

South Korea and U.S. Defense Chiefs Reinforce Alliance in First Phone Call

July 31, 2025

— Categories: Defence & Security



South Korea's acting Defense Minister Kim Seon-ho and U.S. Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth hold their first call on January 31, 2025, reaffirming the strength of the U.S.–South Korea alliance and agreeing to deepen cooperation amid increasing tensions on the Korean Peninsula.

Acting Defense Minister Kim opens the call by praising the alliance as a “linchpin” of peace and stability, particularly as North Korea escalates its nuclear and missile programs. Hegseth responds by reaffirming the “ironclad” U.S. commitment to South Korea’s defense. Both officials agree to expand trilateral cooperation with Japan and increase readiness to counter emerging security risks.

The conversation emphasizes the need to deepen and expand alliance capabilities. Kim and Hegseth pledge to maintain a robust combined posture for deterrence and crisis response. They also endorse initiatives to strengthen joint training, share intelligence, and support regional diplomatic coordination.

Hegseth underscores the strategic importance of trilateral cooperation. He and his Japanese counterpart reaffirm plans to ensure joint security coverage, including missile defense coordination in the East China Sea, and support stable command and control integration across U.S., South Korean, and Japanese forces.

Kim and Hegseth also address broader military collaboration. South Korea views expanded roles for U.S. Forces Korea beyond the peninsula with caution, while the U.S. promotes strategic flexibility amid China’s growing influence. The leaders agree to continue high-level discussions on posture adjustments and burden-sharing, anchored in mutual defense interests.

Both sides voice concern over North Korean collaboration with Russia and the risk of gray-zone threats such as cyber intrusions, disinformation campaigns, and provocations near maritime boundaries. They emphasize

working closely with like-minded partners and international institutions to counter these challenges.

Their agreement sets the stage for ongoing coordination at multiple levels, including science and technology cooperation, ground and naval exercises, and enhanced alliance command modernization. Officials highlight milestones such as the ULCHI FREEDOM SHIELD exercises and the establishment of specialized working groups on missile, cyber, and space operations.

As regional tensions rise, this renewed engagement via first contact between defense chiefs signals a mutual commitment to strengthen deterrence through shared responsibility. Seoul maintains its emphasis on sovereign decision-making in defense policy, while Washington reiterates its commitment to supporting South Korea's security amid evolving geopolitical conditions.

The dialogue lays the groundwork for future in-person consultations and trilateral engagements that could shape strategic posture across the Indo-Pacific.