

# North Korea's Provocation and Japan-South Korea Defence Ties

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## Introduction

Due to the recent nuclear threats emerging from the hermit kingdom, South Korea and Japan now seem to have an opportunity to reconcile and make amends to their soured relations over the past century. As a result, the political and trade dispute between the two countries have been laid aside for the moment, as Pyongyang has accelerated its development of nuclear technologies and missiles at a rapid pace.

According to recent reports, from 25th September to 9th October, North Korea test-launched a minimum of 13 missiles. It is believed that a Hwasong-12 IRBM (Inter-Mediate Range Ballistic Missile) was launched on 3rd October 2022 and from the Chagang province of North Korea. It soared over the Aomori prefecture of Japan before falling into the Pacific Ocean, around 3200 kilometers from Japan. The launch of Hwasong -12 IRBM had raised significant concerns for the United States, reiterating Pyongyang's capability to strike the US island of Guam. The hermit kingdom further claimed its missile launches as protests over the joint military exercises of the United States, South Korea and Japan involving a naval drill using the USS Ronald Reagan aircraft carrier. However, it is most likely that the recent missile test launched by North Korea was not a retaliation against the military exercises launched by the three countries, but a foolproof plan for generating stimulus for a future nuclear operation.

## Japan's Response

According to the reports, the 3rd of October 2022 missile test of the Hwasong-12 (the first to follow the 2017 launch) by North Korea had incited Japan into issuing a J-alert for the citizens to take cover. In response to the launch, Japan's Self Defence Force (SDF) recently claimed to possess the capabilities required to take measures against Pyongyang's initiative, but had avoided doing so since no damage to the Japanese territory was estimated through the test missiles. However, as Japan is constantly revising its approaches to respond to national security threats, Tokyo's pre-emptive or counter-strike capability is currently gaining momentum. This view can be supported by their statement inscribed in their latest annual White Paper, Defense of Japan 2022, where Japan has firmly stated that it will consider all options whilst developing its new National Security Strategy in order to safeguard the lives of its citizens. Even in the case of no actual damage to occurring to Japanese soil, does the country consider the option of using its "counter-strike capabilities," thereby projecting its ability to target enemy bases after an armed attack on Japan takes place. Japan, a non-nuclear state, relies heavily on the extended deterrence provided by the United States of America in accordance with their collective security agreement.

## South Korea's Response

Due to its geographical proximity to North Korea, Seoul had issued warnings of a "resolute response" by deploying 30 fighter jets after North Korea flew 12 warplanes a few kilometers from the inter-Korean border. The Yoon Suk-Yeol administration has advocated a more rigid strategy than its predecessor, prioritizing North Korea's denuclearization and offering financial incentives in exchange. Before being elected as the 20th president of South Korea, Yoon Suk-Yeol had previously given a hint at the potential of a "pre-emptive attack" in the likely scenario of a North

Korean provocation involving a missile bearing a nuclear weapon. The Yoon Suk-Yeol's government, in the National Security Council meeting held on 4th October 2022, took a stance to meet further provocations by North Korea with serious countermeasures. Seoul has been planning the "Three Axis-Defense System" as its counter-strike measure. The main agenda of this system is to counter Pyongyang's evolving nuclear and missile threats. The three Axis fundamentally means three phases of military action by South Korea upon North Korea. Primarily the kill chain pre-emptive strike platform. Secondly, the Korean Air and Missile Defence System. Lastly, to incapacitate the North Korean leadership via the 'Korea Massive Punishment and Retaliation'.

## South Korea and Japan's Potential Reconciliation

Ironically, the most immediate impact of Pyongyang's relentless pace of missile testing is that Japan and South Korea have decided to keep aside their political differences momentarily and work together on security cooperation over North Korea. On 6th October 2022, the leaders of South Korea and Japan had a telephone conversation, where both the leaders agreed upon a "bilateral cooperation for a stern response". At this point, the two nations are at least communicating coherently to maintain a careful watch on North Korea's subsequent provocative activities, including a probable seventh nuclear. The new South Korean president Yoon Suk -Yeol, has pledged a "future-oriented approach" towards Japan based on the "Kim-Obuchi declaration" of 1998. A "future-oriented partnership built on reconciliation" was the goal of the "Kim-Obuchi Declaration". President Yoon Suk-Yeol hopes that Seoul and Tokyo will establish a forward-looking alliance while acknowledging their common history by reviving the spirit of the 1998 declaration. However, despite the progressive convergence on security cooperation between the two countries in response to North Korea's provocations, sensitive issues could derail the new alliance. The South Korean objection against the Japanese government's recurrent inclusion of sovereignty claims over the Dokdo islands in the most recent Annual White Paper Titled Defence of Japan 2022, published on 22nd July 2022, serves as an example of this. Besides, signs for improving relations between Japan and South Korea towards shared security were reflected in its first Missile Defence Exercise" in Hawaii in 2017.

Following that, on 30th September 2022, in the Sea of Japan/East Sea, the navy of the US, Japan, and South Korea performed an anti-submarine drill, which was also a first since 2017. Concerns over North Korea's test launches of ballistic missiles in the water body since 25th September 2022, have increased due to these naval drills. The trilateral partners are now moving toward closer security cooperation, which had previously not progressed far due to historical tensions between South Korea and Japan.

## About the Author

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