPAN-KOREA RELATIONS

SEPTEMBER—DECEMBER 2022

Sept. 1, 2022: US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan, Japanese National Security Secretariat Secretary General Akiba Takeo, and South Korean National Security Office Director Kim Sung-han [meet](#) in US Indo-Pacific Command in Hawaii to discuss their shared vision of a free and open Indo-Pacific.

Sept. 2, 2022: South Korean Foreign Minister Park Jin [meets](#) two Korean plaintiffs in Japanese wartime forced labor cases and promises to solve the issue as soon as possible.

Sept. 3, 2022: South Korean Foreign Minister Park Jin and Japanese Foreign Minister Hayashi Yoshimasa [discuss](#) the need for improving bilateral relations at a forum. Park says "a starting point for improving South Korea-Japan relations is being created," while Hayashi believes "there has never been a time when progress in Japan-South Korea, Japan-US-South Korea cooperation is more important than now."

Sept. 7, 2022: US special representative for North Korea Sung Kim [meets](#) Japanese counterpart Funakoshi Takehiro and South Korean counterpart Kim Gunn in Tokyo to discuss "specific steps" to respond to a potential North Korean nuclear test.

Sept. 7, 2022: South Korean Vice Defense Minister Shin Beom-chul [holds](#) discussion with Japanese Vice Defense Minister for International Oka Masami on the sidelines of the Seoul Defense Dialogue in Seoul, the first vice defense minister-level talks between Korea and Japan since September 2016, and the two sides agreed to work together to normalize defense cooperation. Japan also [invites](#) the South Korean Navy to attend its fleet review to mark the 70th anniversary of the founding of the Maritime Self-Defense Force (MSDF).

Sept. 15, 2022: South Korea's Deputy National Security Director Kim Tae-hyo [announces](#) that South Korea and Japan agreed to meet for a summit in New York. Japan's Chief Cabinet

Secretary Matsuno Hirokazu say that Kishida's schedule has not been determined.

Sept. 16, 2022: Seoul Central District Court [dismisses](#) case for Japan to disclose its state assets in South Korea to pay compensation to comfort women because of its refusal to comply. This follows previous attempts in June and September 2021 for Japan to submit this full list of assets.

Sept. 20, 2022: South Korean FM Park Jin and Japanese FM Hayashi meet for 50 minutes in New York on the sidelines of the United Nations General Assembly to discuss bilateral relations, including working toward an early resolution of the forced labor issue.

Sept. 22, 2022: South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol and Japanese Prime Minister Kishida Fumio [meet](#) for [30 minutes](#) on the sidelines of the UNGA to discuss bilateral relations, the importance of bilateral and trilateral cooperation with the US, and the North Korean threat. This is the [first](#) in-person sit-down meeting between the two countries' leaders since December 2019.

Sept. 22, 2022: US Secretary of State Antony Blinken [meets](#) Japanese and Korean counterparts, Hayashi Yoshimasa and Park Jin on the sidelines of the UNGA. Blinken [stresses](#) the "trilateral partnership matters" to the US, and that "we are even more effective" when the three countries are working together. In their joint statement, the US and Japan also [express](#) support for South Korea's "Audacious Initiative."

Sept. 24, 2022: Former Japanese Prime Minister Hatoyama Yukio [apologizes](#) for Japan's actions toward Korea during a memorial event for the 1587 Battle of Myeongnyang on Jindo Island in South Korea.

Sept. 25, 2022: Japanese Ambassador to South Korea Aiboshi Koichi [describes](#) the Kishida-Yoon meeting on Sept. 22 as a "forward-looking" step to improve bilateral relations.

Sept. 26, 2022: South Korean Deputy National Assembly Speaker Chung Jin-suk [begins](#) three-day trip to Tokyo to attend the state funeral for former Japanese Prime Minister Abe Shinzo. This is Chung's first trip as president of the Korea-Japan Parliamentarians' Union.

Sept. 27, 2022: South Korean delegation led by Prime Minister Han Duck-soo [visits](#) Japan to attend the state funeral of former Prime Minister Abe.

Sept. 27, 2022: During his memorial address at the state funeral for Prime Minister Abe, Prime Minister Kishida [promises](#) to “do everything in my power” to fulfill Abe's mission of bringing back Japanese abductees by North Korea.

Sept. 27, 2022: Asiana Airlines, South Korea's second largest carrier, [announces](#) plans to expand flights to Japan from 10 to 32 starting on Oct. 30, in response to Japan's decision in mid-September to lift the ban on the number of inbound passengers and to resume visa-free travel for visitors from South Korea.

Sept. 28, 2022: South Korean PM Han [meets](#) Prime Minister Kishida in Tokyo and reemphasizes the Yoon administration's desire to “swiftly improve and develop Korea-Japan relations.” They also discussed bilateral issues such as forced labor.

Sept. 30, 2022: Japanese Minister of Education, Culture, Sports Science and Technology Nagaoka Keiko [announces](#) that Japan has submitted to UNESCO a “tentative” revised recommendation letter for the Sado mine to be added to the World Heritage list. In July, ministry officials [said](#) UNESCO found the initial application to be incomplete and therefore did not forward the recommendation to its advisory body by the deadline to be considered for inclusion in the 2023 list.

Sept. 30, 2022: South Korea, Japan, and the US [hold](#) a day-long trilateral anti-submarine exercise off the coast of the Korean Peninsula in the sea between Korea and Japan. The anti-submarine exercise was the first in five years, and it [involved](#) South Korea's *Munmu the Great* destroyer, Japan's *Asahi*-class destroyer, the USS *Ronald Reagan* aircraft carrier, the USS *Chancellorville* missile cruiser and the USS *Barry* missile destroyer. The exercise comes a day after

North Korea fired two ballistic missiles into the sea.

Oct. 4, 2022: In separate bilateral phone calls, top diplomats of South Korea, Japan, and the US [condemn](#) North Korea's launch of an intermediate-range ballistic missile (IRBM) that flew about 4,500 km (about 2800 miles) over Japan. Both FM Park Jin and Secretary of State Blinken called it a “grave provocation.”

Oct. 4, 2022: US Deputy of State Wendy Sherman, South Korean First Vice Foreign Minister Cho Hyundong, and Japanese Vice Foreign Minister Mori Takeo [hold](#) a trilateral call to discuss North Korea's IRBM launch over Japan.

Oct. 6, 2022: South Korean President Yoon and Japanese PM Kishida [discuss](#) North Korea's missile launches in a 25-minute phone call and agree to work together to respond to North Korea's “reckless provocations.” Kishida [tells](#) reporters after the call that he had agreed with Yoon to build a “future-oriented” relationship.

Oct. 6, 2022: South Korean Special Representative for Korean Peninsula peace and security affairs Kim Gunn [holds](#) separate phone calls with US and Japanese counterparts, Sung Kim and Funakoshi Takehiro over North Korea's recent missile launches, voicing “serious concerns.”

Oct. 6, 2022: South Korea, Japan, and the US [hold](#) a joint naval exercise involving the USS *Ronald Reagan* aircraft carrier strike group in response to North Korea's launch of an IRBM over Japan the previous day. The exercise also involved South Korea's *King Sejong the Great* Destroyer and Japan's *Chokai* destroyer.

Oct. 7, 2022: South Korean Deputy Defense Minister for Policy Heo Tae-keun [holds](#) conference call with US and Japanese counterparts, Ely Ratner and Masuda Kazuo to discuss North Korea's missile launches and potential joint responses.

Oct. 7, 2022: South Korean Special Representative for Korean Peninsula peace and security affairs Kim Gunn and US and Japanese counterparts, Sung Kim and Funakoshi Takehiro [agree](#) to increase joint efforts to stop North Korea's cryptocurrency theft, illicit trade and sanctions evasion that help finances its nuclear and missile program.

Oct. 11, 2022: South Korean Director General for Asia and Pacific Affairs [hosts](#) Japanese counterpart Funakoshi in Seoul for working-level consultations on forced labor and other bilateral issues.

Oct. 11, 2022: Japan [lifts](#) border restrictions. About 5000 South Koreans traveled to Japan on the first day of lifted restrictions.

Oct. 12, 2022: South Korean Special Representative for Korean Peninsula peace and security affairs Kim Gunn [hosts](#) Japanese counterpart Funakoshi in Seoul for consultations on North Korean provocations and joint security cooperation.

Oct. 14, 2022: South Korean Special Representative for Korean Peninsula peace and security affairs Kim Gunn [holds](#) separate phone calls with US and Japanese counterparts, Sung Kim and Funakoshi over North Korea's recent provocations, including flying more than 10 North Korean warplanes close to the South Korean border and missile launches into the South's maritime buffer zones.

Oct. 14, 2022: South Korea [announces](#) new unilateral sanctions against North Korea, the first in five years, designating 15 individuals and 16 organizations for their involvement with the nuclear and missile programs.

Oct. 17, 2022: Japanese PM Kishida [sends](#) a ritual offering to Yasukuni Shrine, but does not visit the shrine. South Korea [expresses](#) deep regret.

Oct. 18, 2022: Japan [announces](#) additional sanctions on North Korea and freezes the assets of five organizations for their involvement with the nuclear and missile programs.

Oct. 20, 2022: US Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Gen. Mark Milley [hosts](#) trilateral meeting with Korean and Japanese counterparts, Gen. Kim Seung-Kyum and Gen. Yamazaki Koji at the Pentagon to discuss regional security challenges, including the North Korean threat and the importance of trilateral security cooperation.

Oct. 26, 2022: Japanese FM Hayashi [hosts](#) Deputy Secretary of State Sherman and South Korean First Vice Foreign Minister Cho in Tokyo to discuss the North Korean threat, deepening trilateral cooperation, and the recent 20th

National Congress of the Chinese Communist Party.

Oct. 27, 2022: Air Seoul Inc, a South Korean carrier [announces](#) it will resume flights from Incheon to Osaka and Fukuoka in Japan starting on October 30.

Nov. 1, 2022: South Korean logistics support ship *Soyang* [arrives](#) in Yokosuka port to participate in Japan's international fleet review on Nov, 6, South Korea's first participation since 2015.

Nov. 2, 2022: Aso Taro, vice president of the ruling Liberal Democratic Party and former prime minister, [meets](#) President Yoon in Seoul.

Nov. 2, 2022: An 18-member delegation of Japanese Diet members affiliated with the Japan-Korea Parliamentarians' Union [visiting](#) Seoul paid respects to victims of the Itaewon incident.

Nov. 3, 2022: Former Japanese PM Aso [meets](#) South Korean FM Park in Seoul to discuss ways to improve bilateral relations.

Nov. 3, 2022: South Korean FM Park and Japanese FM Hayashi [speak](#) on the phone to discuss North Korea's latest missile launches of an ICBM and two SRBMs, including one that flew into South Korea's de facto maritime border.

Nov. 3, 2022: 18-member delegation of Japanese Diet members [meet](#) South Korean Prime Minister Han o in Seoul, the first meeting of the annual general meeting of the Korea-Japan Parliamentarians' Union in three years. In congratulatory remarks read by Japanese ambassador to South Korea Aiboshi Koichi, PM Kishida [stresses](#) the importance of Japan-Korea cooperation. The Japanese delegation also [meets](#) Chung Jin-suk, leader of the ruling People Power Party and head of the Korea-Japan Parliamentarians' Union, who stresses the importance of Korea-Japan security cooperation. In their joint statement, members of the two countries' parliamentarians' union [called](#) for swiftly normalizing Korea-Japan relations.

Nov. 4, 2022: A ferry between Fukuoka in Japan and Busan in South Korea [resumes](#) service, the first regular international sea route Japan has restarted since the COVID-19 pandemic. Regular ferry service was suspended in March 2020.

Nov. 4, 2022: South Korean President Yoon [meets](#) visiting Japanese lawmaker delegation in Seoul and asks them to help increase people-to-people exchanges.

Nov. 7, 2022: Japanese FM Hayashi, US Deputy Secretary of State Sherman and South Korean First Vice Foreign Minister Cho [discuss](#) and condemn North Korea's latest missile tests as a "serious threat, including an ICBM.

Nov. 13, 2022: US President Joe Biden, South Korean President Yoon and Japanese PM Kishida [meet](#) at the East Asia Summit in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, their second trilateral meeting in 2022. They [released](#) a comprehensive trilateral joint statement, their first, to increase trilateral cooperation and work together toward a free and open Indo-Pacific. Kishida and Yoon also hold an official summit meeting in Cambodia.

Nov. 18, 2022: South Korean FM Park and Japanese FM Hayashi [speak](#) on the phone about North Korea's latest ICBM test.

Nov. 21, 2022: *Mainichi Shimbun* polls [show](#) that 43% of Japanese respondents want Kishida to quit soon, while 14% respond that they hope he stay in office as long as possible.

Nov. 21, 2022: Japanese FM Hayashi, US Deputy Secretary of State Sherman and South Korean First Vice Foreign Minister Cho [have](#) trilateral call to discuss North Korea's Nov. 18 ICBM test.

Nov. 22, 2022: Jeju Air Co., a South Korean budget carrier, [resumes](#) Incheon-Nagoya route, offering seven flights a week for the first time since the route was suspended in March 2020 due to COVID-19.

Nov. 26, 2022: South Korean Ambassador to Japan Yun Duk Min [calls](#) for return of "shuttle diplomacy" between the two leaders in an interview with the Japanese newspaper, *Kyodo News*.

Dec. 1, 2022: US [sanctions](#) three officials of North Korea's Workers' party of Korea for supporting the nuclear and missile programs.

Dec. 2, 2022: Japan [announces](#) additional sanctions against North Korea, targeting two trading companies, one hacking group, and an official for involvement with nuclear and missile programs. South Korea also [announces](#)

additional sanctions on North Korea, targeting eight individuals and seven institutions involved with the nuclear and missile programs.

Dec. 6, 2022: South Korean Ambassador to the US Cho Taeyong and Japanese Ambassador to the US Tomita Koji [agree](#) during a conference that bilateral and trilateral cooperation are important to deal with the North Korean threat and economic issues.

Dec. 7, 2022: South Korean Ministry of Land, Infrastructure and Transport [announces](#) that Korean Air Lines and Asiana Airlines will gradually increase the number of flights on the Gimpo-Haneda route from 56 per week to 84 per week.

Dec. 13, 2022: South Korean Special Representative for Korean Peninsula peace and security affairs Kim Gunn and US and Japanese counterparts, Sung Kim and Funakoshi, [meet](#) trilaterally in Jakarta to discuss North Korean provocations.

Dec. 16, 2022: Kishida government issues the [National Security Strategy](#) (NSS), the [National Defense Strategy](#) (NDS), and the [Defense Buildup program](#). South Korea "[strongly protests](#)" Japan's inclusion of the dispute islet of Takeshima (Dokdo) in its new National Security Strategy.

Dec. 18, 2022: South Korean First Vice Minister of Health and Welfare Lee Ki-il [starts](#) his four-day trip to Japan to learn about Japan's national pension system.

Dec. 19, 2022: *Mainichi Shimbun* polls [show](#) that the Kishida administration's approval ratings are at 25%, 6% down from polls a month earlier.

Dec. 22, 2022: South Korea and Japan [hold](#) working-level online consultations on the Fukushima water discharge plan.

Dec. 23, 2022: South Korea [conducts](#) biannual drills on the disputed islet of Dokdo/Takeshima.

Dec. 28, 2022: Yoon government [publishes](#) South Korea's Strategy for a Free, Peaceful, Prosperous Indo-Pacific Region.

Dec. 29, 2022: Yamaguchi Natsuo of Komeito, the junior party of Japan's ruling coalition, [meets](#) with President Yoon in Seoul.

Dec. 30, 2022: Yamaguchi Natsuo of Komeito [meets](#) South Korean FM Park Jin in Seoul.