

Washington Is the Matchmaker for the Russia-North Korea Romance

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The [summit meeting](#) between Russian president Vladimir Putin and North Korean leader Kim Jong-un has led to a surge of pearl clutching among the U.S. foreign policy establishment and its allies in the corporate news media. Warnings are growing that the meeting signals greater military cooperation between Moscow and Pyongyang, which portends an [increased security threat](#) to the United States and its allies in both Europe and East Asia. Having made that diagnosis, though, the analysts have very few ideas for a cure or even a modestly beneficial treatment.

Those issuing the alarms also fail to grasp that the Biden administration and the overall foreign policy blob have no one to blame but themselves for this development. The unifying factor in most alliances is the existence of a common enemy. In this case, the common enemy for Russia and The Democratic People's Republic of Korea (North Korea) is the United States and its compliant military allies. U.S. leaders have pursued clumsy, tone-deaf policies toward both Moscow and Pyongyang, thereby creating a powerful incentive for them to boost their security cooperation.

The United States and NATO engaged in one provocation after another toward Russia, with NATO expansion and rising Western [arms shipments](#) to Ukraine being the culmination. Such an aggressive intrusion into a region that Moscow considered not only as its rightful sphere of influence but Russia's core security zone was bound to turn out badly, as perceptive analysts [had warned for years](#). Russia's seizure of Crimea in 2014 and its full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 was the bitter fruit of that policy.

U.S. officials and [pro-NATO propagandists](#) have [insisted](#) that the invasion had [nothing to do](#) with Russian fears about the expansion of the alliance. However, recent statements by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg have [fatally undermined](#) that narrative. He now [concedes](#) that NATO expansion was a major factor in the Kremlin's decision to launch the February invasion.

Instead of retreating from a policy that had produced disastrous results, the United States and its allies drastically escalated the confrontation with Moscow. The alliance is waging a [proxy war](#) against Russian forces in Ukraine and a comprehensive effort to make Russia [a diplomatic and economic pariah](#) throughout the world. That effort has [been ineffectual](#), especially in the so-called [Global South](#), but the mere attempt has poisoned Russia-U.S. relations, sending them to their worst level since the chilliest days of the Cold War.

Putin and the Russian elite now regard the United States as an implacable enemy determined to destroy their country as a meaningful, independent international player. Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin's indiscreet admission that NATO's principal goal in the Ukraine war was not to defend Ukraine but [to weaken Russia](#) to the point that it could no longer pose a threat to any country reinforced Moscow's perception that Washington had a malignant policy agenda.

Under such circumstances, it is hardly surprising that the Kremlin is seeking economic and military allies anywhere it can find them. Even before the latest outreach to the DPRK, Russian leaders were moving to strengthen ties with other countries that are willing to resist Washington global hegemony. The level of cooperation between Russia and Iran [has soared](#) since the onset of the Ukraine war, with Tehran providing (among other things) [drones](#) to assist Moscow's military capabilities in Ukraine. Even more significant is the mounting strategic cooperation between Russia and China. Not only are the two countries (along with others) working together to erode Washington's global economic and financial primacy, the level of bilateral military collaboration has spiked. Joint [military exercises](#) have taken place on [several occasions](#) over the past two years. Both the [pace and scope](#) of such war games also is increasing.

Given the overall atmosphere of intense hostility between the United States and Russia, it is hardly surprising that Russian leaders would find the DPRK as a valuable partner. North Korea has an [extensive and expanding capacity](#) to [produce conventional weapons](#), while Russia faces the danger of a growing drain on its own stocks because of the Ukraine war. In return for boosting weapons shipments to Russia, Pyongyang wants financial aid from Moscow along with [assistance](#) for the DPRK's missile and nuclear programs.

Just as Washington has given Russia ample incentives to pursue strategic cooperation with North Korea, it has given Pyongyang such incentives to work with Moscow. After some promising developments during Donald Trump's administration to ease U.S. tensions with Pyongyang, U.S. policy has reverted to the norm of past decades. The Biden administration's policy toward North Korea has been little more than a [stale rehash](#) of those failed stances. Washington continues to issue its [pointless demand](#) that the DPRK abandon its nuclear weapons program in exchange for vague promises of subsequent sanctions relief and progress toward a normal relationship.



Trump and Kim meet Sunday before Trump became first US president to step on North Korean territory.
(White House Photo)

Meanwhile, military cooperation between the United States and South Korea (as well as between the United States and Japan) has noticeably increased. For the first time [since the early 1980s](#), a U.S. ballistic missile submarine has docked in South Korea. Such actions make Kim and his associates extremely nervous.

The Biden administration's policies toward both North Korea and Russia constitute a failure of foreign policy 101. A cardinal rule of a smart, effective policy is to avoid driving [disparate adversaries together](#). In the years before the onset of the Ukraine crisis, Moscow was trying to distance itself from Kim's regime and its behavior. The Kremlin had even [signed on](#) to U.S.-led international sanctions against Pyongyang. For its part, the DPRK was seeking a more normal relationship with the United States. Washington's abrasive, incompetent moves have sharply reversed both trends.

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