

# COMPARATIVE

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## C O N N E C T I O N S

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### US-KOREA RELATIONS

## NUCLEAR NEW YEAR

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C South Korean president Yoon Suk-yeol has tried to make a priority of transforming the traditional US-South Korea military alliance into a “[global, comprehensive strategic alliance](#)” with increasing ambitions beyond hard security issues on the Korean Peninsula and in Northeast Asia in general. Yoon and his foreign policy team get an “A” for vision and effort—joining the NATO Asia-Pacific Four (AP4) and releasing an Indo-Pacific Strategy in 2022 are evidence. But, like Michael Corleone trying to go legit in *The Godfather III*, every time they make progress getting out, they get pulled back into the Peninsula. To wit, during the first trimester of 2023 Korean Peninsula security issues again commanded disproportionate attention from Seoul and Washington. The proximate cause for this dynamic is North Korea’s mafioso-in-chief, Kim Jong Un, who started 2023 with a [January 1 missile launch](#) and kept at it [throughout the winter](#). This, of course, followed [record-breaking](#) 2022 North Korean missile tests and demonstrations, which totaled approximately 70 launches of around 100 projectiles. Given the near-zero prospects for North Korean denuclearization and the growing arsenal at Pyongyang’s disposal, it is understandable that any South Korean president would be distracted from interests further afield.

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The audacious nature of Yoon's re-focusing on South Korean security was surprising and controversial, however. On January 11, apparently fed up with perceived South Korean vulnerability to its nuclear-armed consanguine, and [perhaps irritated](#) with the Biden administration's slow realization of this South Korean sentiment, he [made a pronouncement](#) that no democratic leader in Seoul has ever made publicly before: he stated that South Korea—which benefits from US extended nuclear deterrence—could still consider acquiring its own nuclear weapons, if “North Korean provocations continued intensifying.” This set off a diplomatic kerfuffle that resonated—on both sides of the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel, as well as in Washington and Beijing—for much of the rest of the January–April reporting period.

Given the provocative nature of Yoon's statement, the South Korean presidential office [later backtracked](#), “clarifying” that Yoon was simply expressing his “firm commitment to defending the nation” against North Korea's nuclear threats, and while the “worst case scenario must be taken into consideration,” “the principle of abiding by the [Nuclear] Nonproliferation Treaty holds.” In any event, Washington took notice of its anxious ally, responding with demonstrations of commitment to extended deterrence for South Korea—including a visit by Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin and strategic asset deployments to South Korea. All this was in addition to regular combined military exercises and naval exercises featuring US aircraft carrier strike groups. Washington also consented to more bilateral consultation with Seoul regarding the US nuclear umbrella.

The saga has concluded—at least for now—with the [Washington Declaration](#) promulgated at the [Biden-Yoon summit](#) in late April. The Washington Declaration promises tightened US–South Korea extended deterrence coordination and consultation, while the leaders' summit—in the context of Yoon's state visit to celebrate 70 years of US–South Korea alliance relations—functioned as a renewal of Washington–Seoul ties. These ties are now perhaps as strong as they have ever been. If Pyongyang has reckoned that increased belligerence would decouple the US–South Korea alliance, it has seemingly miscalculated.



*Figure 1 South Korea President Yoon Suk Yeol signing alongside US President Biden at the White House state dinner on April 26, 2023 in Washington, DC. Photo: Evelyn Hockstein/Reuters*

### **US–South Korea Relations: Good Old Boys Drinkin' Whiskey and Rye**

Long confined to the loony fringe, South Korean conservative rhetoric advocating nuclear weapons development went mainstream during the first trimester of 2023. South Korea has had—and perhaps still has—legitimate questions and concerns about the credibility of US extended deterrence in the face of North Korea's growing nuclear weapons arsenal, which can now strike continental US targets, thus complicating and injecting uncertainty into a potential US decision to retaliate with nuclear weapons in the event of a North Korean nuclear attack on South Korea. These questions and concerns—clear in elite conservative political discourse—explain most of the rhetoric supporting South Korean development of an independent nuclear deterrent. There is an element of desire for [\(inter\)national prestige and worry about the need to hedge](#) against rising China built into the pro-nuclear weapon discussion in South Korea, but what seemingly motivates South Korea's conservative political elites to broach “going nuclear” is a perceived lack of US reassurance vis-à-vis the North Korean nuclear threat. Domestic political opportunism presumably also plays a role, as some South Korean conservative politicians have—[perhaps incorrectly](#)—interpreted high [popular support \(60–70%\)](#) for South Korean nuclear weapons as (a) stemming from a lack of US extended deterrence credibility, and thus (b) a ground for shoring up political support ahead of 2024 general elections.

After Yoon's crossing of the nuclear Rubicon during his January 11 presser, Hong Joon-pyo, a

veteran heavyweight in the conservative People Power Party (PPP), [indicated support](#) for president Yoon's position. Also in mid-January, Seoul mayor Oh Se-hoon, a star conservative, [argued for](#) South Korean nuclear weapons. Oh intensified that stance in a high-profile March interview with Reuters in which he [called for](#) South Korean nuclear weapons even in the face of costs and risks from international opprobrium (sanctions, strained diplomatic ties, etc.). A national assemblyman and former chairperson of the PPP, Chung Jin-suk, [broached](#) South Korean indigenous nuclear weapons in late February. North Korean defector and current South Korean National Assemblyman Thae Yong-ho has been on the record [multiple times](#) calling for South Korean nuclear weapons.

Whether intended or not, this dam-break in loose nuke talk accelerated, broadened, and deepened attempts by Washington to enhance extended deterrence (in fact this was already underway in 2022 with the [revived Extended Deterrence Strategy and Consultation Group](#)). The initial Biden administration response to the outbreak of nuclear armament discussion in early 2023 seemed to focus on deterrent capabilities: air warfare training featuring F-35s, F-22s, B-52s, and B1Bs; aircraft carrier strike group visits to exercise with South Korean naval units; increased trilateral exercises (including on missile defense) with Japan. But the crux of South Korea's anxieties does not concern capabilities, about which there is no doubt in Seoul or Pyongyang. The real issue is reassurance, which is ultimately a question of political will. Consequently Washington decided to offer Seoul greater possibilities for US-South Korea extended deterrence consultations, and to [institute joint nuclear-focused table-top exercises](#) that could give South Korean officials and officers better insight into US nuclear-use decision-making for extended deterrence.

With the subject of South Korea's independent nuclear deterrent still alive in April, during the lead-up to President Yoon's state visit to Washington, DC and accompanying summit, US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan was foreshadowing ["major deliverables"](#) on extended deterrence. That turned out to be the [Washington Declaration](#), which commits the alliance to "deeper, cooperative decision-making on nuclear deterrence, including through enhanced dialogue and information regarding growing nuclear threats to the ROK

and the region." To this end, the Washington Declaration establishes the Nuclear Consultative Group (NCG), which institutionalizes a high-level consultation mechanism enabling South Korea to better understand US policy, posture, and logic regarding nuclear use in an extended deterrence context, and on that basis to communicate Seoul's position. The Washington Declaration also institutionalizes the table-top simulations mentioned above and promises regular "visible" strategic asset deployments on/around the Korean Peninsula, starting with [the first US nuclear ballistic-missile submarine \(SSBN\) port call in South Korea since 1981](#). The quid pro quo was Seoul's reiteration of dedication to the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty, effectively quieting the South Korean indigenous nuclear weapon debate.



Figure 2 Ohio-class ballistic-missile submarine USS Alaska returns to Kings Bay, Georgia on April 2, 2019. Photo: Bryan Tomforde/U.S. Navy/Handout/Reuters

Whether that remains the case will, in the short-/medium-term, likely depend on the quality, personnel-/rank-level, rhythm, momentum, and effectiveness of NCG meetings, as well as the occupant of 1600 Pennsylvania Ave. on January 20, 2025. Another factor will be the connection of the incipient South Korean conventional Strategic Command with the capabilities and planning of US-South Korea Combined Forces Command, and, by extension, to US Strategic Command. In the long-term, South Korea's satisfaction with extended deterrence will likely depend on the interplay of North Korea's nuclear arsenal advancement/rollback and the evolution of the NCG toward a status similar to that of NATO's Nuclear Planning Group (one notes that the US has pointedly denied that the NCG could morph into a NATO-style nuclear-sharing arrangement). If Pyongyang's nuclear weapons growth goes unchecked, or if the NCG fails to

progress, the Washington Declaration will end up a temporary band-aid on South Korean desires for nuclear weapons. Indeed the [conservative media](#) in South Korea were critical of the Washington Declaration and NCG even before Yoon landed in Seoul after his trip to Washington.

President Yoon's state visit to the US was not only about extended deterrence, of course. In the main it was a celebration of the seventieth anniversary of the US-South Korea alliance and an occasion to lay out a path for the future—the “global comprehensive strategic alliance” that the Biden and Yoon administrations both claim as the new frontier of US-South Korea relations. The leaders' [Joint Statement](#) covered a panoply of current and future agenda items that theoretically bind Seoul and Washington across dimensions of interests and values: human rights, defense of democratic freedom (South Korea will host the next Summit for Democracy, initiated by Biden), growing South Korean involvement in the AP4 partnership with NATO, US-South Korea cooperation on quantum information science and emerging materials/new technology, establishment of a US-South Korea Cybersecurity Cooperation Framework, and continued partnering in outer space.

In several passages the Joint Statement refers to US-South Korea Japan trilateral cooperation (diplomatic, security/military, economic), which the Yoon administration has made much more feasible (compared to his Japan-skeptical, progressive-nationalist predecessor Moon Jae-in) through a politically risky dedication to thawing frozen relations with Tokyo. Indeed Yoon's openness in this regard—which clearly pleases the Biden administration—was likely a factor in securing Yoon a state visit, rather than merely a typical summit in Washington. In the Joint Statement the leaders also condemned Russia's invasion of Ukraine (although Seoul remains stand-offish on the possibility of direct lethal aid transfers to Kyiv) and demonstrated strongly worded unity on Taiwan Strait peace and stability (with Yoon even referring to it as a “global” issue in a [pre-summit interview](#), thus challenging Beijing's position that Taiwan is a purely internal, Chinese matter). Finally, no US-South Korea summit Joint Statement would be complete without the obligatory language calling for improved human rights in North Korea, diplomacy leading to denuclearization, and, in the absence of such, strengthened US-

South Korea defense against and deterrence of the Kim regime.

Yoon's state visit also featured numerous other symbolic moments underscoring the tightness of the alliance. The South Korean president delivered a well-received [address](#) on freedom and sacrifice at a joint session of Congress, [paid respects](#) with Biden at the Korean War memorial, and hit the state dinner guests in the feels with an “impromptu” [rendition](#) of part of Don McLean's “American Pie.” If the official [welcoming ceremony](#) on the White House lawn provided the stock images of Biden and Yoon exhibiting the pomp and circumstance of celebrating seventy years of successful alliance relations, Yoon's viral “American Pie” moment provided the optics of insouciant bonhomie between leaders of friendly nations.

Of course, not everything during the summit was a rousing success. On the economic front, Yoon's team [did not get much movement](#) from the US on problematic, discriminatory provisions of the Inflation Reduction Act, although there is emerging analysis that the electric-vehicle provisions that work against Hyundai/KIA in the short-term might be [compensated for](#) by other, long-term advantages (e.g., hedging South Korea's [advanced battery production](#) against [Chinese competition](#)). Nor did South Korea make much headway on solutions to [onerous information-sharing requirements](#) (notably on semiconductor yields) that high-tech companies—such as Samsung and SK Hynix—will face to receive US subsidies as part of the CHIPS and Science Act. Thus, post-summit, some of the Washington-Seoul economic differences—about which we have [written during previous trimesters](#)—remain hurdles to be overcome.

Finally, although not technically part of the state visit, Yoon did not return to South Korea with a significant bump in [domestic approval ratings](#), despite the showcase in Washington. This is not only a small disappointment for Yoon, who probably hoped for more than a 2-3% uptick, but it is also not great for the US-South Korea alliance, which benefits from its leaders' popularity.

President Yoon's indigenous nuclear armament comments in January and the US-South Korea summit in April bookended the trimester reporting period, but plenty of other events took place in the interim. Much activity revolved



around the US–South Korea response to North Korean belligerence and general malign behavior. The least productive but most frequent effort at dealing with Pyongyang was diplomacy, as throughout the winter and spring Washington and Seoul worked bilaterally to call for talks on denuclearization and other issues, [admonished the Kim regime at the United Nations](#), [condemned](#) Pyongyang’s human rights record (including the US [nominating](#) a new North Korea human rights envoy), and held regular [trilateral discussions](#) with Japan to [coordinate messaging](#) and strategy vis-à-vis North Korea. Senior officials—Secretaries/Ministers, Undersecretaries/Vice-Ministers, National and Deputy National Security Advisors, ambassadors, legislators—from the US and South Korea [shuttled back and forth](#) between Seoul and Washington, met on the sidelines of multilateral meetings, and held video conferences and telephone calls. All business as usual, and all doing little more than holding ground vis-à-vis North Korea.

Also quite visible was the ramp-up in US–South Korea combined military exercises—both regularly scheduled and reactive to North Korean military activity (e.g., missile launches). In January, the US and South Korea held two weeks of [live fire exercises](#) near the DMZ involving South Korean Stryker brigades, while February started with several [combined air drills](#) with F-22s, F-35s, and B1Bs. Mid-February also saw US–South Korea [joint air drills](#) as a response to North Korea’s first ICBM launch of 2023, as well as US–South Korea–Japan [trilateral missile defense drills](#) in the East Sea/Sea of Japan. In late February a US Los Angeles-class attack submarine made a [port call in Busan](#) as a show of force, followed by an Arleigh Burke-class [guided-missile destroyer visit to Jeju Island](#) in early March for joint naval exercises with South Korea. March also saw more combined exercises [employing B1Bs](#), as well as the [return of B-52s](#) for a show of force over and around the Korean Peninsula. Mid-March marked the beginning of the regularly scheduled [Freedom Shield](#) US–South Korea combined exercises, which included both computer simulations and twenty field drills. The [end of March and early April](#) featured a Busan port visit by the USS Nimitz aircraft carrier (and its air wing), which was bookended before and after with combined bilateral naval exercises with South Korea, as well as trilateral exercises with South Korea and Japan. April saw the [return of US B-52s](#) for combined air exercises involving South Korean F-35s, while

[large-scale scheduled air drills](#) began in the middle of the month.

Beyond these bilateral/trilateral military exercises, South Korea joined multilateral military exercises such as Cobra Gold (with the US) in Thailand, US-led Sea Dragon [multilateral anti-submarine](#) warfare training near Guam, and [US-UK-South Korea](#) marine infiltration training. In defense acquisition news, South Korea [announced](#) a plan to purchase more F-35s, while Boeing [signed an MOU](#) with South Korea’s DAPA (Defense Acquisition and Procurement Agency) to conduct joint research on high-tech weapon systems.

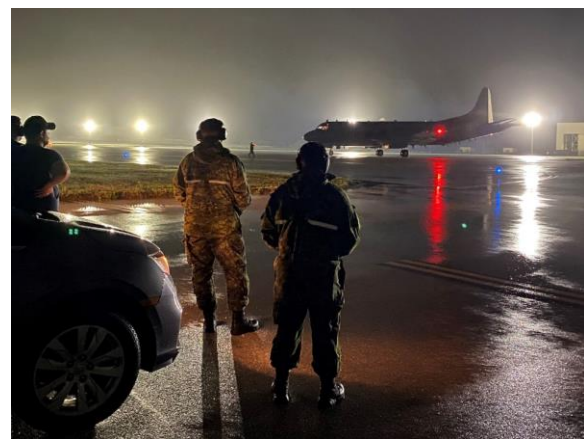


Figure 3 Royal Canadian Air Force CP-140 Aurora Long Range Patrol aircraft lands in Andersen Air Force Base in Guam. Photo: Maj Leonard Kosciukiewicz, 407 Long Range Patrol Squadron

The takeaway on US–South Korea defense/security relations in the first trimester of 2023 is that the 2022 trend of heightened exercises and military responsiveness to North Korea is the order of the day. Shows of force and combined training are considered necessary for deterrence and warfighting readiness, although North Korea seems unbowed. Over the medium-term the US–South Korea alliance is in a deterrence relationship with North Korea, which refuses the idea of denuclearization, and it will be a constant, fraught task to maintain stability without a functioning diplomatic path to accompany the military deterrence situation.

One possible approach to this challenge is better US–South Korea–Japan coordination across a range of areas including diplomacy (notably in [confronting North Korea](#) and containing China), [military/security](#) ([missile defense and anti-submarine warfare](#) coordination), economics ([supply chain cooperation in high-tech sectors](#)),

and [intelligence](#) (more rapid bilateral/trilateral information-sharing). A tighter trilateral Northeast Asia bloc of like-minded partners can achieve synergies catalyzing order-building and order-maintenance that will make it harder for North Korea and China to cause mischief and provoke crises in East Asia specifically and the Indo-Pacific more generally. The key to unlocking that (unproven) possibility is improved Seoul-Tokyo relations, which Yoon made a priority during the first trimester of 2023 through a variety of steps to overcome political and diplomatic hurdles rooted in historical distrust. Yoon's efforts paid off with a [working-level summit](#) in Japan (followed by a visit from Japanese Prime Minister [Fumio Kishida to Seoul in May](#)). There is still much work to be done in this area (especially by a still reticent Japan), but the Biden administration has been [impressed with Yoon](#) on this front.

### US-North Korea Relations: This Winter Made Me Shiver

The US-South Korea relationship is as multifaceted and dynamic as the US-North Korea relationship is uniform and torpid. US-North Korea relations are also dangerous. As official diplomacy between Washington and Pyongyang currently consists of US calls for North Korean denuclearization and North Korean refusals, as well as Biden administration condemnation of Kim regime violation of international law and Kim regime aggrieved umbrage, the security dilemma between the US-South Korea alliance and North Korea is a powder keg with few risk-reduction tools. Tensions are heightened by North Korea's threats to the US-South Korea alliance and the US [promise](#) to "end the Kim regime" if it were to use nuclear weapons.

True to form, North Korea's 2023 started with a [January 1 launch](#) of a 600mm super-large Multiple Launch Rocket System (MLRS), also called the KN-25 short-range ballistic missile (SRBM), which Pyongyang claims is capable of delivering tactical nuclear warheads to any target on the Korean Peninsula. The Kim regime announced at a [handover ceremony](#) that thirty 600mm super-large MLRS units—the backbone of the state's "offensive" rocket forces—are now in the possession of the military and ready for deployment. The January 1 launch also coincided with the [KCNA publication of a Kim speech](#) on work plans, state policies and budget, and nuclear weapons development given at an

end of year (2022) North Korean Workers' Party Plenum.



Figure 4 North Korea Leader Kim Jong-un speaks during the 6th Enlarged Plenary Meeting of 8th Workers' Party of (North) Korea Central Committee. Photo: Yonhap

The item from the speech that got the most international attention was Kim's exhortation to "exponentially increase" North Korean nuclear weapons production from the [currently estimated 40-50 warheads](#). This neatly both communicated Pyongyang's refusal to denuclearize and signaled a strategy of growing the volume of North Korean nuclear weapons (beyond aiming at improvement in quality and sophistication). That would require continued production of weapons-grade fissile material, which Kim indeed [ordered](#) and the IAEA and [other sources](#) observed and confirmed during the January-April 2023 period.

However, what followed the January 1 speech and rocket launch was not the [long-expected seventh nuclear test](#), reasons for the delay of which remain unknown. Instead, North Korea went relatively quiet for a few weeks before carrying out a [solid-fuel rocket engine test](#) in late January, an apparent follow-on to similar test in December 2022. On February 8, North Korea celebrated the founding of the Korean People's Army with a [military Foundation Day parade](#), rolling out eleven *Hwasong-17* ICBMs on transporter-erector-launchers (TELs) and unveiling a new ICBM (*Hwasong-18*). Chairman Kim's daughter, Ju-ae, who has made several appearances at military events since late 2022, was present. Ten days later, on February 18, Pyongyang tested its [first ICBM](#) of 2023, a liquid-fueled *Hwasong-15*, followed by [two SRBMs](#) (KN-25s) on February 20. The February testing spree culminated with a launch of [four land-attack cruise missiles](#) on February 23.

March continued the same belligerent trajectory, beginning with [six mass-fired SRBMs](#), on March 9, at which, again, Kim's daughter Ju-ae was in attendance. Three days later, on March 12, Pyongyang followed up with a test of [two land-attack cruise missiles](#), before returning to [SRBMs](#) with a two-missile volley on March 14. March also marked North Korea's [second ICBM launch of 2023](#), a *Hwasong-17* tested on March 16, seemingly intended to coincide with a Tokyo summit between President Yoon and Prime Minister Kishida. March 18-19 saw a North Korean "[nuclear counterattack drill](#)" presided over by Kim and featuring an SRBM launch. Several days later, during the March 21-23 period, Pyongyang tested [four land-attack cruise missiles and an underwater unmanned vehicle \(UUV\)](#), the latter of which is a relatively exotic weapon (by North Korean standards) about whose effectiveness and value-added there is serious doubt. A [two volley SRBM](#) launch on March 26 closed out a very active month for North Korean kinetic testing.

The biggest advance in Pyongyang's missile arsenal, however, was saved for April 13, a few days prior to the Day of the Sun celebrating the birth of North Korean state-founder Kim Il Sung: the Kim regime flight tested, for the first time, a [solid-fuel ICBM](#), the *Hwasong-18* unveiled at the February 8 parade. This represents a [meaningful advance](#) in North Korea's missile arsenal, as solid-fueled missiles are generally easier to work with in the field, slightly faster to deploy for launch, and, often overlooked, capable of being employed without the retinue of support vehicles usually needed for mobile liquid-fueled ICBMs. This makes them somewhat more survivable, notably with respect to complicating US-South Korea efforts to interdict their use left-of-launch. A solid-propellant ICBM was one of the listed priorities in Kim's [January 2021 Korean Workers' Party speech](#), indicating that he has been investing resources strategically.

Over the first four months of 2023, North Korea launched missiles at a rate similar—albeit slightly slower—to the record-breaking year of 2022. It remains to be seen if that pace will continue, as the Kim regime has other, competing priorities, including testing a tactical nuclear warhead (a mock-up [image of which was released](#) by KCNA in late March) and launching a space launch vehicle (presumably to

place a military reconnaissance [satellite](#) in orbit).

With the exception of the upgrading of extended deterrence consultation with South Korea outlined in the Washington Declaration, and tentative efforts at greater trilateral military/security cooperation involving Japan, the US response to North Korea's continued missile program development was from the typical playbook: military exercises (especially combined with South Korea and Japan), shows of force via strategic asset demonstrations on/around the Korean Peninsula, diplomatic [coordination with South Korea and Japan](#) (as well as the larger international community), rhetorical [condemnation at the United Nations backed by efforts at increased international sanctions](#) (which currently fail due to vetoes by China and/or Russia), and US unilateral sanctioning of North Korean entities and people.

North Korean reaction—occasionally from Chairman Kim's sister [Kim Yo Jong](#)—to US deterrence and diplomacy was the predictable [hostile warning](#) against US-South Korea joint military exercises, [aggrieved menace](#) against US condemnation at the UN, [calls to improve](#) the country's war-footing, and [warning](#) for third-parties not to become involved. It is possible that North Korean leadership believes its own rhetoric in this regard, but that would not also exclude Kim regime instrumentalization of pushback, for domestic political purposes, against the US and South Korea. There are signs that North Korea is struggling under the weight of economic sanctions, the effect of [COVID border closures](#), and execrable economic policies. The latter is especially evident in the [agricultural sector](#), which has led to [serious under-/mal-nutrition](#); meanwhile many offers of humanitarian assistance (including from the US and South Korea) go unanswered.

Finally, in the "various and sundry" category, the US [kept North Korea on its list](#) of state sponsors of terrorism, and the state was a [frequent target of reporting](#) on malicious cybersphere behavior, which nets Pyongyang hundreds of millions of dollars annually that it uses to stay economically afloat. The US and North Korea also engaged in a tit-for-tat spat regarding their respective activities in supporting one of the counterposed sides in the Russia-Ukraine War, with the [US reporting](#) that Pyongyang supplied Russia with munitions and weapons in exchange for food assistance.

All in all, the US-North Korea relationship remains fundamentally broken, with Pyongyang stuck on a path dependent trajectory of external belligerence and domestically predatory behavior, and Washington either unwilling or unable to think and work creatively on alternatives to a frustrating, dangerous deadlock.

**Conclusion: The Man There Said That Music Wouldn't Play**

At least for the moment, North Korea's bet on nuclear weapons to decouple the US-South Korea alliance has proven a failure. Worse, in fact, than a failure: not only have the US and South Korea re-soldered their "ironclad" relationship, but South Korea-Japan rapprochement points toward tighter trilateral cooperation with the US. This is not a welcome geostrategic outcome from the perspective of Pyongyang. Nor of Beijing, for that matter, which dreads improved US-South Korea-Japan regional security cooperation, especially on missile defense, anti-submarine warfare, and coordination regarding any potential crisis in the Taiwan Strait. President Yoon [pointedly told](#) China that enhanced trilateral cooperation is, in part, a bed of China's own making, as it tacitly supports North Korea's nuclear program by, inter alia, not enforcing already agreed-upon international sanctions, and blocking new ones at the UN Security Council. This is certainly not music to Beijing's ears, but for the moment Yoon has chosen his tune.



# CHRONOLOGY OF US-KOREA RELATIONS

## JANUARY—APRIL 2023

**Jan. 1, 2023:** Chief nuclear envoys of South Korea, the United States, and Japan [hold](#) three-way phone talks after North Korean leader Kim Jong-un called for developing a new intercontinental ballistic missile during a ruling party meeting. They warn that North Korean provocations would deepen its isolation.

**Jan. 1, 2023:** North Korean leader Kim and his daughter [inspect](#) dozens of intermediate-range and short-range ballistic missiles, emphasizing Kim's declaration to "exponentially increase" missile production in the new year. North Korea also [tests](#) a nuclear-capable "super-large multiple launch rocket system" which North Korean leader Kim Jong Un states can strike anywhere in South Korea.

**Jan. 2, 2023:** South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol [states](#) that South Korea is in talks with the United States about joint planning and exercises in terms of nuclear capabilities.

**Jan. 3, 2023:** White House [confirms](#) that the US and South Korea are not discussing joint nuclear exercises but are working on an "effective coordinated response" to a range of scenarios, including nuclear use by North Korea.

**Jan. 4, 2023:** White House Press Secretary Karine Jean-Pierre [affirms](#) the US commitment to providing extended deterrence to South Korea.

**Jan. 6, 2023:** Department of Defense spokesperson Brig. Gen. Pat Ryder [states](#) that the United States will "coordinate closely" with South Korea to monitor threats posed by North Korea.

**Jan. 10, 2023:** Jose Fernandez, under secretary of State for Economic Growth, Energy, and the Environment [meets](#) South Korean Vice Foreign Minister Lee Do-Hoon regarding the US Inflation Reduction Act, supply chain issues, and other bilateral issues.

**Jan. 10, 2023:** US Department of State Press Secretary Ned Price [states](#) that the United States will work with South Korea and European allies regarding concerns about the Inflation Reduction Act.

**Jan. 10, 2023:** South Korean Second Industry Minister Park Il-jun [meets](#) Under Secretary of State Fernandez to discuss cooperation on critical minerals and energy issues to ensure stable supply chains.

**Jan. 11, 2023:** In response to North Korean provocations, South Korean President Yoon [calls](#) for "further strengthening of the security cooperation" between South Korea, the United States, and Japan.

**Jan. 11, 2023:** President Biden [states](#) that Hanwha Solutions' plan to build a solar panel production facility in the US will help bring back supply chains and is a "direct result" of his economic plan and the US Inflation Reduction Act.

**Jan. 12, 2023:** Secretary of State Antony Blinken [reaffirms](#) trilateral cooperation with South Korea and Japan against North Korean provocations in a joint press conference with Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin, Japanese Foreign Minister Hayashi Yoshimasa and Japanese Defense Minister Hamada Yasukazu.

**Jan. 13, 2023:** Department of Defense spokesperson Brig. Gen. Ryder [emphasizes](#) US extended deterrence to its allies in the Indo-Pacific region to demonstrate continued support to deter and counter potential aggression against South Korea.

**Jan. 13, 2023:** President Biden [highlights](#) the strength of the US-South Korea alliance in statement observing Korean American Day.

**Jan. 14, 2023:** South Korea's advanced Army unit [stages](#) a joint field exercise with a US *Stryker* Brigade Combat Team near the inter-Korean border.

**Jan. 15, 2023:** Following a six-year hiatus, South Korea [seeks](#) to resume bilateral consultations with the United States on promoting North Korean human rights.

**Jan. 19, 2023:** Department of Defense [requests](#) US Forces Korea to provide equipment to support Ukraine in the war with Russia and

stresses that this move would have “zero impact” on its commitment to South Korea.

**Jan. 21, 2023:** Strategic Communications Coordinator for the US National Security Council John Kirby [reports](#) that North Korea continues to provide ammunition to Russia.

**Jan. 24, 2023:** The US House of Representatives [proposes](#) a resolution calling for the return of USS *Pueblo*, a US Navy Ship seized by North Korea 55 years ago.

**Jan. 24, 2023:** President Biden [nominates](#) Julie Turner, director of the Office of East Asia and the Pacific in the State Department, to serve as a special envoy for North Korean human rights issues. South Korea’s foreign ministry [welcomes](#) her nomination.

**Jan. 25, 2023:** If active dialogue with North Korea commences, the US will [consider](#) appointing a special envoy singularly focused on North Korea states Ned Price, Department of State Press Secretary.

**Jan. 27, 2023:** South Korea’s Army Chief of Staff Gen. Park Jeong-hwan and US counterpart Gen. James C. McConville [sign](#) a strategic vision statement to expand security cooperation in military, science and technology, and space.

**Jan. 27, 2023:** North Korean leader Kim Jong Un’s sister, Kim Yo Jong, [states](#) that the US is “further crossing the red line” by “escalating the war situation” in Ukraine through military hardware support.

**Jan. 29, 2023:** NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg [visits](#) South Korea and meets with President Yoon. Stoltenberg [emphasizes](#) interconnectedness amid North Korea’s military support to Russian war efforts and an increasingly “unpredictable and uncertain world.”

**Jan. 30, 2023:** North Korea [states](#) that NATO Secretary General Stoltenberg’s visit to South Korea is a “prelude” to a “new Cold War” in the Asia-Pacific region as it appears to be “instigating” the creation of an Asian version of NATO.

**Jan. 30, 2023:** Secretary of Defense Austin [arrives](#) in South Korea for talks with South

Korean officials regarding deterrence against North Korean nuclear and missile threats.

**Jan. 30, 2023:** NATO Secretary General Stoltenberg [stresses](#) the importance of the US extended deterrence commitment to South Korea and agrees to strengthen cooperation in areas such as defense science and technology with South Korea.

**Jan. 30, 2023:** According to a Gallup Korea poll of 1000 adults, seven of 10 South Koreans [support](#) the pursuit of an independent nuclear weapons development program in South Korea amid concerns over growing North Korean provocations and security threats.

**Jan. 31, 2023:** South Korean Defense Minister Lee Jong-sup and US Secretary of Defense Austin [pledge](#) to “expand and bolster” the level and scale of this year’s combined exercises and training in response to intensifying North Korean provocations.

**Jan. 31, 2023:** North Korea may have [tested](#) a solid-fuel missile engine, which would mark the first weapons test by the regime since its short-range ballistic missile launch on Jan. 1.

**Feb. 1, 2023:** In response to debates in South Korea whether the country should pursue nuclear armament, the US Department of Defense [releases](#) a Korean-language version of its *Nuclear Posture Review*.

**Feb. 2, 2023:** South Korea and the US [stage](#) combined air drills over the Yellow Sea. South Korea’s defense ministry states that the two countries will enhance confidence in the US extended deterrence commitment by “strengthening combined drills in connection with the deployment of US strategic assets.”

**Feb. 2, 2023:** Following Secretary Austin’s visit to South Korea, North Korea [warns](#) that it will take the “toughest action” to US military action under the “nuke for nuke and an all-out confrontation for an all-out confrontation” principle.

**Feb. 3, 2023:** South Korea and the US [stage](#) combined air drills to show US “will and capability” to keep its security commitment to South Korea and to improve combined operational capabilities.

**Feb. 3, 2023:** South Korean Foreign Minister Park Jin [meets](#) US Congress members to further strengthen US–South Korean relations and discuss South Korean concerns over the US Inflation Reduction Act.

**Feb. 3, 2023:** State Department Press Secretary Price [states](#) that the US is willing to engage in dialogue with North Korea and stresses the need to hold North Korea responsible for its recent missile provocations.

**Feb. 3, 2023:** Nathaniel Fick, US ambassador–at–Large for Cyberspace and Digital Policy, [travels](#) to South Korea amid efforts to curb illegal cyber activities by North Korea.

**Feb. 4, 2023:** South Korean FM Park Jin and Secretary of State Blinken [meet](#) to discuss the US extended deterrence commitment, nuclear, and conventional missile defense capabilities to defend South Korea, and denuclearizing North Korea. They sign an agreement on science and technology cooperation.

**Feb. 7, 2023:** North Korea [convenes](#) a meeting of the Central Military Commission of the Worker’s Party of Korea to discuss major military and political tasks for the year. Meeting agenda items include “more strictly perfecting the preparedness for war” and “constantly expanding and intensifying” operation and combat drills to cope with “the prevailing situation.”

**Feb. 7, 2023:** United States [calls](#) for the release of South Koreans who are unlawfully detained in North Korea and is in close coordination with South Korea to address this issue.

**Feb. 8, 2023:** North Korea [holds](#) massive military parade to mark the 75<sup>th</sup> founding anniversary of its armed forces and to display its nuclear attack capability. The parade [displayed](#) almost a dozen advanced ICBMs, tactical missiles, and long–range cruise missiles and featured tactical nuclear units. A new ICBM, the *Hwasong-17*, was spotted, along with a possible mockup of a new solid–fueled ICBM. Kim Jong Un also [visits](#) the barracks of North Korean military officers with his daughter, Ju–ae, for the anniversary.

**Feb. 10, 2023:** In upcoming allied drills, South Korea and the United States [plan](#) to incorporate “live, virtual, and constructive” (LVC) training elements to bolster combat readiness.

**Feb. 11, 2023:** United States National Security Council coordinator for strategic communications John Kirby [affirms](#) that North Korea has provided artillery ammunition to Russia.

**Feb. 12, 2023:** South Korea and the United States [stage](#) combined counter–drone drills at a US air base amid North Korean drone threats.

**Feb. 15, 2023:** South Korea’s Navy and Marine Corps participates in a Thai and US–led multinational military exercise.

**Feb. 15, 2023:** Deputy Secretary of State Wendy Sherman [reaffirms](#) “ironclad” commitment to providing extended deterrence in a meeting with South Korean First Vice Foreign Minister Cho Hyun–dong. Both stress the importance of the complete denuclearization of North Korea.

**Feb. 15, 2023:** United States Rep. Young Kim [argues](#) that the US needs to take a “stronger stance” against North Korea, appoint a special envoy to work solely on North Korea issues, and better demonstrate its capabilities to help defend allies.

**Feb. 15, 2023:** South Korea’s First Vice Industry Minister Jang Young–jin [visits](#) the US to enhance bilateral partnership in semiconductors and batteries industry sectors, strengthen technology and supply chains, and discuss the Inflation Reduction Act.

**Feb. 16, 2023:** According to South Korea’s new defense white paper, North Korea [resumed](#) plutonium production in 2021, increasing from 50 to 70 kilograms of plutonium for nuclear weapons.

**Feb. 16, 2023:** US agricultural exports to South Korea [reach](#) a record high of over \$10 billion in 2022, a 2% increase from 2021.

**Feb. 17, 2023:** Following South Korea’s announcement of bilateral tabletop exercises with the US on a North Korean nuclear–use scenario, North Korea [warns](#) that it will respond with “unprecedentedly persistent and strong” counteractions to upcoming joint drills.

**Feb. 17, 2023:** United States [plans](#) to release information on the provision on EV battery tax incentives under the Inflation Reduction Act. South Korean Industry Vice Minister Jang

Young-jin states that the “uncertain environment” surrounding the act is “not advantageous.”

**Feb. 18, 2023:** North Korea [fires](#) a long-range ballistic missile into the East Sea, the second ballistic missile provocation this year. South Korean FM Park Jin, Secretary of State Blinken, and Japanese FM Hayashi strongly [condemn](#) the launch and state that the three countries will continue to strengthen defense and joint cooperation.

**Feb. 19, 2023:** North Korea [fires](#) a *Hwasong-15* intercontinental ballistic missile in a “sudden launching drill” aimed at ensuring nuclear deterrence, North Korea’s first ICBM launch since November.

**Feb. 19, 2023:** South Korea and the United States [stage](#) combined air drills, following North Korea’s launch of a long-range ballistic missile. South Korea’s Joint Chiefs of Staff states that the training demonstrated the “alliance’s overwhelming forces.”

**Feb. 20, 2023:** North Korea [fires](#) two short-range ballistic missiles toward the East Sea, following the joint air drills staged by South Korea and the United States.

**Feb. 20, 2023:** South Korea [imposes](#) sanctions on four individuals and five institutions involved in North Korea’s nuclear and missile development programs following North Korea’s latest long- and short-range ballistic missile launches.

**Feb. 20, 2023:** US [condemns](#) North Korea’s recent ballistic missile launches but reaffirms commitment to a diplomatic approach to North Korea. A day later Washington [calls](#) on the UNSC to hold North Korea accountable for its recent missile provocations but fails to reach a consensus.

**Feb. 22, 2023:** Following North Korea’s recent ballistic missile launches, South Korea, the United States, and Japan [conduct](#) a trilateral missile defense exercise to strengthen security cooperation.

**Feb. 24, 2023:** To mark the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the US-South Korea alliance, the South Korean National Assembly [passes](#) resolution calling for a stronger alliance and bolstering cooperation in economic fields.

**Feb. 24, 2023:** North Korea [fires](#) four *Hwasal-2* strategic cruise missiles to demonstrate the “war posture” of the country’s nuclear combat forces.

**Feb. 24, 2023:** South Korea and the US [conduct](#) a tabletop exercise focused on the possibility of North Korea’s use of nuclear weapons.

**Feb. 24, 2023:** Kwon Jong-gun, director-general for US affairs at North Korea’s foreign ministry, [calls](#) on the United States to cease deployment of strategic assets to South Korea and combined drills and that continued provocations will be considered a “declaration of war.”

**Feb. 24, 2023:** US Under Secretary of Commerce for Industry and Security Alan Estevez [states](#) the US will limit the level of semiconductors produced by South Korean companies in China to help minimize the potential damage to business.

**Feb. 24, 2023:** South Korean FM Park Jin [emphasizes](#) importance of improving South Korea-US cooperation on economic, security, and technology in biotechnology, quantum computing, and artificial intelligence.

**Feb. 25, 2023:** USS *Springfield*, a US nuclear-powered submarine, [arrives](#) in South Korea, in an apparent warning to North Korea’s repeated missile provocations.

**Feb. 26, 2023:** South Korean Finance Minister Choo Kyung-ho [calls](#) for US cooperation in the upcoming US guidance on critical mineral and battery component requirements of the US Inflation Reduction Act.

**Feb. 28, 2023:** US, South Korea, and Japan [hold](#) first session of an economic security dialogue to discuss cooperation in areas including “emerging and core technologies, such as quantum, bio, and space, and stabilizing semiconductor, battery, and critical mineral supply chains.”

**Feb. 28, 2023:** South Korean and US special commandos [conduct](#) *Exercise Teak Knife*, combined drills set to strengthen the “ironclad” security commitment between the allies.

**March 1, 2023:** During an address marking the March 1 Independence Movement in South Korea, South Korean President Yoon [emphasizes](#)



the importance of trilateral cooperation with Japan and the US.

**March 1, 2023:** Following the recent bilateral tabletop exercise, Department of Defense spokesperson Brig. Gen. Ryder [reports](#) that the US and South Korea conducted discussions regarding “various approaches on the alliance deterrence posture” in the face of evolving North Korean nuclear and missile capabilities.

**March 2, 2023:** United States [imposes sanctions](#) on two individuals and three companies for their involvement with North Korea’s ballistic missile programs.

**March 5, 2023:** A US guided-missile destroyer [visits](#) South Korea in an apparent show of force to North Korea.

**March 6, 2023:** North Korea has reportedly [developed](#) a high-thrust engine capable of carrying a rocket, allowing the country to launch various satellites into orbit.

**March 6, 2023:** South Korea and the United States [stage](#) combined air drills involving a US nuclear-capable B-52H strategic bomber.

**March 7, 2023:** Kim Yo-jong, sister of North Korean leader Kim Jong Un, [states](#) that North Korea is ready to take “quick and overwhelming action” at any time in response to military activities by the US and South Korea. South Korea and the US [stage](#) landing and takeoff drills following North Korea’s claims that it has rocket launcher is capable of destroying an enemy airfield.

**March 7, 2023:** Rafael Grossi, director general of the International Atomic Energy Agency, [states](#) that there are “deeply troubling” signs of activity detected at North Korea’s Punggye-ri nuclear testing site.

**March 8, 2023:** 2023 Annual Threat Assessment released by US Director of National Intelligence [expects](#) North Korea to conduct another nuclear test and notes that North Korean leader Kim Jong Un has no intentions to give up nuclear weapons.

**March 9, 2023:** North Korea [fires](#) a short-range ballistic missile toward the Yellow Sea.

**March 10, 2023:** North Korea [announces](#) that leader Kim Jong Un oversaw a fire assault drill as Kim stresses the need to “always stay alert” for “frantic war preparation moves” being committed by the “enemy.”

**March 12, 2023:** South Korean navy destroyer ROKS *Choe Yeong* [conducts](#) a joint field exercise with the USS *Rafael Peralta*.

**March 13, 2023:** North Korea [fires](#) two strategic cruise missiles from a submarine in the East Sea. North Korea states that this drill “verified the current operation posture of the nuclear war deterrence means” in different spaces.

**March 13, 2023:** South Korea and the United States [begin](#) the 11-day *Freedom Shield* exercise that present “realistic” scenarios reflective of North Korea’s evolving nuclear and missile threats.

**March 13, 2023:** North Korea “bitterly [denounces](#)” the US for holding an informal UNSC meeting on North Korea’s human rights abuse. North Korea vows to take the “toughest counteraction” against the “vicious hostile plots” of the United States.

**March 13, 2023:** South Korea [participates](#) in the second round of official negotiations for the United States-led Indo-Pacific Economic Framework.

**March 13, 2023:** South Korea [plans](#) to buy F-35A stealth fighter jets and other weapons systems to bolster its deterrence capabilities against North Korea.

**March 13, 2023:** South Korea’s chip industry [feels](#) pressured to take a side between the US and China following the United States CHIPS Act. The industry calls for President Yoon to make a direct deal with President Biden to alleviate pressure.

**March 14, 2023:** In response to North Korea’s recent cruise missile tests from a submarine, the US [insists](#) that North Korean provocations force the US to “continually” reaffirm its security commitment to South Korea.

**March 14, 2023:** North Korea [fires](#) two short-range ballistic missiles toward the East Sea.

**March 14, 2023:** US Marines based in South Korea and Japan [participate](#) in combined drills with South Korea.

**March 15, 2023:** South Korea and the United States [conduct](#) combined river-crossing military drills.

**March 15, 2023:** South Korea [participates](#) in a US-led multinational anti-submarine warfare exercise to enhance joint anti-submarine warfare capabilities.

**March 16, 2023:** North Korea [fires](#) a *Hwasong-17* intercontinental ballistic missile toward the East Sea in a show of the “toughest response posture” against “aggressive” combined drills by the US and South Korea.

**March 16, 2023:** United States [welcomes](#) a “new chapter of cooperation and partnership” between South Korea and Japan and will continue to support the South Korea-Japan relationship.

**March 17, 2023:** Wendy Sherman, US deputy secretary of State, [expresses](#) “strong support” for President Yoon’s efforts to improve ties between South Korea and Japan.

**March 19, 2023:** North Korea [fires](#) a short-range ballistic missile toward the East Sea.

**March 19, 2023:** A US B-1B strategic bomber [returns](#) to South Korea for joint exercises and as a show of force as North Korea fires a ballistic missile into the East Sea.

**March 20, 2023:** North Korea [conducts](#) a two-day practice simulating a tactical nuclear counterattack to South Korea-United States “war” drills.

**March 20, 2023:** 2022 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices, released by the US Department of State, [calls](#) out North Korea for dozens of human rights issues such as torture, total state control of media, and trafficking.

**March 20, 2023:** South Korea and the United States [conduct](#) high-tech military drills with increased “intensity and realism” to bolster deterrence against North Korean provocations.

**March 22, 2023:** North Korea [fires](#) multiple cruise missiles toward the East Sea.

**March 22, 2023:** North Korea [criticizes](#) US Ambassador to the United Nations Linda Thomas-Greenfield for calling on the UNSC to denuclearize North Korea. North Korea states that pressure to dismantle its nukes means “a declaration of war.”

**March 22, 2023:** The United States [condemns](#) North Korea’s latest missile provocations and urges all members of the United Nations Security Council to hold North Korea accountable for its actions.

**March 22, 2023:** Lt. Gen. William M. Jurney, commander of the US Marine Corps Forces, Pacific, [joins](#) ongoing joint South Korea-United States exercises.

**March 22, 2023:** Samsung Electronics Co. and SK Hynix Inc. [express](#) relief as the US government announces that the CHIPS Act defines material expansion as “increasing a facility’s production capacity by 5%.” This will allow the two companies to make technological upgrades in Chinese factories, resolving the worry that the two companies might need to develop an exit strategy from the Chinese market.

**March 23, 2023:** South Korea, the United States, and the United Kingdom [stage](#) combined high-intensity airborne and maritime infiltration drills to strengthen mission capabilities.

**March 23, 2023:** South Korea and the United States [conduct](#) a large-scale combined live-fire exercise near the Demilitarized Zone. US Army Col. Brandon Anderson states that the exercise is “defensive in nature” and that the allies are “not being offensive.”

**March 24, 2023:** US Forces Korea [conducts](#) the first training on the deployment of a remote launcher of the Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) missile defense system stationed in South Korea.

**March 24, 2023:** North Korea [conducts](#) a new underwater nuclear strategic weapon test and cruise missile exercise to “alert the enemy to an actual nuclear crisis.”

**March 24, 2023:** LG Energy Solution Ltd. [states](#) that it will invest 7.2 trillion won to build its second standalone battery manufacturing site in Arizona.

**March 27, 2023:** North Korea [fires](#) two short-range ballistic missiles toward the East Sea.

**March 29, 2023:** President Yoon and President Biden [announce](#) that South Korea will host the third Summit for Democracy.

**March 29, 2023:** South Korea and the United States [conduct](#) major amphibious assault drills.

**March 30, 2023:** President Yoon [nominates](#) Cho Hyun-dong as South Korean ambassador to the United States following the resignation of Kim Sung-han.

**March 30, 2023:** President Yoon [asks](#) United States Trade Representative Katherine Tai to “make favorable considerations” so that South Korean companies operating in the US will not experience difficulties related to the US Inflation Reduction Act and CHIPS Act.

**March 30, 2023:** US Ambassador to South Korea Philip Goldberg [states](#) that steps that President Yoon is making to promote reconciliation between South Korea and Japan deserve “great credit.”

**March 30, 2023:** South Korea’s Trade Minister Ahn Duk-geun and USTR Tai [discuss](#) the US Inflation Reduction Act and the CHIPS and Science Act. Ahn asks for further negotiations for the possible revision of US Section 232 tariff rules.

**March 31, 2023:** United States National Security Council coordinator John Kirby [states](#) that a potential arms deal is being arranged between Russia and North Korea.

**March 31, 2023:** Kurt Campbell, National Security Council coordinator for the Indo-Pacific, [commends](#) President Yoon for taking unilateral steps to improve ties with Japan.

**April 1, 2023:** South Korea [welcomes](#) the new guidelines that the Department of Treasury set under the US Inflation Reduction Act which would “substantially” relieve the uncertainty that South Korean domestic battery and material industries had and will “strengthen” the battery supply chain cooperation between the two countries.

**April 3, 2023:** South Korea, the United States, and Japan [hold](#) a trilateral naval exercise

featuring the USS *Nimitz* carrier that is focused on enhancing response capabilities against underwater threats.

**April 4, 2023:** South Korean National Security Adviser Cho Tae-yong [talks](#) with US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan to discuss strengthening bilateral relations.

**April 4, 2023:** Mandiant, Google’s cybersecurity unit, [finds](#) that a North Korean hacker group classified as APT43 has committed cybercrimes to fund the country’s nuclear weapons program. APT43 has also collected information on COVID-19 vaccines and policy matters related to North Korea by sending spear-phishing emails to pharmaceutical firms, policymakers, and researchers.

**April 5, 2023:** South Korea and the United States [hold](#) combined air drills focused on practicing procedures to protect strategic bombers from potential aerial enemy threats.

**April 8, 2023:** North Korea [tests](#) the *Haeil-2* underwater strategic weapon system that the country claims can generate a “radioactive tsunami.”

**April 8, 2023:** North Korea [denounces](#) South Korea and the United States’ latest joint military drills and calls them an “unprecedented” war rehearsal.

**April 10, 2023:** A spokesperson for the Department of State [announces](#) that the US commitment to South Korea is “ironclad” when asked about recently leaked documents revealing (among other things) that the US may have eavesdropped on conversations at the South Korean presidential office. A South Korean presidential official [states](#) that South Korea will seek “appropriate measures” from the US if necessary after looking into the validity of the leaked documents.

**April 11, 2023:** South Korean Defense Minister Lee Jong-sup [talks](#) with Secretary of Defense Austin regarding recent news of leaked documents that the US wiretapped conversations of top South Korean national security officials. The two agree that a “great deal of disclosed information was fabricated.” Kim Tae-hyo, South Korean principal deputy national security adviser, [states](#) that South Korea and the US believe that a “large portion”

of the leaked classified documents may be fake and are considering the involvement of a “third party.”

**April 12, 2023:** United States [condemns](#) North Korea’s latest ballistic missile launch and urges the country to come to the table for negotiations.

**April 12, 2023:** South Korean FM Park Jin [states](#) that South Korea is working with the US to discuss recent allegations that US intelligence services eavesdropped on discussions between South Korean government officials regarding providing weapons to the US for use in Ukraine.

**April 12, 2023:** South Korea [plans](#) to stage a joint tabletop exercise between its military and government officials and state-run research centers to bolster its response system against dangers from space.

**April 13, 2023:** North Korea [fires](#) a new model of long-range ballistic missile toward the East Sea. North Korean leader Kim [states](#) that the launch “radically” promotes the effectiveness of its nuclear counterattack posture.

**April 13, 2023:** Chief nuclear envoys of the US, South Korea, and Japan [denounce](#) North Korea’s latest missile provocation and express “deep concerns” over the unprecedented level of provocations from North Korea since the past year. NATO also [condemns](#) it.

**April 13, 2023:** A South Korean government official [states](#) that there is no “reason to conclude that the US has wiretapped” South Korean government officials. The official emphasize that not all intelligence collecting activities may not always be malicious and that “every country has the possibility of gathering intelligence,” including South Korea.

**April 13, 2023:** During the Korea-US Integrated Defense Dialogue, South Korea and the US [agree](#) to strengthen cooperation in “each area of extended deterrence,” including information sharing and crisis communication.

**April 13, 2023:** Eom Dong-hwan, minister of the Defense Acquisition Program Administration of South Korea, and Theodore Colbert, Boeing Defense, Space, and Security CEO [sign](#) a memorandum of understanding for joint research and development of advanced weapons.

**April 14, 2023:** South Korea and the United States [hold](#) joint air drills following North Korea’s recent firing of an intercontinental ballistic missile.

**April 15, 2023:** South Korean Principal Deputy National Security Adviser Kim Tae-hyo [states](#) that there is a possibility that Japan could join the South Korea-US intelligence alliance. The three countries [agree](#) to hold regular missile defense and anti-submarine exercises at the Defense Trilateral Talks to deter and respond to North Korea’s nuclear and missile threats.

**April 16, 2023:** During a visit to the United States, Kim Dong-yeon, governor of South Korea’s Gyeonggi Province [attracts](#) a combined 4 trillion won in investment from four companies.

**April 17, 2023:** South Korea [considers](#) joining the Freedom Online Coalition and will discuss South Korea’s potential participation in the coalition with the United States during President Yoon’s upcoming visit to the United States.

**April 17, 2023:** South Korea, the US, and Japan [hold](#) a trilateral missile defense exercise in international waters of the East Sea to strengthen security cooperation against North Korea’s advancing provocations.

**April 17, 2023:** South Korea and the United States [conduct](#) large-scale combined air drills to enhance combined operational capabilities of the allies’ advanced fighters.

**April 18, 2023:** President Yoon [states](#) that the South Korea-US alliance is a “resilient value-based alliance” that can readjust even when their interests are in conflict.

**April 18, 2023:** The United States and South Korea [conducts](#) combined attack drills as part of the Korea Marine Exercise Program to strengthen capabilities and interoperability.

**April 19, 2023:** Georgia Gov. Brian Kemp [states](#) that the US Inflation Reduction Act is hurting Korean companies.

**April 20, 2023:** National Security Council coordinator for strategic communications Kirby [states](#) that the US is “grateful” for the support that South Korea has provided Ukraine and calls the country a “terrific ally” and friend.



**April 20, 2023:** North Korean leader Kim Jong Un [announces](#) the completion of the country's first military spy satellite. A State Department spokesperson states that the launch of this satellite would violate multiple UNSC resolutions.

**April 21, 2023:** North Korea's Foreign Minister Choe Son-hui [states](#) that North Korea's status as a global nuclear power is "final and irreversible" and will not seek recognition or approval from anyone as long as North Korea has the power to counter US nuclear threats.

**April 24, 2023:** President Yoon and First Lady Kim Keon Hee [arrive](#) in the United States to celebrate the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of South Korea-US relations.

**April 24, 2023:** John Kirby, National Security Council coordinator for strategic communications, [reaffirms](#) US commitment to South Korea following Russia's statement that they may consider sending arms to North Korea if South Korea provide lethal assistance to Ukraine.

**April 25, 2023:** President Yoon and President Biden [visits](#) the Korean War Veterans Memorial.

**April 25, 2023:** President Yoon [calls](#) for stronger South Korea-US cooperation on space exploration and science.

**April 25, 2023:** United States [sanctions](#) three individuals for providing support to North Korea's efforts to illegally generate funds for its nuclear and missile development programs.

**April 26, 2023:** President Biden [states](#) that a nuclear attack by North Korea against the United States or its allies and partners will result in the "end of whatever regime were to take such an action."

**April 26, 2023:** President Yoon [attends](#) a dinner hosted by President and First Lady Jill Biden to celebrate the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the South Korea-United States alliance.

**April 26, 2023:** South Korean Prime Minister Han Duck-soo [meets](#) visiting Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis to discuss expanding economic cooperation, such as in space exploration and the aviation industry.

**April 26, 2023:** Corporate officials from both South Korea and the US [sign](#) 23 MOUs to boost bilateral cooperation on advance science and energy industries, such as batteries, robots, and nuclear power generation.

**April 26, 2023:** President Yoon [meets](#) Tesla CEO Elon Musk to ask for his investment in a Gigafactory in South Korea. Yoon calls for greater cooperation between South Korean businesses and SpaceX.

**April 26, 2023:** Six US advanced technology firms [announce](#) plans to invest a combined \$1.9 billion in South Korea and to build production facilities in South Korea that will strengthen bilateral cooperation on supply chains and an environment-friendly energy and industrial structure.

**April 26, 2023:** President Yoon [states](#) that the South Korea-US alliance will not be "shaken" by leaked US documents that allegedly contained the contents of tapped conversations of top South Korean officials.

**April 27, 2023:** President Yoon and President Biden [adopt](#) the [Washington Declaration](#) to strengthen the United States "extended deterrence" commitment to South Korea.

**April 27, 2023:** President Yoon [addresses](#) the US Congress and states that South Korea and the US will "play the role as a compass for freedom" and will "safeguard and broaden the freedom of citizens of the world." In response to North Korean nuclear threats, Yoon emphasizes the need to "speed up" Korea-US-Japan trilateral security cooperation.

**April 27, 2023:** During a joint press conference with President Biden, Yoon [announces](#) that the two countries agreed to establish a Nuclear Consultative Group to conduct the new extended deterrence system laid out by the recently signed Washington Declaration.

**April 27, 2023:** An *Ohio*-class nuclear-powered ballistic submarine, the largest type of ballistic missile submarine operated by the US Navy, will [visit](#) South Korea to strengthen US extended deterrence.

**April 27, 2023:** President Yoon [sings](#) "American Pie" at the end of a state dinner.

**April 28, 2023:** During a meeting with Secretary of Defense Austin, President Yoon [states](#) that North Korea will be faced with a “resolute and overwhelming response, including the US nuclear capabilities” if they attempt to use nuclear weapons.

**April 28, 2023:** South Korean Prime Minister Han Duck-soo [meets](#) visiting Virginia Gov. Glenn Youngkin to discuss growing cooperation in space exploration and technology.

**April 29, 2023:** President Yoon [states](#) that the Washington Declaration is an “upgraded” version of the 1953 Mutual Defense Treaty and includes information sharing on nuclear and strategic operations and planning.

**April 29, 2023:** President Yoon [meets](#) with scholars at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology to discuss cooperation in areas of cutting-edge science such as artificial intelligence and bioscience.

**April 29, 2023:** Two representatives of the United States House of Representatives [introduce](#) a bipartisan bill to reauthorize and improve the North Korean Human Rights Act which expired in 2022.

**April 29, 2023:** Recent commercial satellite imagery [indicates](#) that North Korea is expanding its Yongbyon nuclear complex.

**April 30, 2023:** US Special Representative for North Korea Sung Kim [meets](#) South Korea’s Representative for Korean Peninsula Peace and Security Affairs Kim Gunn to discuss joint responses to North Korea’s nuclear threats.

**April 30, 2023:** North Korea [calls](#) out the Washington Declaration for being a “typical product of the heinous hostile policy” toward North Korea. North Korea states that it is “natural” to bolster its military deterrence in response to President Biden’s statement that using nuclear weapons will result in the “end” of the North Korea regime.

**April 30, 2023:** South Korea-US summit [paves](#) the way for a strong bilateral semiconductor partnership as the two countries agree to build a partnership in case of any disruptions in the global supply chains.