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South Korea's Diplomatic Conflict with Ukraine

In October, Ukraine alleged that the petroleum products from South Korea had been supplied to Russia. About 1,76,000 tonnes of petroleum products from South Korea were exported to Russia during July and August 2026. According to Kyiv, the fuel exports by Seoul amounted to 31 percent of Moscow's fuel imports in August this year. Apparently, the petroleum products from South Korea were exported to Russia through some ships which are under sanctions by the Western nations. Notably, several Western countries have imposed trade restrictions against Russia due to the ongoing war between Kyiv and Moscow. The revelation of this information about the supply of fuel from South Korea to Russia by Ukraine happened in the backdrop of recent strain in ties between Seoul and Kyiv. Recently, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy disclosed the "confidential" information about the handing over of two North Korean prisoners of war (POWs), who were fighting for Russia to the South Korean authorities, which led to a diplomatic row between South Korea and Ukraine. However, South Korea denied allegations of export of petroleum products to Russia and maintained that Seoul has been enforcing international sanctions against Moscow. Later, it was reported that South Korea recalled its ambassador to Ukraine as a strong measure amid deteriorating diplomatic ties between the two countries. However, despite diplomatic spat between South Korea and Ukraine, Seoul pledged to continue providing assistance to Kyiv.

South Korea's Participation in Alaska LNG Project

In October, a controversy erupted between South Korea and the United States over the issue of South Korean investment in the liquefied natural gas (LNG) project in Alaska. Seoul has still not committed to the American proposal due to the economic risks and questionable economic viability of this project. In this regard, South Korean Industry Minister Kim Jung-kwan lodged a protest against the American efforts to put pressure on South Korea to invest in this project in the United States. Apart from the Alaska LNG project, Seoul has also been apprehensive about the commercial viability of various nuclear power projects in the United States in which the Donald Trump administration has been seeking the participation of South Korea. As a result, the American President Trump has even threatened of retaliation against South Korea, if Seoul opposes investment in the Alaska LNG project. However, US Vice President JD Vance stated that Washington and Seoul would resolve the issue of investment in the Alaska LNG project as this project would fulfil the energy demands in the East Asian countries, including Japan. From the South Korean perspective, the Alaska LNG project does have strategic significance due to the energy supply disruptions caused by the ongoing conflict in the West Asian region, but the economic viability of this project still needs to be taken into consideration before Seoul could commit large-scale investment into it.

South Korea Blames North Korea for Landmine Blasts

In October, the South Korean military concluded that the recent explosion incident at Demilitarised Zone (DMZ), which is the de-facto border between North and South Korea, was caused by the landmines which were intentionally planted by North Korea. Notably, these explosions of landmines caused injuries to three South Korean soldiers in September 2026, and were allegedly laid on the southern side of the Military Demarcation Line (MDL) by the North Korean military. According to the South Korean military, this act of North Korea was a violation of the Armistice Agreement which had halted the Korean War (1950-1953) and was signed on 27 July 1953. Despite the North Korean provocations and increased belligerence, the South Korean Ministry of Unification pledged to continue efforts for reconciliation and normalisation of ties with North Korea. However, the North Korean regime categorically denied any role in planting of these land mines and claimed that South Korea was "cooking up the groundless results". South Korea also raised this issue of the planting of landmines by North Korea as a violation of Armistice Agreement in the United Nations (UN) and called upon Pyongyang to comply with the international nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). However, the North Korean representative at the UN rejected South Korean allegations and defended North Korea's right to develop nuclear weapons for the defence of the country. Reportedly, North Korea has been expanding its nuclear weapons programme.

North Korea-China Relations

On 1 October, the North Korean leader Kim Jong-un sent a congratulatory message to the Chinese President Xi Jinping on the 77th founding anniversary of the People's Republic of China (PRC). In his message, Kim applauded the leadership and people in China for building a modern socialist country. He also referred to the 65th anniversary of the North Korea-China Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Assistance this year as a sign of deep bonding between the two countries. Kim Jong-un characterised the relationship between North Korea and China as "forged at the cost of blood". The North Korean Foreign Minister Choe Son-hui also sent a letter to her Chinese counterpart, Wang Yi on the occasion of the founding anniversary of the PRC and she wished for deeper ties between the two countries. Notably, thousands of Chinese People's Volunteers (CPV) fought during the Korean War (1950-1953) and North Korea remains the only treaty ally of China. However, the relationship between Pyongyang and Beijing had apparently turned sour in comparison to the deepening ties between North Korea and Russia in the recent years. But there have been signs of warming up of relations between Pyongyang and Beijing. It was also reported that the New Yalu River Bridge between North Korea and China was inaugurated in October. On 24 October, Kim Jong-un visited China via this bridge and paid his tributes to the CPV.