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US-KOREA RELATIONS

CALM IN THE STORM

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There are many metaphors about using propitious moments to prepare for an inclement future: make hay while the sun shines, the best time to fix the roof is on a clear day, strike while the iron is hot, etc. These all imply the drudgery of work: a farmer baling hay on a sunny day, a slater shingling high on a roof under a blue sky, a forger hammering inside a sweltering workshop on a breezy afternoon. In a third semester continuation of the rest of a tense, yet stable 2023, there is a sense in which both South Korea and North Korea have been following the lesson of these proverbs as they use relative calm on the Korean Peninsula to build out their respective, opposed security and defense capabilities. Another, similar proverb captures an additional element of this dynamic: if you spend your whole life waiting for the storm, you'll never enjoy the sunshine. Despite the tension on the Korean Peninsula, leaders in both Seoul and Pyongyang appear confident, even buoyant about their security and defense buildups.

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The US, as the senior partner in the US–South Korea alliance and primary antagonist for North Korea, usually focuses on the grim dynamic on the Korean Peninsula, but both South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol and North Korean leader Kim Jong Un are seemingly *enjoying* the moments of opportunity to prepare for the coming storm, both in the sense of taking advantage of defense preparation possibilities afforded by relative calm, and in the sense of using them for domestic political benefit.

Yoon’s belief in peace-through-strength, increasing domestic military capabilities, and swaggering alliance relations with the US is his primary source of political capital, given that the National Assembly is held by an opposition majority blocking most of his domestic initiatives. Foreign, defense, and security policy are even more crucial for Yoon as 2024 marks legislative general elections. If Yoon’s People Power Party fails to win a majority, then he will spend his entire presidency with a hostile National Assembly actively undermining his domestic priorities. For Kim Jong Un’s part, North Korea’s rapidly growing military capabilities (including solid-fuel ICBM and military reconnaissance satellite successes) are developing in a favorable international context: the Russia-Ukraine war has led to upgraded Moscow-Pyongyang economic and military relations, great power competition with the US continues to incentivize Chinese economic and diplomatic support for North Korea, and the Israel-Hamas war distracts world attention from malign North Korean behavior. All this aids Kim with his most fundamental interest—maintaining a domestic system that will keep him and his family in power in perpetuity.

There is another, less sanguine interpretation of the current dynamic on the Korean Peninsula: South and North Korea are using current stability to drive forward a security dilemma, notably via an arms race likely to result in crisis. This is in no one’s interest, but that is precisely the tragedy of security dilemmas. For its part, the US may understand the grim dynamic on the Korean Peninsula, but its diplomatic options for off-ramps are precluded by the behavior and nature of the Kim regime, and so Washington has moved forward with a robust development of US–South Korea allied deterrence vis-à-vis North Korea. Hence the security dilemma spiral takes yet another turn toward a stormy reckoning.

US–South Korea Relations: Shelter from the (Oncoming) Storm

The first two reporting periods of 2023 in US–South Korea relations were marked by historic events: (a) the May Biden–Yoon summit in Washington celebrating the 70th year of the alliance and deepening it via the Washington Declaration, which both modernized US extended deterrence for South Korea and expanded the alliance’s scope; (b) the trilateral US–South Korea–Japan summit at Camp David in August, in which the three states formed a sort of quasi-trilateral alliance featuring a shared “commitment to consult” in case of crisis and the institution of regular joint military exercises and cooperation, *inter alia*. Much of the last four months of 2023 in US–South Korea relations was dedicated to transforming the alliance’s recent commitments into concrete action.



Figure 1 President Yoon Suk Yeol of the Republic of Korea and President Joseph R. Biden Jr. of the United States met in Washington to commemorate the 70th anniversary of the U.S.-ROK Alliance. Photo: U.S. Mission Korea

In this regard, military exercises are the most visible deliverable. In September, the US and South Korea [held combined](#) naval drills, which had added urgency as they took place within the context of North Korean threats following a Russia–North Korea leader summit, as well as the earlier unveiling of a North Korean [tactical nuclear-armed submarine](#) (see the US–North Korea section). This was followed in October by US–South Korea [anti-submarine](#) exercises with advanced naval assets—part of a larger set of major combined maritime exercises—and the first-ever landing of a [US nuclear-capable B-52](#) on South Korean territory. November continued the elevated rhythm of Washington–Seoul military exercises, as [combined air drills](#) integrated B-52s with other assets around the Korean Peninsula. Also in November—shortly after North Korea apparently successfully [placed](#)

a [rudimentary](#) military reconnaissance satellite in space—the US engaged in a show of force highlighting integrated deterrence assets with a [port call](#) of the *USS Carl Vinson* accompanied to the region by its carrier strike group, including a nuclear-powered attack submarine that docked at the Jeju-do naval base. Finally, the US and South Korea carried out [combined air maneuvers featuring a B-1B Lancer](#) strategic (non-nuclear) bomber in mid-December as a response to Pyongyang’s [launch](#) of a *HWASONG-18* solid-fuel ICBM, and followed that with [live-fire army maneuvers](#) including K1 tank and Stryker brigades to end the year (even spilling over into the first week of January 2024).

Following the direction of the Washington Declaration in May, all these exercises were in addition to the normal cycle of US–South Korea combined training, which typically leads to a dyspeptic North Korean response. Indeed, the additional third trimester exercises to buttress deterrence on the Korean Peninsula gave Pyongyang the occasion to riposte with the normal fiery rhetoric threatening crisis and annihilation of the Kim regime’s adversaries. What was out of the norm was the degree to which US–South Korea military drills were augmented by trilateral US–South Korea–Japan military exercises (some of which were add-ons to the US–South Korea bilateral maneuvers). This effort—a programmatic realization of the intent outlined at the Camp David summit in August—began in early October with US–South Korea–Japan naval exercises for [interdicting North Korean](#) illicit maritime activity. Late October raised the stakes with the first ever US–South Korea–Japan [joint air exercise](#) held near the Korean Peninsula. Late November saw a [third round of trilateral exercises](#)—these once more naval in nature and including the *Carl Vinson*—in the wake of Pyongyang’s satellite launch vehicle (SLV) and placing of a military reconnaissance satellite in orbit (see US–North Korea section).



Figure 2 On October 22, 2023, fighter aircraft from the U.S., Japan, and the Republic of Korea conducted a trilateral escort flight accompanying a U.S. B-52H Stratofortress Bomber operating in the Indo-Pacific. Photo: U.S. Indo-Pacific Command Public Affairs

Trilateral military training is the tip of the iceberg in terms of augmenting deterrence against North Korean plans and capabilities. US–South Korea–Japan military cooperation is also evolving rapidly in the intelligence space. On Oct. 17 Washington, Seoul, and Tokyo announced the establishment of a [trilateral communication hotline](#) to deal with North Korean threats and Chinese regional assertiveness. Then in November the three states [shared information](#) on North Korea’s SLV. Finally, and potentially most importantly in the medium-term, the US, South Korea, and Japan have taken the first steps for real-time sharing of sensing data on North Korean missiles. This was already announced earlier in 2023, and [reiterated](#) in November, before finally [reaching operational status](#) in December. Washington and Seoul reported the operation of the trilateral real-time missile data sharing on Dec. 19, one day after North Korea successfully fired a solid-fuel *HWASONG-18* ICBM. It is unclear if this data sharing network was utilized to track the December ICBM launch, but North Korea should worry that such shared tracking capability could, over time, lead to trilateral missile defense cooperation that would better shelter the three allies from North Korean attack, degrading the strategic value of Pyongyang’s nuclear arsenal.

The operational military level is only one part of alliance deterrence vis-à-vis North Korea—strategy and diplomacy are also crucial elements. Washington and Seoul naturally emphasized these alliance activities throughout the last part of 2023 as they built on the renewed foundations laid at the Washington and Camp David summits. Leader-level engagement to

this end was noteworthy, with Biden and Yoon meeting on multiple occasions during the September-December period, including at the [September G20](#) and [United Nations General Assembly](#) (UNGA) meetings, as well as in November at the [Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation](#) (APEC) Leaders Meeting in San Francisco.

One level down, at the senior official rank, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken [visited Seoul](#) in November for talks with his counterpart, Park Jin, on US-South Korea cooperation on handling North Korea (especially in the context of greater Moscow-Pyongyang cooperation), the Russia-Ukraine war, the Israel-Hamas conflict, and other issues. US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan [traveled to Seoul](#) for discussions in early December, as did (with no publicity) CIA Director William Burns. The most substantive of high-level US-South Korea alliance maintenance activities during the third trimester of 2023 were the meetings of US and South Korean defense ministers and joint chiefs of staff. Already in September the allies were signaling significant updates to their joint deterrence strategy, and this came to fruition in November with the annual [Security Consultative Meeting](#) (between defense ministers) and [Military Committee Meeting](#) (between joint chiefs of staff). The readouts of these meetings mention an updated [tailored deterrence strategy](#) and a new alliance “[Defense Vision](#).” At the level of deputy national security advisor, the US and South Korea [continued to develop](#) the Nuclear Consultative Group (NCG), established as part of the Washington Declaration to get more buy-in and input from South Korea regarding US extended nuclear strategy for the Korean Peninsula. If the schedule holds up, the US and South Korea will establish guidelines for the planning and operation of a [shared nuclear deterrence strategy](#) by mid-2024. This NCG output was in addition to ongoing, regular meetings of the [Extended Deterrence Strategy and Consultation and Group](#) at the assistant secretary/deputy minister level.



Figure 3 U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken, accompanied by South Korean Foreign Minister Park Jin, addresses the media during a joint news conference at the foreign ministry in Seoul on Thursday, November 9, 2023. Photo: Jung Yeon-je/Pool Photo via AP

More prosaically, US officials approved a raft of military equipment procurement agreements and plans, including South Korean [purchases of additional F-35 fighter aircraft](#) (and related equipment) and [SM-6 interceptors](#), joint military [use of 5G](#), and prioritization of coordination on [production of defense goods/equipment](#). Following Pyongyang’s SLV launch, Seoul’s [partial suspension](#) of the Comprehensive Military Agreement (CMA) providing stability along the military demarcation line met with approval from Washington, which qualified the response as “[prudent](#)” and “[restrained](#)” in light of North Korea’s advancing capabilities.

Beyond deterrence, warfighting, and military cooperation, alliance maintenance in other areas also gained in importance during the September-December period, as Washington-Seoul relations grew in comprehensiveness along with both the commitments of the Washington Declaration and greater global/regional political disorder. In addition to discussion at the leader and ministerial levels, US and South Korean lower-ranking senior officials crisscrossed the Pacific Ocean to discuss [economics/trade and supply chains](#), protection of [cutting-edge technology](#), the Russia-Ukraine and Israel-Hamas wars, emerging issues such as [cyber](#) and [space](#), and global challenges like [human rights, climate change, and HADR](#).

Arguably the two most significant topics among this list are the Russia-Ukraine war and the confluence of trade/economics and high-technology. Regarding the former, North Korea’s apparently [massive delivery](#) of

ammunition and artillery (shells and rockets) to Russia resulted in (likely) significant [Russian assistance to North Korea](#), including possibly in know-how and technology supporting the Kim regime's military satellite program. For its part, South Korea has become a major supplier of [artillery shells to Ukraine](#) (albeit via indirect pathways). As for the latter issue, Washington and Seoul worked at various official levels to overcome confusion and unease on economics/trade and technology, notably through [coordinating on IPEF](#), clarifying rules-of-origin for critical components of technology potentially qualifying for [IRA subsidies](#), and reaching an understanding on rules for technology transfers to China while providing South Korean high-tech industry predictability going forward and time to adjust its business model.

That said, the overlap of international trade, supply chains, and rules-based order within the context of US-China great power competition continues to produce friction between the US and South Korea. Washington's "de-risking" strategy vis-à-vis Beijing is spilling over as an imperative to allies and partners—such as South Korea—who have both a different trade profile with China and different assessments of the relative risks of growing or curtailing trade with China in sensitive areas (e.g., semiconductors, batteries, high-tech minerals). And there is some frustration that the US's "small garden, high wall" masks problematic protectionism of US industry. Put differently, when South Korea's incoming trade minister Cheong In-kyo [pledged to address](#) supply chain risks for certain technology goods, it is hard to avoid reckoning that, in addition to China, the US also falls into the risk column.

The final trend in US-South Korea diplomacy was its incorporation of the trilateral ethos of cooperation with Japan. Washington-Seoul coordination on important issues during the September-December period often included Japan, a reflection of both the Camp David summit commitments and the reality that a world in increasing disarray requires multilateral solutions. To this end, Biden and Yoon met Japanese Prime Minister Kishida Fumio at the [San Francisco APEC summit](#) to follow up on shared geopolitical/geostrategic priorities. Trilateral ministerial level meetings also occurred throughout the trimester. The three states' [foreign ministers](#) met in September (on the sidelines of the UNGA) and November

(sidelines of APEC) to coordinate on North Korea, the Russia-Ukraine war, and geoeconomics and technology. The November meeting allowed the Biden administration to brief counterparts on the planned Biden-Xi summit. US, South Korean, and Japanese defense ministers met in Seoul in November to discuss deepening real-time military intelligence sharing, especially for North Korean missile launches. They also established a [multiyear trilateral military exercise plan](#), taking steps to institutionalize this aspect of the trilateral relationship. In December, the three states' [national security advisors met](#) in Seoul for exchanges on geopolitical issues and North Korea. Washington, Seoul, and Tokyo officials also made the [usual condemnations](#) of North Korean malfeasance through their North Korean nuclear envoys, [assessed and criticized](#) growing Russia-North Korea arms transfers, established a [working group](#) on North Korea cyber issues, and [signed](#) a trilateral scientific research framework.

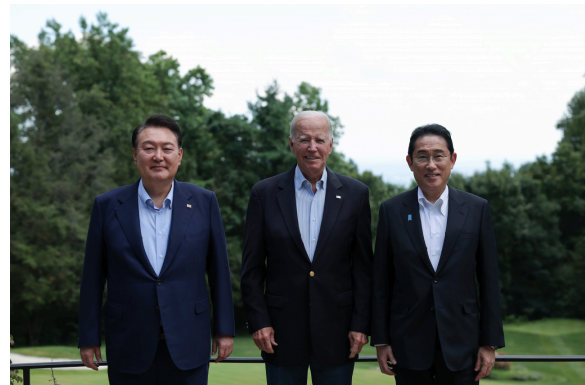


Figure 4 South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol (left) poses for a photo with U.S. President Joe Biden (center) and Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida during a luncheon following a trilateral summit meeting at the Camp David presidential retreat in Maryland. Photo: Yonhap

US-North Korea Relations: Thunder Rolls

Although North Korea continued re-opening post-COVID, none of that change has redounded to the benefit of Washington-Pyongyang ties. Instead, the lack of contact and mutual recriminations that have defined the Biden administration's relations with North Korea continued in the final reporting period of 2023, but with a new emphasis: namely, concerns over growing ties between North Korea and Russia. While Pyongyang finds much fault in growing ties between the US, South Korea, and Japan, it

has been quite proactive in forging a trilateral of its own with Moscow and Beijing, and evidence of its materiel aid to Russia's war effort in Ukraine is mounting. This has caused much consternation for the Biden administration. On the one hand, at a time when US support for Ukraine has been stymied by internal political divisions, North Korean arms to Russia are apparently making a meaningful contribution to Russia's war aims. On the other hand, the US (and South Korea) is worried about what North Korea might be receiving in return (e.g., financial, food, energy, and military assistance of various kinds).

Early in the reporting period, the generally reclusive North Korean leader Kim Jong Un [traveled](#) to Moscow for a summit (focusing on both diplomatic and arms cooperation), the first between the two countries in four years. While there, he [inspected](#) a factory producing modern fighter jets in Russia's Far East, and [met](#) with Russia's Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu to inspect Russia's nuclear-capable bombers. He also extended an invitation to Vladimir Putin to visit North Korea at a time "convenient" for the Russian leader. Putin accepted the offer, though the timing of the visit has not yet been confirmed.



Figure 5 North Korean leader Kim Jong Un visits an aircraft manufacturing plant in the city of Komsomolsk-on-Amur in the Khabarovsk region, Russia. Photo: Governor of Russia's Khabarovsk Krai Mikhail Degtyarev Telegram Channel via Reuters

The US responded by [warning](#) the North that it would "pay a price" for any arms deal with Russia—an ominous but vague threat, one National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan said would take place "in the international community," as the North had chosen to place itself on the side of a country waging a war of aggression against a neighbor. Days later, the US

and South Korea offered a similar warning during a meeting of the Extended Deterrence Strategy and Consultation Group, and noted that such cooperation constitutes a violation of UN Security Council (UNSC) resolutions. They also said they would discuss means of countering their cooperation on Ukraine, as well as how Russia assists the North in its development of nuclear and missile programs.

If Pyongyang was chastened by these warnings it gave no sign, [slamming](#) criticism from South Korea as "hysterical." Indeed, throughout the reporting period reports of cooperation continued to trickle out. In October, [CBS reported](#) that North Korea was sending arms to Russia following the Kim-Putin summit. That same month, the Royal United Services Institute [reported](#) that Moscow has begun large-scale shipments of ammunition via a new supply route from the North Korean port of Rajin to a Russian military facility on the Dunai, and [The Washington Post reported](#) that two Russian ships had made at least five round-trips between North Korea and Russia since mid-August, suggesting that arms transfers could be underway (evidence supports the belief that these transfers have continued). South Korea's intelligence service in September revealed that Moscow had suggested three-way naval exercises among Russia, North Korea, and China. Later in the reporting period, South Korean officials [said](#) North Korea might have provided Russia with short-range ballistic missiles (SRBMs) and portable anti-aircraft missiles, with its military later saying South Korea had [detected](#) signs of North Korea supplying ballistic missiles to Russia. Both [US](#) and open source intelligence have now confirmed that North Korean ballistic missiles (likely *Iskander*-clone SRBMs) have been used on the battlefield in Ukraine, a first for these North Korean missiles.

In response, South Korea's unification minister said that South Korea would [consider](#) "powerful" sanctions against Russia, but that these would be implemented in cooperation with the US and its partners, rather than unilaterally.

Such developments might suggest a seismic shift in the relationship between the Korean Peninsula and Russia, which has since the early days of Putin's rule sought an even-handed approach between the North and South. Whereas the Yeltsin government had shown

favoritism toward South Korea and—in Putin’s eyes, at least—lost influence because South Korea no longer had to work for their support and North Korea no longer trusted Moscow, Putin’s government had sought to “stand on two legs” in the Korean Peninsula. Hence it sought to work with both governments, endorsing sanctions on North Korea for its nuclear testing and—as many reports have noted with irony as its cooperation with the North has come to light—supporting bans on weapons trades with the rogue state. Even so, Russia—along with China—came under fire for shielding the North from the most stringent sanctions at the UNSC through its permanent member veto.

Recent interactions suggest the end of that comparative even-handedness, and increasing impunity for North Korea at the UN level. Still, one must note that North Korea has gone more than six years without testing a nuclear device; while that could end at any time, the North may not feel the need to put its partners in the awkward position of choosing between past votes on North Korean nuclear testing and the currently flourishing relationship, at least while aid continues to flow. Kim Jong Un has [said](#) that a “forward-looking” and “far-reaching” relationship with Russia will continue. Options for reining in such interactions are limited, which is why—with the US and China seemingly having built a floor for their tumultuous relationship—President Biden has been [expressing](#) concern over the North while meeting with Xi Jinping.

Other malfeasance during this time—China’s [repatriation](#) of North Koreans (who likely face torture upon their return), Pyongyang’s continued [official enshrinement](#) of its nuclear program, the new launch of an [ICBM](#), the unveiling of tactical nuclear attack submarine, suspicious activity involving the long-delayed functioning of a new [light-water reactor](#)—is worrisome, but represents mostly developments that have been telegraphed over the last few years.

Another potential watershed during the reporting period revolved around North Korean satellite launches. In late November, after [issuing](#) a sudden notice to Japan, the North [conducted](#) the launch of a spy satellite, which it had previously [defended](#) as an “indispensable strategic option” to counter the United States. Not long after the launch, the North [said](#) its spy

satellite had taken photos of US military facilities in San Diego and Japan (the quality and use value of which are highly questionable). In addition to ostensible intelligence-gathering purposes of the launch, it has been [speculated](#) that Kim Jong Un pushed ahead with the launch because of two failed attempts earlier in 2023, suggesting he worried about signaling weakness. It may also have been an opportunity to put to use the information North Korea has gotten in return for its arms transfers to Moscow; as reported in September, Putin and Kim met at a [spaceport](#) and a Russian military plane [traveled](#) to the North two weeks later. Also, when South Korea successfully [launched](#) its own satellite in early December, the lack of US criticism gave Pyongyang the chance to [hit out](#) at Washington’s supposed double-standards.

For now, considering that the North continues to [reject](#) the possibility of dialogue with the US, and says it [regards](#) the South as an enemy to confront rather than compatriots with whom to reunify (as Kim proclaimed at the end of year KWP party plenum), such activity will continue. The only foreseeable changes to the escalatory cycle would seem to be a change of government in South Korea or the US, or—much as one might not want to contemplate it—a testing miscalculation.

Conclusion: Riders on the Storm in 2024

Looking forward to 2024, South Korean relations with the US are likely to stay on the same trajectory, although there will be new personnel implementing President Yoon’s policies, as the defense minister, foreign minister, trade minister, national security advisor, and chief of the National Intelligence Service were all reshuffled during the final 2023 reporting period. Political conditions may make some policies tougher to enact, as the US (national general elections) and South Korea (National Assembly election) are holding national elections within a highly polarized political spectrum. One new area of US–South Korea cooperation will be at the UNSC, where Seoul will occupy a nonpermanent seat for the next two years (of which one year overlaps with Japan). This will afford the Yoon administration new pathways for pressuring Pyongyang by increasing scrutiny of its sanctions evasion and human rights abuses. A North–South war of words at the UN is highly likely, and one can only hope that fiery rhetoric will not turn into

kinetic firing, as Pyongyang has abrogated the entire North-South Comprehensive Military Agreement and the Northern Limit Line buffer zone, opening potential friction points between the North and the US-South Korea alliance.

Much hinges on the upcoming elections. If the South Korean opposition continues to maintain healthy majorities in the National Assembly it will not necessarily change North Korea's view of the South—the North's treatment of Moon Jae-in after the 2019 Hanoi fiasco suggests it sees Seoul as little more than a conduit to obtaining sanctions relief via Washington—but it will cast a pall over Yoon's efforts at trilateralism with the US and Japan and raise hopes for progressives to return to the Blue House in 2027.

There is a US election as well, which will determine if the Biden administration (or another Democratic Party administration) stays in power and will continue (relative to a possible Trump administration redux) a more traditional, risk-averse diplomatic approach. This distinction promises to have a significant long-/medium-term impact on US-North Korea relations, although perhaps not as immediately as one might think: Kim Jong Un surely remembers that Biden's [likely opponent](#) is the one that left him at the altar in Hanoi.

CHRONOLOGY OF US-KOREA RELATIONS

SEPTEMBER–DECEMBER 2023

Sept. 2, 2023: South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff [reports](#) that North Korea has fired several cruise missiles into the Yellow Sea.

Sept. 3, 2023: *Korean Central News Agency* [announces](#) that North Korea has conducted a drill for "simulated tactical nuclear attack."

Sept. 4, 2023: South Korea reports Russia [proposing](#) three-way naval exercises with North Korea and China.

Sept. 5, 2023: *New York Times* [reports](#) that North Korean leader Kim Jong Un may soon visit Russia for talks with Putin on an arms deal.

Sept. 5, 2023: South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol [arrives](#) in Indonesia to attend ASEAN summits.

Sept. 6, 2023: US [warns](#) North Korea would "pay a price" for any arms deal with Russia.

Sept. 8, 2023: North Korea [unveils](#) a new "tactical nuclear attack submarine" [designed](#) to carry out "both preemptive and retaliatory strikes" and intended to counter US and South Korean "invasion fleets."

Sept. 8, 2023: FBI [says](#) that the North Korea-linked hacking group Lazarus is responsible for the theft of \$41 million in cryptocurrency from online casino and betting platform Stake.com.

Sept. 8, 2023: President Yoon [arrives](#) in India to attend G20 summit.

Sept. 9, 2023: North Korea [holds](#) paramilitary parade to mark the 75th anniversary of the regime's founding.

Sept. 9, 2023: President Yoon and US President Joe Biden [meet](#) on margins of G20 summit.

Sept. 11, 2023: US assistant secretary of state for economic affairs to [visit](#) South Korea and Japan for talks on ways to deepen economic cooperation.

Sept. 11, 2023: South Korea [attends](#) the fifth round of negotiations on the United States-led Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF) in Thailand.

Sept. 12, 2023: White House [urges](#) North Korea not to provide weapons to Russia.

Sept. 12, 2023: North Korean leader Kim Jong Un [heads](#) to Russia for a summit with Russian President Vladimir Putin amid growing concerns over military cooperation between Pyongyang and Moscow.

Sept. 13, 2023: North Korea [fires](#) two short-range ballistic missiles into the East Sea in an apparent show of force ahead of its leader Kim Jong Un's summit with Russian President Vladimir Putin.

Sept. 13, 2023: North Korean leader Kim and President Putin [meet](#) at Russia's Vostochny spaceport ahead of the summit.

Sept. 14, 2023: President Putin [accepts](#) invitation of North Korean leader Kim to visit Pyongyang.

Sept. 14, 2023: US Department of State [approves](#) a possible sale to South Korea of up to 25 F-35A radar-evading fighters and related equipment to help the East Asian ally maintain a "credible" defense capability.

Sept. 14, 2023: US [expresses](#) concern about growing defense cooperation between North Korea and Russia.

Sept. 15, 2023: North Korean leader Kim [inspects](#) factory producing modern fighter jets in Russia's Far East.

Sept. 15, 2023: South Korea and the United States [warn](#) that military cooperation between North Korea and Russia is a violation of UN Security Council resolutions.

Sept. 15, 2023: South Korea and the United States [agree](#) to cooperate in using 5G in joint military operations.

Sept. 15, 2023: South Korea and the US [hold](#) deterrence talks on North Korean nuclear threats following Kim-Putin summit.

Sept. 16, 2023: North Korean leader Kim [meets](#) Russia's Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu to inspect Russia's nuclear-capable bombers.

Sept. 18, 2023: South Korea and the United States [near completion](#) of work to revise their joint deterrence strategy against evolving military threats from North Korea.

Sept. 19, 2023: President Biden [expresses](#) his appreciation to South Korea and other countries for their assistance in the return of five US citizens detained in Iran.

Sept. 19, 2023: US district court [dismisses a lawsuit](#) that a US energy firm filed to stop two South Korean state-run companies (KEPCO and KHNP) from exporting nuclear power plants, determining it is not qualified to take the move.

Sept. 20, 2023: President Yoon [meets](#) UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres to discuss North Korea and Ukraine.

Sept. 20, 2023: President Biden [condemns](#) North Korea's continued violation of UNSC resolutions, but reaffirms his commitment to diplomacy to achieve the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula.

Sept. 20, 2023: President Yoon [meets](#) world leaders in New York for 2nd day to promote

South Korea's bid to host the 2030 World Expo in Busan.

Sept. 20, 2023: US energy firm to [appeal](#) court decision in favor of South Korean state-run companies KEPCO and KHNP over nuclear reactor exports.

Sept. 20, 2023: United States Forces Korea (USFK) service member, a South Korean, and a Filipino are [arrested](#) on charges of [smuggling drugs](#) from the US via military mail.

Sept. 20, 2023: US official [expresses](#) concerns over North Korean detainees in China who are at the risk of torture if repatriated.

Sept. 20, 2023: South Korean and US defense officials [discuss](#) possible space cooperation between Pyongyang and Moscow in tabletop exercise.

Sept. 23, 2023: Top diplomats from South Korea, the United States and Japan [agree](#) to take stern measures against a potential arms deal between Russia and North Korea.

Sept. 23, 2023: US Department of Commerce [announces](#) final rule to restrict semiconductor subsidy recipients from expanding their manufacturing capacity in China.

Sept. 24, 2023: South Korean foreign minister [holds](#) a series of meetings with his counterparts from the Netherlands and others for discussions on bolstering cooperation.

Sept. 24, 2023: South Korean companies [urge](#) the US to clarify from which foreign companies they are not required to import critical electric vehicle battery minerals under the US Inflation Reduction Act.

Sept. 25, 2023: South Korea and the US [stage](#) joint naval drills in East Sea amid North Korean threats.

Sept. 25, 2023: North Korea [slams](#) President Yoon's warning against Pyongyang-Moscow military cooperation as "hysterical remarks."

Sept. 25, 2023: US wireless chipmaker Broadcom Inc plans to [seek an appeal](#) against the South Korean regulator's decision to slap a 19.1 billion won (\$14.3 million) fine for unfair business practices against Samsung Electronics Co.

Sept. 25, 2023: North Korea [opens the border](#) to foreigners for first time since COVID-19.

Sept. 26, 2023: US Secretary of State Antony Blinken [says](#) military cooperation between North Korea and Russia undermines global peace.

Sept. 26, 2023: US senator [calls](#) for cooperation from South Korea in pushing for Washington's technology export and investment curbs against China.

Sept. 26, 2023: President Yoon [says](#) the US-ROK alliance will end North Korean regime in event of nuclear weapons use.

Sept. 27, 2023: North Korea's ambassador [vows](#) stronger self-defense capabilities, claiming the Korean Peninsula faces the "immediate danger of nuclear war breakout."

Sept. 27, 2023: Defense Minister-nominee Shin Won-sik [vows](#) to "firmly punish" North Korea in event of provocation.

Sept. 28, 2023: North Korea [stipulates](#) nuclear force-building policy in constitution.

Sept. 28, 2023: Top nuclear envoys of South Korea, the United States, and Japan [denounce](#) North Korea's constitutional amendment to enshrine its policy on nuclear force.

Sept. 28, 2023: Washington officials [say](#) U.S. soldier Travis King, who crossed the inter-Korean border into North Korea in July, is in US custody after his release by the reclusive regime.

Sept. 29, 2023: US Department of Defense [labels](#) North Korea as a "persistent" threat.

Sept. 30, 2023: North Korean Foreign Minister [slams](#) UNSC meeting over Pyongyang's nuclear force-building policy in constitution.

Oct. 2, 2023: North Korea [slams](#) IAEA's adoption of resolution on Pyongyang's nuclear weapons program.

Oct. 2, 2023: North Korea [accuses](#) US of concealing role in bombing of Russia's Nord Stream.

Oct. 5, 2023: LG Energy Solution to [invest](#) 4 trillion won (\$3 billion) in Michigan plant to supply Toyota with batteries.

Oct. 6, 2023: 2023 *Chicago Council Survey* conducted by Ipsos [shows](#) that US citizens are divided over troop mobilization to defend South Korea in case of North Korean invasion.

Oct. 6, 2023: North Korea [denounces](#) France for its plan to monitor North Korea's illicit maritime activities.

Oct. 6, 2023: CBS [reports](#) North Korea is sending arms to Russia following Kim-Putin summit.

Oct. 6, 2023: Korea Institute for National Unification, a South Korean state-run think tank, [suggests](#) that North Korea may launch its military spy satellite between Oct. 10 and 26.

Oct. 6, 2023: South Korea to [participate](#) in a new round of the US-led Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF) talks in Malaysia.

Oct. 6, 2023: South Korea [seeks](#) 68 billion won (\$50.42 million) in combined fines against Google and Apple for their violation of the country's in-app payment laws.

Oct. 7, 2023: US [suspects](#) North Korea in orchestrating the September hack of a decentralized finance project.

Oct. 9, 2023: US [eases export controls](#) on chip equipment for Samsung and SK factories in China.

Oct. 9, 2023: South Korea's top nuclear envoy [meets](#) Sweden's special envoy for the Korean Peninsula to discuss the recent release of a US soldier from North Korean custody.

Oct. 10, 2023: South Korea, the United States, and Japan [stage](#) a trilateral maritime interdiction exercise for the first time in seven years.

Oct. 10, 2023: North Korea [defends](#) its military spy satellite as “indispensable strategic option” to counter the United States.

Oct. 10, 2023: ROK, Japan, and US advanced assets [join](#) naval exercise to intercept DPRK weapons.

Oct. 11, 2023: President Yoon and US senators [condemn](#) Hamas attack on Israel.

Oct. 13, 2023: Congressional report [shows](#) that North Korea is "on pace" to deploy sufficient nuclear-tipped intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs) to overcome the US missile defense.

Oct. 13, 2023: Unification ministry [says](#) many North Koreans have been repatriated from China.

Oct. 13, 2023: North Korea [threatens](#) to strike US aircraft carrier.

Oct. 13, 2023: US [brushes aside](#) concerns about potential impact of Middle East conflict on Korean Peninsula security.

Oct. 13, 2023: Pyongyang [dismisses](#) speculation over Hamas' use of North Korean weapons against Israel.

Oct. 13, 2023: Policymakers of South Korea and the US [discuss](#) economic and geopolitical uncertainties.

Oct. 14, 2023: A White House official [says](#) North Korea has delivered more than 1,000 containers of military equipment and munitions to Russia for use in Ukraine.

Oct. 16, 2023: North Korea [condemns](#) Japan's move to accelerate its planned acquisition of Tomahawk cruise missiles from the United States as an "arrogant choice."

Oct. 16, 2023: Royal United Services Institute [reports](#) that Moscow has begun large-scale shipments of ammunition from the North Korean port of Rajin to a Russian military facility on the Dunai.

Oct. 16, 2023: South Korea [cracks down](#) on firms building Taiwan navy submarines amid growing concerns over China's possible economic retaliation.

Oct. 17, 2023: *Washington Post* [reports](#) that two Russian ships have made at least five round trips between North Korea and Russia since mid-August, in what could be arms transfers.

Oct. 17, 2023: Seoul [opens](#) its largest-ever International Aerospace & Defense Exhibition (ADEX), [designed](#) to help South Korea to reach its goal of becoming the world's fourth-largest arms exporter.

Oct. 17, 2023: Top nuclear envoys of South Korea, the US, and Japan to [hold talks](#) over suspected DPRK-Russia arms transfer.

Oct. 17, 2023: South Korea, the US, and Japan [install](#) a trilateral communication hotline amid North Korea's evolving military threats and China's increasing assertiveness.

Oct. 17, 2023: South Korean diplomat [discusses](#) North Korean human rights with US envoy.

Oct. 17, 2023: United States [expresses](#) deep concerns about what North Korea will get in return for its suspected delivery of military equipment to Russia.

Oct. 17, 2023: US strategic bomber B-52 [lands](#) at South Korean air base for the first time.

Oct. 17, 2023: US envoy [hopes](#) to work with South Korea on efforts to hold North Korean human rights abusers accountable.

Oct. 18, 2023: Department of Commerce [toughens](#) rules on exports of advanced computing chips to China.

Oct. 18, 2023: South Korea's Ministry of Trade, Industry and Energy [says](#) that new export controls on chips by the United States will not have a significant impact on local businesses.

Oct. 18, 2023: Chief of US Indo-Pacific Command [expresses](#) concern over North Korea-Russia military ties.

Oct. 18, 2023: South Korean defense firm Huneed Technologies [reaches](#) a preliminary agreement with US-based General Atomics Aeronautical Systems to develop an advanced radar for drones carrying out observation missions at high altitudes.

Oct. 19, 2023: South Korea [mulls](#) sanctions amid suspected North Korea-Russia arms deal.

Oct. 19, 2023: South Korea's Navy [holds](#) regular multinational mine warfare drills.

Oct. 19, 2023: Anne Neuberger, deputy national security advisor for cyber and emerging technologies, [says](#) North Korea tries to use artificial intelligence to accelerate writing malicious software.

Oct. 19, 2023: South Korea [proposes](#) top-level diplomatic talks with Japan and China in late November.

Oct. 20, 2023: FBI [says](#) thousands of remote IT workers contracting with U.S. companies have for years secretly sent millions of dollars of their wages to North Korea for use in its ballistic missile program.

Oct. 20, 2023: South Korea and the US [discuss](#) efforts to deter North Korea's nuclear and missile threats.

Oct. 20, 2023: North Korean leader Kim [vows](#) to build a "forward-looking" and "far-reaching" relationship with Russia.

Oct. 20, 2023: State Department [says](#) the US will take "whatever steps" it can to hold to account those involved in arms transfers between North Korean and Russia.

Oct. 22, 2023: Navies of South Korea and the United States [stage](#) joint anti-submarine drills near Guam.

Oct. 22, 2023: South Korea, the US, and Japan [stage](#) joint air exercise for the first time near the Korean Peninsula.

Oct. 26, 2023: South Korea and the US [conduct](#) a large-scale maritime exercise in the Yellow Sea.

Oct. 28, 2023: UN expert panel overseeing sanctions against Pyongyang [estimates](#) North Korea's state-sponsored cyber theft last year at \$1.7 billion.

Nov. 1, 2023: FBI says North Korea, China, and Russia [engage](#) in cyber operations to target US research.

Nov. 2, 2023: Chinese President Xi Jinping [tells](#) North Korean leader Kim Jong Un that he is "willing to make bigger contributions" to "defend the region's peace, stability, development and prosperity."

Nov. 2, 2023: Joint Chiefs of Staff [says](#) North Korea might have provided Russia with short-range ballistic missiles and portable anti-aircraft missiles.

Nov. 2, 2023: South Korean military [detects](#) signs of North Korea supplying ballistic missiles to Russia.

Nov. 4, 2023: Report from the Institute for National Security Strategy [says](#) North Korea is trying to diversify its cybercrimes to offset the declining value of cryptocurrencies it steals to fund its nuclear and missile programs.

Nov. 5, 2023: Hyundai and Kia [announce](#) that combined sales of their electric vehicles using their electric-only dedicated platform top 100,000 in the United States in the past two years.

Nov. 8, 2023: Pentagon [declines to comment](#) on a growing debate in South Korea over whether a 2018 inter-Korean military accord aimed at reducing border tensions should be suspended.

Nov. 8, 2023: South Korea and the United States [announce](#) a push for a "wide range of actions" to prevent North Korea's cryptocurrency theft and cyber espionage.

Nov. 8, 2023: North Korea [threatens](#) to "pour a shower of shells" into South Korea over anti-Pyongyang propaganda leaflets.

Nov. 8, 2023: Defense ministers of South Korea, the US, and Japan to [hold](#) a trilateral meeting in Seoul.

Nov. 8, 2023: North Korea [denounces](#) upcoming visits to Seoul by top US officials.

Nov. 8, 2023: G7 Foreign Ministers [condemn](#) North Korea's arms transfer to Russia.

Nov. 9, 2023: US envoy [calls](#) for human rights dialogue with North Korea.

Nov. 9, 2023: Top diplomats of South Korea and the US to [hold talks](#) amid tightening North Korea-Russia military ties.

Nov. 10, 2023: South Korea's spy agency [signs an agreement](#) with the US Cybersecurity & Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) to strengthen bilateral cooperation in cybersecurity.

Nov. 13, 2023: Defense chiefs of South Korea and the United States [hold](#) annual security talks as the two countries seek to update joint military strategies on North Korea.

Nov. 13, 2023: Defense chiefs of South Korea and the US [revise](#) "tailored deterrence strategy" on North Korea.

Nov. 13, 2023: North Korea [slams](#) South Korea-UN Command defense chief meeting as attempt for "new war of aggression."

Nov. 13, 2023: South Korea and the US [issue](#) joint communique after the 55th Security Consultative Meeting.

Nov. 13, 2023: South Korea and the United States [issue](#) the Defense Vision of the South Korea-US Alliance.

Nov. 14, 2023: UN Command member states [vow](#) united response if South Korea is attacked.

Nov. 15, 2023: US [approves](#) possible sale of SM-6 missile interceptors to South Korea amid North Korea threats.

Nov. 15, 2023: North Korea [tests](#) newly developed solid-fuel engines for new-type for a new type of intermediate-range ballistic missile.

Nov. 15, 2023: President Yoon [departs](#) for San Francisco to attend the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation leaders meeting.

Nov. 15, 2023: Top diplomats of South Korea, the US, and Japan [hold](#) three-way talks on the sidelines of the APEC meeting in San Francisco.

Nov. 15, 2023: US envoy [travels](#) to Brussels to discuss North Korean human rights.

Nov. 15, 2023: South Korea and the US [stage](#) joint air drills with B-52H bombers over Yellow Sea.

Nov. 16, 2023: President Yoon and Japanese Prime Minister Kishida Fumio [hold](#) bilateral summit in San Francisco.

Nov. 16, 2023: North Korea [threatens](#) to take more "visible and strategic" military actions after South Korea and the United States updated their joint deterrence strategies.

Nov. 16, 2023: North Korea and Russia [sign](#) a protocol on expanding cooperation following bilateral talks on economy, science and technology.

Nov. 17, 2023: South Korea and the US [discuss](#) ways to expand bilateral cooperation in the energy and supply chain sectors.

Nov. 17, 2023: South Korea and the US [sign](#) an arrangement for prioritized supply of defense products.

Nov. 17, 2023: Leaders of the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework [agree](#) to launch "critical minerals dialogue."

Nov. 17, 2023: President Biden [expresses](#) worries about North Korea's "illicit" nuclear and missile programs during his summit with Chinese President Xi Jinping.

Nov. 17, 2023: Seoul and Washington [agree](#) to deepen cooperation in disaster and climate change response.

Nov. 20, 2023: President Yoon [says](#) that China would not benefit from trilateral cooperation with North Korea and Russia.

Nov. 21, 2023: North Korea [notifies](#) Japan of a plan to launch satellite by Dec. 1.

Nov. 21, 2023: USS *Carl Vinson* aircraft carrier [arrives](#) in Busan in show of force.

Nov. 22, 2023: North Korea [claims](#) it has successfully placed a spy satellite into orbit and will launch more.

Nov. 22, 2023: Nuclear envoys of South Korea, the US, and Japan [condemn](#) North Korea's satellite launch.

Nov. 22, 2023: South Korea [suspends](#) part of a 2018 inter-Korean military tension reduction agreement.

Nov. 22, 2023: US nuclear-powered submarine [arrives](#) in South Korea after North Korea's satellite launch.

Nov. 22, 2023: South Korea, the US, and Japan [share](#) information on North Korea's spy satellite launch.

Nov. 23, 2023: IAEA chief [reports](#) a "strong" water outflow from a reactor's cooling system at North Korea's key nuclear complex in Yongbyon.

Nov. 23, 2023: North Korea [vows](#) to restore all military measures halted under inter-Korean military accord.

Nov. 23, 2023: North Korea [fires](#) ballistic missile toward East Sea, but launch apparently failed.

Nov. 23, 2023: US [regards](#) South Korea's partial suspension of a 2018 inter-Korean military tension reduction agreement a "prudent" and "restrained" move.

Nov. 23, 2023: North Korea [scraps military deal](#) with South and vows to deploy weapons to border.

Nov. 26, 2023: South Korea, the US, and Japan [stage](#) joint naval drills involving aircraft carrier.

Nov. 28, 2023: North Korea [says](#) its spy satellite has taken photos of the White House, the Pentagon and nuclear aircraft carriers docked at a US naval base.

Nov. 29, 2023: South Korea's Busan [comes up short](#) in World Expo bid.

Nov. 30, 2023: US [sanctions](#) a cryptocurrency mixer for serving as a "key money-laundering tool" of a North Korea-linked hacking group.

Nov. 30, 2023: North Korea [says](#) its spy satellite has taken photos of US military facilities in San Diego and Japan.

Nov. 30, 2023: Biden [visits](#) a Colorado-based factory of a South Korean wind tower maker in a trip meant to highlight his economic agenda.

Nov. 30, 2023: North Korea [dismisses](#) the possibility of resuming dialogue with the United States.

Nov. 30, 2023: US and South Korea [hold talks](#) on lingering uncertainties regarding the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) and chips subsidy rules.

Dec. 1, 2023: South Korea [imposes sanctions](#) on 11 North Korean individuals after spy satellite launch.

Dec. 1, 2023: US [slaps](#) additional sanctions against North Korea in response to spy satellite launch.

Dec. 1, 2023: US [keeps](#) North Korea on its list of state sponsors of terrorism in 2022 report.

Dec. 2, 2023: North Korea [bristles](#) at US over comments about possible disabling of its spy satellite.

Dec. 2, 2023: US [approves a potential sale](#) to South Korea of munitions for the operation of F-35 radar-evading fighter jets and related equipment.

Dec. 2, 2023: South Korea successfully [launches](#) its first indigenous military spy satellite into orbit.

Dec. 4, 2023: South Korea [successfully conducts](#) third test flight of solid-fuel space rocket.

Dec. 4, 2023: North Korea [denounces](#) Washington for having a "double standard" over South Korea's spy satellite launch.

Dec. 5, 2023: *Washington Post* [reports](#) that South Korea has indirectly supplied more 155-mm shells for Ukraine than all European countries combined.

Dec. 5, 2023: Security advisers of South Korea, the US, and Japan to [discuss](#) joint responses to regional geopolitical risks, including North Korean threats.

Dec. 7, 2023: South Korea, the US, and Japan hold [1st trilateral working-level talks](#) on North Korea cyber threats.

Dec. 8, 2023: US defense policy bill [calls](#) for maintaining 28,500 US troops in Korea.

Dec. 8, 2023: North Korea [slams](#) UN resolutions condemning its nuclear program.

Dec. 8, 2023: South Korea, the US, and Japan [sign framework agreement](#) on research cooperation.

Dec. 9, 2023: South Korea and the US [agree](#) to strengthen cooperation in semiconductors.

Dec. 9, 2023: South Korea, the US, and Japan [vow](#) to strengthen cooperation against North Korea's nuclear and missile threats.

Dec. 10, 2023: North Korea [increases activities](#) in the truce village of Panmunjom after effectively scrapping an inter-Korean military tension reduction agreement.

Dec. 11, 2023: North Korea [lambasts](#) South Korea-US joint military drills.

Dec. 13, 2023: Defense Minister Shin Won-sik [meets](#) eight NATO representatives to expand security and defense industry cooperation.

Dec. 13, 2023: Air Koryo, North Korea's national carrier, [operates](#) first commercial flights connecting Pyongyang and Shenyang after a hiatus of nearly four years prompted by the COVID-19 outbreak.

Dec. 16, 2023: South Korea and the US [agree](#) to complete establishment of guidelines on the planning and operation of a shared nuclear strategy by mid-2024.

Dec. 17, 2023: US nuclear-powered submarine [arrives](#) in South Korea amid the possibility of a North Korean intercontinental ballistic missile launch.

Dec. 17, 2023: Industry data [shows](#) that combined vehicle sales of Hyundai and Kia in the US surpass 1.5 million units in 2023.

Dec. 18, 2023: North Korea [fires](#) one short-range [ballistic missile](#) toward the East Sea.

Dec. 18, 2023: Nuclear envoys of South Korea, the US, and Japan [condemn](#) North Korea's missile provocations.

Dec. 19, 2023: South Korea, the US, and Japan [launch](#) a system to share North Korean missile warning data in real time.

Dec. 19, 2023: North Korean leader Kim Jong Un [says](#) the ICBM launch shows what option he has if the US makes the wrong decision.

Dec. 19, 2023: North Korea [confirms](#) test-launch of a *HWASONG-18* solid-fuel intercontinental ballistic missile.

Dec. 19, 2023: President Yoon [appoints](#) Cho Tae-yong as new director of the National Intelligence Service and Cho Tae-yul as foreign minister.

Dec. 19, 2023: South Korea, the US, and Japan [share information](#) on North Korea's cryptocurrency theft and other malicious cyber activities.

Dec. 20, 2023: LG Chem Ltd., South Korea's leading chemical firm, [begins construction](#) of cathode plant in the United States.

Dec. 20, 2023: UNSC [ends](#) meeting on North Korea's latest test-firing of an ICBM without a united response.

Dec. 20, 2023: US [deploys](#) B-1B bombers near Korean Peninsula after North Korean ICBM launch.

Dec. 21, 2023: North Korean leader Kim [says](#) the launch of an ICBM shows he won't hesitate to launch a nuclear attack in event of enemy's nuclear provocations

Dec. 21, 2023: Sister of North Korean leader Kim [denounces](#) UNSC meeting on Pyongyang's ICBM launch.

Dec. 24, 2023: US [expresses](#) serious concern over North Korea showing signs of starting the operation of a new light-water nuclear reactor.

Dec. 27, 2023: South Korea [signs](#) a contract with the US government to buy 20 additional F-35A stealth fighter jets amid efforts to bolster response capabilities against North Korean military threats.

Dec. 27, 2023: North Korea [convenes](#) a key year-end meeting of the ruling Workers' Party with leader Kim Jong-un in attendance to discuss next year's policy direction.

Dec. 28, 2023: KCNA [reports](#) that North Korean leader Kim is calling for stepped-up efforts to prepare for war.

Dec. 28, 2023: President Yoon [names](#) First Vice Foreign Minister Chang Ho-jin as new national security adviser and Lee Kwan-sup, the director of national policy at the presidential office, as his new chief of staff.

