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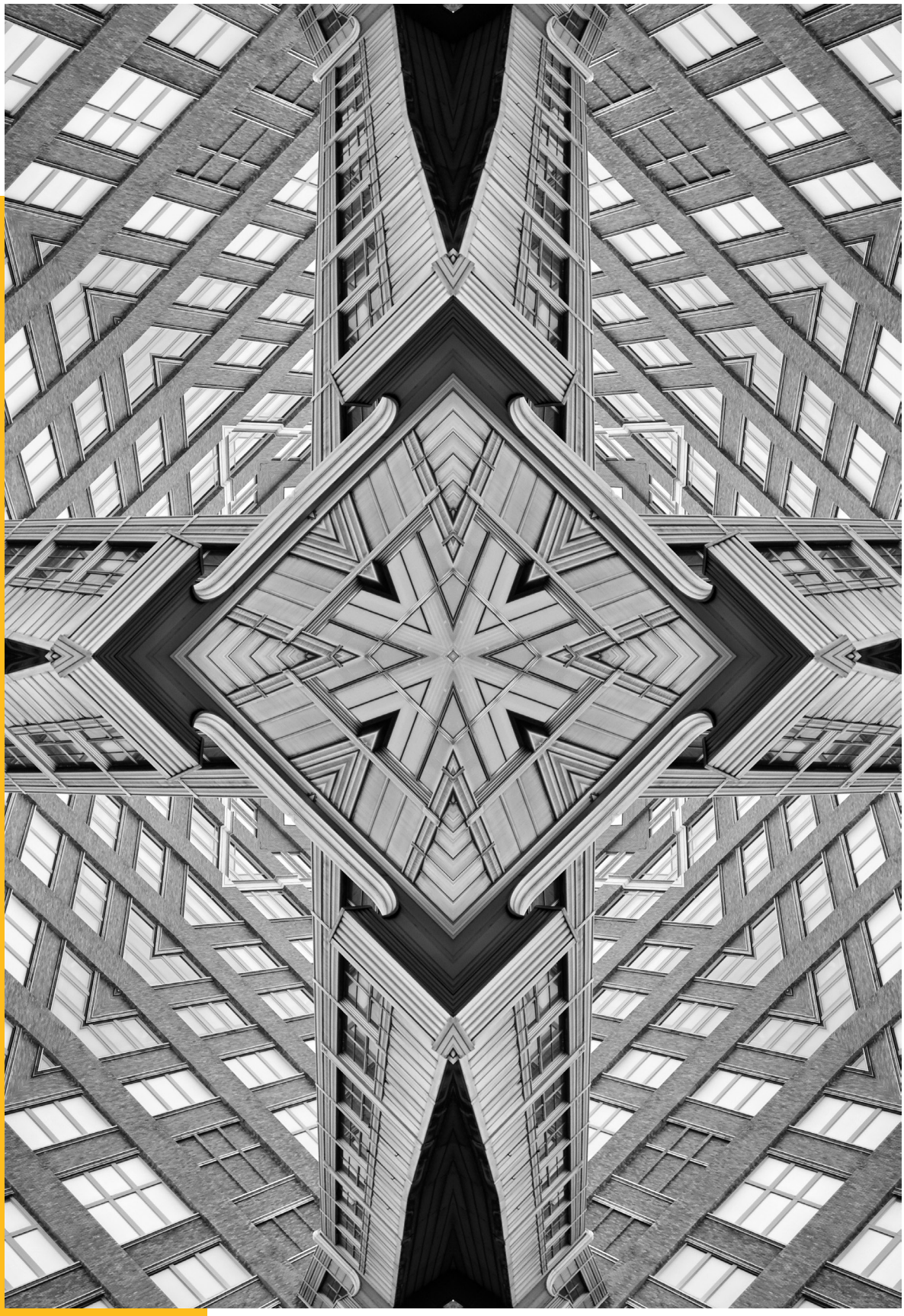

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South Korea's Policy Adjustments Under Trump 2.0

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Abstract

The shifts in the United States' (US) foreign policy since Donald Trump's re-election as 47th president have perhaps been most visible in the country's relations with the European Union. Meanwhile, the changes are more nuanced and complex in the case of the US's allies in the Indo-Pacific region. In particular, US-South Korea relations have been marked by numerous changes, both political and those related to trade and security cooperation. This paper analyses the changing dynamics of US-South Korea relations under President Trump across different domains, examining the persistent challenges and exploring the opportunities ahead.

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Introduction

In a 2025 poll in South Korea, respondents identified the following as their country's top three threats: United States (US)-China strategic competition and conflict; the spread of protectionism and competition in advanced technologies; and North Korea's nuclear missile capability.[1]

The threats centre on three countries—the US, China, and North Korea—all influencing South Korea's security outlook and economic strategy. For long, South Korea managed its security and economic prosperity without provoking either the US or China. Simultaneously, it successfully maintained pressure on North Korea to denuclearise. However, circumstances have lately arisen which are making the established equilibrium increasingly difficult to sustain. Of particular concern are two factors: the US-China geopolitical and geoeconomic contestation, and the Trump administration's shifting priorities due to its MAGA ('Make America Great Again) project. These have disrupted South Korea's strategic calculations, forcing its administration to recalibrate and reassess plans. While all these changes have occurred under the second Trump administration, their impact may be lasting and profound.

This paper examines how South Korea is coping with the security and economic challenges that have arisen under Trump 2.0. It highlights how South Korea has upgraded its alliance with the US in terms of greater burden sharing and closer economic and security cooperation, while maintaining its sovereignty and protecting its security and financial interests.

Trump, Trade, and Industrial Renaissance

Under Trump's second administration, South Korea has become one of the countries with the highest tariff rates among the US's Free Trade Agreement (FTA) partners.[2] Initially, it was hit with a 26 percent reciprocal tariff on top of the 10 percent baseline tariff applicable to all countries.[3] Additionally, Korean exports of auto parts, automobiles, and steel faced 25 percent tariffs.[4] Following a series of trade negotiations, in July 2025, the US agreed in principle to reduce reciprocal and auto tariffs to 15 percent (effective from 1 November 2025).[5] In turn, the US demanded that South Korea invest US$350 billion in the US, where the US would decide in which sectors it should do so, and would retain 90 percent of the profits within the US. This amount of US$350 billion exceeds South Korea's combined foreign direct investment (FDI) from 2020 to 2024.[6] South Korea ultimately agreed to the demand.

South Korea is already one of the US's top investors. Its outbound foreign direct investment (OFDI) to the US was US$27.77 billion in 2022,[7] US$27.72 billion in 2023,[8] and US$22 billion in 2024.[9] In 2024, it invested US$3.92 billion in the US manufacturing sector, accounting for 25 percent of the US's manufacturing investment and 17.7 percent of total.[10] Just one company, Hyundai, initially announced plans of investing US$21 billion in the US (US$6.1 billion in steel, components and logistics, US$6.3 billion in future industries and US$8.6 billion in the automotive sector); it later raised the figure to US$26 billion.[11]

While the interim deal was secured in end-July 2025, a final deal was reached only in October during President Trump's visit to South Korea for the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) summit. Of the total US$350-billion investment, US$150 billion will go into the shipbuilding sector and the remaining into the other kinds of manufacturing, with an annual investment of US$20 billion.[12] The two sides also signed 11 new contracts in diverse sectors, including shipbuilding, minerals, nuclear energy, liquefied natural gas, and aviation.[13]

In return, South Korea secured certain guarantees against future tariffs from the US for the semiconductor sector, giving it parity with other global players like Taiwan.[14] It also received assurances of Most Favoured Nation (MFN) treatment in sectors such as pharmaceuticals and timber, including zero tariffs on generic pharmaceuticals and aircraft components.[15] However, the new trade deal between Taiwan and the US, signed in January 2026, raises questions over whether South Korea will continue to maintain its edge over Taiwanese semiconductor chips.[16] The US might also ask South Korea to increase its investment in the chips sector if it seeks additional exemptions. Moreover, Trump's threat on 27 January 2026 that he would again increase tariffs to 25 percent, on the ground that the South Korean national assembly had not yet formalised the October trade agreement, has renewed the risk of jeopardising the deal and thereby placing South Korea in a difficult position vis-à-vis the US.

The US-South Korea trade negotiations have established a fresh precedent in their relationship. The US propensity to repeatedly leverage trade and commerce to maximise its business interests has now become a new normal. The US's recurrent threats to scrap the trade deal as a tactic to further pressure South Korea on other issues has now come to fruition. Despite the achievements on the trade front, Trump's actions have proved that uncertainty will be a constant in these bilateral relations. Even if South Korea resolves the current trade impasse, there is no guarantee that Trump will abide by the negotiated terms.

The precedents are not easy for South Korea to ignore. In September 2018, during his first term, Trump had renegotiated a trade deal with South Korea, calling it "a very big deal" at the time;[17] it is the same deal he has disregarded in his second term. Already, the trade arbitrariness of the Trump administration has resulted in notable losses for South Korean businesses operating in the US.

Domestic socio-political issues in the US, particularly the Trump administration's drive against illegal immigrants, have also impacted the mobility of skilled South Korean workers there, worsening the erosion of trust. In September 2025, for example, 300 South Korean workers at an electric vehicle (EV) battery factory that Hyundai and LG were building

together in the state of Georgia, were detained by the US's Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), casting another shadow on US-South Korea relations.[18] Indeed, even before this incident, an EAI poll in South Korea revealed a deeply unfavourable attitude towards the US, with 80 percent of respondents citing the Trump administration's global trade polices as the primary reason for their distrust.[19]

However, given the critical importance of the US as one of South Korea's top export destinations and its essential role in its economic security, the South Korean government has had no choice but to double-down on its investments and commitments to the US. Further, South Korea's declining exports to China and China's rising domestic manufacturing in several sectors pose a risk to South Korea's industrial supremacy.

With its US partnership and through trade diversification,[20] South Korea hopes to strengthen its global position against China, which it increasingly perceives as an unfair trade partner. It wants to reinforce its importance to the US as a trade, investment and technological partner, to position itself as an ally in the US's effort to bring about a 'renaissance' in domestic manufacturing, particularly in sectors such as shipbuilding, EVs, and advanced batteries.[21]

Trust and Antitrust: Tech Non-Tariff Barriers

The trade tussle may be over, but South Korea faces another challenge relating to its regulations over big tech. The Trump administration has hardened its stance on big tech regulations worldwide, fearing these could adversely impact US tech companies. It has threatened allies; it even cancelled a trade meeting with South Korea in December 2025 on this score.[22]

Prominent US tech companies operating in South Korea (as well as domestic ones such as Kakao Corporation and Naver Corporation)[23] have for years had an inimical relationship with the government. They have been accused of unfair trade practices, such as leveraging their market dominance to suppress competition. Issues have ranged from app store policies,[24] customer support,[25] network fees, and corporate

tax payments.[26] They have been repeatedly found guilty and fined—in 2021, and again in 2023, for instance, South Korea's antitrust watchdog, the Free Trade Commission, fined Google US$177 million and US$32 million, respectively—the first time for abusing its market position to block Android customisation, and then for misusing its gaming platform.[27] The first decision, contested by Google, was upheld by a Seoul court in January 2024.[28]

To ensure free and fair competition, South Korea wants to introduce domestic legislation on digital services, which has not been well received by the US or its digital service providers, which see it as a non-tariff barrier.[29] Called the Online Platform Monopoly Prohibition (OPMP) Act, which South Korea maintains will promote innovation and market competitiveness, it is being perceived as a hurdle by both domestic and foreign tech conglomerates.[30]

Mandatory in-app payments, as introduced by US Big Tech companies like Google and Apple, have been deemed to violate South Korea's antitrust regulations. There are also concerns about these two companies' insistence on exporting high-precision map data.[31] According to a report by the Competere Foundation, South Korea's competition-related policies may cost tech companies some US$525 billion.[32] The US is concerned about the economic fallout of these policies, and is increasingly pressuring the South Korean administration.[33]

Intense pressure from the Trump administration has led to South Korean President Lee Jae Myung putting the legislative policies on hold. His move underscored South Korea's fear that the issue could create friction in US-South Korea ties. It further highlighted that while earlier US administrations, however concerned about antitrust and fair competition matters, never used them as negotiation tactics, Trump was different.

Eventually, South Korea watered down its digital services rules. Ju Biung-ghi, Korea's Fair Trade Commission Chairman, while addressing this issue, has also stated that South Korea is exploring diversification towards the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries, and various international organisations, to reduce its export dependence on the US.[34]

At the same time, the November 2025 data breach at Coupang, South Korea's biggest online retailer (US-registered, and hence technically a US company) in which private details of 34 million accounts were illegally accessed, has underlined the crucial importance of online security and again put big tech concerns at the forefront of Korea-US ties.[35] The leak generated much outrage, more so because Coupang showed a marked reluctance to cooperate with the government probe that followed, while lobbying the US government to pressure South Korea to cease its intervention. And indeed, Sarah Rogers, US Undersecretary of State for Public Diplomacy, criticised even the passing of the relatively watered-down Promotion of Information and Communications Network Utilisation and Protection Act by South Korea's national assembly in March 2026. In a post on X, she maintained that the Act "ostensibly focused on redressing defamatory deepfakes, reaches much further—and endangers tech cooperation."[36] Similarly, Jamieson Greer, US Trade Representative, claimed the Act was sufficient reason for the US to break its trade agreement with South Korea.[37] This attitude has generated further outrage against both the company[38] and the US, leading to counter-pressure on the government.[39]

The Import of MAGA Ideology

Trump's ascendance has also had an impact on South Korea's domestic politics. His MAGA ideology has resonated with the right-wing opposition party, the People Power Party (PPP), especially the section still supporting Yoon Suk Yeol, the country's controversial former president who was impeached in December 2024 and removed from office soon after. This section, with its slogan 'Make Korea Great Again (MKGA)' has been promoting far-right talking points, fanning conspiracy theories and seeking to discredit the ruling Democratic Party of Korea (DPK), accusing it of links to the Chinese Communist Party.

The camaraderie between the proponents of MKGA and MAGA has strengthened,[40] spanning the media and online influencers, apart from those in the political arena. This bonhomie presents a new challenge for liberal and progressive forces in the country, as debates on gender and immigration, echoing the MAGA movement, become widespread.[41] It has also affected South Korea's relations with other countries, especially China, fanning a rise in anti-Chinese sentiment.[42]

Foreign Policy Fractures

Foreign policy differences between the US and South Korea have grown, especially over three issues. The first is North Korea, specifically its denuclearisation and non-proliferation programme, including the negotiation process with it. The second is China, of which South Korea and the US have differing threat perceptions. The third are similar variations in perceptions related to other countries.

For South Korea, the North Korea issue still occupies centrestage. The EAI Public Opinion Poll 2025 found 90 percent of South Koreans regarding North Korea as their top potential military threat, while about 52 percent named North Korea's nuclear missiles as one of the top three military threats.[43] However, the US view in Trump's second term is very different from that during his first—his administration no longer sees North Korea as a serious security threat. In the US's National Security Strategy (NSS) document of 2017, North Korea was mentioned 17 times, and in the NSS 2025 it is not discussed at all.[44]

Clearly, as the statements of Trump himself, his Cabinet, and even his former acting US ambassador to South Korea, Kevin Kim, show, they are deliberately downplaying the North Korea issue, including the question of its nuclear capability.[45] This position represents a notable shift from those of previous US administrations; the US now expects South Korea to handle the North Korea threat on its own, in addition to assisting the US in its Indo-Pacific security operations elsewhere.

As for China, while South Koreans are concerned about its growing military and economic power, they do not see the country as an existential threat.[46] No doubt, the EAI 2025 poll showed that more than 70 percent of South Koreans perceived China as the second-largest potential military threat after North Korea.[47] This sentiment, however, has not led to increased calls for US support, nor to any significant policy changes in South Korea's economic strategy or military posture. (In contrast, in Japan for example, leaders have made statements about the Chinese threat, issued policy documents, and considerably increased defence spending.)

Finally, the implications of some of the US's actions overseas worry South Korean leaders. Since South Korea is perceived as a staunch US ally, US actions against other countries puts South Korean economic investments, energy security, and citizen safety in those countries in jeopardy,[48] apart from worsening its diplomatic relations with them.

After Trump, during his first term, for instance, withdrew from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) with Iran in May 2018, and imposed fresh sanctions, South Korea was compelled to freeze US$7 billion in Iranian funds held by two of its commercial banks.[49] In retaliation, Iran banned Samsung's products and seized a South Korean oil tanker.[50]

Since Trump's actions often violate the international rules-based order and the United Nations Charter, South Korea's silence on such occasions is perceived as an endorsement by other countries, particularly North Korea, eroding any prospects of warming ties and denuclearisation.[51] They also encourage North Korea, Russia, and China to undertake similar unilateral actions in Northeast Asia.

Overall, US foreign policy is undergoing changes under Trump—some inevitable, others radical—and allies like South Korea will have to adjust to them. The inevitable ones are related to burden sharing and fair trade, which previous administrations had also raised. The radical ones stem from the 'isolationist' worldview Trump has been displaying in his second term, in marked contrast to his first. It is a worldview that prioritises the US's national interest over those of its allies,[52] as Europe has already discovered. It is a policy that views allies' concerns—both security and economic—as subservient to those of the US, and transactional as well. It risks bartering allies' interests in great-power negotiations.

Thus US foreign policy towards South Korea is no longer focused on North Korea; instead, China is an important part of bilateral conversations. This is a clear shift from the Biden administration's stance, which viewed both China and North Korea as strategic challenges.

Many overlapping interests remain between the two countries, particularly in the areas of shipbuilding, semiconductors, EVs, and advanced batteries.

Shipbuilding Cooperation

In shipbuilding, the US needs South Korea, both for strategic assistance as well as investment. Given the state of its domestic shipbuilding industry, the US is relying on South Korea's shipbuilding giants, especially the big three—Hanwha Ocean, HD Korea Shipbuilding and Offshore Engineering, and Samsung Heavy Industries—for transfer of expertise, skills, and technology.[53] This has been part of the Trump administration's agenda since the start of his second term, building on the Biden administration's earlier efforts. Korean shipbuilders have been responding positively: in June 2024, for instance, when Biden was still president, Hanwha Ocean bought Philly Shipyard, a US shipbuilder, as part of its global defence expansion.[54] Under Trump, South Korea has been the main contributor so far to his Make American Shipbuilding Great Again (MASGA) initiative, announcing a US$150-billion investment in the US exclusively focused on the shipbuilding sector. Table 1 shows some of the most relevant contributors to the initiative.

Table 1: Shipbuilding Investments by South Korean Companies in the US

Company	US Partner	Area of Focus
HD Hyundai	Huntington Ingalls Industries, signed a Memorandum of Agreement (MoU)	To build the next generation US Naval ships, build auxiliary fleet Collaborate on design and construction of naval and commercial vessels Explore joint investment opportunities in new acquisitions and establish new shipbuilding facilities in the US

Company	US Partner	Area of Focus
Hanwha Ocean	Acquired US-based Philly Shipyard for US$100 million	To invest US$5 billion in the new entity, Hanwha Philly Shipyard, to increase capacity, install two blocks and three quays,[55] increase shipyard building capacity from 2 vessels a year to 20. Also to help revive the US merchant navy fleet.
Samsung Heavy Industries Co.	Signed MoU with Vigor Marine Group	To support maintenance, repair and overhaul of US Navy support vessels, including setting up joint shipbuilding projects at US shipyards.[56]
HJ Shipbuilding and Construction SK Oceanplant K Shipbuilding	US Navy	Master ship repair, to maintain and repair US battleships

Source: Author's own, using various sources.[57]

With these strategic investments, South Korea hopes to expand into the US shipbuilding sector over the coming decade, and use it as strategic leverage during trade negotiations.[58] The new trade deal, with lowered tariffs, seems to indicate that Seoul has adopted the right strategy.[59] The deal also includes an approval to increase the South Korean stake in Austral, an Australian shipbuilding company.[60] The joint factsheet released following the Trump-Lee meeting in November 2025 says, "Both countries (are) committed to collaborate further through a shipbuilding working group, including on maintenance, repair, and overhaul, workforce

development, shipyard modernization, and supply chain resilience."[61] South Korea has also received a "return gift" from the US—an approval to build a nuclear attack submarine,[62] which had been one of South Korea's long-standing demands.[63]

Alliance First (America First) Vs. Autonomy First

The US's recent actions, such as military attacks on Iran and Venezuela, have made many of its allies increasingly cautious[64]—they do not want to sign up on the US bandwagon without careful consideration. In South Korea, two camps have formed: the alliance-first camp and the autonomy-first camp. The former prefers adjusting South Korea's interests to accommodate the US, while the latter advocates cautious engagement, with South Korea's interests at the centre.

The debate primarily centres on strategic flexibility and the North Korea nuclear issue. Strategic flexibility pertains to US Forces stationed in Korea—their structure and number, as well as their operational control. In May 2025, for instance, South Korea was caught by surprise when a US media outlet reported that the US was expected to shift 4,500 troops from South Korea.[65] Air Force reconfiguration, and even large-scale reduction, remains a possibility.[66]

The size of the force the US maintains in South Korea—brought in at the start of the Korean War in June 1950 and retained even after the armistice with North Korea in August 1953—has fluctuated over the decades. Following the 9/11 attacks on the United States, for instance, one brigade was transferred to West Asia.[67] Nonetheless, under previous US administrations, South Korea was informed before modifications in the force were made—mechanisms such as the Strategic Consultation for Allies Partnership agreement, signed between the US and South Korea in January 2006, existed. Under Trump, these have been discarded, despite the 2006 agreement clearly stating, "The US respects the Republic of Korea's position that it shall not be involved in a regional conflict in Northeast Asia against the will of the Korean people."[68]

Cooperation and Costs

Trump's view that North Korea is no longer a major threat differs not only from that of the Lee administration, but also that of many senior US defence officials, including the US Forces Korea (USFK) Commander Xavier Brunson and the US Indo-Pacific Commander, Admiral Samuel Paparo, who have publicly maintained that the North Korea threat would increase if troops were reduced.[69] Even the US Congress has introduced restrictions, barring troop reduction in South Korea below 28,500 personnel and tightened the conditions for wartime operational control in the National Defence Authorisation Act.[70] For now, these moves have prevented Trump from taking any further unilateral steps.

Apart from underplaying the North Korean threat, the Trump administration also expects South Korea to increase its defence spending and take greater responsibility "to deter adversaries and protect the first island chain," as mentioned in NSS 2025.[71] The new US security strategy puts China at the centre, while Seoul is expected to assume primary responsibility for deterring North Korea, while simultaneously enhancing its capabilities and role as an ally to counter China. However, while South Korea has always been ready to cooperate with the US on North Korea, China was never part of the agreement. The US wants to use USFK military bases as launchpads for its future operations in the Indo-Pacific, including towards China in the event of any conflict in the Taiwan Strait and the South China Sea,[72] while South Korea is trying to exercise its limited strategic autonomy to balance between strategic entrapment and strategic abandonment. The Lee administration has also made the complete transfer of Wartime Operational Control (OPCON)—in case of any armed conflict—from the US to South Korea one of its national security priorities.[73] Indeed, South Korea aims to take control of operational command, and thereby the fate of inter-Korean relations, entirely in its own hands.[74]

Under periodically renewed Special Measures Agreements (SMAs), South Korea defrays part of the US's cost of maintaining the USFK. The latest such agreement, signed in November 2024, for the years 2026-30, raised South Korea's contribution in 2026 by 8.3 percent over that in 2025. Yet Trump, who had been elected by then but had yet to take over in his second term, was not impressed, declaring to a gathering that South Korea's contribution should be raised from US$1.2 billion to US$10 billion. "If I were there now, they'd be paying us US$10 billion a year," he said.[75]

Cooperation and Costs

In South Korea, one school of thought wants—despite Trump's fickleness—still closer military cooperation with the US, including involvement in addressing regional security threats, particularly those posed by China, and taking on greater overall responsibility adjusting to the US's Indo-Pacific pivot.[76] This strategy, however, risks pulling South Korea into conflicts unrelated to North Korea. The other view prioritises South Korea's interests over the alliance, questioning the importance of some of its aspects, including expectations regarding the roles, responsibilities, and capabilities of US allies. This direction would risk alienating the US.

Modernising the Alliance While Challenges Remain

Ultimately, irrespective of disagreements, South Korea continues to bet on the US. This dependence stems from enduring ties dating back to the Korean War. South Korea's strategy is based partly on geopolitical realities, such as the US's continued interest in maintaining supremacy in East Asia, while also drawing on the goodwill it has enjoyed with the US since the Korean War. This was apparent from President Lee's remarks while addressing a public gathering at the Centre for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), a US-based think tank, in August 2025: "President Trump and I agreed to make and modernize our bilateral alliance to be more reciprocal and future-oriented in line with the changing security landscape."[77]

The enduring alliance has fostered a strong emotional bond between the people, the military, and various institutions of both countries. Each sees the other as an irreplaceable part of their future. Both during the first Trump administration and the second, tariff issues appeared to be shaking the foundations of US-South Korea ties, but they have been resolved. Yet Trump 2.0 has also shaken the South Korean political system across the aisle, forcing many to re-evaluate certain assumptions that had earlier been taken for granted. Some South Korean scholars have advised policymakers to start preparing for a Plan B, focused on diversifying Korea's economic and security partners.[78]

In practice, Seoul has doubled-down on cooperation with the US. (While its engagement with China has also attracted attention, it is, in fact, merely stabilising its ties with Beijing.) Essentially, South Korea is modernising its alliance with the US, aiming to align itself with the changing US political environment and the great-power contest, be it in critical foreign policy, or economic and security issues. However, South Korea also understands the challenges that arise from modernising the US-Korea alliance. Some of them are easy to address, while others are beyond Seoul's capacity.

On critical foreign policy issues, the Lee administration wants to foster closer diplomatic cooperation with the US. Crucial ones include inter-Korean relations, trilateral security cooperation, and the North Korea

Modernising the Alliance While Challenges Remain

nuclear issue. Lee aims to continue the diplomatic efforts of Moon Jae-in, the last progressive president before him, including signing a peace treaty with North Korea, building on the US-DPRK 2018 Singapore summit declaration, pressing for denuclearising North Korea, and strengthening the trilateral partnership with the US and Japan.[79] Korean policymakers believe that to achieve these core diplomatic goals, the country needs active US support. It needs stability in its relations with the US to pursue policies such as normalising ties with China and Russia, as well as diversifying its diplomatic engagement with the Global South, including Southeast Asia and India.

However, given Trump's unpredictable foreign policy record, especially as displayed in Venezuela and Iran, expecting the US to resolve pending issues within an acceptable diplomatic framework and international liberal order seems to be unrealistic. This illiberal turn in US foreign policy under Trump will likely weaken South Korea's position on critical issues and even make it difficult to strengthen ties with China and Russia.

For now, the October 2025 deal may have solved Seoul's trade problems, though it has also legitimised the unfair trade practices of the US, including the fragmentation of institutions like the World Trade Organization (WTO). A precedent has been set where the economic interests of small and middle powers have become subservient to that of nations with economic clout, be it the US or China.

On security issues, South Korea has secured significant concessions, including agreement on the transition of wartime operational control, reiteration of the US's extended deterrence, and approval for a nuclear attack submarine. But again, while these may address its short-term security, further security challenges are expected to arise in the long term. The concessions will likely contribute to heightened regional insecurity, further contributing to an arms race in the region and nuclear proliferation (vertical and horizontal). South Korea also risks strategic entanglement with the US as defence cooperation increases, thereby alienating China and Russia.

Modernising the Alliance While Challenges Remain

The new strategic roadmap diverges substantially from the US-South Korea strategic understanding delineated in the 1953 Mutual Defence Treaty. If it is realised, it may well put South Korea in a difficult position. An increase in its defence budget will send signals to North Korea, China and even Russia that South Korea is part of the US bandwagon, which could trigger a counter-response in the form of an arms race and impact inter-Korean dialogue. North Korea might even suspend talks, which would contradict the reconciliatory goals of the Lee administration. Will Seoul make this leap of faith just to save its alliance?[80]

Conclusion

The US-South Korea alliance is in transition, as South Korea adapts to the US's growing political demands. It views the changes it is making as an opportunity to modernise the alliance under Trump 2.0. It has made trade, security, and technology concessions to the US. Its political and economic investments in the US have further sealed the alliance, including securing some critical concessions for South Korea. But while South Korea may have secured its short-term interests, there could well be long-term costs in prioritising the US-South Korea alliance over South Korea's national interests. Seoul has established a new template for alliance partnerships, which risks jeopardising its strategic interests.

With its trade deal, South Korea has justified and legitimised the US's illiberal behaviour and mercantilist trading approach. This has established a new precedent that allows the US to leverage the alliance in future negotiations. It has been said that South Korea has had the best possible deal among the US's allies. It remains to be seen whether this deal will pay in the long term.ORF

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