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North Korea Has Reaped $13Bln From Military Aid to Russia, South Korean Intelligence Says

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North Korean State Media

North Korea has earned an estimated $13 billion over the past three years by providing military assistance to Russia for its war against Ukraine, Nikkei Asia reported Monday, citing South Korean intelligence.

The figure, if confirmed, would represent a major economic windfall for Pyongyang, which does not release statistical data. UN estimates placed North Korea's 2024 GDP at $17.2 billion, while South Korea's central bank estimated it at $25.3 billion.

In exchange for weapons and manpower, Pyongyang is believed to have received hard currency, energy supplies and critical military technologies, helping the regime bypass international sanctions.

Russia and North Korea have deepened military, economic and cultural ties since the 2022

invasion of Ukraine. In 2024, the two countries signed a mutual defense treaty that requires them to provide military support if either is attacked.

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In 2025 alone, North Korea's shipments of rocket artillery, shells and short-range ballistic missiles to Russia were valued between $7 billion and $13.8 billion, according to the Institute for National Security Strategy, a government-funded research institute in Seoul.

Russia is also estimated to have paid more than $600 million for North Korean troop deployments since late 2024. The deployments followed a surprise Ukrainian incursion into the southwestern Kursk region in August of that year.

In February, a South Korean lawmaker who visited Ukraine said that around 10,000 North Korean special forces, 10,000 engineers and "hundreds" of drone operators remained in the combat zone.

North Korea is believed to have paid a high cost in human lives in exchange for its support of Russia. According to estimates by South Korea's National Intelligence Service, around 6,000 North Korean soldiers had been killed or wounded as of mid-February.

Some reports suggest Pyongyang may be preparing to send additional troop deployments to the front lines to bolster Russian operations.

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