

HOW SOUTH KOREA CAN EQUIP UKRAINE

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SEPTEMBER 4, 2026



TOPLINE: Ukraine needs additional air defense systems to counter incoming Russian drones and missiles. South Korea fully designs, manufactures, and produces its own primary air defense systems, and could sell their systems to the U.S., freeing up the U.S. to distribute either South Korean air defense systems or our own Patriot air defense systems to strategically aligned nation-states like Ukraine who are in active conflict with our enemies.

Background: Despite Ukrainian requests, South Korea has declined direct military assistance in the form of air defense systems like the Cheongung-II (a Patriot-compatible missile interceptor) and focused on humanitarian aid. South Korea is allegedly concerned about North Korean missile attacks, but other concerns likely include Russian backlash and South Korea's existing contracts with Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates.

In sharp contrast, North Korea has provided extensive manpower and military support to Russia, including artillery rounds, rockets, ballistic missiles, and thousands of troops. South Korea has condemned this military cooperation and demanded that North Korea withdraw its troops, calling it a "grave security threat."

Easing Tensions Among Allies: Tensions between South Korea and the United States are understandably high. President Trump has called for an end to military drills and exercises with South Korea, citing financial costs to the U.S. and South Korea's unwillingness to participate in the Iran war. After the announcement, North Korea fired 10 short-range missiles towards Japan.

Threatening to end these drills is short-sighted and a gift to China in its quest for regional and global hegemony. The U.S. is running short on Patriot missile interceptors. South Korea could demonstrate its commitment to the alliance by selling air defense systems, replenishing U.S. stockpiles and giving the U.S. greater flexibility in arming the free world. U.S.–South Korea military coordination ought to resume, but South Korea could lower the temperature between the two countries through free trade with free nations.

BOTTOMLINE: Ukraine has held its own against Putin's invasion for 4.5 years now, and it has done so because of the grit and stamina of the Ukrainian people who continue to defend their country, but it has also been due to Ukraine's partners offering intelligence, weapons, and defense systems. If the military supplies slow, Ukraine's battle gets more precarious. North Korea has chosen a side in the war. South Korea could strike a blow at North Korea by selling the Cheongung-II to the United States, allowing the United States to rearm Ukraine as it continues to fight Russia.

