

FMSO's Military DIME (M-DIME) Research Project

Tracking Russian and Chinese military influence in states around the world

Instruments of Russian Military Influence in North Korea

Lucas Winter^a, Jason Warner^b, and Michael Donmoyer^c



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OVERVIEW OF FMSO'S M-DIME RESEARCH PROJECT

The Military DIME (M-DIME) Research Project is a dynamic effort from researchers at the U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command's Foreign Military Studies Office (FMSO). Its goal is to provide Army leaders with a clear, comparative understanding of how China and Russia employ instruments of national power to obtain military influence around the world. The M-DIME framework is derived from the "DIME" concept, which classes instruments of national power into four types: Diplomatic, Informational, Military, and Economic. Based on this concept, the M-DIME framework gives more narrow attention to the instruments that China and Russia employ to gain military influence in third-party countries.

The M-DIME framework's purpose is to track and analyze the military influence of "Benefactor" countries (i.e. China and Russia) in select "Recipient" countries in Africa, Latin America, the Middle East, and South and Southeast Asia. Benefactor countries are assumed to engage in activities that result in them having increased military influence in Recipient countries to gain leverage over global rivals, competitors, and adversaries; for China and Russia, this means the United States. Within this framework, "military influence" is defined as the ability of a Benefactor country to shape or alter the attitudes, behaviors, and capabilities of actors within—and entities associated with—the armed forces of Recipient countries.

The M-DIME framework identifies 12 distinct instruments of national power employed by Benefactor countries to gain military influence in Recipient countries, three for each of the DIME categories. They are as follows:

DIPLOMATIC INSTRUMENTS

- D1 Defense-Related Diplomacy
- D2 International Military Education and Training
- D3 Soft Power Activities

INFORMATIONAL INSTRUMENTS

- I1 Cultural and Media Outreach, Collaboration, and Alignment
- I2 Information and Communications Technology (ICT) Support
- I3 Cooperation in Military Intelligence and Communications

MILITARY INSTRUMENTS

- M1 Formal Bilateral Military Engagements
- M2 Shared Informal/Multilateral Military Engagements
- M3 Defense/Security Pacts and Agreements

ECONOMIC INSTRUMENTS

- E1 Arms Transfers
- E2 Technology-Sharing and Joint Production Agreements
- E3 Trade and Cooperation in Strategic Commodities/Sectors

M-DIME analysis is based on qualitative assessments of Benefactor influence in Recipient countries along each of the 12 M-DIME instruments of influence. These assessments are made for the Benefactor's **Current Influence** (assessed as Very High, High, Medium, Low, Very Low, or Unobserved) and **Projected Influence** (assessed as Increasing, Steady, Decreasing, or Unknown). Current assessments are made based on activities from 2012 to the present, while future assessments are three-year forecasts.

The bulk of activities considered in the M-DIME Research Project involve members of the armed forces or defense sector personnel in both Benefactor and Recipient countries. Such activities include formal and informal military-to-military diplomacy, security cooperation engagements, and arms transfers. However, the M-DIME Research Project also tracks and analyzes Chinese and Russian activities that employ non-military instruments of influence but ultimately bear on the decisionmaking and capabilities of the Recipient country's armed forces. Such activities include Chinese and Russian collaboration with Benefactor states in media, communications technology, and strategic sectors.

The M-DIME Research Project's findings are derived from open-source research. Each M-DIME product is produced with the collaboration of analysts from across FMSO, frequently with the assistance of non-Department of Defense subject matter experts coming from academia, think tanks, and the private sector. Given its basis in open-source research, the M-DIME Research Project has an inherent limitation. It cannot track Chinese and Russian military influence activities that are deliberately kept secret. Consequently, assessments of Chinese and Russian influence based on instruments for which secrecy is important or where information would typically be classified by the Benefactor or Recipient countries—for instance, military-technology sharing or intelligence collaboration—are acknowledged to be made with low confidence. Assessments of

Projected Influence, unless otherwise stated, are also made with low confidence given pervasive information gaps and the potential for bilateral dynamics to quickly shift. In certain cases, assessments are not made where open-source data is considered inconclusive

In sum, the M-DIME Research Project is a tool for U.S. Army and U.S. Government personnel to better understand the instruments of national power employed by China and Russia to gain global military influence and the impact these activities have on U.S. national security interests. Over time, FMSO will expand the body of research and assessments based on this framework, increasing its comparative value across Benefactor and Recipient countries.

KEY ASSESSMENTS



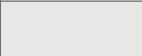












DIPLOMATIC / INFORMATION			MILITARY / ECONOMIC					
	D1	Defense-Related Diplomacy	     	M1	Formal Bilateral Military Engagements			
	D2	International Military Education and Training		M2	Shared Informal/Multilateral Military Engagements			
	D3	Soft Power Activities		M3	Defense/Security Pacts and Agreements			
	I1	Cultural/Media Outreach, Collaboration, Alignment		E1	Arms Transfers			
	I2	Information/Communications Technology Support		E2	Technology-Sharing, Joint Production Agreements			
	I3	Cooperation in Military Intelligence/Communications		E3	Trade/Cooperation in Strategic Commodities/Sectors			
CURRENT DEGREE OF INFLUENCE			PROJECTED FUTURE DEGREE OF INFLUENCE					
Very High	High	Medium	Low	Very Low	None/Unobserved	Increasing 	Steady 	Decreasing 

Figure 1. M-DIME Overview

Russia's current M-DIME influence in North Korea is assessed as Medium. Some of the most important instruments contributing to Russia's current military influence in North Korea include:

- Defense-Related Diplomacy (D1).** High-level bilateral meetings followed North Korea's stalled nuclear negotiations in 2019 and rapidly increased pace in 2023. Increasing influence via this instrument will likely enable the two countries to more effectively implement the agreements reached in the 2023 and 2024 Putin-Kim summits.
- Defense/Security Pacts and Agreements (M3).** The 2024 "Treaty on Comprehensive Strategic Partnership between North Korea and the Russian Federation" reinstates a mutual defense clause and signals an era of closer coordination and cooperation across all M-DIME instruments.
- Soft Power Activities (D3).** Russia's and North Korea's general estrangement from the international community and their support for each other in international organizations such as the UN will likely continue to increase Russia's influence via this instrument.

Russia's projected M-DIME influence in North Korea is assessed as Increasing, with all influence instruments but one projected to increase. Some of the most dynamic instruments informing Russia's projected military influence in North Korea include:

- Bilateral Military Engagements (M1).** North Korea's deployment of soldiers to Russia signals an unprecedented level of bilateral military cooperation for the Korean People's Army (KPA) in the post-Cold War era, reinforcing the increasingly disruptive role of both countries toward international security in Europe and the Indo-Pacific.



International Military Education and Training Programs (D2). The initial implementation of the 2024 Comprehensive Strategic Partnership treaty will likely involve cooperation in low-level activities that fall within this instrument, such as increasing the exchange of military academy cadets and training the KPA on lessons learned from combat operations in Ukraine.



Information and Communications Technology Support (I2). Russian support for North Korea's ICT sector will likely significantly increase, particularly in information security, AI implementation, and the provision of Russian technical expertise to North Korea's satellite program.



Trade and Cooperation in Strategic Commodities/Sectors (E3). Russia has maintained an interest in the North Korean economy and proposed several joint projects and development initiatives over the past two decades. The 2024 Comprehensive Strategic Partnership treaty will likely promote extensive bilateral cooperation across several strategic sectors.

INTRODUCTION TO RUSSIA-NORTH KOREA RELATIONS

Since the end of World War II, Russia and North Korea have maintained a complex and evolving relationship, shaped by military cooperation, ideological alignment, and shifting geopolitical dynamics, with periods of both strategic alignment and political distancing.¹ Although the two countries concluded the Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation, and Mutual Assistance in July 1961, the early Sino-Soviet split strained Russia-North Korea relations from 1956 until a military aid agreement was signed in 1965.² From the mid-1960s to 1990, North Korea imported about three-quarters of its weaponry from the Soviet Union; these imports enabled its defense industry to replicate the military technology to achieve a level of development capable of providing its domestic needs in conventional weapons and military equipment (apart from large naval ships and fighter aircraft) in the 1980s.³ North Korea also began to independently develop its nuclear weapons program after the Soviet Union rescinded the two countries' nuclear cooperation agreements in 1988.⁴ The collapse of the Soviet Union in early 1991 disrupted political and economic relations with North Korea's primary benefactor.⁵ During the 1990s, the Yeltsin administration in Moscow sought to distance itself politically from North Korea, ending transfers of military equipment and technology to Pyongyang.⁶ Nonetheless, North Korean scientific and technical

collaboration with Russia continued.⁷ President Putin visited North Korea in 2000, the first by a Russian leader since the founding of North Korea, and this summit was followed up with subsequent defense meetings and agreements in 2001.⁸

Russia limited its military aid to North Korea throughout the 2000s-2010s, and Putin and Kim Jong Un did not meet until 2019.⁹ However, cooperation between Russia and North Korea has steadily increased since 2023, beginning with high-level diplomatic exchanges and transfers of North Korean munitions to support Russia's military operations in Ukraine and culminating in the June 2024 signing of the "Treaty on Comprehensive Strategic Partnership between the North Korea and the Russian Federation."¹⁰ North Korea's deployment of approximately 10,000 soldiers to Russia in October 2024 suggests that both countries seek to affirm the binding nature of the 2024 Comprehensive Strategic Partnership treaty's mutual defense pact.

The United States and North Korea do not maintain official diplomatic relations. However, according to the U.S. Department of State, "Peace and prosperity on the Korean Peninsula is the ultimate goal for the United States in its relationship with the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK)."¹¹ The United

States has sought to engage North Korea in order to mitigate the risks of its nuclear weapons and missile development programs.¹² U.S. foreign policy towards North Korea remains a point of strong bipartisan consensus among American legislators, focusing on denuclearization, deterrence, and human rights.¹³ North Korea’s support for Russia’s military operations in Ukraine have raised concerns among U.S. policy-makers regarding how strengthened Russia-North

Korea ties could advance North Korea’s ballistic missile development programs.¹⁴ Russia-North Korea ties were codified in the 2024 Comprehensive Strategic Partnership treaty, which states that the two countries will provide mutual defense, support each other’s contravention of U.S. and UN Security Council (UNSC) sanctions, and jointly challenge U.S. policy aimed at achieving denuclearization of the Korean peninsula as well as its leadership of the liberal international order.¹⁵

NORTH KOREA AT A GLANCE	
Capital	Pyongyang ¹⁶
Population	26,298,666 (2024 est.) ¹⁷
GDP per Capita	\$1,700 (2015 est.) ¹⁸
Head of Government	Choe Ryong Hae (최룡해) ¹⁹
Head of State	Kim Jong Un (김정은) ²⁰
Minister of Defense	No Kwang-chol (노광철) ²¹
Chief of General Staff	Ri Yong-gil (리영길) ²²
Military Expenditure (total)	\$1,604,440,000 (as of 2016) ²³ ; Estimated \$7 billion to \$11 billion between 2010 and 2020 ²⁴
Military Expenditure (% of GDP)	16% goal (State announcement for 2023 expenditures); Estimated 20-30% between 2010 and 2020 ²⁵
Armed Service Branches	Korean People’s Army (KPA): KPA Ground Forces, KPA Navy, KPA Air Force and Air Defense Forces, KPA Strategic Forces (missile forces), KPA Special Forces (special operations forces); Security Guard Command; Military Security Command ²⁶
Active Armed Forces Personnel	Estimated 1-1.2 million active-duty troops; Estimated 200,000 internal security forces (as of 2023) ²⁷

Figure 2. North Korea at a Glance.

D - Diplomatic Instruments

Since Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022 and the relaxation of North Korea's COVID-19 restrictions, Russia has significantly increased its use of diplomatic instruments for military influence in North Korea. The 2024 Comprehensive Strategic Partnership treaty provides a framework to significantly expand diplomacy and bilateral cooperation in the next three years.



D1: Defense-Related Diplomacy

Current Influence: Very High

Projected Influence: Increasing

- ***There have been 20 defense delegations exchanged between Russia and North Korea since 2012, but most were conducted at the vice-ministerial level until a series of high-level bilateral exchanges were initiated in 2023.²⁸ These exchanges culminated in two summits between Putin and Kim in 2023 and 2024.***
 - » From 2014 to 2019, several bilateral defense exchanges at the vice-ministerial level occurred both in Russia and North Korea to discuss matters regarding relations between the countries' armies as well as security developments on the Korean peninsula.²⁹
 - » In April 2019, Putin and Kim Jong Un held a summit to discuss the stalled denuclearization talks with the United States.³⁰
 - » In 2023, then-Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu led a delegation to North Korea to participate in the 70th anniversary celebrations of the "Fatherland Liberation War" (조국해방전쟁).³¹ This visit facilitated continued arms shipments from North Korea to Russia and laid the groundwork for the September 2023 Putin-Kim summit.
 - » At the September 2023 summit, Putin and Kim discussed military cooperation, the war in Ukraine, and possible Russian support for North Korea's satellite program.^{32 33}
- ***Following the 2023 Putin-Kim summit, there has been an increase in diplomatic and intelligence delegations exchanged between Russia and North Korea to discuss matters pertaining to defense cooperation and security.***
 - » In January 2024, a North Korean government delegation headed by Foreign Minister Choe Son Hui paid an official visit to Russia and held discussions with Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov and a courtesy call to Putin.^{34 35}
 - » In March 2024, a delegation of the Russian Foreign Intelligence Service visited North Korea to discuss Russia's and the Korean peninsula's regional and international situation as well as technical issues related to strengthening cooperation with North Korea's Ministry of State Security.^{36 37}
- ***The 2024 Putin-Kim summit represented a significant expansion in diplomacy and bilateral cooperation between the two countries.***
 - » Both countries were represented by several high-level officials at the 2024 summit.³⁸
 - » A month after the summit in July 2024, Kim hosted a Russian military delegation led by Deputy Defense Minister Alexei Krivoruchko to discuss bilateral defense cooperation.³⁹

- » In October 2024, North Korea’s Foreign Minister Choe Son Hui led a delegation to Russia, which the Russian Embassy argued took place within the framework of the 2024 Comprehensive Strategic Partnership treaty.⁴⁰
- ***Russia and North Korea are expected to continue expanding bilateral engagement and increasing the number of delegations exchanged. The 2024 Comprehensive Strategic Partnership treaty outlines extensive areas of cooperation and shared principles that challenge the U.S.-led international order, indicating Russia’s use of diplomatic instruments in North Korea will likely increase significantly in the next three years.***



D2: International Military Education and Training Programs

Current Influence: Very Low

Projected Influence: Increasing

- ***For decades, publicly available information on this instrument had been limited, and there were no observable instances of North Korean military personnel studying at Russian military academies. However, senior Russian defense officials have acknowledged that such exchanges have occurred.***
 - » UN Security Council Resolutions 1718 and 2270 prohibit the hosting of North Korean officers for the purpose of military training, specifically pertaining to operating combat aircraft and warships, among other things.⁴¹
 - » In April 2019, Deputy Defense Minister Alexander Fomin stated in a meeting in Pyongyang with then-Defense Minister No Gwan Chol that “there is a communication between general staffs, constant visits of delegations, education exchange between Russian and North Korean military educational institutions.”⁴²
 - » In July 2024, a KPA delegation led by the president of Kim Il Sung Military University, Kim Kum Chol, traveled to Russia.⁴³
- ***A relatively small number of North Korean civilian students have studied in Russia since 2012, and the North Korean government has expressed interest in increasing this number. Most North Korean students studying abroad pursue academic disciplines pertaining to national defense and dual-use technology.***
 - » In April 2024, the North Korean Minister of Education Kim Sung Du announced that the country wants to send as many citizens as possible to study at Russian universities. There are already more than 130 North Koreans studying in Russia, and North Korea has submitted more than 100 applications for its students to study there in the upcoming academic year.⁴⁴
 - » Data from the Russian Federal Security Service shows that a total of 2,508 North Koreans entered Russia from January to June 2024. The data shows that the number of students increased from 38 to 332.⁴⁵
- ***Based on the 2024 Comprehensive Strategic Partnership treaty, which provides for joint measures to strengthen defense capabilities and increase educational exchanges, Russia is expected to host more North Korean defense delegations for the purpose of professional military education and training. It will also likely permit more North Koreans to travel to Russia as state-sponsored migrant laborers and as exchange students studying academic disciplines related to defense and dual-use technology in the next three years.***



D3: Soft Power Activities

Current Influence: High

Projected Influence: Increasing

- ***Russia and North Korea have consistently exchanged defense and veterans delegations for celebrations of milestones in the countries' history.***
 - » In 2018, Russian Deputy Defense Minister Alexander Fomin took part in the reception of the 70th anniversary of the founding of North Korea.⁴⁶
 - » In September 2023, the Russian Army Academic Song and Dance Ensemble visited North Korea to participate in the country's 75th anniversary of its founding. Attendees included the North Korean Vice Minister of National Defense Pak Kyong Chol, Russian Ambassador Alexandr Matsegora, and Military Attaché of the Russian Embassy Valeri Isaenko.⁴⁷
 - » In May 2024, Kim sent greetings to Putin in honor of the 79th anniversary of Russia's victory in the "Great Patriotic War."⁴⁸ Russian embassy members, including military attaché Valeri Isaenko, also laid a wreath at the Liberation Tower in Pyongyang.⁴⁹
- ***North Korea regularly sends delegations to attend defense-related events in Russia, such as the Moscow Conference on International Security.***
 - » In 2015, former Defense Minister General Hyon Yong Chol attended and spoke at the IV Moscow Conference on International Security, an annual defense forum that discusses global and regional stability issues.⁵⁰
 - » In 2023, North Korean Defense Minister Kang Sun Nam attended the XI Moscow Conference on International Security and delivered a speech supporting Russia's military actions in Ukraine, criticizing the United States for escalating tensions in Europe and East Asia.⁵¹
 - » In August 2024, the North Korean First Vice Department Director of the WKP Kim Jong-sik, sanctioned for his involvement in North Korea's ballistic missile development, attended the opening ceremony of Army 2024 in Moscow.⁵²
- ***Since 2022, Russia has used its position as a permanent member of the UN Security Council to veto sanctions and alleviate international pressure on North Korea.***
 - » In May 2022, Russia and China vetoed a draft proposal brought forth by the United States that had the support of thirteen Security Council members to strengthen sanctions on North Korea for its continued ballistic missile testing.⁵³
 - » In March 2024, Russia vetoed a mandate to extend UNSC Resolution 1718 (2009), which provided for a Committee and Panel of Experts to monitor compliance with sanctions on North Korea's weapons programs.⁵⁴
- ***Russia is highly likely to increase its soft power activities towards North Korea and to continue its support of North Korea in multilateral forums in the next three years. The 2024 Comprehensive Strategic Partnership treaty provides the framework to substantially increase exchanges that entail soft power activities.⁵⁵ Although these soft power activities will likely expand to other areas of bilateral engagement, the limiting factor in this diplomatic instrument will be North Korea's strictly controlled domestic policies.***

I - Informational Instruments

Russia and North Korea have a low level of collaboration in the information space, primarily due to North Korea's strictly controlled media and information environment. However, the substantial increase in cultural exchanges leading up to the signing of the 2024 Comprehensive Strategic Partnership treaty indicates that Russia's use of informational instruments towards North Korea will likely increase in the next three years.

I1: Cultural and Media Outreach, Collaboration, and Alignment



Current Influence: Medium

Projected Influence: Increasing

- ***Russia and North Korea have consistently exchanged cultural delegations at various levels since 2012.***
 - » Since 2012, there have been roughly 40 cultural, social, and sports delegations exchanged between Russia and North Korea, many involving youth programs, theater and artistic performances, and military bands.⁵⁶
 - » Since 2023, the number of delegations exchanged between North Korea's and Russia's Ministries of Culture has increased.⁵⁷
- ***Despite North Korea's strictly controlled media and information environment, it has signed limited agreements with Russian state news agencies.***
 - » In October 2019, representatives from Russia's RT news service and state-run TASS met with officials from North Korea's radio and telecommunications committee and signed a cooperation agreement with the Korean Central News Agency to replace the previous one from 2005.⁵⁸
 - » The 2024 Comprehensive Strategic Partnership treaty provides a framework for increasing such media cooperation and cultural exchanges.⁵⁹
- ***Media and cultural collaboration are not limited by UNSC sanctions, and Russia and North Korea will likely increase collaboration of this kind in the next three years. North Korea's strictly controlled media and information environment limits the effectiveness of this informational instrument. Government-sponsored delegations and state media airings, with limited face-to-face contact, will be the main venue for most cultural exchanges.***

I2: Information and Communications Technology (ICT) Support



Current Influence: Medium

Projected Influence: Increasing

- ***Russia and China are the only countries on which North Korea relies for its telecommunications structure to access the global internet.***⁶⁰
 - » Russian telecommunications company TransTeleCom, a subsidiary of the state-owned enterprise Russian Railways has provided technical and infrastructure support to North Korea.⁶¹
 - » In 2017, a Russian state-owned satellite company called SatGate provided North Korea backup access to the global internet through an assigned range which resolves to the company's location in Lebanon.⁶²

- **The 2024 Comprehensive Strategic Partnership treaty provides a framework for increased ICT collaboration.**
 - » Article 18 of the treaty provides for bilateral cooperation and inter-agency dialogue in information security. It also emphasizes cooperation and information-sharing in cybersecurity and combating cybercrime.⁶³
 - » In July 2024, North Korea switched from China’s ChinaSat 12 satellite to the Russian Express 103 for its foreign broadcasting of Korean Central Television.⁶⁴
- **Russian ICT support to North Korea will likely increase in the next three years. However, telecommunications products and digital devices in North Korea are strictly regulated by the government, with most hardware and software provided by Chinese manufacturers. North Korean state-owned enterprises have reverse-engineered these devices to produce domestic equivalents with extensive surveillance features. Therefore, any Russian expansion in this sector will likely entail scrutiny from North Korean officials to ensure such products comply with these regulations.**



I3: Cooperation in Military Intelligence and Communications

Current Influence: Very Low

Projected Influence: Increasing

- **There is limited publicly available evidence of bilateral cooperation in military intelligence and communications occurring since the 1990s.**⁶⁵
- **Russia will likely increase its technical support to North Korea’s satellite program, which could enhance its intelligence collection capabilities and advance its development of ballistic missiles.**
 - » In September 2023, Putin hinted that Russia would help North Korea build satellites, though neither country has clarified details about their potential space-related cooperation.⁶⁶ UNSC Resolutions 1718, 1874, and 2087 prohibit such technology transfers to North Korea.⁶⁷
 - » In November 2023, South Korean defense officials said that North Korea appeared to be receiving technical assistance from Russia related to its successful satellite launch that month.⁶⁸
 - » Some scholars argue that the failure of North Korea’s two previous satellite launches, both of which preceded the Putin-Kim summit, signify a strong causal connection between Russian support and the post-summit launch’s success.⁶⁹

The Russian government maintains unofficial connections with North Korea’s cybercriminal underworld, occasionally collaborating to conduct offensive cyber operations.

- **There is extensive evidence that Pyongyang maintains a close working relationship with Russia’s cybercriminals.**⁷⁰
 - » A North Korea cyber unit was reportedly found working in the Russian Far East, with an officer from a North Korean military cyberwarfare unit, Major Choe Kum Chol, being apprehended by Russian authorities in Razdelnoe after he attempted to defect.⁷¹

- ***In the next three years, the 2024 Comprehensive Strategic Partnership treaty will likely serve as a foundation for future military intelligence and communications agreements, which could include Russian increased technical support to North Korea’s satellite program.***
 - » There is a historical basis for Russia-North Korea collaboration in military intelligence and communications, particularly due to the Soviet Union’s provision of advanced weapons technology in the 1980s.

M - Military Instruments

The 2024 Comprehensive Strategic Partnership treaty and its reinstatement of the mutual defense clause is the most significant development in the two countries' defense and security agreements in several decades, reversing the downgrade that came with the 2000 Treaty on Friendship, Good Neighborliness, and Cooperation. Since 2023, ministerial-level defense visits between Russia and North Korea have focused primarily on arms transfers and military-technical cooperation. It is likely that the two countries will increase bilateral military engagements in the next three years, although they may remain limited in scale.



M1: Formal Bilateral Military Engagements

Current Influence: Medium

Projected Influence: Increasing

- ***Until 2022, Russia played a mediating role in nuclear negotiations with North Korea and voted in favor of UNSC sanctions targeting North Korea's nuclear weapons program. Accordingly, Russia limited direct military engagements with North Korea to comply with the sanctions.***
 - » UNSC Resolution 1718 (2006) prohibits member states from providing technical training to North Korea, including hosting trainers, advisors, or other officials for the purpose of military-, paramilitary- or police related training.⁷² However, the KPA delegation of military trainers that traveled to Russia in July 2024 potentially have violated this sanction.
 - » UNSC Resolution 2321 (2016) prohibits member states from providing nuclear or military training to North Korea.⁷³
- ***The 2024 Comprehensive Strategic Partnership treaty will serve as a foundation for expanding the two countries' bilateral military engagements, possibly including combined combat operations.***
 - » In October 2024, Russia's State Duma ratified the 2024 Comprehensive Strategic Partnership treaty in a vote of 397 to 0, providing the legal basis to host North Korean soldiers in Russia.⁷⁴
 - » Article 8 states that "the parties shall establish mechanisms for taking joint measures to strengthen defense capabilities to prevent war and ensure regional and international peace and security."⁷⁵
- ***In October 2024, North Korea deployed soldiers to Russia, including in the Far Eastern Federal District and the Kursk Oblast near the Russia-Ukraine border, where they began training with Russian forces.***⁷⁶
 - » At a Joint Press Availability on October 31, 2024 at the U.S.-South Korea Foreign and Defense Ministers' Meeting, it was confirmed that 10,000 North Korean soldiers have deployed to Russia with as many as 8,000 in the Kursk region.⁷⁷
 - » According to then Secretary of State Blinken, Russian forces have provided North Korean soldiers training in artillery, UAVs, and basic infantry operations, including trench clearing.⁷⁸ Then Secretary of Defense Austin claimed that the North Korean soldiers are outfitted with Russian uniforms and equipment.⁷⁹
 - » In late October 2024, KCNA released a statement by North Korea's Vice Foreign Minister Kim Jong Gyu that did not explicitly confirm North Korea's deployment of soldiers to Russia but argued that the 2024 Comprehensive Strategic Partnership treaty provides it the legal right to do so.⁸⁰

- » South Korea's National Intelligence Service reported that it has "officially confirmed" that the Deputy Chief of the KPA General Staff Kim Yong Bok has traveled to Russia to oversee North Korea's military deployment.⁸¹ General Kim is likely still the officer-in-charge of the KPA's Special Operations Force.
- ***Russia and North Korea are highly likely to increase their formal bilateral military engagements in the next three years, particularly after North Korea's unprecedented deployment of a large KPA contingent to Russia. However, the scope of this cooperation remains uncertain. The combat deployments of North Korean soldiers in Ukraine suggest a much more comprehensive military partnership, one that has provided the KPA its first modern combat experience. However, it remains uncertain whether this cooperation will result in routinized bilateral engagements and joint training in the future.***



M2: Shared Informal/Multilateral Military Engagements

Current Influence: Unobserved

Projected Influence: Unknown

- ***There have been no public multilateral military engagements involving Russia and North Korea. In 2017-18, Russia and China held a few joint military exercises that were assumed to be focused on responding to U.S.-led military operations on the Korean peninsula. It is possible that North Korea sent officials to observe these exercises, although this is difficult to confirm through publicly available information.***
- ***Russia reportedly proposed trilateral military drills with China and North Korea directly to Kim in July 2023, followed by a series of ministerial level visits in the following year.***
 - » Seoul's National Intelligence Service shared an assessment in September 2023 that then Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu likely proposed trilateral military drills with China and North Korea during his visit to Pyongyang in July 2023.⁸²
 - » Russia's ambassador to North Korea said in an interview that he felt trilateral China-Russia-North Korea drills would be an appropriate response to large-scale U.S.-South Korea military exercises.⁸³
- ***Russia and North Korea are unlikely to engage in multilateral military engagements in the next three years. Russia and China have not formally involved North Korea in their previous joint exercises due to UNSC sanctions against providing military training to North Korea and the significant impact such an action would have on the security environment in Northeast Asia. Therefore, North Korea's participation in multilateral military engagements is contingent on China's approval rather than Russia's, and China is unlikely to agree to such engagements in the next three years.***



M3: Defense/Security Pacts and Agreements

Current Influence: Very High	Projected Influence: Increasing
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- **Prior to June 2024, Russia and North Korea did not enact many active defense and security agreements. The agreements that were in place focused on limited cooperation and avoided specifying mutual defense, remaining vague on commitments should a conflict occur.**
 - » The 2000 Russia-North Korea Treaty on Friendship, Good Neighborliness, and Cooperation did not include any binding clauses on automatic mutual military assistance. It only provided for mutual consultation when danger arises.⁸⁴
 - » In November 2015, Russia and North Korea signed a deconfliction agreement to prevent accidental military provocations near the Russia-North Korea border.⁸⁵ In 2017, the first meeting of a Russian-North Korean military commission discussed the implementation of this agreement at Russia’s embassy in Pyongyang.⁸⁶

The 2024 Comprehensive Strategic Partnership treaty includes a mutual defense clause. This defense pact expands the scope of security cooperation between the two countries.

- **Article 3 states that “the parties shall mutually cooperate to ensure solid regional and international peace and security. In the event of a direct threat of a potential armed aggression against either party, they shall coordinate their positions at the request of either party and immediately activate bilateral negotiation channels to agree on possible practical measures to cooperate in eliminating the posed threat.”⁸⁷**
 - » Article 4 states that “in the event that either party falls into a state of war due to armed invasion from an individual state or multiple states, the other party shall immediately provide military and other assistance by all of one’s means available, in accordance with Article 51 of the UN Charter and the laws of the DPRK and the Russian Federation”⁸⁸
 - » Article 17 expands security cooperation beyond the realm of military affairs. It provides for counterterrorism and combating several forms of transnational crime.⁸⁹
- **The 2024 Comprehensive Strategic Partnership treaty reinstated the mutual defense clause of the 1961 treaty. Russia and North Korea will likely reach new defense/security pacts and agreements to implement the principles of the treaty in the next three years. Despite this, it is uncertain whether such agreements will entail a substantial expansion in Russia’s and North Korea’s actual bilateral and multilateral military engagements.**

E – Economic Instruments

The 2024 Comprehensive Strategic Partnership treaty provides a framework for significantly expanding Russia's use of economic instruments in North Korea, to a degree not seen since the early days of Soviet-North Korea relations. The treaty's economic clauses span several strategic commodities and sectors, including emerging and dual-use technologies, and it is highly likely that trade and cooperation in these areas will increase substantially in the next three years.



E1: Arms Transfers

Current Influence: Low

Projected Influence: Increasing

- ***Since the 1980s, arms transfer between Russia and North Korea have been limited. However, in late 2022, North Korea began to ship artillery shells and ballistic missiles to Russia in support of its military operation in Ukraine.***
 - » In January 2023, the White House released satellite imagery of arms transfers between North Korea and the Wagner paramilitary group at the Tumangang-Khasan railroad crossing that occurred in November 2022.⁹⁰
 - » In October 2023, the U.S. Mission to the UN accused North Korea of shipping more than 1,000 containers of arms and munitions to Russia. On the same day, the White House released images of 300 shipping containers in the North Korean port city of Najin that it claimed arrived in Russia via ship on 12 September 2023, the day before the second Putin-Kim summit.⁹¹
 - » The U.S. Government assessed that Russia launched a North Korean SRBM against Ukraine on 30 December 2023, followed by the launch of multiple missiles on 2 January 2024. A slide presented by then NSC Coordinator for Strategic Communications Kirby featured archive images of North Korean Hwasong-11A (KN-23) SRBM.⁹² Arms control experts and Ukrainian officials claim that missile fragments recovered from Russian strikes suggest the use of Hwasong-11A SRBMs.⁹³
- ***Both Russia and North Korea have officially denied that any arms transfers have occurred, but third-party analysts have provided extensive evidence that such transfers are ongoing.***
 - » Both Russia and North Korea have denied that arms transfers between the two countries have occurred, with Vice Department Director of the Central Committee of the WPK Kim Yo Jong denying that weapon systems produced by North Korea are exported to Russia.⁹⁴
 - » The Washington Post reported that, from August 2023 through January 2024, more than 74,000 metric tons of explosives were distributed from two ports in Russia's Far East to 16 sites mainly along the country's western borders near Ukraine, 12 of them near known ammunition storage facilities. The receiving sites indicated that the arriving goods were munitions, despite the documentation referring to them as explosives.⁹⁵
 - » The Royal United Services Institute (RUSI) used satellite imagery to monitor movements between North Korea and Russia and identified 27 shipments between the port of Rajin and two Russian ports, estimating that thousands of containers had been moved. However, the contents of the containers remain unknown.⁹⁶

- ***There is evidence that small-scale arms transfers have occurred as part of Russia’s and North Korea’s recent diplomatic engagements.***
 - » Russian state-media outlet TASS reported that Primorsky Krai governor Oleg Kozhemyako confirmed that Russia gifted five kamikaze drones, a Geran-25 reconnaissance drone, military uniforms, and bulletproof vests to North Korea during Kim Jong Un’s September 2023 visit to the Russian Far East.⁹⁷
- ***The 2024 Comprehensive Strategic Partnership treaty stipulated defense cooperation and mutual support for sanctions evasion, which indicates that arms transfers will likely increase in the next three years. Putin has suggested that Russia reserves the right to supply weapons to North Korea.⁹⁸ However, both countries may refrain from transferring key strategic assets and force multipliers to avoid provoking escalation in the Western response.***



E2: Technology-Sharing and Joint Production Agreements

Current Influence: Low

Projected Influence: Increasing

- ***The 2024 Comprehensive Strategic Partnership treaty serves as a foundation to expand and increase technology-sharing and joint production agreements between the two countries. Although no such agreements have since been signed, many analysts point out the possibility of limited technology-sharing.***
 - » Article 8 states that “the parties shall establish mechanisms for taking joint measures to strengthen defense capabilities to prevent war and ensure regional and international peace and security.”⁹⁹ Although no explicit arrangements have been made, many analysts interpret this to be a foundation for future Russian technology-sharing and technical support to North Korea.¹⁰⁰
 - » In February 2025, a delegation from North Korea’s National Aviation Administration visited a Russian drone training center at Moscow State Technical University of Civil Aviation and attended the National Aviation Infrastructure Show, suggesting the possibility of increased dual-use technology-sharing.¹⁰¹
- ***Russia and North Korea are highly likely to sign technology-sharing and joint production agreements in the next three years to meet the mutual defense goals outlined in the 2024 Comprehensive Strategic Partnership treaty. Since North Korea’s defense industry was built by importing Soviet weapons systems, such joint production will not require substantial preparation to implement.***



E3: Trade and Cooperation in Strategic Commodities/Sectors

Current Influence: Medium

Projected Influence: Increasing

- ***Since 2012, Russia and North Korea have exchanged over 60 economic delegations. In 2014-2015, there was a flurry of activity that promoted Russia-North Korea economic relations, with Russian officials declaring 2015 as the Year of Friendship between Russia and North Korea.¹⁰²***
 - » In 2015, North Korean Minister for Foreign Economic Affairs Ri Ryong Nam led an economic delegation to Moscow to meet with Russian Minister for the Development of the Russian Far East Alexander Galushka to discuss the creation of advanced development zones in Russia’ Far East and North Korea.¹⁰³

- » In 2015, Russia and North Korea set up the Russia-North Korea Business Council at the Chamber of Commerce of the Russian Federation to assist businessmen and companies to establish business relations.¹⁰⁴
- » In September 2015, a North Korean delegation took part in the Eastern Economic Forum organized in Vladivostok.¹⁰⁵
- ***Since 2012, Russia has expressed interest in investing in the North Korean energy, health, and education sectors. Such development projects are likely to increase following the signing of the 2024 Comprehensive Strategic Partnership treaty.***
 - » In 2012, Russia agreed to write off 90 percent of North Korea's \$11 billion decades-old debt, much of it carried over from the former Soviet Union.¹⁰⁶
 - » In 2014, North Korean officials agreed to facilitate the issuing of multiple-entry visas as well as provide Russian investors with mobile phones, Internet access, and easier access to information on legislation. In the second half of 2014, for the first time, twelve Russian businessmen received long-term multiple-entry visas to North Korea.¹⁰⁷
 - » In March 2014, Russia and North Korea agreed to expedite the preparation of an intergovernmental agreement on international road transport, signed in April 2015 in Moscow.¹⁰⁸
 - » In December 2015, Russia and North Korea signed an agreement on cooperation in the field of electric power.
 - » During the third Putin-Kim summit in 2024, the two leaders discussed Russian assistance to help North Korea build a new hospital.¹⁰⁹
- ***Although trade between Russia and North Korea is marginal in comparison to North Korea's trade with China, Russia has maintained an interest in developing rail infrastructure in and exporting oil to North Korea.***
 - » RasonConTrans is a Russia-North Korea joint venture founded in 2008 as part of the joint Khasan-Rajin logistical project connecting the Russian Far East and North Korea's northeast by a railway bridge. The company has operated Pier 3 since it rebuilt the rail infrastructure and modernized the terminal in 2013-2014.¹¹⁰
 - » In 2014, Russian company Mostovik expressed its intention to invest \$25 billion in the modernization of the North Korean railroad in exchange for access to North Korean mineral deposits, including coal and iron ore. An agreement was signed between Russia and North Korea in 2014.¹¹¹ The project plan included the reconstruction of more than 3,000 kilometers of railroads over 20 years.¹¹²
 - » Former NSC Coordinator for Strategic Communications, John Kirby, said that Russia is violating UNSC limits on its exports of refined petroleum to North Korea. In March 2024, Russia shipped over 165,000 barrels to North Korea.¹¹³ The UNSC caps annual exports to 500,000 barrels.¹¹⁴

- ***Russia's and North Korea's bilateral trade and cooperation in strategic commodities and sectors will significantly increase in the next three years with the 2024 Comprehensive Strategic Partnership treaty providing the foundation for the cooperation. The limiting factor in such opportunities is the efficacy of the U.S. and UNSC sanctions regime on both countries.***
 - » Article 9 states that the two countries will cooperate on transnational challenges, such as climate change, food and energy security, cybersecurity, and public health.¹¹⁵
 - » Article 10 states that the two countries will promote cooperation in trade, finance, and scientific and technological fields, such as space, biology, peaceful nuclear energy, and artificial intelligence.¹¹⁶

CONCLUSIONS

Russia's current M-DIME influence in North Korea is assessed as Medium. Russia relies on all four types of instruments to gain military influence in North Korea, and the two countries have substantially rejuvenated their relationship since 2022. Bilateral cooperation in military affairs has advanced significantly, with North Korea acknowledging its support for Russia's objectives in Ukraine and implementing a growing transfer of arms and munitions to Russia. This shared estrangement has facilitated a growth in bilateral diplomatic activities, including the 2023 and 2024 head of state summits (D1). Since its 2022 invasion of Ukraine, Russia has also increased its diplomatic support for North Korea in international venues and intensified its soft power military activities (D3). The signing of the 2024 "Treaty on Comprehensive Strategic Partnership between North Korea and the Russian Federation" is likely to fundamentally alter the geopolitics of Northeast Asia (M3). This renewed alliance has formed in opposition to the increasing trilateral security cooperation between the United States, Japan, and South Korea. North Korea's deployment of 10,000 soldiers to Russia in October 2024 suggests that both sides seek to affirm the binding nature of the 2024 Comprehensive Strategic Partnership treaty's mutual defense pact and, in doing so, rapidly move away from the constraints that used to characterize their bilateral relations in the post-Cold War era.

Russia's projected M-DIME influence in North Korea is assessed as Increasing for nearly all the instruments. Over the next three years, we expect Russia to continue using all four types of instruments to gain military influence in North Korea. The Comprehensive Strategic Partnership is likely to propel an overall increase in both the volume and the impact of Russian military influence-seeking activities across all instruments. Russia's increasing military influence in North Korea will likely be reinforced by the expansion of international military education

and training programs, facilitating the exchange of military academy cadets and specialized training based on combat experience in Ukraine (D2). Additionally, Russia's support for North Korea's information and communications technology (ICT) sector as outlined in the 2024 Comprehensive Strategic Partnership treaty is expected to significantly grow, particularly in the areas of cybersecurity, artificial intelligence, and satellite development, providing North Korea with critical technical expertise (I2). Furthermore, the treaty will likely accelerate trade and cooperation in strategic commodities and sectors, expanding Russia's role in North Korea's energy, transportation, and industrial development despite ongoing international sanctions (E3). North Korea's deployment of 10,000 soldiers to Russia in October 2024 demonstrates both countries' unprecedented commitment to their cooperation to flout the standards of the international community and the rules-based order (M1). Even if China does not provide explicit support for this increasingly antagonistic coalition, both Russia and North Korea alone will be a significant disruption to international security in Europe and the Indo-Pacific.

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Authors

a. Mr. Lucas Winter is Senior Analyst, Middle East/North Africa, at the Foreign Military Studies Office. He has an M.A. in International Relations from Johns Hopkins SAIS and was an Arabic Language Flagship Fellow in Damascus, Syria in 2006-2007.

b. Dr. Jason Warner is Director of Research and Senior Analyst, Africa and Terrorism/Transnational Crime, at the Foreign Military Studies Office. He is the author of two books, and dozens of peer-reviewed articles and reports on African security and international affairs. He holds a Ph.D. from Harvard in African Studies.

c. Michael Donmoyer earned a Certificate in Chinese and American Studies at the Hopkins-Nanjing Center and is pursuing a M.A. in International Relations at Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies. He holds a B.S. in International Relations from the United States Military Academy and served as a U.S. Army field artillery officer. Following his military service, he worked as a management consultant specializing in supply chain and operations. He also worked as a Research Fellow at the Congressional-Executive Commission on China.

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