

North Korea asserts new power in the Ukraine war, selling weaponry to Russia

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Kim Jong-Un and Vladimir Putin at a 2019 meeting

As the war in Ukraine trudges on, Russia is turning to North Korea to source rockets and artillery shells for its Soviet-era weaponry. But while Russia certainly benefits on the surface from a boost in their supply, it is North Korea that recognizes that this strategic move has broader implications for its relative position in the global neighborhood. These implications are better understood using the concept of geopolitical codes.

[Geopolitical codes](#) refer to the way in which a country orients itself to the rest of the world. This includes calculating how they will create or strengthen relationships with current and potential allies, or how they will defend against countries adverse to their interests. Most importantly, a country needs to be able to present and justify their responses regarding their allies and enemies to their own citizens and the rest of the global community. Russia and North Korea's latest steps epitomize this decision-making and subsequent justification. In addition to the financial implications of selling desperately-needed weaponry to a country embroiled in war, North Korea is rejecting both Western and Chinese influence. Closer relations with Russia mean that North Korea is able to diversify away from China, on which North Korea recognizes its over-dependence. Further, the United States continues to aid Ukraine in the conflict, including a new \$2.98 billion military package. In response, North Korea's funneling of weapons to Russia comes to represent an overarching rejection of western involvement in the area. North Korea's justifications could hardly

be more clear: the country [asserted](#) that the U.S. is only seeking power in the region, and is "hellbent" on containing Russia and China. In this light, North Korea frames the sale of weapons not just as a move to support Russia. Instead, the policy is portrayed as a noble resistance against Western domination.

The way Russia and North Korea justify their strengthening ties can be understood more fully using the concept of top-down [nationalism](#), the manner in which state institutions and media create a sense of national identity to justify geopolitical actions. Russian and North Korean media are notoriously tied to the state, and are used to circulate claims that justify their countries' actions. As the media propagates claims that Ukraine as an independent country threatens Russian identity, Russian citizens become more supportive of a partnership with North Korea that they may not otherwise find palatable.