



Written by [Angeline Tan](#) on September 6, 2023

North Korea's Kim to Meet With Putin: U.S. Intelligence

On September 4, *The New York Times* [reported](#), citing sources within the U.S. intelligence community, that North Korean authoritarian leader Kim Jong-un intends to make a rare trip to meet Russian President Vladimir Putin and talk about weapons deliveries by North Korea to Russia for its war in Ukraine.

Although Moscow and Pyongyang have yet to confirm this purported meeting, it is poised to take place during the [Eastern Economic Forum](#) from September 10 to 13 in Vladivostok, Russia.

The same report indicated that Russia plans to obtain artillery shells and anti-tank missiles from North Korea. In exchange, the Russians would supply the North Koreans advanced technology for satellites and nuclear-powered submarines. Citing U.S. intelligence sources, the report posited that Kim intended to discuss “the possibility of supplying Russia with more weaponry for its war in Ukraine and other military cooperation.” Kim, who seldom leaves North Korea and mainly travels by train, would reportedly travel to Vladivostok “probably by armored train” to meet Putin, whom he last met in Vladivostok in 2019.

Previously, the United States reported that Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu had traveled to North Korea in July to pave the way for such a bilateral weapons deal. During that visit, Kim allegedly also invited Putin to visit North Korea.

Kim’s visit, if it does materialize, would only confirm Russia’s plans to hold joint military drills with the East Asian pariah state.

“Why not, these are our neighbors. There’s an old Russian saying: you don’t choose your neighbors and it’s better to live with your neighbors in peace and harmony,” Reuters reported, citing Shoigu’s alleged remarks on September 4, according to an Interfax report.

When questioned about the prospect of joint bilateral military drills between the two countries, Shoigu replied that such drills were “of course” being discussed, as per Reuters reports.

Russia’s ambassador to North Korea, Alexander Matsegora, hitherto [told](#) Russian news agency TASS that political ties between Russia and North Korea were currently “on the rise,” and that it would be



AP Images

2019 photo of Kim Jong-un and Vladimir Putin



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“appropriate” for North Korea to join China and Russia in trilateral military exercises.

For the record, the United States and South Korea already conduct frequent military exercises in the Asia-Pacific region, drills that North Korea has categorically slammed as preparations for a future invasion.

The latest *New York Times* report came amid rising U.S. concerns about Russia and North Korea boosting military relations, a move that could enhance Russia’s military successes in its conflict in Ukraine.

At a [press conference](#) on August 30 at the United Nations in New York, U.S. Ambassador Linda Thomas-Greenfield, along with representatives of Japan, South Korea, and the U.K., expressed worries that Russia and North Korea were “actively advancing” talks for arms that would be used in the conflict in Ukraine.

Labeling the development as new and “deeply troubling,” Thomas-Greenfield continued that any weapons agreements between the two nations are “shameful” and would breach UN Security Council resolutions.

The North Korean and Russian missions to the UN in New York did not immediately respond to a request for comment, according to Reuters [reports](#).

Thomas-Greenfield’s remarks were echoed by U.S. National Security Council Coordinator for Strategic Communications John Kirby.

During a press briefing, Kirby said that North Korea had deployed infantry rockets and missiles to Russia in 2022, and that Moscow has tried to procure more since then.

Washington, Kirby elaborated, remained “concerned that the DPRK [Democratic People’s Republic of Korea] continues to consider providing military support to Russia’s military forces in Ukraine” and that it had “new information” that it was “able to share today that arms negotiations between Russia and the DPRK are actively advancing.”

Additionally, Kirby pointed out that “high level discussion may continue in coming months,” before asserting that Russia’s request for weapons from Iran (from which it obtained the [Shahed drones](#)) and North Korea showed Moscow’s rising “desperation and weakness.”

The American admiral then proceeded to “urge the DPRK to cease its arms negotiations with Russia and abide by the public commitments that Pyongyang has made to not provide or sell arms to Russia.”

Earlier in August, it was reported that Putin and Kim [had exchanged letters](#) vowing more collaboration. Besides, the United States alleged it had intelligence that another group of Russian officials visited Pyongyang after Shoigu’s recent visit.

The Kremlin also [confirmed](#) its plans to bolster relations with North Korea, with Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov declaring that Moscow and Pyongyang “maintain good, mutually respectful relations” and that they “intend to develop them further.”

Washington’s disapproval of closer Russo-North Korean ties came amid Pyongyang’s confirmation on August 31 that it had fired two short-range ballistic missiles the previous day.

Having already attained a landmark number of such missile tests, Pyongyang declared that its test on August 30 was a “simulation of a tactical nuclear strike” on South Korea, after Seoul’s joint military maneuvers with Washington, based on reports from North Korea’s state news agency KCNA.



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Officially, North Korea has repeatedly denied American allegations of its involvement in supplying arms to Russia. Rather, Pyongyang has constantly cautioned that the deployments of U.S.-made F-16 fighter planes to Ukraine could provoke “a nuclear war,” slamming the United States for bringing about the Ukraine conflict and the confrontation between NATO and Russia.

For its part, the United States has beefed up its presence and military activities in East Asia, with a recent Japanese court ruling that Japan’s Okinawa Prefecture would have to permit new U.S. Marine Corps air strips to be constructed on its main island regardless of public objections to Washington’s escalating military presence in the region.

As per the court ruling, construction of the new runways to relocate Marine Corps Air Station Futenma from an urban area of the island to reclaimed land in Henoko, which had been suspended for some time, must now be allowed to start again.

While Japan’s central government started reclamation work in 2018, they had to change plans after most of the site was discovered to lie on overly soft ground. However, Okinawa’s prefectural government dismissed the government’s new plans as inadequate, instead stating that such a project would jeopardize the environment.

Okinawa Governor Denny Tamaki, who was re-elected last year after vowing to continue opposing the U.S. military project, voiced his disappointment at the recent ruling.

“The ruling is extremely disappointing because we had expected a fair and neutral judgment based on respect for the local government autonomy,” Tamaki declared, adding that he was immensely worried by the precedent of invalidating the local government’s decision and ignoring its constitutional right to autonomy.

Amid worsening U.S.-North Korean ties and Sino-U.S. ties, the area around Okinawa has taken on added geopolitical importance. Last month, U.S. President Joe Biden lauded a “new era” of defense cooperation with Japan and South Korea, including expanded joint military drills in the region. Chinese and North Korean officials have castigated Washington’s joint exercises with Japan and South Korea as provocations. On his end, Biden has pledged to cooperate with Japan to tackle China’s “dangerous behavior in the South China Sea.”



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