

**SOUTH KOREA IN 2023: STRONGER  
ALLIANCE, STRAINED INTER-  
KOREAN RELATIONS AND  
DOMESTIC POLITICAL GRIDLOCK**

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*EAI Background Brief No. 1759*

## Synopsis in English, [Chinese](#), [French](#) and [Spanish](#)

*In 2023, the Yoon Seok-yeol government continued to deepen its security cooperation with the United States through the Washington Declaration, while lessening its economic dependency on Beijing through increased exports to the United States. Yoon's reconciliatory approach towards Japan over the compensation issue further strengthened the US-ROK alliance by adding a trilateral dimension to it. Progress was less forthcoming in Seoul's strained relations with China and North Korea. Not only did North Korea resume its missile launch and adopt a more belligerent rhetoric towards the South, it also developed security cooperation with Russia, a move that could destabilise the Korean peninsula. Some of Yoon's biggest problems are domestic, however, with an ailing and ageing economy as well as a political gridlock with the opposition party. The upcoming national assembly election in April 2024 will be critical for Yoon, as its outcome could boost his governance or turn him into a lame duck.*

### **Chinese:**

**2023 年的韩国：更牢固的联盟、紧张的朝韩关系以及国内政治僵局**

2023 年，尹锡悦政府通过《华盛顿宣言》进一步深化了与美国的安全合作，同时通过增加对美国的出口减少了对北京的经济依赖。尹锡悦政府在赔偿问题上对日本采取的和解态度，促进了美日韩三国合作，进一步加强了美韩同盟。而韩国与中国和朝鲜的紧张关系则未见改善。朝鲜不仅恢复了导弹发射活动，对韩国采取了更加好战的言论，而且还加强了与俄罗斯的安全合作，这可能会破坏朝鲜半岛的稳定。然而，尹锡悦政府面临的一些最大问题来自内部，例如经济疲软，人口老化，以及与反对党陷入政治僵局。即将于 2024 年 4 月举行的国会选举对尹锡悦至关重要，选举结果可能提振他的执政能力，也可能让他成为“跛脚鸭”领导人。

### **French:**

**CORÉE DU SUD EN 2023: UNE ALLIANCE RENFORCEE, DES RELATIONS INTER-COREENNES TENDUES ET UNE POLITIQUE INTERIEURE DANS L'IMPASSE**

En 2023, le gouvernement de Yoon Seok-yeol a continué d'approfondir sa coopération en matière de sécurité avec les États-Unis à travers la Déclaration de Washington, tout en réduisant sa dépendance économique à l'égard de Pékin grâce à l'augmentation des exportations vers les États-Unis. L'approche réconciliatrice de Yoon envers le Japon sur la question de l'indemnisation a par ailleurs contribué à renforcer l'alliance entre les États-Unis et la République de Corée en y ajoutant une dimension trilatérale. Les progrès ont toutefois été moins visibles au niveau des relations tendues qu'entretien Séoul avec la Chine

et la Corée du Nord. Non seulement la Corée du Nord a repris ses tirs de missiles et a adopté une rhétorique plus belliqueuse envers le Sud, mais elle a également développé une coopération sur les questions de sécurité avec la Russie, une démarche qui pourrait déstabiliser la péninsule coréenne. Certaines des principales difficultés de Yoon sont toutefois d'ordre national, avec une économie en chancelante et vieillissante ainsi qu'une impasse politique avec le parti d'opposition. Les prochaines élections à l'Assemblée nationale en avril 2024 seront cruciales pour Yoon, leur résultat pouvant aussi bien renforcer sa gouvernance que le transformer en canard boiteux.

*Spanish:*

### **COREA DEL SUR EN 2023: ALIANZA MÁS FUERTE, RELACIONES INTERCOREANAS TENSAS Y ESTANQUEIDAD POLÍTICA INTERNA**

En 2023, el gobierno de Yoon Seok-yeol continuó profundizando su cooperación en materia de seguridad con Estados Unidos a través de la Declaración de Washington, al tiempo que redujo su dependencia económica de Beijing mediante el aumento de las exportaciones a Estados Unidos. El enfoque reconciliador de Yoon hacia Japón sobre la cuestión de la compensación fortaleció aún más la alianza entre Estados Unidos y la República de Corea al agregarle una dimensión trilateral. Los avances fueron menos evidentes en las tensas relaciones de Seúl con China y Corea del Norte. Corea del Norte no sólo reanudó el lanzamiento de misiles y adoptó una retórica más beligerante hacia el Sur, sino que también desarrolló una cooperación en materia de seguridad con Rusia, una medida que podría estabilizar la península de Corea. Sin embargo, algunos de los mayores problemas de Yoon son internos, con una economía enferma y envejecida, así como un estancamiento político con el partido de oposición. Las próximas elecciones a la Asamblea Nacional en abril de 2024 serán críticas para Yoon, ya que su resultado podría impulsar su gobernanza o convertirlo en un candidato saliente.

## Executive Summary

1. US-ROK (Republic of Korea) relations continued to deepen. The newly created Nuclear Consultative Group aims to strengthen extended deterrence, discuss nuclear and strategic planning, and manage the threat to the nonproliferation regime. The consultative mechanism will allow Seoul to have more input in US nuclear policy and strategy on the Korean peninsula.
2. The US-Japan-ROK trilateral at Camp David agreed to act on issues including maritime security and climate change, critical technologies and supply chains. Given the economic size and technological capabilities of the three, the trilateral could change regional power dynamics, including in the Taiwan Strait, and have a major impact on regional order.
3. The political stalemate with China has impacted economic relations as well. Korea's export to China fell to \$125 billion down from \$156 billion in 2022, producing a trade deficit of \$18 billion for the first time in 31 years. In contrast, Korea's export to the United States has surpassed its export to China, making the United States its largest export market.
4. Inter-Korean relations took a major setback. Kim Jong-un increased North Korea's aggressive behaviour and belligerent rhetoric towards Seoul, calling the Washington Declaration an "anti-DPRK nuclear confrontation programme" and Seoul as the "principal enemy".
5. While Pyongyang terminated all communication channels with Seoul, it enhanced bilateral military and economic cooperation with Moscow, a move that is likely to increase military tensions on the Korean peninsula and destabilise the region. Continuing socioeconomic troubles could push Pyongyang towards China and Russia in the future.
6. The ROK faces several domestic challenges such as a sluggish economy, a high inflation rate and a declining property sector. Fertility rate is likely to break the 0.7

mark in 2024, while the pension reform will be delayed due to the coming elections and gender conflict continues to intensify. The result adds to an already divided and polarised Korean society.

7. The national assembly election in April 2024 is crucial for Yoon's presidency as a win for Yoon could improve his governance with the passage of government-initiated legislations cleared. A loss will likely turn Yoon into a lame duck; with three more years left for his presidential term, internal turmoil and power struggle for his party are likely.
8. The US presidential election in November 2024 will also have a major bearing on the direction of the ROK's foreign and domestic policy. The Yoon administration could be compelled to re-strategise its entire foreign policy direction if Trump returns to power and resumes his transactional and America-first approach to America's allies, including South Korea.