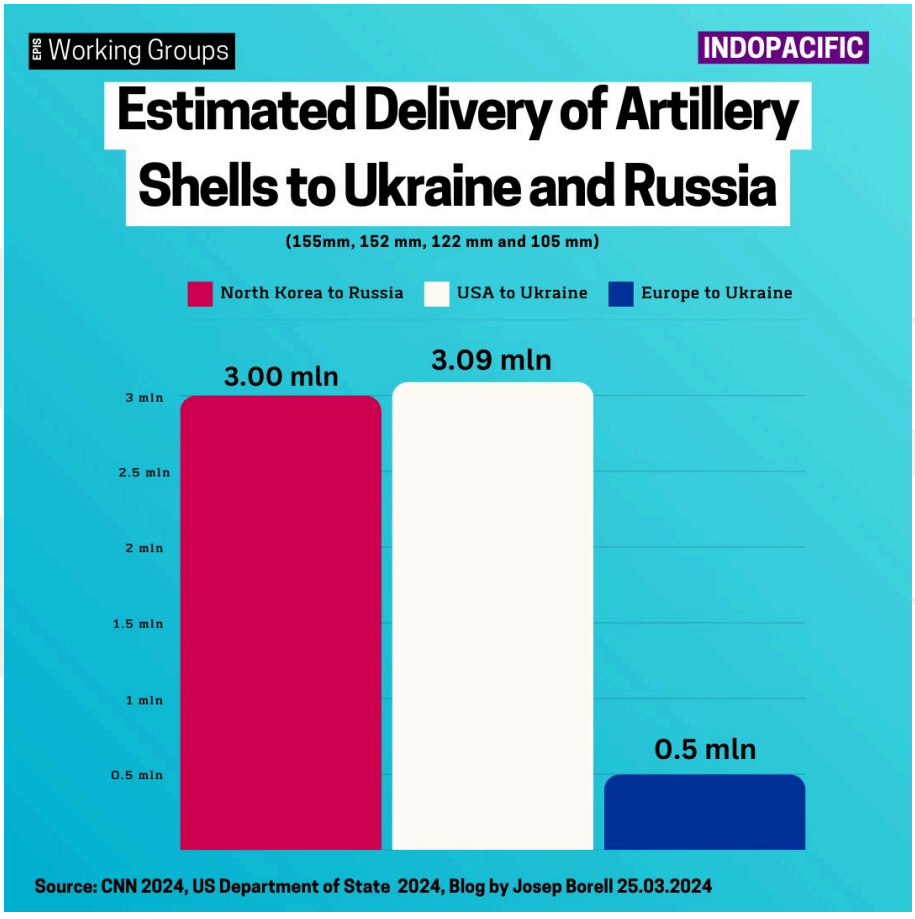
North Korea

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At a press conference back in late February, South Korean Defence Minister Shin Won-Sik warned that North Korean munitions factories were operating at "full capacity" in supplying Russia with large amounts of weapons and ammunition. Most notably, this includes artillery shells which currently sustain Russia's indiscriminatory bombing campaigns in eastern Ukraine, and have been supplied since last September following a summit between the two countries. During said summit, Putin even gifted a car to Kim Jong-un as a sign of their "special personal relations".

This relation is further reflected in the importance North Korea puts on this new arrangement with Russia, with Shin claiming that factories supplying arms for non-Russian clients are currently reducing operating

capacity to 30%. This may also reflect North Korea's grave need for what it receives in return, namely what Shin claims amounts to more than 9000 containers of food, fuel and other necessities. He also raised his concern that the more dependent Russia gets on North Korean shells, the price for these shells will only increase, potentially entailing technology transfers for North Korea's missile- and satellite program.

And it is no small part of munitions that North Korea have been supplying. Since August, Pyongyang has reportedly shipped about 10,000 containers to Russia according to the US State Department, with the capacity to accommodate more than 3 million rounds of 152mm artillery shells or more than 500,000 rounds of 122mm multiple rocket launchers. The two countries have also been working towards arrangements for moving between 20,000 to 50,000 North Korean workers for infrastructure projects in the Russian Far East. While assessing its impact on the conflict in Ukraine is difficult, it is reasonable to assume that North Korea's support is vital in Russia's insistence on continuing its war of attrition in Ukraine.

North Korea's support may be understood further if one considers the historic relations between the two countries. With the Soviet Union being the first state to recognise North Korea as the sole legitimate authority in Korea in 1948, to the reinvigoration of relations after Putin's elevation to prime minister in 1999 and considering Russia forgave $10 billion of North Korean debt in 2012, historic relations may be described as good. During the beginning of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, North Korea was one of the few countries to vote against UN condemnation, as well as being one of only three to recognize the independence of Donetsk and Luhansk.

If one instead considers North Korea's historic position as an isolated state and heavily dependent on Russia for both trade and domestic food supply, their eagerness to aid Russia may be understood from an angle of motives. Historically, North Korea has received its greatest amount of support from Russia during times of conflict, best exemplified by the Soviet Union sponsoring the heavy-industry backbone in the wake of the Korean War. Seeing their strategic relevance only increase as the war goes on, it might lie in North Korea's interest to continue to flame Russia's access to military hardware to the best of its ability.