South Korean president heads to Washington for summit

Ben McGrath
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Ahead of a trip to the United States this week, South Korean President Yoon Suk-yeol made clear that he is working to further integrate Seoul into US war planning in the region, ultimately aimed at stoking a major conflict with China. Yoon's trip also marks the 70th anniversary of the US-South Korea military alliance.

Yoon will visit the US from April 24 to 29 for a summit with US President Joe Biden and discussions with other administration officials. The two leaders will meet at the White House on April 26, with Yoon scheduled to deliver an address to a joint session of Congress the following day.

In an interview with Reuters published on April 19, Yoon laid out what is undoubtedly on the agenda for his trip, including stating that Seoul could potentially begin sending lethal military aid to Ukraine and backing Washington's campaign to start a war with China over Taiwan.

Yoon called for a bilateral alliance with Washington that goes beyond a NATO-styled grouping. While Washington and Seoul have not revealed the details of the discussions, according to Reuters, the two sides "are focusing on bilateral measures to strengthen information-sharing, joint contingency planning and joint execution of the plans."

Portraying these as directed against supposed North Korean "aggression," Yoon stated: "In terms of responding to a powerful nuclear attack, I think stronger measures than what NATO has should be prepared." He added that Japan could be admitted to such an alliance in the future, but emphasized that "since there's been much progress between the US and South Korea, it would be more efficient to create this system ourselves first."

This means further developing Seoul's involvement in US nuclear planning, and potentially a nuclear-sharing agreement similar to what exists between the US and select NATO allies. The NATO pact itself formally commits its members to military intervention if any other member is allegedly attacked.

Currently, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Belgium, and Turkey all participate in nuclear sharing with the US. Under this program, each of the five countries hosts US nuclear weapons. During war, the US military would mount these weapons on allied aircraft, to be used on the battlefield. This is what Yoon is advocating, meaning South Korean pilots could become responsible for carrying out US-directed nuclear attacks on China and Russia, a fact that is being kept hidden from the public.

In January, Yoon said Washington and Seoul were in discussions over an agreement he described as being "as good as nuclear sharing" while also stating the same month that Seoul could potentially acquire its own nuclear weapons. Yoon subsequently walked back this latter statement, but told the *Wall Street Journal* on January 19: "We [Washington and Seoul] are preparing a stronger joint planning and joint execution in operating the US nuclear assets on the Korean Peninsula."

Such an arrangement with South Korea could openly return US nuclear weapons to the Korean Peninsula for the first time since 1991, sharply escalating tensions with China. Significantly, in February 2022, Japan's former prime minister and anti-China hawk Shinzo Abe initiated open debate in Tokyo over hosting US nuclear weapons as well.

Whether or not Washington and Seoul agree to nuclear sharing, the US is intent on further developing the trilateral alliance between itself, South Korea and Japan, which includes increased intelligence sharing

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and military coordination. This is part of the system of alliances Washington is forging in the Indo-Pacific to surround China, including the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad), comprising the US, Japan, Australia and India, and the AUKUS pact made up of Australia, the United Kingdom and the US.

Speaking on Yoon's upcoming visit at a press briefing on April 19, Victor Cha of the Center for Strategic and International Studies, a think tank with close connections to the US government, said the talks in Washington would discuss "the types of exercising around the [Korean] peninsula with regard to extended deterrence and more ways of demonstrating the presence, the reliability, and the strength of the US nuclear umbrella."

Contrary to official and media claims, the US nuclear arsenal is not directed at North Korea, an impoverished state of 26 million people. Washington already possesses enough weaponry to destroy the country several times over. Instead, these nuclear weapons would be directed at China and Russia, with US bases in South Korea capable of launching attacks on major Chinese cities as well as the headquarters of Russia's Pacific fleet located near Vladivostok.

Furthermore, since announcing last month the "normalization" of the 2016 intelligence-sharing pact between Seoul and Tokyo, known as the General Security of Military Information Agreement, South Korea has drawn closer to Japan, including holding joint military exercises alongside the US. Last week, the three militaries held missile drills in the Sea of Japan, involving Aegis-equipped destroyers. Aegis systems, including missiles and radars, are part of the missile network that Washington is developing in the region in preparation for war with China.

On April 14, following the 13th Defense Trilateral Talks in Washington, the US, South Korea and Japan agreed to regularly hold these missile exercises as well as anti-submarine drills. In a press release, the three sides made clear that their alliance was directed at more than North Korea. While denouncing Russia, it stated: "The three representatives also discussed the security situation in the Indo-Pacific region and reiterated their shared commitment to the rules-based international order. They emphasized the importance of peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait."

References to "stability across the Taiwan Strait" are not innocent remarks, but meant to further challenge the "One China" policy while denouncing Beijing for refusing to accept the "rules-based order" set by Washington in the post-World War II period. Washington has all but officially overturned the "One China" policy, which it has de facto accepted since formally recognizing Beijing as the government of China and withdrawing diplomatic recognition from Taipei in 1979. This is in an effort to goad China into invading Taiwan, much like the US did in Ukraine with Russia.

This week's summit between Biden and Yoon will only lead to an escalation of tensions in the Indo-Pacific region and the further danger of a catastrophic nuclear war with China.

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