

South Korea Politics & Policy

South Korean minister says China must push Pyongyang to curb nuclear plans

Kim Yung-ho admits sanctions regime is 'not working' as North Korea and Russia pursue closer ties



South Korea's unification minister Kim Yung-ho accused Beijing and Moscow of keeping a 'back door' open for North Korea to evade sanctions © Handout/Ministry of Unification

Song Jung-a in Seoul and **Christian Davies** in London YESTERDAY

South Korea's unification minister has accused Russia and China of undermining international sanctions against North Korea but said Seoul was pushing Beijing to put pressure on Pyongyang over its weapons development.

Kim Yung-ho said in an interview with the Financial Times that Seoul was "making efforts to persuade Beijing to . . . play a constructive role to rein in Pyongyang" and expected "some positive results".

But he admitted "the existing international sanctions are not working", blaming China and Russia for keeping open a "back door" for [North Korea](#).

"If Beijing continues to allow North Korea to act like an unbridled foal, this will further strengthen security co-operation between South Korea, the US and Japan," he warned.

The leaders of the US, South Korea and Japan signed a trilateral security pact last month, agreeing to deepen defence co-operation over North Korea's nuclear and ballistic missile programmes and China's increasingly assertive stance in the region.

"The trilateral security alliance is stronger than ever," Kim said. "North Korea can't reach Tokyo or Washington without going through Seoul."



South Korea's president Yoon Suk Yeol, centre, waves during the country's first military parade in a decade in Seoul this week © Kim Hong-ji/Pool/AP

Kim is visiting the UK and Germany this week and next to attend events commemorating the 33rd anniversary of German unification, and to muster international support for Korean unification and North Korean denuclearisation.

Pyongyang on Thursday amended its constitution to enshrine leader Kim Jong Un's policy of nuclear weapons development, with Kim calling for it to be boosted "exponentially". Last year the regime adopted a more aggressive nuclear policy that allowed for pre-emptive strikes.

The constitutional amendment came one day after Pyongyang [released US army private Travis King](#), who fled over the heavily fortified border with South Korea in July, back to American custody.

Kim Yung-ho also raised concerns about arms transfers between Moscow and Pyongyang, after a [summit this month](#) between Vladimir Putin and the North Korean leader, who pledged his "full and unconditional support" for Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

North Korean munitions have been [observed on both sides of the conflict](#), and Putin is thought to have sought conventional munitions such as artillery from Kim's large stockpile of Soviet-era arms.

“We will consider stronger action if Russia’s military support for North Korea threatens our security,” Kim Yung-ho said. [South Korea](#) has refrained from selling weapons directly to Ukraine, opting instead to backfill reserves in countries such as the US and Poland.

But he admitted it would be difficult for the UN to escalate sanctions on Pyongyang without co-operation from Russia and China, which wield veto power at the UN Security Council. Seoul has planned to pursue further unilateral sanctions on Pyongyang instead, he said.

Kim Yung-ho suggested that Beijing, which has been more equivocal in its support of Moscow, could be subject to greater pressure on North Korea’s denuclearisation. China’s economy, which has struggled to revive growth this year, is more globally integrated, while Russia has been isolated by western-led sanctions in response to the invasion.

“Unlike the former Soviet Union, China has got its foot in the door. We can use its deepening interdependence with the world economy as a weapon,” he said.

This week South Korea held its first large-scale military parade in downtown Seoul in a decade, a show of force that included ballistic missiles, homegrown fighter jets and reconnaissance drones. President Yoon Seok Yeol warned that a nuclear attack from Pyongyang would be met by an “overwhelming response”.

But experts said Seoul had few options to force Pyongyang to relinquish its nuclear weapons — or pressure China and Russia to implement sanctions.

“The North Korean economy is heavily dependent on China and Russia. The sanctions regime is no longer effective without their participation,” said Yang Moo-jin, president of the University of North Korean Studies in Seoul.

“We need to change our policy and strategy to persuade Pyongyang, rather than sticking to sanctions only. Otherwise, North Korea will continue to accelerate its nuclear development and ratchet up tension on the Korean peninsula.”

