



## NK Update for August

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### Key Updates

- 1) The recent developments in military cooperation between Russia and North Korea resulted in sanctions on entities that facilitated their arms deals.
- 2) The South Korea-U.S.-Japan Summit at Camp David laid a strong foundation for continuous and stable trilateral cooperation to address North Korean threats and bolster regional security.
- 3) North Korea's second "satellite launch" has raised regional concerns and prompted trilateral action.

### Russia-North Korea Military Cooperation

The Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu's visit to Pyongyang last month in light of North Korea's 70th War Victory Day celebrations has ignited interest and concern regarding the growing cooperation between Russia and North Korea. Matthew Miller, the spokesperson for the U.S. Department of State, emphasized the United States' longstanding concerns about this collaboration, particularly on North Korea's alleged support for Russia's involvement in Ukraine (DOS 2023a). Vedant Patel, the Principal Deputy Spokesperson, pointed out that Shoigu's visit to North Korea was an attempt to persuade North Korea to provide further munitions, thereby aiding Russia's war efforts (DOS 2023b). He emphasized that such security cooperation or arms deals between North Korea and Russia would unquestionably contravene a series of UN Security Council resolutions.

In response, the U.S. Department of the Treasury announced the imposition of sanctions on three entities closely associated with Ashot Mkrtychev, a Slovakian national previously sanctioned by the U.S. for his involvement in facilitating arms deals between North Korea and Russia (DOS 2023c). These sanctions come in the wake of Mkrtychev's attempts to facilitate the supply of arms to Russia for its involvement in the ongoing conflict in Ukraine. Mkrtychev has coordinated with North Korean procurement officials and used Versor to conduct negotiations with companies abroad

(TREAS 2023). This latest action underscores the U.S. commitment to identify, expose, and penalize individuals and entities from third countries that support Russia's illegal activities in Ukraine. Meanwhile, the White House emphasizes that Russia, as a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council, bears a heightened responsibility to comply with the numerous UN Security Council resolutions pertaining to North Korea (White House 2023a). Any failure to adhere to these resolutions, particularly those related to ballistic missile defense technology, would constitute a breach of international obligations.

### **South Korea-U.S.-Japan Summit at Camp David: Key Milestones and Global Reactions**

On August 18<sup>th</sup>, President Yoon Seok Yeol of South Korea, President Biden of the United States, and Prime Minister Kishida of Japan held a landmark 65-minute summit at Camp David in Washington, D.C. (MOFA Japan 2023a). This was the first occasion during President Biden's tenure in which he extended an invitation to a foreign leaders at Camp David, the presidential retreat. During the summit, they adopted the Camp David Principles, reaffirming their unwavering commitment to a shared vision for their partnership and the broader Indo-Pacific region. Among the significant outcomes of the summit was their resolute and unified stance on North Korea, where they explicitly expressed their dedication to the complete denuclearization of North Korea and opposed "any unilateral attempts to change the status quo by force or coercion [in the Indo-Pacific]" (The White House 2023). In the Spirit of Camp David, the leaders expressed concern over North Korea's cyber thefts and sanctions evasion, highlighted their commitment to dialogue without preconditions, and urged for respect for human rights. Another noteworthy development was their pledge to share real-time missile warning data on North Korea by the end of 2023, building upon the commitments outlined in the November 2022 Phnom Penh Statement and highlighting their resolve to address regional security challenges. Institutional mechanisms for trilateral cooperation at various levels, including "regular summits, annual government personnel meetings, and a communication channel for swift coordination in times of crisis" were established as well (White House 2023b; PMOJ 2023a).

In his remarks during the Joint Press Conference following the Trilateral Leaders' Summit at Camp David, President Yoon emphasized the pressing need for enhanced cooperation in response to North Korea's evolving nuclear and missile threats (MOFA 2023). Stressing the urgency of the situation, he conveyed that the three countries had engaged in substantial discussions on practical methods to strengthen their collective response capabilities. Furthermore, as part of their comprehensive efforts to counter North Korea's nuclear and missile threats, the leaders acknowledged the significance of trilateral defense exercises. They committed to establishing annual plans for South Korea-U.S.-Japan drills, reaffirming their dedication to regional security. In a bilateral South Korea-Japan summit held on the same day, the two leaders acknowledged that recent progress in the trilateral partnership enhances coordination between the U.S.-Japan Alliance and the South Korea-U.S. Alliance, elevating trilateral security cooperation to new heights (MOFA Japan 2023c). They also highlighted the potential for more effective cooperation between South Korea and Japan as non-permanent members of the UN Security Council next year.

In response to the recent developments in the trilateral partnership, both China and Russia expressed concerns, raising questions about the implications and the impact on regional security dynamics. China's Foreign Ministry spokesperson, Wang Wenbin, defined the trilateral initiative as an attempt to form "exclusionary groupings" under the pretext of Korean Peninsula issues. He cautioned against the escalation of regional bloc confrontations and called for a departure from the "Cold War mentality," emphasizing the need for meaningful dialogues to address each party's "legitimate concerns" (MOFA China 2023). During the First Session of the Preparatory Committee for the 11th Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), the Head of the Russian Federation's Delegation highlighted what it perceives as U.S. hypocrisy in accusing DPRK of NPT violations, especially in light of the recent U.S.-ROK agreement on a "joint nuclear planning (MOFA Russia 2023)." The Head expressed apprehension that such actions not only undermine efforts to resolve the Korean Peninsula situation but also erode the system of UN Security Council resolutions aimed at denuclearization.

### **North Korea's Second Satellite Launch and Trilateral Response**

On August 24<sup>th</sup>, North Korea launched a second 'space launch vehicle' carrying a military reconnaissance satellite. The missile's trajectory took it over the airspace between Japan's main island of Okinawa and Miyakojima island, prompting a swift response from Japanese Chief Cabinet Secretary. He stated that this launch employed ballistic missile technology, further escalating the regional security threat (PMOJ 2023b). Additionally, during a recent telephone meeting, the foreign ministers of Japan, the United States, and South Korea strongly condemned such deed and expressed concern over the increasing frequency and evolving methods of North Korea's missile launches. The three ministers reiterated their commitment to bilateral and trilateral collaboration for the complete denuclearization of North Korea, in line with United Nations Security Council resolutions.

### **Conclusion**

In recent months, the schism between the U.S.-South Korea-Japan partnership and the Russia-North Korea-China coalition has notably deepened. Specifically, the South Korea-U.S.-Japan Summit at Camp David laid the groundwork for formalizing trilateral cooperation to address North Korean challenges and bolster regional security. Criticism from China and Russia concerning this trilateral partnership, coupled with North Korea's recent satellite launch, has further exacerbated this confrontational scenario. It is worth noting that leaders from South Korea, the United States, and Japan discussed plans for a trilateral defense exercise and aimed to enhance coordination between the U.S.-Japan Alliance and the South Korea-U.S. Alliance, thus elevating trilateral security cooperation to unprecedented levels. On the other hand, with regards to the recent meeting between the leaders of North Korea and Russia on September 13, where Russian President Putin expressed his willingness to support North Korea in its satellite development efforts and emphasized that United Nations sanctions on North Korea would not hinder the future development of relations between Russia and North Korea, it becomes crucial for the Korean government to carefully assess whether Russia's

involvement will lead to shifts in North Korea's stance or influence its interactions with other regional players, particularly China. As regional security dynamics continue to evolve, maintaining open lines of communication and engagement with all stakeholders will be essential. ■

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