

# KOREA NEWSLETTER

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## South Korea's Alliance with the United States

In August 2025, it was reported that South Korea and the United States were possibly in discussion for “[strategic flexibility](#)” of their military alliance. The “[modernised alliance](#)” was term used for the possible new role of the U.S. Forces Korea (USFK) in not only deterring the North Korean belligerence, but also to deal with the emerging regional security situation in the Indo-Pacific. The United States is trying to [reconfigure](#) alliance with South Korea for its increased role in checking the rising Chinese military hegemony in the region. However, Seoul has been wary of the fact that increased role of the USFK outside the Korean Peninsula might provoke Beijing and may even embolden Pyongyang. According to another report, President Donald Trump [signed](#) the order to reduce the “reciprocal tariff” on South Korea to 15 percent. Earlier, in April 2025, Trump had imposed 25 percent reciprocal tariff on Seoul. The South Korean shipbuilding manufacturers are also planning to invest in the American shipbuilding industry. Reportedly, South Korea has [planned](#) to invest US\$ 150 billion to revive the shipbuilding industry in the United States. The South Korean companies such as HD Hyundai, Hanwha Ocean and Samsung shall collaborate in this effort to “Make American Shipbuilding Great Again” (MASGA). In August, the South Korean President Lee Jae Myung also [visited](#) United States and met President Trump. Both leaders discussed to enhance economic and security ties.

## South Korea to Reduce Regional Disparity

The South Korean President Lee Jae Myung has pledged to [reduce](#) the increasing disparities between the national capital region and the provinces of the country. Notably, there has been an excessive concentration of resources and population in the Seoul metropolitan area. The strategy to have a more balanced regional development is part of the policy of the Lee administration to reduce the economic gap between various regions of South Korea. In August, President Lee had a meeting with mayors of the metropolitan areas and provincial governors to discuss on this issue of balanced economic development. According to another report, the South Korean government is [planning](#) to promote the domestic tourism sector and increase consumption in the country to reduce the regional economic imbalance and promote economic activities in the provincial regions. In this effort, the South Korean government would also distribute vouchers to the citizens which could be used only in the regions outside the capital area. Earlier, in July 2025, the Lee Jae Myung administration started providing financial [benefit](#) of 150,000 Won to all South Koreans and some foreign residents to increase consumption within the country and also provided special support to the residents of the provincial regions. It was also reported that the South Korean government would [pursue](#) a “real growth” and initiate a “new national growth strategy” for the country to promote economic development and reduce regional disparity.

## South Korean Foreign Minister's Remarks on China

A controversy erupted over the remarks made by the South Korean Foreign Minister Cho Hyun during his interview with the Washington Post regarding China as “[problematic](#)” for its neighbours. Cho was referring to the increasingly aggressive behaviour of China in the Yellow Sea and South China Sea. The South Korean foreign minister also stated that China should follow the established international laws in bilateral and regional issues. Later, the Chinese Embassy in South Korea responded to Cho Hyun's remarks by arguing that Beijing maintains cordial relations with all its neighbours. The South Korean Presidential office also played down the comments made by Foreign Minister Cho on China. The swift action of the South Korean government was reportedly to [manage](#) any further damage in South Korea-China relations as Chinese President Xi Jinping is expected to attend the upcoming Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Summit in South Korea this year. Earlier, in July 2025, the issue of participation of the South Korean President in China's Victory Day event in September this year in Beijing also fueled [controversy](#) in South Korea. In the recent times, China has constructed some steel structures in the South Korea-China Provisional Measures Zone (PMZ) of the Yellow Sea which have raised [apprehensions](#) in Seoul regarding the intentions of Beijing. Notably, Cho Hyun had earlier served as South Korean Ambassador to India during 2015~2017, and he [visited](#) India in August 2025.

## North Korea's Nuclear Weapons Programme

North Korea has been advancing its nuclear weapons programme. In August, it was reported that Pyongyang is getting help from Russia in the [development](#) of “nuclear weapons carriers”. In recent years, Russia and North Korea have enhanced their military, technological and economic exchanges. North Korea has also sent troops and weapons to Russia for war against Ukraine. In June 2024, Russian President Vladimir Putin signed a “Comprehensive Strategic Partnership” treaty with the North Korean leader Kim Jong-un, which includes collaboration between the two countries in the field of military technology. On the other hand, there is a possibility that the United States may tolerate the nuclear weapons programme of North Korea. According to former American Undersecretary of State for Arms Control and International Security Robert Joseph, the United States may [accept](#) the nuclear arms of Kim dynasty regime in Pyongyang as Washington has the capability to deter North Korean nuclear threats. Notably, North Korea has refused the American demands for denuclearisation. Earlier this year, President Donald Trump had called North Korea a “[nuclear power](#)” which raised concerns in South Korea that the United States may recognise North Korea's nuclear armament. According to another report, Pyongyang [slammed](#) the military exercises by the United States, South Korea and Japan, as a measure for preparations of “pre-emptive strikes” against North Korea. Pyongyang also criticised the possible development of “[nuclear alliance](#)” between the United States and Japan.