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Potential Arms Deals? Russia-North Korea Summit in Eastern Russia



The two leaders shaking hands at the Vostochny Cosmodrome.

Vladimir Smirnov / Sputnik

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Russian and North Korean officials inspect a rocket.

Artyom Geodakyan/ Sputnik

North Korean leader Kim Jong Un made a surprise state visit with Russian President Vladimir Putin on Tuesday, September 12th, within the Amur Oblast situated in the Russian Far East. The agenda of their meeting encompassed discussions about arms agreements, the ongoing Russia-Ukraine Conflict, and fostering cooperation between the two countries.¹ The most crucial part of their meeting occurred at the Vostochny Cosmodrome, eastern Russia's premier space launch center. The two leaders toured the assembly lines and mission control centers where Kim Jong Un was briefed on the details of Russian-made spacecrafts.²

¹ <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/09/04/us/politics/putin-kim-meeting-russia-north-korea-weapons.html>

² <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/sep/15/vladimir-putin-kim-jong-un-summit-russia-north-korea-meeting-five-things>

This meeting between the two occurred against the backdrop of the Russian-Ukraine war. Western outlets report that Kim visited Putin at the facility in a bid to exchange much-needed artillery for the war effort for Russian satellite knowledge.³ North Korea has attempted and failed to launch two spy satellites into orbit this year, with another attempt this October.⁴ This meeting has alarmed Western powers as an exchange of arms between the two countries would violate the arms sanction against North Korea. White House National Security Council spokesperson John Kirby previously condemned any interactions between the two leaders, stating that cooperation would violate multiple UN agreements.⁵

Aftermath and Future Considerations

Following a comprehensive six-day tour of space flight centers and fighter jet production lines across the Russian Far East, Kim Jong Un returned to Korea on Sunday, notably without any official agreement. The Kremlin stated that no deals have been signed or will be signed.⁶ However, it is unwise to discount the fostering of closer relations between the two states. Kim Jong Un has publicly backed Russia in the Russia-Ukraine war, stating that "the Russian army and people will certainly win a great victory in the sacred struggle for the punishment of a great evil that claims hegemony and feeds an expansionist illusion." Putin, in return, has hinted at military cooperation but made it vague. The Kremlin stated that the discussions between the two were a private matter.

³ Ibid

⁴ <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-66601760>

⁵ <https://thehill.com/homenews/administration/4179155-white-house-warns-russia-north-korea-weapons-negotiations-are-actively-advancing/>

⁶ <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2023/09/19/seoul-summons-russian-ambassador-after-kim-putin-summit-a82511>

Furthermore, the two leaders have already agreed on future dialog with President Putin accepting a future invite to Pyongyang.⁷ The emerging collaboration between these two nations presents a complex challenge for the United States now that it must deal with potential North Korean weapons on the Ukrainian front and a belligerent state armed with Russian technology in Asia-Pacific. The details of any actual exchange between the two states are murky at best, but the potential for deepening bilateral cooperation has raised concerns within the United States.

⁷ Ibid



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