

ISSUE BRIEF

No. 2025-08

Europe as a Strategic Partner: The Case for a Sharper South Korea–Europe Policy

Kim Saeme

Associate Research Fellow
2025-09-22

Introduction

What should South Korea's policy toward Europe look like under the Lee Jae Myung administration? For much of the past two decades, relations with Europe have been grounded in trade and values. While cooperation is wide-ranging, it remains imbalanced. Europe has been treated largely as an economic and normative partner, with defense and security ties only recently being developed in a substantive way.

Over time, such strategic considerations will need to move from the margins to the central pillar of South Korea's Europe policy. Intensifying tensions between the United States (U.S.) and China, uncertainty in the U.S. approach to allies, and the growing convergence between the European and Indo-Pacific theatres, most clearly demonstrated by the Russia–North Korea partnership, underscore the need for a more strategic orientation. A sharper Europe policy offers South Korea alignment in an era of U.S. unpredictability and opportunities for durable defense-industrial integration. The Lee administration should therefore reposition Europe as a pivotal partner, anchoring the relationship in firmer political commitments, clearer security engagement, and stronger networked coordination.

This Issue Brief is structured as follows. First, it examines the evolution of South Korea's relations with the European Union (EU), the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), and key European states. Second, it outlines why changing global dynamics make closer alignment with Europe necessary. Third, it offers three policy recommendations for the Lee administration's Europe policy.

South Korea's Policies toward Europe: Centered on Economic and Normative Engagement

One challenge in recalibrating South Korea's Europe policy is that "Europe" is not a single state but a collection of actors with diverse interests, tied together through institutions such as the EU and NATO. In this light, it is essential to distinguish between Seoul's approach to the EU, NATO, and bilateral or regional relationships with individual European states. Each track reflects distinct areas of cooperation.

South Korea's relationship with the EU is governed by three core agreements: the 2010 Framework Agreement, which sets out cooperation across a wide range of political and economic issues; the Free Trade Agreement, provisionally applied in 2011 and fully in force since 2015; and the 2016 Crisis Management Participation Agreement, which allows South Korea to contribute to EU-led security operations. Early engagement was heavily trade-focused. South Korea began negotiations for a free trade agreement (FTA) with the EU in 2007, and the agreement, signed in 2010, was the EU's first FTA with an Asian country. On this basis, trade between the two sides doubled over the last decade: goods trade stood at €60 billion in 2010 and exceeded €132 billion in 2022.¹ This economic foundation underpinned the upgrading of the relationship into a Strategic Partnership, making South Korea one of only ten such EU partners worldwide.²

From the outset, Seoul and Brussels also emphasized shared normative commitments, including democracy, human rights, non-proliferation, sustainable development, and the rule of law. The EU has consistently supported South Korea's efforts to raise human rights concerns about North Korea at the United Nations and backed its commitment to denuclearization, while Seoul has aligned with Europe on global issues such as climate governance. Thus, while ROK–EU cooperation is broad and comprehensive, it has been anchored primarily in economic and normative engagement. More recently, however, there has been a notable shift toward security, marked by the signing of the ROK–EU Security and Defence Partnership in 2024, which aims to strengthen cooperation on global peace and security.³

Meanwhile, South Korea's dialogue with NATO began in 2005, with practical cooperation starting in 2010 when Seoul contributed to the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan. It also supported NATO's counter-piracy operations in the Gulf of Aden by escorting merchant vessels through the region. Since 2023, relations have been structured by the four-year Individually Tailored Partnership Program (ITPP), which sets out 11 areas of cooperation ranging from cybersecurity and emerging technologies to climate change and the defense industry.⁴ The ITPP replaced the earlier two-year Individual Partnership and Cooperation Program (IPCP), which had guided South Korea–NATO ties since 2012.

Under the Yoon administration, the partnership with NATO deepened significantly. President Yoon attended NATO summits in 2022, 2023, and 2024, underscoring Seoul's closer alignment with Western partners⁵ following Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Building on achievements of the Moon Jae-in administration, such as joining NATO's Cooperative Cyber Defence Centre of Excellence and expanding cyber collaboration,⁶ the Yoon administration added a more strategic dimension. In 2023, Seoul and NATO agreed to establish annual military talks,⁷ and in October 2024 South Korea participated for the first time in the NATO Defence Ministers' Meeting.⁸

Beyond institutions, South Korea maintains varying levels of engagement with individual European states and regions. In November 2023, for example, Seoul and London elevated ties to a Global Strategic Partnership through the Downing Street Accord, which reaffirmed their commitment to strengthening a resilient international order, advancing economic security, and promoting sustainability.⁹ At the same time, South Korea has significantly expanded its role as a defense exporter, particularly to Central and Eastern Europe. Since 2022, Poland has signed multi-billion-dollar contracts for Korean defense equipment, including K2 main battle tanks, K9 howitzers, FA-50 fighter aircraft, and K239 multiple rocket launchers.¹⁰

This multi-layered yet sprawling approach has created diverse avenues for cooperation but has remained focused more on economic and normative dimensions, with security and strategic elements only beginning to take shape in recent years. This imbalance was evident in the Yoon administration's National Security Strategy, which largely framed Europe as a partner for "value-based diplomacy and economic security cooperation,"¹¹ while giving limited attention to defense and security ties.

That orientation was sufficient in the past, but changes in Europe's security landscape, combined with U.S. adjustments in its approach to allies, require South Korea to adopt a more strategic approach. A sharper focus on security and defense cooperation will be essential to ensure that South Korea's relationship with Europe keeps pace with evolving geopolitical realities. The following section explains why a more strategic ROK–Europe partnership will benefit South Korea.

The Need for a Strategic European Policy

Consolidation Among U.S. Allies

Two mutually reinforcing shifts underscore the need for closer strategic alignment between South Korea and Europe. The first is the retreat of the U.S. from its traditional role as the central guarantor of security and defender of multilateralism. The second is the U.S. adoption of a more openly transactional approach to alliance relations. Although South Korea and Europe face different immediate adversaries, these shifts have placed both in a similar predicament. With reduced certainty regarding the depth and durability of U.S. security commitments, allies have had to consider how best to strengthen their own capabilities and hedge against the possibility of American retrenchment. On the one hand, pressure to increase defense spending may help enhance indigenous capabilities; on the other hand, it risks creating uncertainty that adversaries could exploit by testing potential gaps in U.S. security commitments.

In this context, closer strategic alignment among U.S. allies has become more important as a way to mitigate the destabilizing effects of U.S. retrenchment. For Seoul, investing in this partnership offers a means of reinforcing its transatlantic ties and positioning itself as a proactive contributor to global security alongside like-minded allies. Equally important, closer coordination with Europe allows South Korea to join a broader collective voice that can signal to Washington the continued value of alliance cohesion. Such alignment is important both to strengthen deterrence against common adversaries as well as to prevent divisions among allies that could otherwise invite external challenges.

This cooperation should extend beyond the defense domain. Filling the gaps left by the U.S. on the international stage will require joint efforts in development assistance, climate change governance, and support for multilateral institutions. Europe's extensive global networks and reputation as a normative power, as well as South Korea's expanding contributions to global governance, are mutually reinforcing in this regard. By consolidating their approaches, South Korea and Europe can contribute to the preservation of a rules-based international order that ultimately benefits both sides.

Countering the North Korea Threat

A more strategic approach to relations with Europe can also contribute to addressing the North Korea challenge. The Lee Jae Myung administration has signaled its intention to adopt a more conciliatory approach toward Pyongyang, exemplified by the decision to shut down propaganda loudspeakers in the first week of his term.¹² More recently, President Lee announced a three-step denuclearization plan: to freeze, reduce, and ultimately eliminate North Korea's nuclear arsenal.¹³ There is tacit recognition, however, that South Korea is not currently in a position to induce North Korea back into denuclearization talks on its own. For the time being, the priority will likely rest on reducing tensions, with the continued involvement of the United States.

In this context, Europe could serve as an important interlocutor in helping to bring relevant stakeholders together. Europe's long-standing policy of "critical engagement" with North Korea, despite the need for an update,¹⁴ has consistently emphasized reducing tensions on the Korean Peninsula, upholding non-proliferation norms, and promoting human rights. These aims broadly align with South Korea's own approach. In addition, Europe retains a valuable diplomatic presence, with several EU member states maintaining embassies in Pyongyang and North Korea itself operating embassies across Europe.¹⁵ Drawing on its experience in non-proliferation, arms control, and humanitarian engagement, Europe could play a useful role in supporting the first step of the Lee administration's three-step plan, namely freezing North Korea's nuclear program, while also ensuring that such efforts remain tied to the longer-term goal of complete denuclearization.

Moreover, European governments are increasingly alert to North Korea's deepening alignment with Russia, most notably its provision of military support for the war in Ukraine.¹⁶ Europe has also taken note of North Korea's cyber operations, which have targeted European financial institutions and businesses.¹⁷ This convergence of concerns highlights the need for closer South Korea–Europe coordination, both to deter Pyongyang's destabilizing activities and to situate the North Korea issue within a broader strategic context that links Euro-Atlantic and Indo-Pacific security.

Boosting Defense (Industry) Cooperation

South Korea's deepening strategic relations with Europe also come at a time when Europe is undergoing a massive defense build-up. For Seoul, this build-up is both an opportunity to sell arms as well as a chance to anchor itself more deeply in Euro-Atlantic security networks. In the near term, South Korea benefits by helping European countries backfill equipment sent to Ukraine and rapidly strengthen their defenses against Russia. This has already resulted in major contracts for South Korean arms companies, with Poland purchasing a second batch of K2 tanks from Hyundai Rotem.¹⁸

In the mid- to long term, by embedding in Europe's restructured defense landscape, South Korea gains access to one of the world's largest and most stable markets, as NATO members raise spending toward 5% of GDP by 2035, with at least 3.5% earmarked for core defense.¹⁹ Europe's drive to expand production also creates openings for South Korean firms to enter joint development programs, adopt NATO standards, and benefit from technology partnerships with European defense companies. This strengthens South Korea's own defense modernization and ensures its industry is integrated into Western supply chains rather than standing outside them.

There are, however, caveats. Europe seeks to keep procurement largely "within Europe" to reduce external dependency and strengthen its own defense industrial base. The EU's European Defence Industrial Strategy (EDIS) sets targets that by 2030, at least 50% of member states' defense procurement should come from the European Defence Technological and Industrial Base (EDTIB), rising to 60% by 2035.²⁰ The European Defence Industry Programme (EDIP) also incentivizes joint production and intra-EU supply chains.²¹ To provide financial assistance for EU members to boost defense readiness, the Council of the European Union adopted a financial instrument called Security Action for Europe (SAFE), which will provide up to 150 billion Euros to member states investing in defense capabilities.²² While the full benefits of SAFE loans are only available to EU member states, common procurement participation extends to trusted partners with Security and Defence Partnerships, including South Korea.

This has several implications for South Korea. Recognition under SAFE makes Korean firms eligible to participate in EU joint procurement schemes, moving beyond ad hoc bilateral arms sales. In doing so, South Korean defense companies can link into European supply chains by co-producing with European primes. In other words, SAFE elevates South Korea's role from that of a vendor to that of a structural partner in Europe's defense resilience. The long-term success of this shift will depend on the ability of Korean firms to localize production in Europe through joint ventures, assembly lines, and technology sharing. This is already being done. For example, Poland's contracts with Hanwha and Hyundai Rotem include local assembly of the K2 tank and plans for domestic production of the K9 howitzer, while Romania's K9 contract foresees the creation of a local support hub.²³

Cooperating in the Indo-Pacific

For Europe, South Korea is an attractive partner not only because of its defense industrial cooperation but also because many European countries are eager to maintain a presence in the Indo-Pacific. The European Union as a whole, along with individual member states such as France, Germany, and the Netherlands, have issued Indo-Pacific strategies underscoring their commitment to regional stability, freedom of navigation, and the rules-based order.²⁴ Yet in the context of a protracted war in Europe, there are clear limits to how much political will and strategic attention Europe can realistically devote to the Indo-Pacific.

South Korea thus serves as a bridge, providing regional insight and operational cooperation that allow Europe to sustain and amplify its Indo-Pacific engagement. For example, South Korean participation alongside European navies in joint maritime exercises demonstrates solidarity and improves interoperability. Information-sharing on maritime security, including threats to sea lines of communication and undersea infrastructure, enhances situational awareness.

This division of labor benefits both sides. By working with South Korea, Europe can sustain its Indo-Pacific engagement despite resource constraints, thereby reinforcing its strategic credibility with partners in the Indo-Pacific. In return, European engagement in the Indo-Pacific strengthens South Korea's deterrence posture vis-à-vis North Korea, highlighting that South Korea is backed not only by the United States but also by a broader coalition of like-minded democracies. Such mutual reinforcement ensures that both Europe and South Korea can extend their strategic reach in ways neither could achieve alone.

Policy Recommendations

Firmer Political Commitment

As the Lee Jae Myung administration recalibrates its approach toward Europe, it should take into account three key recommendations. First, South Korea should make firmer political commitments, beginning with continued support for Ukraine. During the Yoon administration, Seoul emerged as a strong supporter of Ukraine and of Europe's assistance to Kyiv, for example, cooperating on sanctions against Russia and providing non-lethal aid to Ukraine.²⁵

Building on these measures, the next step would be to join the Coalitions of the Willing, signaling Seoul's readiness to align more closely with like-minded partners. In the Indo-Pacific, Japan, Australia, and New Zealand are already part of the talks on joining this coalition.²⁶ Participation does not necessarily require South Korea to deploy combat forces; coalition members have pledged to contribute to a peacekeeping force in Ukraine once a ceasefire is signed, whether through troop deployments or other forms of support. Such involvement would enhance South Korea's credibility as a proactive contributor to collective security. At the same time, Seoul should maintain sanctions against Russia and refrain from moves that could be interpreted as a normalization of ties in the near term, since this would risk weakening its credibility as a security partner and complicating defense-industrial cooperation with Europe.

In parallel, South Korea should engage more proactively in the NATO-IP4 framework. NATO and the EU are eager to maintain a profile in the Indo-Pacific without overstretching their resources, and Seoul can serve as an effective bridge, connecting Europe with the region while ensuring that Indo-Pacific priorities are reflected in Euro-Atlantic debates. Committing to attend future NATO-IP4 summits and hosting a dedicated IP4 gathering in the Indo-Pacific rather than limiting discussions to the sidelines of NATO meetings, would be a visible demonstration of commitment.

Clearer Security Engagement

Second, South Korea should deepen security engagement. More active participation in European naval visits and exercises in the Indo-Pacific would be a concrete step. For instance, the Royal Navy's HMS Prince of Wales deployed to the Indo-Pacific in 2025, conducting freedom-of-navigation drills with Japan, the United States, and Australia before making a port call in Busan, where it engaged in joint training and naval diplomacy with South Korea.²⁷ While the Busan visit signaled goodwill and cooperation, Seoul's absence from the multinational drills highlighted a missed opportunity. By not

joining the exercise, South Korea appeared less visible than its Indo-Pacific counterparts, reinforcing the perception that Japan and Australia are Europe's more natural security partners in the region.

Another avenue for greater security engagement would be to focus on the experiences of Russia's invasion of Ukraine and, in particular, North Korea's participation in the war. Such involvement could influence Pyongyang's future tactics and doctrine in ways directly relevant to South Korea's own defense posture. To prepare for this, Seoul should step up defense dialogues with NATO allies, expand structured channels for intelligence sharing on Ukraine and North Korea's role in the conflict, and participate in joint analysis or tabletop exercises focused on the war's operational lessons. Integrating these exchanges into regular military consultations would not only enhance South Korea's preparedness against evolving North Korean tactics but also demonstrate to European partners that Seoul is a proactive contributor to shared security learning.

Stronger Networked Coordination

Third, South Korea should place greater emphasis on minilateral coordination. Working more closely with the other IP4 members, Japan, Australia, and New Zealand, would magnify Seoul's influence in Europe by embedding it within broader coalitions of like-minded states. These IP4 members already enjoy well-established networks with European actors. For example, Australia is part of AUKUS with the United States and the United Kingdom and, along with New Zealand, participates in the Five Eyes intelligence-sharing alliance. Japan, for its part, has partnered with the United Kingdom and Italy in the Global Combat Air Programme (GCAP) to develop a next-generation fighter aircraft. Such arrangements give these countries an additional layer of strategic visibility in Europe that South Korea currently does not have.

To be sure, Seoul has built a dense network of bilateral exchanges with NATO and with individual European states, especially during the previous Yoon administration. Furthermore, South Korea's defense-industrial cooperation with Eastern European partners is, in many respects, deeper than what Japan or Australia have achieved. Yet these ties remain largely bilateral. Without being embedded in minilateral frameworks, South Korea risks being perceived as a transactional partner rather than a long-term strategic actor.

To address this, South Korea should seek to "minilateralize" its cooperation by creating more networked formats with trusted partners. One suggestion would be to launch a trilateral dialogue with Japan and the United Kingdom, focusing on defense-industrial collaboration, interoperability, and lessons from the war in Ukraine. Another option could be to institutionalize IP4 coordination ahead of major NATO summits, presenting joint Indo-Pacific perspectives rather than four separate voices. This kind of effort would elevate South Korea's profile and allow it to shape collective agendas with partners that already enjoy strong European footholds. In doing so, South Korea can build up its own long-term security networks with European partners.

Conclusion

As the Lee Jae Myung administration updates South Korea's approaches to its key partners, it must recognize that Europe is not peripheral but pivotal to Seoul's strategic interests. Some may argue that

it is sufficient to keep South Korea–Europe relations loose, emphasizing trade and values while leaving security cooperation underdeveloped. Yet in an era of intensifying U.S.–China rivalry and deepening linkages between the European and Indo-Pacific theatres, most clearly demonstrated by the growing Russia–North Korea ties, maintaining an ambiguous approach would come at a cost.

Namely, imbalance in security relations with Europe would reinforce perceptions in both Europe and the Indo-Pacific that South Korea is a secondary player compared to Japan or Australia, who already maintain structured frameworks with European partners. In addition, ties based largely on trade or transactional defense sales would be vulnerable to leadership changes or sudden regulatory shifts. Without anchoring itself in Europe’s long-term strategic calculus, South Korea would miss opportunities to shape global responses to threats like North Korea’s acquisition of battlefield experience through its support for Russia.

By contrast, a more strategic approach would bring tangible gains. For South Korea, deeper engagement with Europe offers strategic alignment with like-minded partners in times of U.S. unpredictability. It would also lead to durable defense-industrial partnerships and amplified influence in multilateral institutions. By demonstrating firmer political and security ties and reinforcing cooperation through networked relations with the other IP4 members, South Korea can transform its relationship with Europe into a more balanced and genuinely strategic partnership anchored in long-term security and political cooperation.

About the Author

Dr. Kim Saeme is an associate research fellow in the Center for Foreign Policy and National Security at the Asan Institute for Policy Studies. Her research focuses on South Korea–Europe relations, multilateral cooperation in the Indo-Pacific, and middle power diplomacy. Dr. Kim is a non-resident fellow at the Korea Economic Institute of America. She was previously a resident fellow at the Royal United Services Institute and a resident fellow at Pacific Forum International. Dr. Kim received her PhD in international relations from King’s College London, her MSc in international relations from the London School of Economics and Political Science, and her BA from Ewha Woman’s University.

¹ “EU trade relations with the Republic of Korea,” European Council, Council of the European Union, Accessed August 26, 2025,

<https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/infographics/south-korea-trade/>

² Michael Reiterer, “The 10th anniversary of the EU Korea Strategic partnership,” *KF-VUB Korea Chair Policy Brief* (July 2020),

<https://csds.vub.be/publication/the-10th-anniversary-of-the-eu-korea-strategic-partnership/>

³ “Security and Defence Partnership Between the European Union and the Republic of Korea,” European Union External Action, Accessed September 15, 2025,

<https://www.eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/documents/2024/EU-RoK%20Security%20and%20Defence%20Partnership.pdf>

⁴ “‘Tailored partnership’ with NATO to boost security cooperation,” Ministry of Foreign Affairs, July 13, 2023, https://www.mofa.go.kr/eng/brd/m_5674/view.do?seq=320840

⁵ Pardo, Ramon Pacheco, and Saeme Kim. “South Korea: siding with the west and distancing from

Russia." *International Politics* 60.5 (2023): 1113-1133.

⁶ Jo He-rim, “South Korea’s intelligence agency joins NATO’s cyber defense center as first in Asia,” *The Korea Herald*, May 5, 2022, <https://www.koreaherald.com/article/2859343>

⁷ Lee Minji, “S.Korea, NATO to hold 3rd military staff talks in Seoul,” Yonhap News Agency, May 12, 2025, <https://en.yna.co.kr/view/AEN20250512002200315>

⁸ Kim Eun-jung, “S.Korea to attend NATO defense ministers’ meeting for 1st time,” *Yonhap News Agency*, October 1, 2024, <https://en.yna.co.kr/view/AEN20241001005000315>

⁹ “The Downing Street Accord: A United Kingdom-Republic of Korea Global Strategic Partnership,” November 22, 2023, Accessed September 15, 2025.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-downing-street-accord-a-united-kingdom-republic-of-korea-global-strategic-partnership>

¹⁰ Korean firms ink follow-up contracts with Poland to export K2 tanks, K9 howitzers,” *The Korea Times*, August 28, 2022.

<https://www.koreatimes.co.kr/southkorea/defense/20220828/korean-firms-ink-follow-up-contracts-with-poland-to-export-k2-tanks-k9-howitzers>

¹¹ “The Yoon Suk Yeol Administration’s National Security Strategy,” Office of National Security, June 2023, p.61, Accessed September 15, 2025.

¹² Seo Ji-eun, “President Yoon was harsh on North Korea. President Lee wants to do things differently,” *Korea JoongAng Daily*, June 18, 2025,

<https://koreajoongangdaily.joins.com/news/2025-06-18/national/northKorea/President-Yoon-was-harsh-on-North-Korea-President-Lee-wants-to-do-things-differently/2332126>

¹³ Lee Jihae, “President Lee suggests strategy for N. Korea’s denuclearization,” *Korea.net*, August 21, 2025, [President Lee suggests strategy for N. Korea's denuclearization : Korea.net : The official website of the Republic of Korea](#)

¹⁴ Saeme Kim, “Europe Needs to Update its North Korea Policy,” *RUSI Commentary*, August 8, 2025, <https://www.rusi.org/explore-our-research/publications/commentary/europe-needs-update-its-north-korea-policy>

¹⁵ In Europe, North Korea currently has embassies in Austria, Belarus, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Germany, Italy, Poland, Romania, Russia, Sweden, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom.

¹⁶ Seo Ji-eun, “EU official says North’s military support for Russia is ‘concerning,’ stresses connectivity with Indo-Pacific security,” *Korea JoongAng Daily*, July 16, 2025.

<https://koreajoongangdaily.joins.com/news/2025-07-16/national/diplomacy/EU-official-warns-Seoul-that-reproachment-with-Pyongyang-could-impact-defense-cooperation/2354234>

¹⁷ Vishwam Sankaran, “North Korean IT workers spies now targeting jobs across Europe, researchers warn,” *The Independent*, April 2, 2025.

<https://www.independent.co.uk/tech/north-korea-spy-europe-it-jobs-b2725924.html>

18 “Poland signs \$6.5 billion deal to purchase second batch of K2 tanks,” *Korea JoongAng Daily*,
August 2, 2025. <https://koreajoongangdaily.joins.com/news/2025-08-02/national/defense/Poland->

[signs-65-billion-deal-to-purchase-second-batch-of-K2-tanks/2367180](https://www.defense.gov/Newsroom/Recorded-Statements/Recorded-Statement.aspx?cid=2367180)

¹⁹ “Defence expenditures and NATO’s 5% commitment,” North Atlantic Treaty Organization, Accessed August 26, 2025, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_49198.htm

²⁰ “First-ever European defence industrial strategy to enhance Europe’s readiness and security,” European Commission, March 5, 2024, <https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip-24-1037>.

https://commission.europa.eu/news-and-media/news/first-ever-european-defence-industrial-strategy-enhance-europes-readiness-and-security-2024-03-05_en

²¹ “European Defence Industry Programme: Council ready to start negotiations with the European Parliament,” European Council, Council of the European Union, June 23, 2025.

<https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2025/06/23/european-defence-industry-programme-council-ready-to-start-negotiations-with-the-european-parliament/>

²² “EU Member States endorse €150 billion SAFE defence loan instrument to boost European defence capabilities,” European Commission Press Release, May 27, 2025, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_25_1340

²³ Kwon Hyuk-chul, “Korea inks deal worth \$6.5B to export K2 tanks to Poland,” *Hankyoreh*, July 3, 2025, https://english.hani.co.kr/arti/english_edition/e_national/1206147.html

²⁴ “Indo-Pacific: Council adopts conclusions on EU strategy for cooperation,” European Council, Council of the European Union, April 19, 2021, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2021/04/19/indo-pacific-council-adopts-conclusions-on-eu-strategy-for-cooperation/#:~:text=The%20Council%20approved%20conclusions%20on%20an%20EU%20strategy,region%20of%20prime%20strategic%20importance%20for%20EU%20interests>.

²⁵ Lee Haye-ah, “Yoon sends strong message of solidarity with NATO, Ukraine,” *Yonhap News Agency*, July 16, 2023, <https://en.yna.co.kr/view/AEN20230716000200315>

²⁶ “Prime Minister Ishiba’s participation in the Virtual Leaders Meeting of the Coalition of the Willing on Ukraine,” Prime Minister’s Office of Japan, September 4, 2025, <https://japan.kantei.go.jp/103/diplomatic/202509/00004.html>; “Starmer says military planning for future Ukraine peace deal moving to ‘operational phase’,” *BBC News*, March 15, 2025, <https://www.bbc.com/news/live/c5y9vqvjvgt>

²⁷ Kelly Ng and Steve Lai, “UK aircraft carrier in Indo-Pacific on rare deployment,” *BBC*, June 25, 2025, <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cx2gp07yqnjo>