

South Korean president backs US war plans in summit with Biden

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South Korean President Moon Jae-in traveled to Washington last week for a summit with US President Joe Biden. The meeting on Friday was Moon's first trip abroad since the COVID-19 pandemic began, as well as Biden's second in-person summit with a foreign leader, following Japanese Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga's visit in April. Biden's emphasis on US alliances with Japan and South Korea at the beginning of his term is indicative of Washington's growing war preparations aimed at China.

Couched in the empty terms of adherence to "democratic norms, human rights, and the rule of law at home and abroad," the summit's purpose was to shore up the military alliance between Washington and Seoul. Under former President Donald Trump, Washington sharply ratcheted up tensions with Beijing over Taiwan by increasingly calling into question the "One China" policy, which the Biden administration has only intensified.

The "One China" policy states that Taiwan is a part of China, a fact which Washington recognizes as it has had no formal diplomatic relations with Taipei since 1979. Beijing has stated that any attempt by Taiwan to declare independence will lead to war, particularly as it fears the island will be turned into a launch pad for US attacks against the Chinese mainland.

Moon and Biden's joint statement released following the summit makes clear that Seoul has signed onto these war plans behind the backs of the South Korean people. Seoul attempted to claim afterwards that, as the statement did not directly reference China, there should be no reason for Beijing to be upset and dismissed the latter's concerns. In fact, the joint statement included a veritable checklist of anti-China phrases.

The two leaders, the statement read, "pledge to maintain peace and stability, lawful unimpeded

commerce, and respect for international law, including freedom of navigation and overflight in the South China Sea and beyond. President Biden and President Moon emphasize the importance of preserving peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait."

Phrases like "freedom of navigation" and "rule of law" are used to demonize Beijing while simultaneously justifying US belligerence in the East and South China Seas.

The reference to Taiwan is the first time that a joint statement between Washington and Seoul has mentioned the island. Biden and Suga included a similar reference to Taiwan last month for the first time since 1969. Neither Washington nor Seoul or Tokyo have any concern for "peace and stability" over Taiwan. The naming of the island in the statement calls into question the "One China" policy, which all three countries formally recognize. Seoul ended diplomatic relations with Taipei and recognized Beijing as the legitimate government of all China including Taiwan in 1992.

The summit took place a few days after another US naval provocation. On May 18, the US Navy sent a guided-missile destroyer, the USS Curtis Wilber, through the Taiwan Strait, stating that the maneuver "demonstrates the US commitment to a free and open Indo-Pacific." It was the fifth transit through the strait since Biden took office in January. The inclusion of Taiwan therefore is a strong signal of Seoul's support for Washington's confrontational stance against Beijing.

China's Foreign Ministry spokesman Zhao Lijian warned Monday, "China brooks no foreign interference on the Taiwan issue." China's ambassador to South Korea, Xing Haiming, commented the same day on the joint statement, "There was no mention of China, but

it's not that [Beijing] is unaware it is targeting China.” He reiterated that the Taiwan issue an internal affair.

Indicative of the current war danger, Washington and Seoul also used the summit to announce the end of any restrictions on the range of South Korea's ballistic missiles. The restrictions had banned missiles that exceed 800 kilometers and stem from 1979 when Washington sought to halt Seoul's nascent nuclear weapon program. The changes will allow Seoul to acquire weaponry that could strike deep into China.

A former Defense Ministry official told Yonhap News Agency: “Longer ranges mean that we can launch missiles from safer locations in the rear, which will give us greater strategic flexibility and enable us to better prepare for threats from North Korea and others,”—undoubtedly a reference to China.

Expressing China's concern about long range South Korean missiles, Ambassador Xing warned, “China would not sit still should its national interests be harmed.” In response, South Korea's First Vice Foreign Minister Choi Jong-geon brushed aside the comments, declaring on Monday, “If [Beijing] was uncomfortable, it should have already been uncomfortable about the missile development long before.”

In fact, Beijing has made it quite clear for years, particularly in response to the deployment of a US Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) missile battery in South Korea that it was deeply concerned about the development of missile and radar capabilities close to its borders. While the US operates the THAAD battery, its deployment caused a serious rift between Beijing and Seoul and economic retaliation by China.

In a similar vein, Moon also expressed support for the US-South Korea-Japan trilateral alliance, ostensibly aimed at North Korea. The alliance is considered a crucial aspect of US war plans including to station radar and ballistic missile systems, such as THAAD, throughout the region, including placing missiles in Taiwan, Okinawa, and the Philippines. The US considers the missile and radar systems in South Korea and Japan as a key element of its nuclear strategy in blocking Chinese counter-attacks.

To facilitate these operations, Washington has long-pushed for closer military cooperation between Seoul and Tokyo. This includes the General Security of

Military Information Agreement (GSOMIA), which Seoul and Tokyo signed in November 2016.

Moon's ruling Democratic Party, which praised the results of the Biden summit as a success, postured as opponents of GSOMIA in 2016 as the opposition party, though they attacked it from a right-wing nationalist perspective, calling it “unpatriotic.”

The results of the summit demonstrate not a commitment from Seoul and Washington for “peace and stability” in the Asia-Pacific, but the opposite: a drive towards a conflict that could have devastating global consequences.



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