

China's trade bullying calls for an Article 5

Trade interdependence is a two-way street, and China is not the only one with leverage.

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By Victor Cha, Ellen Kim and Andy Lim

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It's been a busy month for Chinese trade weaponization. Last week, Beijing slapped punitive sanctions on five U.S. subsidiaries of a Korean shipping company. This followed its Oct. 9 announcement imposing sweeping export controls on rare earth minerals. Chinese officials cited national security concerns for the moves and this week could agree to pause China's restrictions for a year, but in truth, they were just the latest act in a three-decade-long power play.

As President Donald Trump tours Asia, he should consider a way to work with allies and partners to stop the bullying. Individually, the targets of Chinese economic pressure find it difficult, if not impossible, to hold their ground against the second largest economy in the world. But if they act collectively, they can deter China's coercion once and for all.

This is especially vital given how China deploys its economic might to achieve aims beyond the economic sphere. Leveraging its massive market, China uses tariff and nontariff barriers to infringe on the sovereign political choices of others. The goal is not the conventional one of protecting domestic markets; rather, Beijing seeks to change the target's policies on Taiwan, Tibet, Hong Kong, Xinjiang and other areas deemed core interests by the Chinese Communist Party.

This trade weaponization has increased dramatically under President Xi Jinping. The three of us have compiled a dataset tracking instances of Chinese economic coercion over the past 28 years, and the pattern is clear: Worldwide since 1997, there have been 23 cases of targeted pressure by China against governments and 582 against individual companies.

In 2012, China stopped importing Philippine bananas over a territorial dispute. In 2020, it slapped tariffs as high as 218 percent on Australian wine and blocked beef imports from 10 processors because Canberra called for an independent investigation into the origins of covid-19. U.S. companies Apple, Amazon, FedEx, Google, Intel, McDonald's, Microsoft, Nike and Walmart have all faced retaliation by China for myriad supposed transgressions, including objections to labeling of Hong Kong and Taiwan on websites and products or actions, such as sending packages or selling T-shirts, perceived as supporting Hong Kong protests.

In almost all cases, the government or company quickly conceded in order to minimize losses. China pocketed the win and moved on to the next target.

However, what if Trump, rather than tariffing European and Asian partners, tried to bring them into a collective economic deterrence pledge? In the spirit of NATO's bedrock Article 5 mutual defense commitment, such a pledge would treat economic coercion against one as economic coercion against all — to be answered with retaliation by the whole group.

Trade interdependence is a two-way street, and China is not the only one with leverage. Indeed, targets of China's coercion export almost 600 goods and raw materials that China is heavily dependent on.

The Group of Seven countries plus Australia and South Korea together produce about 600 items, worth \$37 billion, that China is heavily dependent on. The U.S. exports 132 of these items, Japan 147 items, South Korea 48, Canada 26 and Australia 22. These exports range from intermediate goods such silver powder (used for solar panels) and spodumene (used for lithium batteries) to luxury items like lobster, fine brandies and cold-weather Kentucky blue grass seeds for soccer pitches.

Currently, China sees no vulnerability in this trade dependence because it assumes that no target would dare retaliate against it. A collective pledge to use high-dependence items to answer Chinese economic intimidation tit-for-tat would make China think twice.

A coalition of exporters could even deter China's persistent leveraging of critical minerals. While China dominates this market, it is largely dependent on international trade for nickel and nickel-related by-products for its steel and electric vehicle industries. More than 80 percent of China's imports of nickel alloys, bars, rods and profiles come from United States, Japan and Germany, while 57 percent of nickel catalysts and 55 percent of nickel articles imported by China come from the U.S. and Germany and the U.S. and Korea, respectively. Because its nickel reserves constitute only 4 percent of the world's total reserves, China lacks a viable domestic alternative.

Collective economic deterrence has already been shown to work. In response to China's sanctions against Lithuania in 2021 for opening a Taiwan office, the European Union created a list of retaliatory measures and an adjudication system for identifying China's coercion. Since its inception in December 2023, the E.U.'s Anti-Coercion Instrument has been relatively successful at deterring further bullying by Beijing. No such mechanism currently exists in Asia or involves the United States. It is time to create one.

Importantly, collective economic deterrence would only be used if China acts out. In this sense, it is a strategy aimed not at starting a trade war, but at stopping China's destruction of the free-trade order. To do nothing, or to cave to China's demands, only ensures more intimidation.

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THE PENINSULA

North Korea's Human Rights Record Worsens as UN Pushes for Concrete Benchmarks

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Author: [Robert King](#)

Category: [North Korea](#), [South Korea](#)



The UN Human Rights Council continued its scrutiny of North Korea this month, with UN Special Rapporteur Elizabeth Salmón presenting a sobering assessment. She noted that over the past decade, the human rights situation in North Korea showed no improvement and, in many instances, “[had degraded](#).” Salmón detailed the expansion of border fences, stricter restrictions on movement, and a shoot-on-sight policy against would-be escapees—measures that have accelerated as Pyongyang’s military partnership with Moscow has deepened.

In a notable push for accountability, the special rapporteur proposed using “[measurable indicators](#)” across five areas, including freedom of movement and the right to food, to track whether North Korea follows through on recommendations it has deflected for more than twenty years. The shift from broad condemnation to concrete benchmarks could give future Human Rights Council sessions something specific to hold North Korea to, including commitments the country accepted during its 2024 Universal Periodic Review (UPR).

The UPR is a review of the human rights conditions in every UN member country conducted every five or six years. All UN member states undergo this process on a rotating basis, and North Korea had its fourth review in fall 2024. Building off this most recent review, Salmón proposed focusing on five areas: the right to life, freedom of movement, the right to food, the right to work, and the rights of persons with disabilities. It is not clear how this monitoring system will function or how information will be gathered, but focusing on changes over time in these five important human rights areas could help put pressure on Pyongyang to make progress.

Special Rapporteur Salmón also voiced concern about labor rights. The North Korean government rejected all recommendations made on labor rights during its last UPR. Salmón noted that North Korea's 2025 Labor Management Act enables the government to assign citizens to workplaces, which reinforces a state-directed labor policy that is equivalent to forced labor. Human rights advocates have reported that labor for North Korean nuclear and missile programs is insured by arbitrary detention, torture, enforced disappearances, forced labor, and restrictions on movement and access to information.

“Even More Suffering”

Salmón's assessment that North Korean human rights have not improved echoes a special report on the status of human rights in North Korea published by UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Volker Türk ten years after the publication of the UN Commission of Inquiry on human rights in North Korea. “The overall human rights situation in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) has not improved over the past decade and, in many instances, has degraded, bringing even more suffering to the population,” Turk concluded.

In her report to the Human Rights Council in Geneva two weeks ago, Special Rapporteur Salmón cited High Commissioner Türk's report and argued for continuing engagement with North Korea on the human rights abuses identified in that report.

The message was clear in the report and during the discussion on North Korea at the Human Rights Council in March 2026. Special Rapporteur Salmón told the Human Rights Council, “As the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights concluded in his 10-year assessment report last September [2025], there has been no overall improvement in the human rights situation in the last decade.” The report quoted a North Korean escapee who spoke with UN officials after reaching South Korea: “To block the people's eyes and ears, they strengthened the crackdowns. It was a form of control aimed at eliminating even the smallest signs of dissatisfaction or complaint.” No other population lives under such vicious restrictions in today's world.

In February, just one month before the UN Human Rights Council took up the issue of North Korean human rights abuses, Special Rapporteur Salmón met South Korean government officials and non-government human rights organizations in Seoul. She also met with North Korean refugees who had recently arrived. In addition, Salmón was questioned by the media on legal issues related to North Korean prisoners held by Ukraine—two North Korean soldiers captured by Ukrainian troops have reportedly asked to defect, fearing that returning to Russia following their capture would be treated by North Korean officials as a serious crime, and both could be executed or imprisoned under abusive conditions.

In response to a question during the media briefing, Salmón said, “There are reasonable grounds to believe that in the DPRK, cases of torture and ill-treatment have been very well documented over the years. So, I think that Ukraine has some legal obligations concerning the principle of non-refoulement. It means that one state should not repatriate people to a place where there are reasonable grounds to believe they would face torture or ill-treatment.” At the same time, she carefully noted that “it is up to Ukraine to respect international law and to make the best decision.”

Putting aside the complicated political aspects of the decision, the United Nations and international law are clear, as expressed by Special Rapporteur Salmón. Prisoners of war should not be repatriated if there is a clear risk of harm under the principle of non-

refoulement. The final decision on the fate of the captured North Korean soldiers is in the hands of Ukraine, and no decision has been made thus far.

The UN Human Rights Council will hold a vote on adopting the resolution critical of North Korea in the next couple of weeks. It can be a recorded vote, in which member countries are tallied and recorded in official records, or a voice vote, in which the report is approved without naming those in favor or opposed. Over the past two decades, North Korea and its allies, China and Russia, have not demanded that countries' votes be recorded and published because very few countries oppose the resolution and very few would vote in favor. It is better to adopt the resolution without a vote than to force one in which only a handful of countries would vote against it.

Individual countries, however, can cosponsor the resolution, which is noted and recorded. There has always been a significant number of countries that make a point of putting their name on the record by cosponsoring. Notably, the South Korean government decided on March 28 to cosponsor the resolution "under the stance of cooperating with the international community for the practical improvement of the human rights of North Korean residents." The Lee Jae Myung administration cosponsored a similar UN General Assembly resolution critical of North Korean human rights in December 2025. The resolution will be approved by an unrecorded vote, but countries have until two weeks after that vote to add their name to the list of cosponsors.

Conclusion

North Korea's crackdown since the COVID-19 pandemic has dramatically reduced the number of escapees reaching South Korea. Only a few dozen arrive each year this decade, down from over a thousand before the pandemic. Many of those now reaching the South left North Korea years ago and spent time in China or elsewhere—either by force or by choice—before completing the journey. Emboldened by warming relationships with Russia and increasingly China, the Kim regime shows no signs of relenting on movement restrictions and border controls. Defector numbers may remain a trickle for years to come, which is precisely why Salmón's push for measurable benchmarks matters. Without a concrete framework to track conditions inside North Korea, the UN Human Rights Council risks another decade of condemnation with little to show for it.

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Feature image is a UN photo by Anastasiia Laurenteva.

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Return to the Peninsula



THE PENINSULA

The Impact of the Iran War on the Korean Peninsula

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Author: [Ellen Kim](#)

Category: [Indo-Pacific](#), [Iran](#), [South Korea](#)



The war in Iran is shaking the world. As the conflict involving the United States, Israel, and Iran shows signs of spilling over into neighboring Middle Eastern countries, concerns are growing that a surge in oil prices resulting from the closure of the Strait of Hormuz will provoke a prolonged global energy security crisis. At the same time, U.S. President Donald Trump's [request for allied troop deployments](#) to the Strait of Hormuz is placing both the transatlantic and Indo-Pacific alliance systems under severe strain at a critical juncture.

South Korea [now faces](#) not only the fear of entrapment in the Middle East conflict, but also the fear of abandonment due to the U.S. deployment request. Under the framework of “modernizing the alliance,” the strategic flexibility of U.S. Forces Korea (USFK) and the priorities set in the Trump administration's [National Defense Strategy](#)—which emphasized a leading role for South Korea in deterring North Korea—are gradually becoming a reality; for instance, some U.S. military assets stationed on the Korean Peninsula are being [redeployed to the Middle East](#) following the outbreak of hostilities.

While the South Korean government is taking a cautious approach to President Trump's request for troop deployments, it must also prepare for the possibility of a prolonged conflict if the [situation escalates further](#), particularly through strikes on key energy infrastructure in the Middle East. Approximately 70 percent of South Korea's crude oil imports pass through the Strait of Hormuz, and if the blockade is prolonged, [analysis by the Korea Institute for Industrial Economics & Trade \(KIET\)](#) suggests that manufacturing production costs in South Korea could rise by up to 11.8 percent. Conversely, even if Trump

declares a swift end to the war and withdraws from the region, it cannot be ruled out that he may expect countries relying on the Strait of Hormuz to assume responsibility for securing it.

Beyond the bilateral U.S.-South Korea relationship, it is also important to consider, from a strategic perspective, how this war could influence North Korea's strategic calculations. Iran does not hold the same level of strategic importance for North Korea as Russia does, and the likelihood of North Korea deploying troops to a war as it did in Ukraine is low, given the direct involvement of U.S. forces in the conflict. However, since the 1980s, North Korea has maintained missile and related technology cooperation with Iran and has also directly and indirectly supplied military equipment not only to Syria and Libya but also to armed groups such as Hamas and Hezbollah.

Given the fact that North Korea has already gained economic and strategic benefits through troop deployments and arms support in the Ukraine war, it seems possible that North Korea may seek further gains by providing missile technology, drones, and other weapons systems to Iran and other actors in the future. According to the 2026 Annual Threat Assessment released this week by the U.S. Office of the Director of National Intelligence (ODNI), North Korea, Russia, China, and Iran "are likely to continue selective cooperation with each other." At a Senate Select Committee on Intelligence hearing, National Intelligence Director Tulsi Gabbard stated that "if a hostile regime survives, it will seek to begin a yearslong effort to rebuild its missiles and UAV force," an effort that North Korea could play a central role in as an arms proliferator.

North Korea's overseas arms exports not only undermine the international security environment but have also enabled Russia to neutralize international sanctions against North Korea during its war against Ukraine. Furthermore, the economic gains derived from such activities have ultimately lessened North Korea's perceived need to engage in dialogue with the United States—an aspect that should not be overlooked.

In sum, the South Korean government should engage in swift consultations and close coordination with Japan and European countries, which are also facing U.S. deployment requests, to help prevent further escalation in the Middle East and work toward a peaceful resolution.

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Feature image from The Pentagon.

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Return to the Peninsula



THE PENINSULA

The Iran War Is Stress-Testing South Korea's Energy Model

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Author: Tom Ramage

Category: [Economic Security](#), [Indo-Pacific](#), [Iran](#), [South Korea](#)



The global price of oil hit USD 119 a barrel last week, and few countries are as vulnerable to the sudden increase as South Korea. Korea imports nearly all its energy and ships most of its crude oil through the Strait of Hormuz, which is now effectively closed. The country has imposed gas price caps, begun tapping strategic reserves, and faces mounting strategic material shortages that threaten semiconductor output.

The crisis is accelerating a rethink of how Korea powers itself. Emergency measures such as lifting limits on coal-fired generation and expanding nuclear energy utilization are buying time, but long-term measures, like securing access to U.S. energy resources that would route fuel through the Pacific Ocean rather than through Middle Eastern chokepoints and efforts to expand alternative energy capacity, may place Seoul in a new position following the crisis altogether.

Strait of Hormuz and Korea's Oil Imports

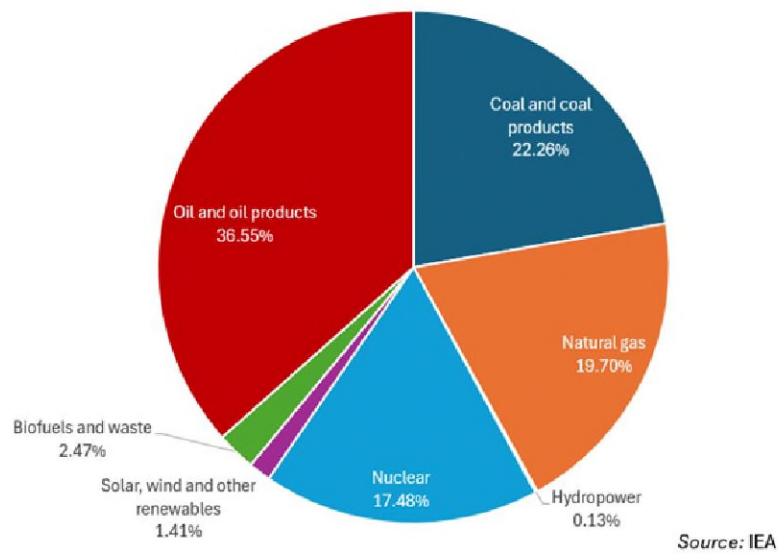
Iran is attacking commercial and naval vessels that try to pass through the Strait of Hormuz as part of a broader retaliation against the United States and Israel. This has resulted in an effective closure of the Strait, through which 20 percent of the world's oil and liquified natural gas passes.

The effects have been deleterious for Korea, which imports close to 94 percent of its energy resources from abroad, including 70 percent of its crude oil via ships transiting through the Strait. To some extent, the fallout has been tempered by the country's efforts

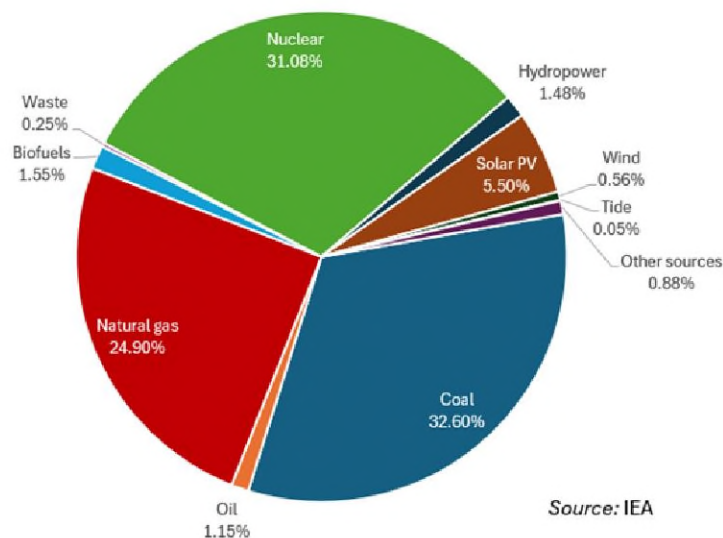
to diversify its energy portfolio and emergency measures to tap strategic oil reserves. But rapid increases in fuel prices, supply shortages of petroleum-derived strategic materials, and tightening windows for reserves of products such as liquefied natural gas (LNG) are likely to prompt Korea to reevaluate its overall position in international energy trade.

Coal and natural gas **make up the majority** of Korea's energy portfolio. The Iran crisis has an immediate impact on Korea's access to the LNG it uses for more than 19 percent of its total energy supply and roughly 25 percent of its electric power generation. As of 2025, some 15 percent of Korea's LNG imports came from Qatar, located behind the blocked Strait of Hormuz. This is behind Malaysia (16.1 percent) and ahead of the United States (9.4 percent). Following an Iranian attack on Qatar's Ras Laffan gas facility, Qatar's national gas company **declared force majeure** on some of its long-term gas contracts, excusing them from obligations to fulfill them.

Korea Total Energy Supply, 2024



Korea Electric Power Generation, 2024

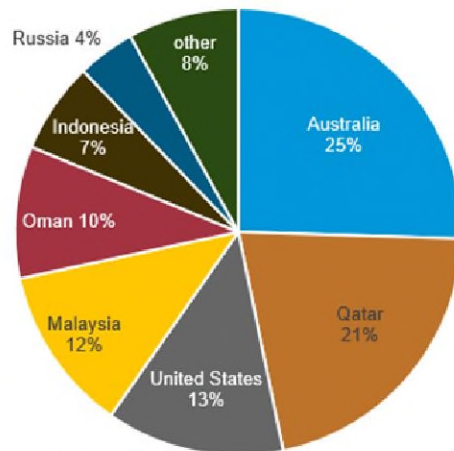


Korea's Ministry of Trade, Industry and Resources **has indicated** that the country's LNG reserves are sufficient "for a considerable period, even if imports from Qatar are completely halted." Indeed, the effects on Korea are perhaps more blunted than they would have been in prior years, when Korea had more LNG imports from Qatar; Korea's LNG imports from the country decreased by 6.9 percent from 2022 to 2025, and regional partners like Australia are playing a larger role. But LNG supplies could be disrupted for an extended timeframe due to the strikes on Qatari gas fields, meaning higher prices could stick around well beyond the cushion of Korea's LNG reserve stockpiles.

Immediate Impacts on the Korean Economy

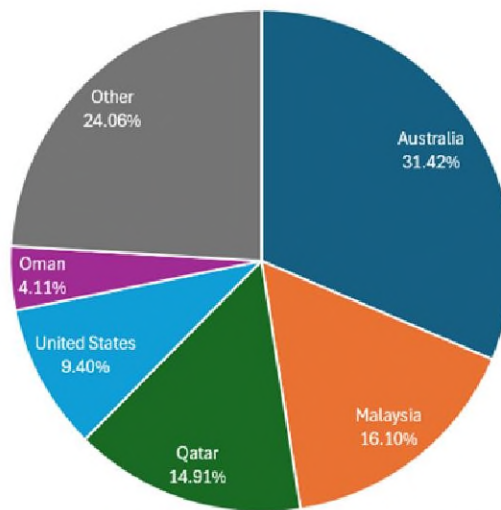
The Iran war may incentivize Korea to diversify its energy sources away from the Middle East. More immediately, disruptions in the gas trade as a result of the crisis will likely increase domestic reliance on Korea's coal sector, which comprises roughly 33 percent of the country's electric power generation, and hasten the speed at which nuclear power generation comes online. The Korean government has since stated that Korea will lift limits on coal power generation and increase nuclear plant utilization to up to 80 percent.

Korea's LNG imports by source, 2022



eia Data source: Vortexa
 Note: LNG=liquified natural gas.

Korea's LNG imports by source, 2025



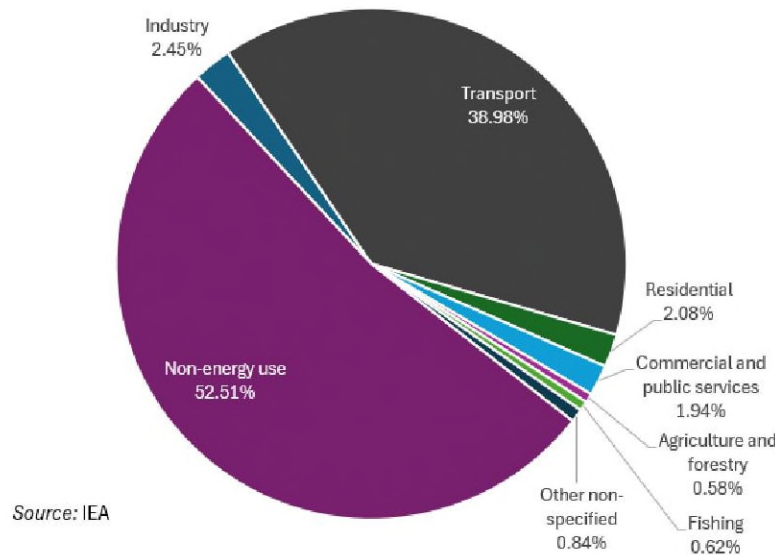
Source: International Trade Centre

As for oil, this has broader economic effects on inflation and household spending, prompting government efforts to encourage price stability. Rising oil prices in Korea have prompted the imposition of **price caps on gas** for the first time in thirty years. Seoul has joined other International Energy Agency (IEA) member countries in initiating a **targeted release of its strategic oil reserves** to stabilize prices. This may buy some time to avert a widespread economic crisis because of high fuel prices. Still, the associated effects **may slightly reduce** Korea's overall growth this year from 2 percent to 1.9 percent.

For example, the effects of the oil shocks are hard felt in the industrial sector. While oil accounts for a majority of Korea's total energy imports, it is primarily used for "**non-energy use**" (including the manufacturing of advanced products such as semiconductors), followed secondarily as fuel for transportation. The combination of high-energy costs and volatility in **industrial inputs for advanced technology products** has the potential to cause a ripple effect in the Korean and global economies for as long as the conflict continues. Shortages in naphtha—a chemical additive critical for the production of synthetic fibers used downstream in industries such as semiconductor and automobile production—have further prompted the Korean government to place it on a list of "**economic security**" items and establish a support fund for companies impacted by the supply chain disruptions.

Gas field closures have also obstructed Korea's access to helium, a critical component for semiconductor manufacturing. Roughly **65 percent** of its supply comes from Qatar. Chemical fertilizer—another byproduct of LNG production—also faces supply shocks from a prolonged conflict in Iran.

Korea Oil Products Final Consumption by Sector, 2023



While accounting for shortages in strategic materials can only be addressed by diversifying Korea's import sources for petroleum products, one way of mitigating the energy aspect of future resource shocks will likely involve increasing the share of alternative energy sources in Korea's portfolio. Korea has been proactive in promoting renewable energy capacity to meet its electric power generation needs, with solar, wind, and biomass accounting for an **increasing share** of the country's domestic energy consumption.

Nuclear energy is already well on its way to powering a larger share of Korea's energy needs, driven by AI. It is possible that momentum in the nuclear energy sector will prompt discussions between the United States and Korea on autonomous nuclear fuel reprocessing and other cooperative measures. Doing so would take advantage of Korea's largest domestic energy source. Of the roughly 607 TWh generated for electricity consumption in 2024, more than 31 percent came from nuclear—the second-largest source of electric power generation behind coal.

U.S. Energy Appeal

Beyond the initial shocks of the crisis, the Iran war will also likely drive larger energy purchases from the United States and other partner countries. Korea was the fourth-largest importer of U.S. oil in 2025 and remains a major destination for U.S. LNG shipments. Similar to Japanese investments under the U.S.-Japan memorandum of understanding (MOU), investment participation in U.S. LNG and oil facilities is rumored to comprise a large portion of Korean investment commitments in the United States, while the U.S.-Korea trade deal commits USD 100 billion toward the purchase of U.S. energy products.

Although the U.S. Department of Energy projects LNG imports will play a smaller role in Korea's energy generation going forward, its use as a transitional fuel and increasing flexibility in sourcing could allow it to serve as an interim anchor of Korea's electric power generation as the country approaches its net-zero 2050 initiative. Against this backdrop, investments in foreign energy projects, particularly in the United States, could serve as a bulwark against chokepoints and volatility in future energy crises.

For example, the development of export terminals and pipeline infrastructure could allow LNG and oil to transit to Korea across the Pacific rather than through the Middle East, acting as a hedge against long-term geopolitical supply chain disruptions. Such investments would also expand opportunities for Korean-built LNG carriers to play a larger role in the U.S. energy trade. It will be up to the U.S.-Korea investment committee, however, to determine if such projects make economic and strategic sense under the terms of the MOU.

In any case, increases in energy prices and shortages in supplies of key materials are bound to take months to years to recover. The effects beyond energy will be manifold: economic reverberations from the spikes in oil prices and supply chain shortages, short-term pressure on the Korean won and KOSPI index, billions of dollars in Korean investment projects across the Middle East at risk of being delayed, and undue pressure placed on the U.S.-Korea alliance. It is unlikely that the global environment will easily snap back to the way it was before.

Taking everything into account, the Iran conflict may not only redefine Korea's domestic energy priorities but also its overall place in the international energy, economic, and security system. Its effects will initiate lasting changes to how energy is sourced, used, and prioritized.

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Return to the Peninsula



THE PENINSULA

What America-First Cybersecurity Means for the U.S.-South Korea

Alliance

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Author: [Sebastian Garcia](#)

Category: [South Korea](#), [Technology](#), [United States](#)



The new U.S. national cybersecurity strategy presents both opportunities and challenges for the U.S.-South Korea alliance. The White House released the strategy on March 6, aligning federal cybersecurity policy initiatives with the “America First” doctrine that also shaped the Donald Trump administration’s National Security Strategy and National Defense Strategy. Much like those previous documents, the cybersecurity strategy makes no mention of state actors that pose significant cyber threats to U.S. interests, including North Korea. The strategy nonetheless emphasizes a robust offensive posture in cyberspace, backed by efforts to modernize critical infrastructure, encourage private sector innovation, and build a stronger cyber workforce.

This new [U.S. cybersecurity posture](#) offers much for South Korea to consider as the Lee Jae Myung administration finalizes its own [National Cybersecurity Strategy](#), set to be released within the year. Under the current cyber doctrine, introduced by the previous Yoon Suk Yeol administration in 2024, South Korea has pursued more offensive cyber capabilities to proactively detect and neutralize North Korean threats, collaborating with the United States to emulate its “[defend forward](#)” cybersecurity approach. Such efforts aligned with the Yoon administration’s more hawkish posture toward North Korea; the document for the first time explicitly named North Korea as the greatest cyber threat to South Korea.

Whether the Lee administration’s cybersecurity strategy continues this trend or follows the U.S. example of scaling back its naming-and-shaming of North Korea remains to be seen. But given both leaders’ preference for a reconciliatory approach to engaging North Korea, it is likely that the U.S. and South Korean cybersecurity postures will align in placing less emphasis on directly challenging adversaries. The shift in U.S. rhetoric

could also relieve pressure on South Korea to more forcefully call out China as a cyber threat. Attribution has long been a source of friction, as popular perception in South Korea is that extensive trade with China exposes the country to particularly painful retaliation.

Rhetorical alignment on cybersecurity priorities may smooth alliance relations in the short term, but there is a danger in promoting a U.S.-South Korea strategic framework that fails to address China's emergence as a peer competitor in cyberspace. It also leaves critical questions unanswered, such as how the two countries can jointly defend their networks and infrastructure from sustained North Korean, Chinese, and Iranian attacks. The ongoing war in Iran and related targeting of U.S. medical device company Stryker only adds to the urgency.

What is clear is that South Korea's new cybersecurity strategy will focus on building a level of cyber resilience that "will enable Korea to become a top-three AI nation." With the U.S. cybersecurity strategy emphasizing the importance of building secure supply chains for critical infrastructure, information, and emerging technologies to protect its "national intellectual advantage," South Korea can position itself as a trusted supplier and resourceful collaborator in securing the cybersecurity supply chain and advancing research into AI-powered cybersecurity tools.

The allies should take advantage of forums such as the ROK-U.S. Public-Private Joint Economic Forum to convene leaders from government, industry, and academia to devise new initiatives to invest in cybersecurity research and development and to align public and private sector incentives that strengthen innovation and resilience. Close consultation and collaboration give the United States the benefit of leveraging an ally's technical and intellectual expertise to maintain its emerging technology advantage in cyberspace, while giving South Korea the opportunity to learn from the world's standard makers in corporate cybersecurity governance.

Despite clear opportunities for strategic alignment, the U.S. cybersecurity strategy still does not fully clarify structural issues that could impose short- to medium-term challenges to robust U.S.-South Korea cybersecurity cooperation. Pathways for engaging the United States in international cybersecurity cooperation are murky with the fragmentation of the U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Cyberspace and Digital Policy, the elimination of the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency's international affairs offices at the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, and the suspension of foreign aid programs such as the Cybersecurity and Digital Connectivity Fund. While military-to-military coordination between U.S. Cyber Command and the South Korean Cyber Operations Command remains intact—if somewhat impacted by increased demand for U.S. Cyber Command's assistance in offensive combat operations elsewhere—the alliance has lost significant institutional capacity for coordinating civilian cybersecurity policy and overall cybersecurity strategy both between and among the labyrinthine architectures of the U.S. and South Korean cybersecurity apparatus.

It is further unclear how the new U.S. Office of the National Cyber Director, a coordinating body across all U.S. cyber policy, will engage with relevant South Korean counterparts, especially an intelligence body like the National Intelligence Service, which bears significant cyber-coordination responsibilities across the South Korean government.

For the Trump administration, achieving the national cybersecurity strategy's aim of ensuring "the distribution of cost and responsibility [is] fair across the U.S. and allies who share our democratic values" requires reconstituting the institutional mechanisms that enable regular cybersecurity coordination and discussions of cyber burden-sharing. The rollout of the new strategic document included a promise of several executive orders that will implement the strategy's policy pillars in the coming weeks; within those orders, the issue of alliance coordination should be carefully considered.

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