

South Korean president visits Europe to promote US-led war drive against China

Ben McGrath

28 November 2023

South Korean President Yoon Suk-yeol completed a trip to Europe last Sunday with stops in the United Kingdom and France. The tour was closely bound up with the development of military alliances throughout the Indo-Pacific region and with European powers as part of the US-led war drive aimed at China.

Yoon first made a four-day state visit to the UK, meeting with British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak on November 22. Yoon and Sunak agreed to raise their diplomatic relations to a “global strategic partnership,” the highest level. The South Korean president also attended a state banquet hosted by King Charles as well as other business-related events to deepen economic ties between the two countries.

Following the summit, Yoon and Sunak released the so-called “Downing Street Accord,” supposedly to mark the 140th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between the UK and Korea as well as the 70th anniversary of the end of the Korean War. The accord states that London and Seoul “commit to deepening our cooperation on security issues to address the geopolitical environment and uphold a resilient international order that fosters regional and global stability.”

The reference to the “international order” is just one of many throughout the document, with Yoon and Sunak claiming the “order” is now under threat. The accord specifically denounces North Korea and Russia as well as Hamas, while all but ignoring the genocide being committed by Israel in Gaza. However, as with all such agreements being adopted today, whether with the US or between Washington’s allies, the chief target is China.

The “international order” is that established by Washington in the post-World War II period and which is threatened by China’s economic growth. Yoon and

Sunak’s claims that they are defending “stability” or the “rule of law” is to uphold an international order dominated by the US in which it set the rules and under which London and Seoul have pursued their own national interests.

Over the last decade, the US has responded to China’s economic rise by drastically ramping up the militarization of the Indo-Pacific to encircle and undermine the world’s second-largest economy. British imperialism has signed up to this war drive as a means of reestablishing a military presence and expand their own influence in Asia. Seoul hopes to reap economic rewards and the possible subjugation of North Korea by lining up behind US imperialism.

For all their talk of the “rule of law” and “human rights,” both London and Seoul have demonstrated they have no concern for either in their defense of Israel and its genocidal war against the oppressed Palestinian people.

As part of this anti-China campaign, the Downing Street Accord states, “Peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait is an indispensable element in the security and prosperity of the international community. Given the serious nature of the situation in the East and South China Seas, we strongly oppose any unilateral attempts to change the status quo in the region.”

Taiwan and the Taiwan Strait separating the island from the Chinese mainland are now routinely mentioned at summits by the US and its allies. The reference is not an innocent remark, but specifically meant to challenge the “One China” policy under which the vast majority of countries including the US recognize Beijing as the legitimate government of all China, including Taiwan.

The focus on Taiwan represents the most open and provocative attempt by Washington and its allies to

goad China into a war, given that Beijing will not allow Taiwan to become a military base for imperialism or to set a precedent for carving up Chinese territory.

In response to the accord's reference to Taiwan, China's Foreign Ministry Spokeswoman Mao Ning stated on November 24, "The Taiwan question is purely China's internal affair and brooks no interference by any external forces. As for issues related to the South and East China Seas, neither the ROK nor the UK is a party concerned, and there has never been any problem with regard to the 'freedom of navigation and overflight.' China urges relevant parties to stop making irresponsible comment on issues bearing on China's core and major concerns and be very prudent about what they say or do."

Specific measures in the accord call for London and Seoul to prepare a Memorandum of Understanding on closer military cooperation, increasing bilateral military exercises between the two and conducting joint patrols, supposedly targeting North Korea's attempts to avoid sanctions. This can only raise tensions in the Indo-Pacific, where patrols and military exercises on Beijing's doorstep have become an almost daily occurrence and heighten the danger of military conflict.

On the economic side, the accord includes pledges to "deepen collaboration on semiconductors" and "improve the resilience of semiconductor supply chains." This is meant to reduce the reliance of the US and its allies on China—an essential part of the preparations for war. Semiconductors, in particular, are a crucial component of advanced weaponry.

South Korea's increased cooperation with Britain also means increased cooperation with AUKUS, the military pact that includes Australia and the US. Notably, a UK Foreign Affairs committee recommended in August that South Korea as well as Japan be invited to join parts of AUKUS, specifically the technological defense cooperation agreement, or Pillar Two of the pact. US military officials and those close to the military have similarly argued for an "AUKUS+2" deal.

The inclusion of South Korea or Japan in any aspect of AUKUS would be highly provocative. It would be part of the web of alliances that the US is building throughout the region, which includes the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (the US, Japan, Australia, and India),

and a de facto trilateral military alliance between the US, South Korea and Japan.

Following the trip to London, Yoon visited France for three days. He met with French President Emmanuel Macron last Friday when they similarly agreed to strengthen technology cooperation. Macron expressed support for Yoon's belligerent stance towards North Korea. The South Korean president also made a push for the city of Busan to host the 2030 World Expo.



To contact the WSW and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

[wsws.org/contact](https://www.wsws.org/contact)