

COMPARATIVE

CONNECTIONS

A TRIANNUAL E-JOURNAL OF BILATERAL
RELATIONS IN THE INDO-PACIFIC

US-KOREA RELATIONS

The Worst Angels of Our Nature

MASON RICHEY AND ROB YORK

The last several reporting periods of *Comparative Connections* have featured little drama in US relations with the two Koreas. A lot of important changes happened—a burgeoning Washington-Seoul-Tokyo trilateral, Pyongyang’s advancing nuclear weapons program, etc.—but these developments were mostly incremental. However, the June-December 2024 reporting period—the final *Comparative Connections*—has featured bombshells, both metaphorically and literally. The most spectacular event was South Korean president Yoon Suk Yeol going full rogue authoritarian and [recklessly declaring martial law](#) at 11pm on December 3 in order to carry out a military “[self-coup d’état](#).” That is, Yoon annulled democratic processes and civil constitutional protections, arrogated all political and executive power to himself and the military, and attempted to suspend the national assembly. This shocking step toward tyranny—considered long-relegated to the distant past of South Korea’s developmental dictatorships of the 1950s-1980s—was as badly conceived as it was executed, farcically [falling apart](#) after less than three hours, when legislators (mostly from the opposition) breached the cordon of deployed soldiers around the national assembly, entered the plenary chamber, and voted 190-0 to revoke the martial law decree.

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Figure 1 South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol speaks at the presidential office in Seoul, South Korea, Saturday, Dec. 7, 2024. Photo: AP.

In addition to a raft of political and security instabilities (see next section) introduced by the self-coup attempt, the “values-based” US-South Korea alliance is now shaken to the core by a wanton power-grab of an allied leader close to the US.

And it is not as though the US-South Korea alliance was steaming toward placid political waters in any event, as the re-election of another noted [destroyer of domestic democratic norms](#)—Republican Donald Trump—[won re-election](#) as US president in November, following the dramatic cognitive and physical decline of Democratic president Joe Biden, who was forced out of his re-election campaign and replaced by hapless vice-president Kamala Harris. Beyond Trump’s own capacity to undermine the democratic values that supposedly support the US-South Korea alliance, his negative proclivities toward alliances, which he views primarily transactionally, and plans for tariffs and other measures potentially unfavorable to South Korea, were already promising friction between Seoul and Washington. The likely impending replacement of Yoon (a pro-US conservative) by a (typically) US-lukewarm progressive South Korean president would make the friction greater.

Finally, North Korea has provided the literal bombshell—many bombshells, in fact—during this *Comparative Connections* reporting period, as the Kim Jong Un regime has supplied Russia with millions of [artillery shells](#) and (likely) [hundreds](#) of short-range ballistic missiles and [multiple launch rockets](#) to support Moscow with materiel for the prosecution of its illegal war of aggression against Ukraine. This has been augmented by North Korea’s dispatch of at least [10,000 troops](#) to the Kursk region of Russia. This not only marks a clear escalation in

Pyongyang’s support for Moscow, but also likely furthers the [arms/technology transfer flowing into North Korea](#), which in turn complicates deterrence and warfighting by the US-South Korea combined forces. All of this is undergirded by a [newly forged Russia-North Korea military alliance](#), another element of the “axis of upheaval” destabilizing East Asia and sharpening the external security challenges faced by the US and South Korea.

US-South Korea Relations: South Korea Goes Rogue, the US Tees Up Trump 2.0



Figure 2 Lawmakers hold placards reading “Yoon Suk Yeol should resign” on 4 December. Photo: BBC News.

Following months of [mounting domestic political turmoil](#), at 10:23pm on December 3 South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol delivered a six-minute televised address in which he cited “legislative dictatorship,” “pro-DPRK, anti-state forces,” and a raft of political subversion measures by the opposition Democratic Party as justification for an “[emergency martial law](#)” decree that went into effect at 11pm. There [seems to be](#) no policy, political, or constitutional foundation or justification for this measure, which was thus illegal, illegitimate, and authoritarian.

The thought process behind Yoon’s decision remains unclear, as does his state of mind at the time and his ostensible endgame for martial law. What is clear, however, is that Yoon—and his co-conspirators, especially the minister of national defense, Kim Yong-hyun—intended to annul democratic processes and civil constitutional protections, arrogate all political and executive power to Yoon and the military, and suspend the national assembly for an indeterminate period of time. More darkly still, Yoon and Kim apparently instructed special operations forces to [arrest senior legislators and party leaders](#)—including the conservative

People Power Party head, Han Dong-hoon—and detain them at a government facility. This is especially noteworthy, given South Korea's authoritarian history of black site torture of political dissidents.

However, the whole martial law circus collapsed within hours, as legislators managed to reach the interior of the national assembly building and convene a plenary session, during which they voted 190-0 to rescind martial law (in accord with the South Korean constitution). Although several hundred soldiers entered the national assembly building in an attempt to stop the proceedings, their efforts were clearly half-hearted, as were their efforts to prevent legislators from entering the national assembly building in the first place. Testimony from the deployed special operations commander revealed that [he ordered soldiers](#) participating in martial law enforcement not to use live rounds in their weapons, enter the plenary chamber of the national assembly, or hurt civilians. That—along with the fact that Yoon, the defense minister, and martial law commander general Park An-su did not control major media outlets—strongly suggests that the coup attempt was badly conceived and organized. It seems that Yoon had little support from and control over the military.

In any event, by 2 am on December 4 the military [withdrew to its normal posts and Yoon conceded](#) to the national assembly vote by announcing the retraction of the martial law decree, a decision that was ratified by cabinet ministers meeting in their State Council formation. Thus, by the morning of December 4 the farcical [state of exception](#) was over, with Yoon, conspiring ministers and military, and elite hard-right conservative supporters suffering a humiliating defeat. The consequences of this attempted self-coup d'état—among the most bizarre and embarrassing in modern political history—are still far from clear, but the most likely outcome is that [Yoon will no longer be president](#). Yoon was impeached by the National Assembly on December 14, with his final removal from office now dependent on a Constitutional Court decision in 2025. The entire cabinet and suite of presidential senior officials have [tendered their resignations](#) (although many remain in post pending acceptance of their resignation), the ruling conservative People Power Party (PPP) is discredited and in shambles, and South Korea is engulfed in political chaos. Kim Yong-hyun (the

now former defense minister) is [under arrest for insurrection](#). Other cabinet ministers, senior officials, and military and police officers [are likely to follow](#). The [police](#) and special prosecutor's offices are now [investigating Yoon himself for insurrection](#), conviction for which in South Korea carries penalties ranging to the death sentence.

As of the time of writing, the political situation in South Korea is [chaotic and fluid](#). Yoon eventually indicated the inevitability of the legislative impeachment process and his will to fight post-impeachment conviction in the Constitutional Court, but at first attempted to remain in office with the support of PPP lawmakers who initially [refused to support impeachment](#) because it would (following potential conviction) lead to a snap presidential election that a candidate from the hated progressive Democratic Party would likely win. Worse still, during the first chaotic week after martial law, the PPP attempted to stay in power through [a byzantine](#) and extra-constitutional plan for Yoon to surrender his administrative power to an opaque governing committee consisting of the prime minister (Han Duk-soo) and party politicians (notably Han Dong-hoon). At best this created a power vacuum; at worst, there was for several days an unelected cabal of conservative PPP members and the prime minister [engaged in a second coup d'état](#). Both situations represented security risk on the peninsula. For instance, it was uncertain who de facto held the top position in the South Korean chain of military command. If North Korea had attacked, it is unknown who would have been able to command the South Korean military.

Even if South Korea's politics are restored quickly to a normal democratic state of the rule of law, Yoon's attempted self-coup (and the apparent follow-on coup attempt by his party) will leave scars, including in terms of relations with the US. To begin with, the military dimension of the alliance was implicated in a way that casts major doubt on South Korea's reliability as a partner. Yoon's presidential office apparently [did not inform the US in advance](#) of the martial law decree. Chief among those uninformed was US Forces Korea and Combined Forces Command general Paul LaCamera, which means that the US unified combatant commander on the Korean Peninsula was unaware in advance of a deeply destabilizing political shift that (a) deployed allied South Korean forces under US-ROK combined wartime

operational control, and (b) could have incentivized North Korea to opportunistically attack South Korea (for instance, by taking disputed islands south of Northern Limit Line) without US and South Korean military units being on heightened alert. Trust issues may also form at the civilian level of armed forces control, which could both call into question current mil-mil arrangements and make future high-level military cooperation a more difficult sell in Washington. Indeed, the US has [suspended](#) the meeting of the Nuclear Consultative Group, designed to give South Korean defense leaders a stake in and insight into US nuclear strategy regarding the Korean Peninsula.

On the diplomatic-political level, the Biden administration is [clearly upset](#), although it took some time for US messaging to indicate as much apoplexy for the desecration of democracy as for the destabilizing of US-South Korea relations. [Initial public statements](#)—from the US ambassador, as well as administration spokespeople—expressed relief at the return to democratic processes post-martial law, eschewing direct criticism of Yoon for the self-coup attempt. Only two days later did deputy secretary of state Kurt Campbell issue a statement criticizing Yoon for a [“badly misjudged,” “illegitimate” act](#). Even after the blunter criticism of Yoon, however, secretary of state Antony Blinken (in the [readout](#) of a meeting with South Korean foreign minister Cho Tae-yul) and Vedant Patel (deputy state department spokesperson) provided boilerplate answers about South Korean democratic resilience and US-South Korea ironclad democratic values, failing to openly criticize Yoon and the conservative PPP. Perhaps more forceful communications occurred in private, but at least in public the US has hardly appeared to meaningfully demand democratic accountability and the rule of law from its ally. What the incoming Trump administration would think about the situation in Seoul is unknown.

The US’s weak public support for democracy during this South Korean crisis will hardly come as a surprise to Cold War political history students, but the Biden administration has spent an extraordinary amount of time extolling its alliances (including with South Korea) as “values-based,” “like-minded” defenders of democracy and the rule of law. In the future, this rhetoric will [ring hollow](#), as will, obviously,

South Korean invocation of democratic values as support for its foreign policy choices.

The political fallout of South Korea’s chaotic situation will likely include a progressive party president succeeding Yoon—and sooner rather than later, although the Constitutional Court’s impeachment review could last for months, leaving a leadership vacuum. This has dramatic consequences for the US-South Korea alliance. There was a reasonable expectation that Yoon and Trump would be able to cooperate in numerous areas, including advancing the Washington Declaration and the Camp David summit agenda of US-South Korea-Japan trilateralism, both of which are among the crown jewels of Yoon’s (and Biden’s) foreign and security policy accomplishments. The hope—from both the Biden and Yoon administrations—was that Yoon and Biden’s successor (either Trump or Harris) would have at least two years (the remainder of Yoon’s term) to institutionalize these accomplishments before the possibility that the South Korean presidency would likely swing in 2027 to a progressive president less prone to be naturally supportive of these directions in the development of the alliance.

With Yoon likely soon out of office, and a progressive possibly taking over the presidency, the window for institutionalization of the Washington Declaration and Camp David trilateralism is likely to be much reduced. Despite the [ongoing establishment](#) of a secretariat, the trilateral relation with Japan is especially vulnerable, as the progressive Democratic Party has a deep-seated distrust of Japan and typically vilifies Tokyo at every opportunity, including opportunistically for domestic political benefit. This would obviously greatly undermine the ability of Japan to cooperate with South Korea, even in a trilateral context and *a fortiori* given new Japanese prime minister Shigeru Ishiba’s weak political position.

For most *Comparative Connections* reporting periods, the election of a US president—especially one as volatile and skeptical of alliances as Donald Trump—would top the agenda. Yoon’s inexplicably mad self-coup attempt momentarily relegates [Trump’s November election](#) victory to second place, but the incoming Trump administration will of course have major short-, medium-, and long-term impacts on the US-South Korea alliance.

Four cardinal rules apply to analysis of Trump's foreign policy. 1) Trump is risk-acceptant, with a wider (compared to most presidents) aperture of conceivable action; 2) Trump is generally hostile to alliances; 3) Trump is highly transactional in his dealings; and 4) the people surrounding Trump play a critical role in all of the above (as Trump is unstudied/unfocused and thus reliant on aides, swayable such that who influences him at the beginning and end of the day is important, and has senior officials who can both catalyze and obstruct his decisions). All of this was on display vis-à-vis South Korea during Trump's first term, during which he met with Kim Jong Un on multiple occasions, denigrated the US-South Korea alliance, attempted to extort massive host nation support payment increases, and was slow-walked by his National Security Council on negotiations with North Korea.

The [Trump 2.0 administration](#) will doubtless display differences to the first administration, but Trump's campaign rhetoric (commenting on ingrate alliance partners, extolling tariffs, etc.) was largely consonant with expectations based on past behavior. His [personnel decisions](#) since election victory also hint at continuity with his first administration.

So far, much of the [expert discourse](#) regarding Seoul-Washington relations under Trump 2.0 has speculated on the incoming administration's potential willingness to:

- force renegotiation of the SMA (Special Measures Agreement) or damage the KORUS Free Trade Agreement (including via tariffs),
- withdraw troops from the Korean Peninsula and/or otherwise undermine the US-South Korea alliance,
- weaken US extended nuclear deterrence for South Korea,
- neglect the blossoming US-South Korea-Japan trilateral relationship,
- allow South Korea to develop nuclear weapons,
- provoke crisis with North Korea, thus creating instability for South Korea,
- or negotiate an unfavorable deal (from South Korea's perspective) with North Korea regarding Pyongyang's nuclear arsenal.

These are all areas deserving attention, although some areas (SMA renegotiation, tariffs) are more likely to occur than others (US troop withdrawal, unfavorable nuclear deal). And of course the aftermath of the self-coup attempt in South Korea will mean that the trilateral with Japan will be undermined, while the already low probability of US support for Seoul's nuclear weapon development should be nearly nil.

There is one dynamic of the US-South Korea alliance that is highly likely to emerge during a second Trump administration: [increasing pressure on the alliance](#) due to sharpening US-China rivalry. The new Trump administration—both in policy statements and presidential nominations for security/defense/foreign policy cabinet positions—has signaled that China will receive extraordinarily high priority from a group of hawks. Trump's new national security advisor, Michael Waltz, as well as his deputy, Alex Wong, are known China hawks. The same holds for Marco Rubio and John Ratcliffe, the respective choices for secretary of state and director of the CIA. Pete Hegseth, the controversial and inexperienced selection for defense secretary, also has a reputation for a tough line on China.

It is very probable that US allies and partners will be expected to join efforts to counter China. This could involve a range of actions, including military aspects of the US-South Korea alliance. Although previous US presidential administrations have taken small, quiet steps to begin this expansion of the focus of the US-South Korea alliance, Trump and his team will probably push farther and faster. To wit, incoming NSA Waltz is on the record in a 2022 House of Representatives hearing demanding to know if South Korea would allow US forces stationed on the Korean Peninsula to be used in a Taiwan contingency. In this vein, the Trump administration may push for US Forces Korea to be postured more for a role in a regional (read: China-focused) conflict, rather than only for defense of South Korea. Trump may also press for US assets to be allowed to use airfields, ports, and sustainment facilities on the Korean Peninsula as a part of US efforts to respond to a China-Taiwan conflict.

China would, of course, respond angrily, and thus all of this would be very difficult even with a conservative, pro-US, anti-China Yoon administration. It will be even more contentious

with a progressive, US-lukewarm, China-moderate Democratic Party president in office. Arguably the situation would be even worse for South Korea if Yoon's impeachment case before the Constitutional Court drags on for the first months of Trump's presidency, leaving a leadership vacuum that the US could exploit.

Although less likely, another way in which US-China rivalry under Trump may affect the US-South Korea alliance is that Trump 2.0 may attempt to weaken China's regional position via Washington's interactions with Pyongyang. If the Trump administration were interested in isolating China, one option might be to drive wedges between Beijing and Pyongyang (China's only de jure ally). It is unclear what it would take for such a deal to emerge—presumably both the US and North Korea would have to make some sacrifices on priority issues in order to create a rapprochement sufficient to significantly weaken North Korea's ties to China—but Trump is noted for his interest in attempting big, strategic alignment-inducing negotiations, including with dictators and other odious leaders. In the case of North Korea, such an attempt by the new Trump administration would likely implicate some form of de facto recognition of the Kim regime's nuclear arsenal, which would greatly complicate South Korea's security in the medium-/long-term, as well as upend decades of inter-Korean policy. It is unclear how a progressive South Korean president would deal with this situation, but in principle Seoul's progressives support US diplomatic outreach to Pyongyang.

Although a bit convoluted, Trump's apparent desire to end the war in Ukraine also has an effect on South Korea. To wit, a primary strategic reason that Trump (along with some senior officials) wants to reduce support for Ukraine (and thus force it to the negotiating table) is so that the US can better focus on China, yet this has major indirect implications for North Korea. Namely, North Korea is currently enjoying a splendid emergence from diplomatic and economic isolation (as well as over-reliance on China) due to Pyongyang's new alliance and strategic partnership with Moscow (see section below), which is providing North Korea with cash, food, energy, and military-technology support in exchange for artillery shells, short-range ballistic missiles, and troops. If the war in Ukraine were to end due to US pressure, this could dramatically reduce (from Moscow's perspective) the need for

Russia-North Korea cooperation, which would be a positive for South Korea.

In the end, Trump 2.0 is likely to be unpredictable. Some of the above may happen, or all of it, or none.

Finally, one notes that during the June-December reporting period all the typical [alliance management](#), [coordinated foreign/security policy](#), [military exercises](#), cultural exchange, and [trade and investment](#) activities (see chronology below) took place between the US and South Korea—right up until all hell broke loose on December 3 and retroactively cast doubt on the underpinnings of the relationship.

US-North Korea Relations: North Korea Goes Supervillain



Figure 3 North Korean leader Kim Jong Un walks with President Trump north of the military demarcation line that divides North and South Korea, in the Joint Security Area of Panmunjom in the Demilitarized Zone, on Sunday. Photo: Brendan Smialowski/AFP/Getty Images.

The case for re-electing Donald Trump, originally the consummate political outsider, has largely relied on his willingness to do what other presidential candidates will not. This is true for both domestic and foreign policy, with Trump's outreach to North Korea in the 2018-19 period being especially noteworthy. After all, North Korea went from conducting regular medium-/long-range missile and nuclear tests up through the end of 2017 to their graduated cessation following Trump's denunciations, vows to "[completely destroy](#)" North Korea should it threaten the US, and his willingness to resolve their disputes over dialogue. Whatever one thinks of Trump's direct outreach to North Korean leader Kim Jong Un, such testing ostensibly halted by early 2018, before missile testing slowly resumed after the failed 2019 Hanoi summit and then picked up pace under

Joe Biden, a president North Korea has largely regarded as not worth addressing.

Or so the story goes. In reality, North Korea, having demonstrated the increased potency of its nuclear arms and the ability to reach any part of the continental US via its long-range missiles—and seeing potentially pliant administrations in both Washington and Seoul—probably broke its diplomatic isolation in 2018 for reasons all its own. The failure of the 2019 Hanoi summit seemingly indicates that Trump’s vision of himself as a tough negotiator did not proceed him, and that Kim was furious that he did [not receive a favorable deal](#).

This matters in assessing events from the last half of 2024 because—with the Biden interlude giving way to Trump 2.0—hopes of a return to the summitry of Singapore and Hanoi (with a hopefully better outcome) are [already circulating](#), at least among those inclined to support diplomacy with Pyongyang. For others, this provokes worry—the Washington “blob” is [nervous](#) about the prospect, while the international press has already reported on South Korea’s [concerns](#) that Trump may seek to bypass them. Indeed reports have floated that some on the Trump team may indeed [favor something](#) of that nature. It is unclear how this would play out if South Korea were to soon have a left-leaning president rather than Yoon, who is skeptical of engagement with North Korea.

But the North Korea of 2018 is not the North Korea of 2024 or 2025. Its [nuclear](#) and missile programs have [grown considerably](#) (with significant ballistic missile (and [rocket](#)) testing and demonstration taking place during this reporting period), including a new Hwasong-19 ICBM [seemingly successfully launched](#) in November. Pyongyang now [refers](#) to South Korea as a hostile state, rather than a misguided brother state to be led toward unification (an attitude backed up by a [hybrid war campaign](#) of trash-filled balloons floated over South Korea). To be sure, Pyongyang’s [harsh messaging](#) toward Washington and Seoul has been consistent ([even rising](#)), but its diplomatic priorities have shifted. As noted in this issue’s China-Korea chapter, Pyongyang’s direct outreach to Beijing atrophied in the latter half of this year, and the Kim regime thus far has not deigned to respond to Trump’s electoral victory—a statement not long after the election result in which Kim called for [“limitless” nuclear expansion](#) to counter the US is the

closest he has come to acknowledging the return of his old pen pal.

Both elements of this diplomatic shift likely have a common root. North Korea has found a kindred spirit in Vladimir Putin’s Russia, also regarded as an international pariah and revisionist power, and the two have developed a mutually beneficial arrangement that in the short-term goes beyond what they can get from China, much less the US. In the first reporting period of 2024, North Korea was already engaged in large-scale arms sales (notably artillery shells and missiles/rockets) to Russia in exchange for [fuel](#), [funding](#), modern (by North Korean standards) [fighter jets](#), and [missile defense support](#). This list reflects what is more or less publicly known, but informed speculation has broached the possibility of [additional](#) in-kind military assistance, including military satellite and re-entry vehicle technology, help with submarine design, and support in building out North Korea’s defense industrial base.

The June–December reporting period saw this relation deepen further. First, North Korea dispatched at least 10,000 troops to Russia to support Putin’s war against Ukraine. The [current status](#) of those troops—their training level and combat readiness, deployment areas, warfighting role, tactical and strategic value, etc.—is unknown, but the assumption is that they are likely engaged in the Kursk region of Russia in the counter-offensive to push back Ukraine’s incursion. Second, North Korea and Russia have strengthened their partnership diplomatically, signing a bona fide treaty alliance in June ([during a Putin-Kim summit in North Korea](#)), which came into force on December 4. Whether this alliance is sustainable—or rather an artifact of the Russia-Ukraine war, both states’ sanctions challenges, and perceived shared threats—remains to be seen, as dictators are not historically adept at long-term cooperation. For the moment, however, the Moscow-Pyongyang alliance helps both states alleviate their isolation. The US and South Korea have [expressed deep](#) concern about the advancement of North Korea-Russia relations, as it links together the Euro-Atlantic and East Asian theaters in ways that threaten both the US and South Korea individually and as alliance partners.

As mentioned above, Trump’s return to office likely means a different level and time horizon

of US support for Ukraine, with the goal being to force an end to the war sooner rather than later (Ukraine may have to accept a settlement allowing Moscow to retain some of the territory the Russian army has seized). The knock-on effect may be that the Moscow-Pyongyang arms transfer ecosystem could dry up, which would be a positive for the US-South Korea alliance, insofar as that would presumably result in North Korea advancing more slowly on selected military programs. How one views this from Pyongyang would be a matter of perspective. On the one hand, there might be disappointment that the arrangement would become less beneficial; on the other hand, one could say that Kim rolled the dice on support for Putin and won.

Yoon Suk Yeol's botched martial law declaration was not the only "December surprise" relevant to the Korean Peninsula and its diplomatic outlook. North Korea actually took an (unsurprisingly) cautious approach to the South Korean crisis, before eventually [using it](#) for domestic propaganda. But developments in the Middle East surely caught Pyongyang's eye as well. Namely, the North's sometime partner and fellow Russian client state, Bashar al-Assad's Syria, fell to rebel forces on December 7, nearly 14 years after the Syrian Civil War began. Assad had over time regained control of his state, and stamped out resistance with Russian help, and that had persisted... until suddenly it didn't.

A swift new rebel offensive swept through Aleppo and Homs before continuing into the Syrian capital and sending Assad [fleeing to Moscow](#). In addition to Israel's role in decimating Hezbollah and punishing Iran, the speed of the change demonstrated the extent to which Assad had relied on Russian support, which had dried up due to Russian forces being tied down in Ukraine's eastern front. Russia's reputation as a revisionist power able to halt the progress of the international order (and in some cases roll it back) while supporting dictatorial partners, has taken a [major hit](#). Pyongyang was doubtless watching with some concerned interest.

Given that, [rumors of Kim's dissatisfaction](#) as to how his troops have been employed in Ukraine, and [Russia's heavy losses](#) during its recent offensive, one may conclude that the emerging Russia-North Korea axis might not be built for the long term. Pyongyang has [historically profited](#) from Beijing's and Moscow's

willingness to compete for its attention, and, given the failure of its outreach to the US—another potential counterweight to China—in 2019, Kim appears to have reverted to the old habit of asking Russia to provide what China will not. If Moscow does not reverse its current losing streak, Pyongyang may be back on the market for new partners, even if the "new" partner is the same one that left Kim Jong Un at the altar in Hanoi.

In short: *Comparative Connections* has gone the length of the entire Biden administration with no meaningful diplomatic interactions between North Korea and the US to report. The Trump redux offers some possibilities of renewed outreach, but readers are urged to temper their expectations. Should it take place it will largely depend on the wishes of Kim, rather than Trump, and thus on how Kim assesses the options available to him.

Conclusion: Into the Unknown



Figure 4 U.S. President Joe Biden, Japan's Prime Minister Fumio Kishida, and South Korea's President Yoon Suk Yeol on the day of trilateral engagement during the G7 Summit in Hiroshima, Japan, on May 21, 2023. Photo: Jonathan Ernst/Reuters.

This issue closes the book on *Comparative Connections* as an outlet for detailed triannual updates on bilateral relations in the Indo-Pacific. Few bilaterals have been harder to document than that of the US and North Korea, the "rogue state" par excellence that prides itself on its willingness to withstand pressure from the world's strongest military power for decades. There has, on the other hand, been much to document in the relations between the US and South Korea, one of Washington's oldest alliances in Asia, but one beset by fluctuations, such as progressive parties skeptical of long-term reliance on the US and conservative parties

that, while usually reliable US partners, retain disconcerting ties to the country's period of military rule that they have, based on recent events, not put completely behind them. Pacific Forum has treated *Comparative Connections* as an extension of its overall mission, which is to foster dialogue between the US and the major players in Indo-Pacific diplomacy, including both the governments and publics in countries considered friendly, hostile, or ambivalent toward US interests. Doing so has required rigorous attention to detail, as captured in our meticulous attention to bilateral events, but also a commitment to honesty when it comes to US interests and values, some of which have left the US at odds with even long-term partners.

In that spirit: Much of the US foreign policy community welcomed the election of Yoon Suk Yeol in 2022, given his commitment to alignment with the US on regional security issues, openness to engagement with Japan, and well-deserved skepticism toward China. This welcome came despite the very clear flaws in Yoon as a candidate and statesman, manifest in his consistently low approval ratings, pushed down by his swirling scandals and gaffes. Now that Yoon has seemingly reached back to the spirit of [Yushin](#) to overthrow South Korea's constitutional order—and revealed the deep contempt the military and even his own party have for him—it appears the effort spent on him by the Biden and Kishida administrations to deepen trilateral cooperation will not produce the expected benefits. Donald Trump's return to office, along with a likely progressive successor to Yoon, will probably push Seoul toward greater autonomy in diplomatic and military affairs. The responsibility of the US foreign policy community may now shift to making this transition a smooth one—and preventing the outright collapse of Seoul-Tokyo ties. Those distraught by the return of the Democratic Party to power in Seoul can take comfort in that it is only popular relative to Yoon's party, and even that may be short-lived.

North Korea will remain a thorny diplomatic issue regardless of how relations with Russia evolve, and whether Pyongyang reaches out to the Trump administration (much less reaches a deal). Even if Trump and Kim forge an understanding that lowers tensions for a time, North Korea has a decades-long history of hostility toward the US, Japan, and conservative elements in South Korea that will die hard.

Trump, and all others who attempt to work with Pyongyang, should be prepared for tensions over the long term.

Administrations change, as will the format of *Comparative Connections*, but Pacific Forum's mission will not.

CHRONOLOGY OF US-KOREA RELATIONS

MAY-DECEMBER 2024

May 1, 2024: *TIME* [reports](#) that former President Donald Trump has suggested that the United States could pull out its troops stationed in South Korea if the Asian ally does not make more financial contributions to support them.

May 3, 2024: *NK Pro* [reports](#) that North Korea has conducted a rocket engine test as Pyongyang intensifies preparations for its first satellite launch of the year.

May 7, 2024: Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman Admiral Kim Myung-soo [meets](#) with the head of the US Space Force to discuss ways to bolster their joint capabilities in space to fend off evolving North Korean threats.

May 7, 2024: South Korean government [submits](#) its comments to the US Department of Commerce as the department has requested public feedback on its rule-making process designed to tackle potential security risks stemming from "connected vehicles" that use technology from China and other countries of concern.

May 15, 2024: Daniel Kritenbrink, assistant secretary of state for East Asian and Pacific affairs, [says](#) the United States has no choice but to "double down" on security cooperation with South Korea and Japan, and the enforcement of anti-North Korea sanctions due to the recalcitrant regime's rejection of dialogue.

May 15, 2024: US Air Force in South Korea [releases](#) details of a briefing on Chinese missile threats targeting US bases in South Korea and Japan and the artificial islands constructed by China in the South China Sea.

May 15, 2024: UN experts [report](#) that North Korea laundered \$147.5 million through virtual currency platform Tornado Cash in March after stealing it last year from a cryptocurrency exchange.

May 15, 2024: *KCNA* [reports](#) that North Korean leader Kim Jong Un has inspected a new tactical missile weapons system and called for an "epochal change" in war preparations by attaining arms production plans.

May 15, 2024: Cerberus Capital Management [rebuilds](#) Subic Bay's shipbuilding capacity as it intends to hire 2,000 workers after firming a long-term lease agreement with Agila Subic Compass, in partnership with leading maritime manufacturer HD Korea Shipbuilding and Offshore Engineering (HD Hyundai KSOE).

May 18, 2024: A committee of the US House of Representatives [adopts](#) a resolution recognizing the importance of trilateral cooperation among South Korea, the United States and Japan, in a sign of congressional support for three-way engagement.

May 18, 2024: United States [condemns](#) North Korea's launch of ballistic missiles equipped with a new 'autonomous' navigation system, citing it as a violation of U.N. Security Council resolutions.

May 19, 2024: CJ Logistics Corporation, South Korea's biggest logistics company, [says](#) it will build a cold chain logistics center in the United States as part of efforts to expand its foothold in the North American market.

May 20, 2024: North Korea [threatens](#) to take powerful deterrent action against what it claims is the US nuclear threat, denouncing Washington for its recent subcritical nuclear test.

May 20, 2024: South Korea's leading carrier Korean Air [says](#) it has partnered with Amazon Web Services to develop an artificial intelligence-based platform to improve customer convenience.

May 20, 2024: Tesla [pushes](#) to slim down its workforce in Korea in line with its massive global layoff announcement as electric car demand slows, putting Supercharger projects on hold.

May 21, 2024: South Korea and the United States [set](#) to begin a second round of negotiations on sharing the costs for stationing American troops.

May 31, 2024: North Korea [denounces](#) a US reconnaissance aircraft's flight over South Korea, warning that its enemies could face an "unpredictable disaster" if they continue reckless military moves.

June 1, 2024: US Deputy Secretary of State Kurt Campbell [says](#) South Korea, the United States and Japan are pushing to form a coordinating body for trilateral cooperation amid persistent North Korean threats and other challenges.

June 4, 2024: South Korea [declares](#) its plans to resume all military activities near the Military Demarcation Line and its northwestern border islands for the first time in more than five years, with the full suspension of a 2018 inter-Korean tension reduction pact.

June 4, 2024: China's embassy in South Korea [expresses](#) "strong dissatisfaction and firm opposition" to South Korea's "consecutive erroneous remarks" regarding the Taiwan issue, made in coordination with the United States and Japan, which oppose any unilateral attempts to change the status quo in Indo-Pacific waters and emphasize the importance of countering unlawful maritime claims in the South China Sea.

June 4, 2024: *TIME* [reports](#) that US President Joe Biden stated that North Korea's security challenge remains "equally as threatening as it was before," seemingly rejecting the idea that Pyongyang's threat has intensified during his presidency.

June 4, 2024: South Korean defense minister Shin Won-sik and Japanese defense minister Kihara Minoru [reach](#) an agreement on the margins of the Shangri-La Dialogue in Singapore

to normalize bilateral defense ties, which have been essentially on ice since 2018.

June 5, 2024: Newt Gingrich, a former US House Speaker, [asserts](#) that if former President Donald Trump is reelected, he has no intention of leaving South Korea "undefended," though he may expect the "wealthy" ally to contribute more to its own security.

June 5, 2024: *NK News* [reports](#) that a US B-1B bomber dropped precision bombs during joint drills with South Korea for the first time in seven years, marking a show of force toward North Korea amid heightened border tensions following DPRK balloon launches.

June 7, 2024: A South Korean fleet of warships and maritime aircraft and around 840 Navy and Marine troops [departs](#) for Hawaii to join a US-led multinational maritime exercise.

June 13, 2024: Samsung Electronics Chairman Lee Jae-yong [meets](#) with the chief executives of Meta Platforms, Amazon, and Qualcomm in the United States to discuss future technologies and potential business collaborations.

June 14, 2024: *Beyond Parallel* [reports](#) movements of North Korean ballistic missile submarines at a shipyard on the country's east coast, suggesting they may indicate the start of submarine trials or preparations for a submarine-launched ballistic missile test.

June 15, 2024: US House of Representatives [approves](#) an annual defense policy bill that calls for maintaining 28,500 American troops in South Korea and reaffirming the United States' deterrence commitment to the Asian ally.

June 18, 2024: NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg [calls](#) for close ties with Indo-Pacific partners amid Russia's growing alignment with North Korea, China and its other "authoritarian" regimes.

June 18, 2024: South Korea and China [hold](#) "two plus two" talks of their senior foreign and defense officials amid Russian President Vladimir Putin's imminent visit to North Korea.

June 18, 2024: South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol [meets](#) with Georgia Gov. Brian Kemp, seeking his support for Korean electric vehicle and battery companies operating in the state.

June 19, 2024: Russian President Vladimir Putin and North Korean leader Kim Jong Un [sign](#) a comprehensive treaty outlining mutual defense obligations, with President Putin stating that the agreement includes provisions for "assistance in the event of aggression," as North Korea reportedly provides arms for use in the conflict in Ukraine.

June 19, 2024: LG Electronics [says](#) it has partnered with ChargePoint Incorporation, the leading supplier of charging solutions for electric vehicles in North America, to expand its EV charging business on a global basis.

June 20, 2024: South Korea [declares](#) that it will reconsider its stance on arms supply to Ukraine after North Korea and Russia signed a treaty that involves a mutual pledge to provide immediate military assistance if one of them is attacked.

June 20, 2024: KCNA [discloses](#) the full text of the comprehensive strategic partnership treaty that North Korean leader Kim Jong Un and Russian President Vladimir Putin signed after their talks in Pyongyang, which includes an agreement to provide military assistance "without delay" if either party is attacked.

June 21, 2024: United States [takes](#) South Korea off its list of countries to monitor for their foreign exchange policies for the second consecutive time while adding Japan to the list.

June 22, 2024: South Korean Foreign Minister Cho Tae-yul [says](#) South Korea, the United States and Japan have agreed on close security cooperation through "timely" consultation,

after Russia and North Korea signed a new security treaty during a summit in Pyongyang.

June 24, 2024: Institute for National Security Strategy, a state-run think tank based in Seoul, [recommends](#) that South Korea consider diversifying its approach to addressing the North Korean nuclear issue, including the possibility of arming itself with nuclear weapons, in light of the signed comprehensive strategic partnership treaty between Pyongyang and Moscow.

June 24, 2024: USS Theodore Roosevelt aircraft carrier [arrives](#) on the Korean Peninsula in a show of force to deter North Korea, following the DPRK-Russian military pact and ahead of trilateral drills with Japan and South Korea.

June 25, 2024: South Korea and the United States [sign](#) a memorandum of understanding on cooperating in the exchange of diplomatic intelligence analyses.

June 26, 2024: North Koreans [vows](#) to "annihilate" America during anti-US rallies across the country, with state media reporting that 100,000 citizens attended an event in Pyongyang as the DPRK kicks off month of propaganda against the United States and South Korea.

June 27, 2024: United States, South Korea, and Japan [launch](#) the inaugural Freedom Edge drills, featuring multi-domain aerial and naval exercises, including a US aircraft carrier, to counter North Korean threats.

June 27, 2024: South Korea [launches](#) technology research centers at four US universities, including Yale University, Johns Hopkins University, Purdue University, and the Georgia Institute of Technology.

June 27, 2024: A survey conducted by the Korea Institute of National Unification (KINU) [reveals](#) that 44.6 percent of respondents favor the development and possession of an independent nuclear arsenal over maintaining the US military presence in South Korea, while 40.1 percent

prefer the opposite, reflecting a rise in support for an independent nuclear deterrent.

July 5, 2024: NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg [invites](#) the leaders of South Korea, Japan, Australia and New Zealand to the NATO summit for the third consecutive year to expand the security alliance's partnership with the countries in the Indo-Pacific region and to discuss with South Korea ways to enhance practical cooperation related to Ukraine.

July 5, 2024: South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol to [visit](#) US Indo-Pacific Command in Hawaii on July 8-9.

July 6, 2024: South Korea and the United States [head](#) for closer cooperation in military logistics and maintenance particularly in the event of a regional crisis.

July 6, 2024: NATO and its Indo-Pacific partners, including South Korea, [plan](#) to discuss resilience, support for Ukraine, disinformation, cybersecurity and emerging technologies during their summit in Washington.

July 8, 2024: South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol [travels](#) to the United States to attend a NATO summit in Washington, where he will address concerns over deepening defense cooperation between North Korea and Russia.

July 8, 2024: Republic of Korea Navy [assumes](#) the role of deputy commander in the US-led Rim of the Pacific (RIMPAC) maritime exercise near Hawaii, marking the first time South Korea has held this position in the large-scale multinational drills, a move aimed at demonstrating the strength of the US-ROK alliance to North Korea.

July 8, 2024: South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol [plans](#) to hold more than 10 bilateral meetings with his counterparts on the sidelines of the NATO summit, including discussions with leaders from the Czech Republic, Sweden, Finland, and Norway.

July 10, 2024: Jung Pak [leaves](#) the post as the US senior official for North Korea, adding to uncertainty over Washington's diplomatic efforts to reengage with a recalcitrant Pyongyang.

July 10, 2024: South Korean Navy [holds](#) air defense drills with an SM-2 interceptor during a US-led multinational exercise in waters near Hawaii amid efforts to bolster response capabilities against North Korean missile threats.

July 10, 2024: South Korea and the United States [hold](#) fifth round of negotiations on the sharing of the cost for the upkeep of US Forces Korea.

July 17, 2024: Samsung Electronics [launches](#) an energy management service for electric vehicles of Tesla in the United States as part of their strategic partnership aimed at enhancing connectivity.

July 19, 2024: Former US President Donald Trump [boasts](#) about his personal ties with North Korean leader Kim Jong Un, suggesting that the recalcitrant leader might "miss" him and welcome his return to office, in an apparent signal of his desire to resume dialogue with Pyongyang.

July 19, 2024: The opposition party in South Korea [criticizes](#) the presidential office for suggesting that the preceding Moon Jae-in administration bears responsibility for the exposure of South Korean intelligence operations detailed in the indictment of Sue Mi Terry, a renowned foreign policy expert and former US Central Intelligence Agency official, who was charged in New York this week with acting as an unregistered agent for the South Korean government from 2013 to 2023.

July 21, 2024: South Korea's military [blares](#) K-pop songs and news through its loudspeakers across the border with North Korea on Sunday as it steps up its psychological campaign in response to North Korea's repeated launches of trash balloons.

July 22, 2024: Presidential office of the Yoon Suk Yeol administration [says](#) South Korea will continue to closely work with the United States regardless of the outcome of the upcoming presidential election as support for the bilateral alliance is "bipartisan."

July 22, 2024: US President Joe Biden [drops out](#) of the presidential race, officially endorsing Vice President Kamala Harris to become the Democratic Party's nominee to take on former President Donald Trump in the November 5 general election.

July 22, 2024: Korean Air [announces](#) that it has signed a memorandum of understanding with Boeing to buy up to 50 airplanes, including 20 777-9s, in a bid to upgrade its fleet.

July 23, 2024: Ri Il-gyu, a former counselor of political affairs at the North Korean embassy in Cuba, [says](#) scores of North Koreans staying abroad, such as diplomats and overseas workers, have attempted to defect to South Korea since North Korea began undoing its COVID-19 border closure.

July 24, 2024: Camille Dawson, deputy assistant secretary of state for East Asian and Pacific affairs, [says](#) that South Korea has been discussed as a potential future partner for cooperation with issue-specific working groups of the Quad forum.

July 31, 2024: Russia [deploys](#) a high-tech North Korean guided missile system in the Ukraine war, signaling a remarkable evolution in arms trade.

Aug. 1, 2024: US Forces Korea commander general Paul LaCamera [says](#) South Korea and the United States will not incorporate a North Korean nuclear attack scenario into their upcoming major military exercise, despite expectations that the exercise would feature the nuclear crisis dimension for the first time.

Aug. 5, 2024: KCNA [reports](#) that North Korean leader Kim Jong Un has attended a ceremony to commemorate the transfer of a new-type tactical ballistic missile weapon system, which serves as the "pivot military hardware" in the armed forces.

Aug. 6, 2024: US Department of Commerce [announces](#) that SK Hynix secured \$450 million in grants for its \$3.9 billion chip-packaging facility in Indiana.

Aug. 9, 2024: United States [announces](#) a conditional commitment for a loan guarantee of up to \$1.45 billion to Hanwha Qcells to support the South Korean company's effort to build a solar supply chain facility in Georgia.

Aug. 9, 2024: South Korea and the United States [agree](#) to boost clean energy cooperation by holding regular dialogues and bolstering public-private partnerships, as the two countries aim to strengthen ties in energy security and carbon reduction.

Aug. 20, 2024: South Korea [prepares](#) to purchase \$3.5 billion worth of US Apache attack helicopters following US approval, as both nations navigate defense cost-sharing negotiations to mitigate uncertainties ahead of the US presidential election in November, 2024.

Aug. 24, 2024: North Korea [lashes out](#) at a revised US nuclear strategy plan, approved by President Biden in March to counter China's growing nuclear threats and potential coordination with North Korea and Russia, vowing to further strengthen its nuclear capability.

Aug. 24, 2024: Presidential office of the Yoon Suk Yeol administration [says](#) discussions with the US government taking place to resolve a dispute between the two countries' companies over a nuclear power plant construction project in the Czech Republic.

Aug. 25, 2024: South Korea and the United States [prepare](#) to begin their large-scale amphibious landing exercise in the southeastern city of Pohang and the eastern coast to build up the allies' combat readiness posture and interoperability.

Aug. 26, 2024: South Korea and the United States [begin](#) a joint live-fire aerial exercise to reinforce capabilities to counter North Korean threats.

Aug. 27, 2024: Associated Press [reports](#) that a US federal agency plans to reexamine its environmental permit for an electric vehicle factory of South Korea's Hyundai Motor in Georgia after conservationists claimed regulators failed to properly review the plant's impact on the local water supply.

Aug. 27, 2024: US nuclear energy firm Westinghouse Electric [files](#) an appeal with the Czech Republic to protest the decision to select a South Korean company as the preferred bidder to build two nuclear power units in the Central European country.

Aug. 28, 2024: Pentagon press secretary Major General Pat Ryder [says](#) that the US takes North Korea's "suicide drones" threats seriously, reaffirming its commitment to regional security in cooperation with South Korea and other allies, following reports that Kim Jong Un oversaw drone tests to enhance war preparedness.

Aug. 28, 2024: The deputy nuclear envoys of South Korea and the United States [discuss](#) ways to work together to cut off North Korea's sanctions-evading funding channels, such as illegal cyberactivities and ship-to-ship transfers.

Aug. 28, 2024: KCNA [reports](#) that North Korean leader Kim Jong Un has overseen a test-fire of a 240mm multiple rocket launcher with a new guidance system amid speculation that the new artillery system could be provided to Russia for use in its war with Ukraine.

Aug. 28, 2024: Samsung SDI and General Motors [plan](#) to jointly invest \$3.5 billion to build a battery plant in Indiana despite the global slowdown in EV sales.

Sep. 4, 2024: First Vice Foreign Minister Kim Hong-kyun [meets](#) with US Deputy Secretary of State Kurt Campbell in Washington to discuss the bilateral alliance, North Korea and other issues.

Sep. 4, 2024: United States [reiterates](#) that it will continue efforts to hold North Korea accountable for its support for Russia's war in Ukraine, as concerns linger that arms transactions between Pyongyang and Moscow could prolong the war in the war-torn Eastern European nation.

Sep. 5, 2024: NK News [reports](#) that major construction at North Korea's Thaesong Machine Factory, a key site for ICBM production, reflects efforts to enhance missile manufacturing as Kim Jong Un intensifies the modernization of arms factories nationwide.

Sep. 7, 2024: Under Secretary of State for Arms Control and International Security Bonnie Jenkins [is set to lead](#) the US delegation to the Second Annual Responsible AI in the Military Domain (REAIM) Summit set to take place in Seoul.

Sep. 8, 2024: North Korea [reveals](#) a new, larger ICBM under development, displayed on a twelve-axle missile launch vehicle during Kim Jong Un's visit to a factory.

Sep. 11, 2024: UN Command members [condemn](#) the "illegal and dangerous" North Korea-Russia arms trade in a joint statement by defense chiefs of member states, responding to "unprecedented" global tensions, according to experts.

Sep. 12, 2024: US President Joe Biden [nominates](#) Lt. Gen. Xavier Brunson to lead the United States Armed Forces in South Korea, entrusting him with the critical responsibility of deterring potential attacks from North Korea.

Sep. 13, 2024: KCNA [reports](#) that North Korean leader Kim Jong Un calls for increasing the number of centrifuges for uranium enrichment to expand the country's nuclear weapons for self-defense during a visit to the Nuclear Weapons Institute.

Sep. 24, 2024: Trade Minister Cheong In-kyo [announces](#) that clean economy and anti-corruption deals, two of four pillars under the US-led Indo-Pacific Economic Framework, will come into force in October.

Sep. 24, 2024: South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol's dinner meeting with the leadership of the ruling People Power Party [ends](#) without meaningful discussions on sensitive issues such as medical reform and First Lady Kim Keon Hee.

Sep. 24, 2024: Deputy Minister for Defense Policy Cho Chang-rae and Anka Lee, US deputy assistant secretary of defense for East Asia [discuss](#) the need for a coordinated response to North Korea's "gray zone" provocations during their regular defense talks.

Sep. 25, 2024: Republican US presidential nominee Donald Trump [claims](#) that re-electing him in November would trigger a "mass exodus of manufacturing" from South Korea, China, and other countries to America, as he intensified efforts to win over swing voters.

Oct. 4, 2024: North Korean leader Kim Jong Un [threatens](#) nuclear strikes on South Korea if its sovereignty is "infringed," while also questioning President Yoon Suk Yeol's sanity following his speech at a military parade showcasing new South Korean missiles.

Oct. 4, 2024: Korea and the United States [finalize](#) the 12th Special Measures Agreement, setting Seoul's cost-sharing for American troop upkeep from 2026 to 2030, with an 8.3 percent increase in the first year and subsequent annual adjustments tied to inflation.

Oct. 16, 2024: Former US President Donald Trump [says](#) that South Korea would be paying \$10 billion a year for the stationing of the 28,500-strong US Forces Korea if he were in the White House, as he described the Asian ally as a "money machine."

Oct. 16, 2024: South Korea [says](#) it is "closely" monitoring for signs of North Korea possibly sending troops to support Russia in its war against Ukraine, following media reports of Russia forming a battalion of North Koreans.

Oct. 16, 2024: State-run Korea Trade Insurance Corporation [says](#) that it has granted trade finance of \$1.35 billion to Hyundai Motor for the ongoing construction of an electric vehicle plant in the US state of Georgia.

Oct. 16, 2024: South Korea's First Vice Foreign Minister Kim Hong-kyun [announces](#) the launch of a new multinational monitoring body to enforce sanctions against North Korea, six months after the UN monitoring body was dissolved following Russia's veto.

Oct. 18, 2024: South Korean Vice Defense Minister Kim Seon-ho [says](#) North Korea might be providing Russia with civilian personnel rather than sending its own troops for the war effort in Ukraine.

Oct. 21, 2024: South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol [pledges](#) to dispatch a delegation to NATO to share intelligence on military cooperation between North Korea and Russia.

Oct. 21, 2024: South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol [holds](#) a phone call with NATO Secretary General Mark Rutte to share information on North Korea's preparations to dispatch troops to help Russia in its war with Ukraine.

Oct. 23, 2024: US government [confirms](#) and releases evidence that North Korea is sending troops to Russia, backing South Korean and Ukrainian claims.

Oct. 28, 2024: South Korean intelligence reports [indicate](#) that North Korea has supplied Russia with over 9 million artillery shells.

Nov. 1, 2024: South Korea and the United States [conduct](#) their first-ever live-fire drone drill following North Korea's ICBM test, aiming to enhance reconnaissance and strike capabilities.

Nov. 1, 2024: South Korea [conducts](#) a drill simulating a strike on a North Korean missile launcher just hours after Pyongyang's ICBM test, showcasing its ability to retaliate with "overwhelming force" using a guided bomb.

Nov. 14, 2024: Foreign Minister Cho Tae-yul and US Secretary of State Antony Blinken [plan](#) to hold talks on the margins of the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation meeting in Peru.

Nov. 16, 2024: *Financial Times* [reports](#) that North Korea has supplied Russia with 50 domestically produced self-propelled howitzers and 20 multiple launch rocket systems (MLRS), while 11,000 North Korean troops are reportedly amassing in Russia's Kursk Oblast to train alongside Russian forces in the war against Ukraine.

Nov. 22, 2024: North Korean leader Kim Jong Un [showcases](#) new drones and ICBMs at a North Korean arms expo, rejecting talks with the US and emphasizing nuclear expansion as the top priority at the first major weapons event since Trump's election.

Nov. 22, 2024: North Korean leader Kim Jong Un [expresses](#) his pessimism toward talks with Washington, claiming that past negotiations only revealed the United States' "unchanging invasive and hostile policy" despite Pyongyang's extensive efforts.

Nov. 22, 2024: South Korea's National Security Adviser Shin Won-sik [states](#) that Russia supplied North Korea with anti-air missiles in exchange for Pyongyang's deployment of troops.

Nov. 23, 2024: US President-elect Donald Trump [appoints](#) Alex Wong, a key figure in working-level nuclear talks with North Korea during his first term, as principal deputy national security adviser, signaling potential reengagement with Pyongyang upon his return to office.

Nov. 26, 2024: Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergey Ryabkov [announces](#) that Russia is considering deploying medium- and short-range missiles to Asia in response to potential US missile redeployments, raising concerns that North Korea, amid strengthening ties with Moscow, could become a potential host for Russian weapons.

Nov. 26, 2024: Ukraine's defense intelligence [reports](#) that North Korea has sent over 100 KN-23 and KN-24 ballistic missiles, along with military specialists, to Russia in support of its war with Ukraine, following South Korea's confirmation of North Korea's additional artillery exports to Russia.

Nov. 27, 2024: South Korea's presidential office [plans](#) to hold an emergency meeting to address US President-elect Donald Trump's proposal to impose tariffs on Canada, China, and Mexico, following his announcement on social media to implement the measures via executive order on his first day in office.

Nov. 27, 2024: Top diplomats of South Korea, Canada, France and Italy [voice](#) concerns over the threat posed by North Korea's troop deployment to fight for Russia in its war with Ukraine, pledging to work together for a concerted response.

Dec. 1, 2024: US Forces Korea [seeks](#) the permanent deployment of its advanced F-35A stealth fighters to the Korean Peninsula, marking the first official stationing of the aircraft in Korea after previously operating from Japan and other locations during heightened North Korean threats or training exercises.

Dec. 3, 2024: South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol [declares](#) emergency martial law, accusing the opposition of "anti-state activities plotting rebellion."

Dec. 3, 2024: Caught off guard by South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol's declaration of martial law, the Biden administration [refrains](#) from condemning the move while grappling to address the rare and dramatic political turmoil in a close US ally.

Dec. 3, 2024: United States [announces](#) a new semiconductor export control package targeting China, including restrictions on high-end chips for artificial intelligence, a move expected to impact South Korea's semiconductor industry.

Dec. 4, 2024: South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol [lifts](#) a surprise martial law declaration, backing down in a standoff with parliament, which roundly rejected his attempt to ban political activity and censor the media.

Dec. 4, 2024: Nearly all South Korean Cabinet members, including Finance Minister Choi Sang-mok, Prime Minister Han Duck-soo, and Education Minister Lee Ju-ho, [express](#) their intent to resign, taking responsibility for the president's declaration and subsequent lifting of martial law.

Dec. 5, 2024: US Secretary of State Antony Blinken [states](#) that the United States was unaware of South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol's intention to declare martial law.

Dec. 5, 2024: KCNA [reports](#) that the "Comprehensive Strategic Partnership Treaty," agreed upon by the leaders of North Korea and Russia in June, officially came into force following the exchange of ratification instruments in Moscow.

Dec. 5, 2024: US Deputy Secretary of State Kurt Campbell [says](#) that South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol "badly misjudged" his decision to declare martial law.

Dec. 5, 2024: Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken [speaks](#) with South Korean Foreign Minister Cho Tae-yul, expressing deep concerns over the declaration of martial law in South Korea and welcoming its lifting after a unanimous National Assembly vote.

Dec. 6, 2024: South Korea's ruling party leader Han Dong-hoon [maintains](#) his stance that President Yoon Suk Yeol should be "suspended from his position."

Dec. 6, 2024: United States [pauses](#) high-level communication with Seoul, adding to diplomatic uncertainties, as Korean experts warn that President Yoon's martial law move could strain the "iron-clad" alliance with the US.

Dec. 7, 2024: Adm. Samuel Paparo [discusses](#) negotiations between Moscow and Pyongyang over the transfer of Russian MiG-29 and Su-27 fighter jets, without providing details on the number of aircraft involved.

Dec. 7, 2024: The commander of troops deployed to the National Assembly under martial law [recounts](#) the chaos, stating, "I was shocked" by orders to remove lawmakers by force, including breaking doors or cutting electricity.

Dec. 8, 2024: Han Dong-hoon, leader of the ruling People Power Party, [renews](#) his call for President Yoon Suk Yeol's orderly resignation after the impeachment motion against the president was abandoned due to the ruling party's boycott of the National Assembly vote.

Dec. 8, 2024: Prosecutor Park Se-hyun, head of the special investigation headquarters probing President Yoon Suk Yeol's brief declaration of martial law, [announces](#) that the president has been booked as a suspect on charges of treason.

Dec. 8, 2024: President Yoon Suk Yeol's ill-fated bid to impose martial law [creates](#) a power vacuum in his governing camp, pushing the country deeper into what analysts call a constitutional crisis.

Dec. 8, 2024: National Assembly Speaker Woo Won-shik [calls](#) the joint exercise of presidential power by the prime minister and the ruling party as "unconstitutional."

Dec. 15, 2024: South Korea's National Assembly [votes](#) to impeach Yoon Suk Yeol, removing him from power and sending the matter to the Constitutional Court.

