



KOREA DIGEST

Korea Digest is a monthly publication of the Korea Centre, School of International Relations and Politics, Mahatma Gandhi University, that compiles major political, security, economic and diplomatic developments in the Korean Peninsula. Korea Digest aims to track, highlight and provide brief analysis of important developments in the Korean Peninsula.

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1. Heightened Security Tensions in the Korean Peninsula

On November 1, North Korea [announced the successful test](#) of its new intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM), the Hwasong-19, described as the "ultimate version of the ICBM" and a complement to the Hwasong-18 in its nuclear arsenal. According to state media reports, the missile reached a record-breaking altitude of 7,687.5 kilometers (4,776.8 miles) and travelled 1,001.2 kilometers during a flight lasting 5,156 seconds, or approximately 85 minutes and 56 seconds. The test, conducted at 7:10 a.m. on October 31 in Pyongyang on a lofted trajectory, was followed by an initial report and a detailed account with 22 accompanying photographs released by the Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) about five hours later. North Korean leader Kim Jong Un, accompanied by his daughter Ju-ae, oversaw the launch and expressed "extreme satisfaction" with the missile's performance. He declared that the test demonstrated North Korea's "dominant position" in nuclear weapons development, emphasising that the nation's progress in this domain is "absolutely irreversible." Analysts interpret the missile test and its accompanying publicity as a strategic message underlining the inevitability of North Korea's nuclear buildup, likely intended to deter U.S. adversaries amid the U.S. presidential election.



North Korea fires the new Hwasong-19 intercontinental ballistic missile, photo released by KCNA on Nov 1

In response to North Korea's recent launch of an intercontinental ballistic missile, [South Korea announced sanctions](#) targeting 11 North Korean individuals, including a diplomat stationed at Pyongyang's embassy in China, and four entities linked to missile development and foreign exchange activities. Effective November 6, the sanctions prohibit South Korean entities from conducting financial transactions with the designated individuals and organisations unless authorised by the Bank of Korea or the Financial Services Commission. Violations will incur penalties under applicable laws. The measures, approved by the National Security Council and unveiled by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on November 1, underscore Seoul's commitment to addressing North Korea's provocations. In a statement, the Foreign Ministry emphasised that such actions would carry consequences and reaffirmed its intent to collaborate with the international community to pressure Pyongyang into halting provocations and returning to denuclearisation talks.

On November 3, South Korea, the United States, and Japan [conducted joint air drills](#), featuring B-1B bombers, according to South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS). The exercises took place in waters east of Jeju Island, within an area overlapping the air defence identification zones of South Korea and Japan. During the drills, B-1B bombers simulated strikes on a designated target, showcasing their formidable capabilities, national media reported. The JCS stated that the operation was aimed at demonstrating enhanced trilateral security cooperation and deterrence against North Korean threats following the ICBM launch on October 31. This marked the second set of joint drills conducted by the three nations this year.



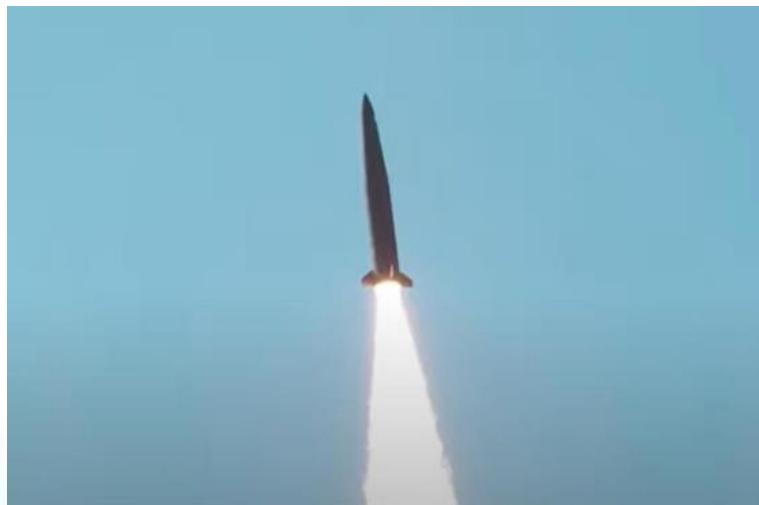
U.S. B-1B bombers hold joint air drills with South Korean, U.S. and Japanese fighter jets over waters south of Jeju, picture provided by the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS)

In retaliation, Kim Yo-jong, sister of North Korean leader Kim Jong Un, [strongly condemned the drills](#), accusing them of validating her country's policy to enhance its nuclear arsenal. The statement, released by the Korean Central News Agency (KCNA), described the drills as "hostile" and "dangerous," further asserting that they reinforced the necessity of strengthening North Korea's nuclear capabilities.

On November 5, North Korea [launched multiple short-range ballistic missiles](#) into the East Sea, hours before the start of voting in the U.S. presidential election, according to South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS). The missiles were fired at 7:30 a.m. local time from Sariwon in North Hwanghae Province, located along North Korea's southwest coast, and travelled approximately 400 kilometres (249 miles) before landing in the East Sea. While the JCS did not disclose the exact number of missiles fired, it confirmed that it is maintaining heightened readiness and closely coordinating with U.S. and Japanese authorities regarding the launch. This incident occurred five days after North Korea's test of a Hwasong-19 intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) and just hours before the opening of polling stations in the United States for the election.

South Korea's military conducted live-fire missile drills on November 6, showcasing its Hyunmoo-2 surface-to-surface missiles and Cheongung air defence systems, in response to North Korea's recent missile provocations. The exercise followed North Korea's launch of several short-range ballistic missiles on November 5 and its test of the Hwasong-19 intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) on October 31. The drills, designed as a strategic warning, demonstrated South Korea's readiness and capability for a rapid counterstrike. The Hyunmoo-2, a short-range ballistic missile operated by the Army's Missile Strategic Command,

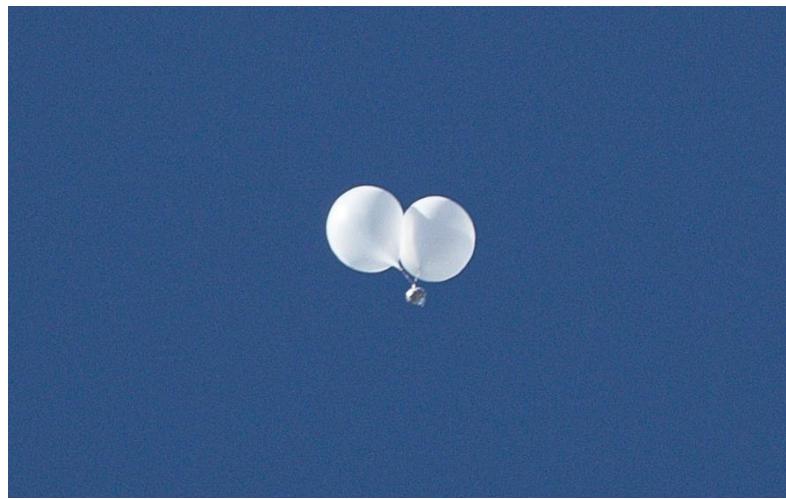
boasts a range of up to 1,000 kilometres, capable of targeting all of North Korea. Similar drills were last conducted in October 2022 after North Korea launched an intermediate-range ballistic missile.



South Korea's Hyunmoo ballistic missile, source: Korea JoongAng Daily

On November 10, The South Korean government reported that North Korea had [conducted 331 GPS jamming](#) incidents from November 1 to November 10, although no significant damage was recorded. The Ministry of Science and ICT revealed that its radio monitoring system continuously detected jamming signals originating from North Korea. Of the 331 incidents, 279 affected aircraft and 52 impacted ships. Despite these disruptions, the Ministry confirmed that no operational accidents occurred. On November 9 and 10, GPS jamming signals were sent from North Korea's Haeju and Kaesong regions, causing some operational disturbances for South Korean ships and civilian aircraft. However, the intensity of the jamming was weaker than previous incidents in May. The South Korean military reported that North Korea's GPS signals have been [disrupted for ten consecutive days](#) along the border, with recent attacks originating from the northwestern islands. The jamming is believed to be part of a North Korean military exercise in response to potential drone threats. North Korea has been intermittently sending GPS jamming signals from its West Hwanghae Province since early October.

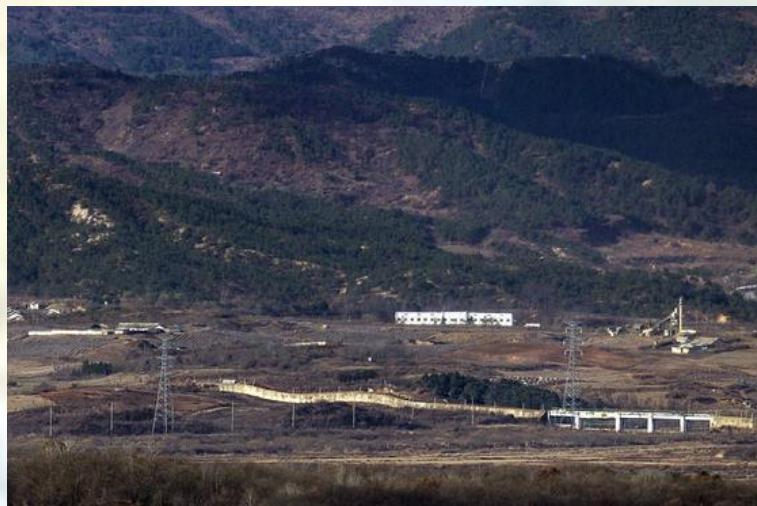
On November 18, [North Korea resumed](#) its controversial practice of launching balloons filled with trash into South Korean territory, marking the 31st such incident since May, according to the South Korean military. The Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) reported that around 40 balloons were launched early that morning, with roughly half landing in the Seoul metropolitan area and surrounding Gyeonggi Province. The balloons contained leaflets critical of South Korea but no hazardous materials. This latest act follows a three-week pause in Pyongyang's campaign, which it claims is retaliation for anti-regime propaganda leaflets sent across the border by South Korean activists. Since late May, over 7,000 balloons have been sent in this manner. The JCS issued a [strong condemnation](#), stating that North Korea had "overstepped its bounds" and warning that Pyongyang would bear full responsibility for the consequences of its actions.



This photo shows trash carrying balloons from North Korea floating over Seoul, Source: The Korea Times

On November 18, North Korea's state media reported that Kim Jong Un directed officials to bolster the [country's nuclear capabilities](#) "without limits" and enhance war preparedness. The Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) stated that Kim delivered these remarks during the fourth conference of battalion commanders and political instructors of the Korean People's Army on November 15, marking the first such meeting in a decade.

North Korea has begun [dismantling power transmission lines](#) that were originally constructed by South Korea to supply electricity to the now-shuttered Kaesong Industrial Complex, Seoul confirmed on November 26.



Transmission towers built by South Korea to supply electricity to the now-shuttered inter-Korean Kaesong Industrial Complex in the North Korean border city of Kaesong and a barrier installed by North Korea are visible along the Gyeongui Line road in the western front Demilitarised Zone (DMZ). Source: Korea JoongAng Daily.

2. South Korea included in China's visa-free entry scheme

China has [announced a visa-free entry policy](#) for South Korean citizens, set to take effect on November 8, allowing stays of up to 15 days for purposes such as business, tourism, family visits, or travel. The unexpected decision, revealed by China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs on November 1, also extends to eight European nations: Slovakia, Norway, Finland, Denmark,

Iceland, Andorra, Monaco, and Liechtenstein. This is the first time South Korea has been added to China's visa waiver program, albeit on a trial basis. Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Lin Jian emphasised the move aims to enhance travel convenience for international visitors. However, analysts suggest the policy may also carry diplomatic undertones, coinciding with the U.S. presidential election and evolving alliances between North Korea and Russia.

3. South Korea and the US signed a defence cost-sharing deal

South Korea and the United States [formally signed a new defence cost-sharing agreement](#) on November 4, aimed at solidifying the long-term presence of U.S. troops in Korea as Seoul accelerates its domestic approval process ahead of the U.S. presidential election. The agreement, signed by South Korean Foreign Minister Cho Tae-yul and U.S. Ambassador Philip Goldberg at Seoul's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, follows the allies' recent consensus on a five-year plan to outline Seoul's financial contributions for maintaining the 28,500-strong U.S. Forces Korea (USFK). The 12th Special Measures Agreement (SMA), effective until 2030, stipulates that South Korea will contribute 1.52 trillion won (approximately \$1.19 billion) in 2026, an 8.3% increase from the 1.4 trillion won expected in 2025. Unlike previous agreements that linked annual increases to South Korea's defence budget growth, the new deal ties adjustments to changes in the consumer price index. Negotiations to renew the SMA began earlier than expected in April, with Seoul proactively seeking to finalise a deal before the possibility of former U.S. President Donald Trump's return to office. Trump had previously demanded a sharp increase in South Korea's financial contributions and hinted at a potential withdrawal of U.S. troops. The new agreement is seen as a strategic move to pre-empt similar demands under the second Trump administration and to maintain stability in the Korea-U.S. alliance.



Korean Foreign Minister Cho Tae-yul, and U.S. Ambassador to South Korea Philip Goldberg shake hands after signing a defence cost-sharing agreement

4. The U.S. approved potential sale of early warning aircraft to boost Korea's recon capabilities

The United States has [approved a major defence deal](#) to bolster South Korea's intelligence and reconnaissance capabilities, according to an announcement on November 4. The U.S. State Department has authorised a \$4.92 billion Foreign Military Sale (FMS) of advanced airborne early warning and control (AEW&C) aircraft to South Korea, as confirmed by the Defence Security Cooperation Agency (DSCA). The agreement includes the sale of four E-7 AEW&C aircraft, ten jet engines, and associated logistical and program support components. The DSCA highlighted that the acquisition would significantly enhance the Republic of Korea Air Force's (ROKAF) intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) capabilities while strengthening its command, control, communications, computers, intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (C4ISR) interoperability with U.S. forces. Amid ongoing security challenges on the Korean Peninsula, the DSCA emphasised that these advanced systems would bolster South Korea's ability to counter both present and emerging threats. The agency added that the ROKAF is well-prepared to integrate the new equipment seamlessly into its operational framework.

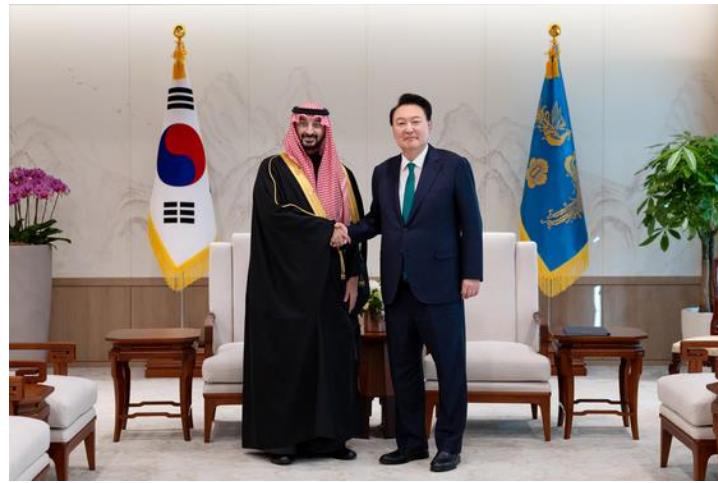
5. Korea and the U.S. signed an MOU on nuclear exports and cooperation

The United States Department of Energy announced on November 4 that South Korea and the United States have [signed a Memorandum of Understanding \(MoU\)](#) on Principles for Nuclear Exports and Cooperation, marking a significant milestone in their nuclear partnership. Signed on November 1, the MoU underscores the shared commitment of both nations to advancing peaceful nuclear energy while adhering to the highest standards of safety and security.

In its statement, the department highlighted that this agreement builds upon the longstanding alliance between the United States and the Republic of Korea, aiming to enhance collaboration in civil nuclear energy. The MoU also reinforces both countries' efforts to strengthen export controls on civil nuclear technology. These commitments are expected to pave the way for expanded bilateral cooperation in addressing climate change, accelerating the global energy transition, and fostering substantial economic opportunities while safeguarding critical supply chains. The agreement is subject to final review by the governments of both nations. Its signing follows a recent dispute involving Korea Hydro & Nuclear Power (KHNP) and U.S.-based Westinghouse Electric over the export of nuclear reactor technology.

6. President Yoon Highlights Defence Industry Cooperation as Key to Strengthening Saudi Ties

President [Yoon Suk-Yeol emphasised](#) the pivotal role of defence industry collaboration in fostering closer ties between South Korea and Saudi Arabia across diverse sectors. During a meeting on November 5 with Saudi Minister of the National Guard Abdullah bin Bandar Al Saud at the Presidential Office, Yoon highlighted Saudi Arabia's strategic importance to Korea's economic and energy security. He described the kingdom as a vital partner and noted that enhancing defence cooperation would not only bolster Saudi Arabia's military capabilities but also deepen bilateral relations.



President Yoon Suk Yeol, shakes hands with Abdullah bin Bandar Al Saud, Saudi Arabia's minister of the National Guard, during their meeting at the presidential office in Seoul.

Minister Abdullah praised the advanced state of defence collaboration between the two nations, citing Korea's cutting-edge weapons systems demonstrated during firepower drills and weapon displays. Before the meeting, Abdullah observed a live demonstration of Korea's K9 self-propelled howitzer and K2 tanks and held discussions with Korean Defence Minister Kim Yong-hyun on furthering defence and security ties. In a significant development in November 2023, South Korea's LIG Nex1 secured a \$3.2 billion deal to provide 10 Cheonggang mid-range surface-to-air missile Block II systems to Saudi Arabia. Additionally, the Korea Electric Power Corporation was awarded contracts for renewable energy projects in Saudi Arabia, valued at approximately 3 trillion won (\$2.17 billion), reflecting the expanding cooperation between the two nations in defence and energy sectors.

7. Marriages between Koreans and foreigners increased 17.2% on year

The number of international marriages in South Korea surged by 17.2% in 2023, reflecting a significant shift toward greater multiculturalism in the country. According to data from Statistics Korea released on November 7, 20,431 international marriages were recorded last year, up from 17,428 in 2022. This marks the second consecutive increase after a steep decline during the COVID-19 pandemic when figures dropped from 24,721 in 2019 to 13,926 in 2021 before rebounding in 2022. Multicultural unions constituted 10.6% of all marriages in South Korea in 2023, an increase from 9.5% the previous year. Among these, marriages between South Korean men and foreign women made up 69.8%, with Vietnamese women accounting for the largest share at 27.9%, followed by Chinese women at 17.4% and Thai women at 9.9%. On the other hand, foreign husbands were primarily from China and the United States (6.9% each), Vietnam (3.9%), and Canada (1.4%). The average ages of grooms and brides in multicultural marriages were 37.2 and 29.5 years, respectively. Divorces among multicultural couples rose by 3.9% to 8,158 in 2023, marking the first increase in 13 years. Meanwhile, the number of babies born to multicultural couples fell to 12,150, but their share of the total births in Korea increased slightly to 5.3%. These statistics underscore the evolving demographic landscape in South Korea as the nation continues its journey toward embracing multiculturalism.

8. South Korean Labor unions held large-scale rallies in central Seoul

On November 9, two major labour unions in South Korea, the Korean Confederation of Trade Unions (KCTU) and the Federation of Korean Trade Unions (FKTU), organized [large-scale rallies across Seoul](#) to protest the labour policies of President Yoon Suk-Yeol's administration. Around 130,000 union members participated in the simultaneous demonstrations, with the KCTU, the country's largest umbrella labour organization, claiming that approximately 100,000 attended their rally in central Seoul. The KCTU accused President Yoon of neglecting workers' rights, particularly following his control of broadcast outlets, and called for his resignation. Meanwhile, the FKTU held a separate rally in western Seoul, demanding the expansion of workplace safety laws to penalise employers for serious industrial accidents.



Members of the Korean Confederation of Trade Unions stage a rally calling for President Yoon Suk Yeol to step down and enhanced labour rights

The protests were a strong show of opposition to the government's conservative labour policies, with participants holding banners calling for Yoon's resignation. In response, the government has pledged to continue efforts to address the grievances and engage in talks with union representatives. The Seoul Metropolitan Police [detained 11 protesters](#) on charges of obstructing official business, leading the KCTU to accuse the government of inciting violence by interfering with the peaceful rally. The union also claimed that police had used excessive force in detaining its members. In a statement, the KCTU vowed to continue its efforts, announcing plans for additional rallies on November 20 and December 7.

9. Yoon ordered forming of consultative body to prepare for Trump administration

President Yoon Suk-Yeol has instructed the immediate establishment of a [consultative body](#) to address anticipated shifts in global economic and security dynamics under a prospective second Donald Trump administration. During an economic and security review meeting held on November 10 at the presidential office in Yongsan, Seoul, Yoon emphasized the need for prompt and coordinated action in the areas of finance, trade, and industry. Vice Prime Minister Choi Sang-mok of Economic Affairs will oversee the initiative. Yoon highlighted that international markets are already reacting to the potential policy direction of the incoming U.S. administration, underscoring the urgency of proactive measures. The meeting aimed to analyse the likely impact of external changes on South Korea's economy and security while outlining strategic policy responses. The President warned of significant disruptions to the global economic and security landscape that could directly affect South Korea, particularly in the trade sector, which he identified as most susceptible to external changes. Yoon underscored the importance of government intervention to enhance industrial and corporate competitiveness, calling for robust communication with key industries to navigate the evolving environment effectively. This initiative reflects Seoul's concern over how the anticipated policy

realignments under the Trump administration may influence Korea's economic and security policies.

10. President Yoon attended the APEC and G20 summits in Peru and Brazil

South Korean President Yoon Suk-Yeol [completed](#) a significant eight-day [diplomatic tour](#), attending the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) summit in Peru and the Group of 20 (G20) summit in Brazil, where he emphasized international solidarity, addressed regional security concerns, and showcased South Korea's leadership on global issues.

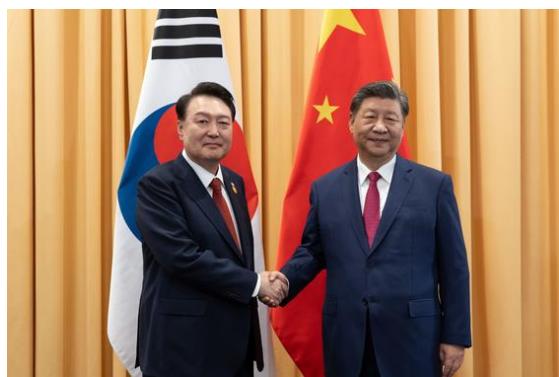
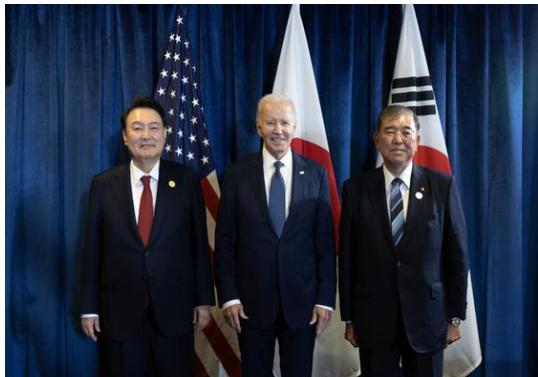


Leaders of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) countries, pose for a photo during the APEC summit in Lima, Peru



South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol poses for photos with other G20 countries' leaders during the launch ceremony of the Global Alliance Against Hunger and Poverty as part of the G20 summit

At the APEC summit in Lima, President Yoon held bilateral and multilateral talks with key global leaders. He participated in a [trilateral summit](#) with U.S. President Joe Biden and Japanese Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba, reinforcing trilateral cooperation amidst concerns over military collaboration between North Korea and Russia. In a joint statement, the leaders strongly condemned such alliances, underscoring the threats to regional stability and international order. President Yoon also met Chinese President Xi Jinping in their [first bilateral meeting](#) since 2022, urging Beijing to play a constructive role in mitigating tensions on the Korean Peninsula. President Xi emphasized peaceful conflict resolution and pledged to strengthen South Korea-China ties.



South Korean President Yoon Suk-Yeol poses for a photo with US President Joe Biden, Japanese Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba and Chinese President Xi Jinping as part of the APEC summit in Lima, Peru.

In Peru, Yoon delivered a keynote address as the incoming chair of APEC for 2025 and proposed establishing an "APEC Future Prosperity Fund" to support youth entrepreneurship, foster regional exchanges, and advance AI integration in manufacturing. [Yoon also signed agreements](#) to deepen South Korea-Peru ties, including defence industry collaboration and infrastructure projects. Notable agreements included Hyundai Heavy Industries' memorandum with Peru's SIMA for submarine development and Korea Aerospace Industries' partnership with Peru's SEMA for producing KF-21 fighter jet components.



Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol, shakes hands with Peruvian President Dina Boluarte after their joint press briefing

Transitioning to the [G20 Summit in Brazil](#), President Yoon advocated for global action on hunger, poverty, and climate change. He announced South Korea's [increased contribution to the International Development Association](#), pledging an additional 260.8 billion won (\$187.4 million) over the previous replenishment. South Korea also [committed \\$10 million in humanitarian aid](#) for Africa and expanded food assistance through the World Food Program. Addressing climate challenges, Yoon called for international cooperation to accelerate the clean energy transition.



President Yoon Suk Yeol attends the launching ceremony of the Global Alliance Against Hunger and Poverty at the Group of 20 summit in Brazil

On the sidelines of the APEC and G20 summit, Yoon met with leaders, including [Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau](#), [British Prime Minister Keir Starmer](#), and [South African President Cyril Ramaphosa](#). Talks focused on enhancing economic ties, addressing supply chain vulnerabilities, and condemning North Korea-Russia military cooperation. Yoon proposed a Korea-Africa Critical Minerals Dialogue to strengthen strategic resource partnerships, demonstrating South Korea's proactive stance on global economic resilience.



President Yoon Suk Yeol poses for photos with other G20 countries' leaders

President Yoon's diplomatic engagements at the APEC and G20 summits underscored South Korea's commitment to global stability, economic collaboration, and responsible leadership in addressing pressing international challenges as a Global Pivotal State.

11. North Korea ratified military alliance with Russia

On November 12, North Korea's state media announced the [approval of a treaty with Russia](#), formalizing their relationship as a military alliance. This development follows the stationing of North Korean troops in Russia, reportedly preparing for combat operations in Ukraine's Kursk region. Analysts suggest that both nations aim to exploit the perceived leadership vacuum during the U.S. presidential transition to advance their strategic objectives on the battlefield. The treaty, officially titled the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership between the Democratic

People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) and the Russian Federation, was signed in Pyongyang on June 19. North Korea's leader, Kim Jong-un, authorized its ratification on November 11, a day before the announcement, through an order from the State Affairs Commission. On the Russian side, President Vladimir Putin signed the treaty on November 9, following its approval by Russia's lower house of parliament.



North Korean leader Kim Jong-un and Russian President Vladimir Putin sign joint documents during a ceremony at the Kumsusan State Guest House in Pyongyang on June 19.

According to the agreement, the treaty comes into effect upon the exchange of ratification documents between the two nations, a step sources indicate has been finalized. Observers expect an official exchange of instruments to occur shortly, potentially triggering a military escalation in Kursk. The treaty's ratification coincided with a diplomatic visit by North Korean Foreign Minister Choe Son-hui to Russia, underlining the deepening ties between the two nations. Key provisions of the treaty, including Article 4, establish a legal framework for mutual military support. It obliges both countries to assist each other militarily if either is subjected to an armed invasion or enters a state of war, raising concerns over the potential scope of North Korea's involvement in the ongoing conflict in Ukraine.

12. South Korea and US confirmed North Korean troops engaged in combat in Russia's Kursk region

The National Intelligence Service (NIS) of South Korea has confirmed that North Korean troops stationed in Russia have begun active participation in combat operations. The NIS revealed on November 13 that North Korean forces were deployed to Russia's Kursk region over the past two weeks and are now engaged on the battlefield. This confirmation aligns with earlier reports from the United States, which stated that North Korean soldiers in Kursk Oblast are fighting alongside Russian forces against Ukraine. According to U.S. intelligence, these troops received training from Russia in artillery usage, unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) operations, and essential infantry tactics, including trench-clearing techniques. Speaking ahead of the North Atlantic Council (NAC) meeting in Brussels, U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken noted that most of the North Korean soldiers have been positioned in western Kursk Oblast and are actively involved in combat. NATO and other allied nations continue to monitor the situation closely. Meanwhile, South Korea's NIS stated that it is intensifying efforts to gather and analyse further intelligence on the matter.
