

South Korean president arrested

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Investigators in South Korea on Wednesday arrested impeached President Yoon Suk-yeol at his residence on charges of insurrection and abuse of power. This stems from his attempt to impose martial law last month in what was essentially a failed coup. He has already been suspended from office following his impeachment on December 14.

The Corruption Investigation Office for High-ranking Officials (CIO) along with the National Police Agency carried out the arrest warrant and Yoon was taken in for questioning at the CIO's headquarters in Gwacheon, just south of Seoul. While other former South Korean presidents have been jailed, Yoon is the first sitting president in the country's history to be arrested. When not being questioned, Yoon has been held in solitary confinement at the Seoul Detention Center in Uiwang.

The president was questioned for ten hours on Wednesday, though the CIO stated he largely refused to cooperate. He then refused to attend any sessions yesterday, claiming to be ill. "President Yoon is not well and fully explained his position yesterday (Wednesday) so there is nothing more to be interrogated about," one of his lawyers, Yun Gap-geun, stated. The CIO has ordered Yoon to attend the 10 a.m. questioning session today.

After his arrest, the president's lawyers filed for a review of his detention with the Seoul Central District Court. They also filed accusations with the Seoul Central District Prosecutors office against the heads of the CIO, O Dong-un, and the police's National Office of Investigation, U Jong-su, of "insurrection" against the government for detaining Yoon. They previously claimed that Yoon is immune from prosecution for acts he carries out as president, specifically citing the United States Supreme Court ruling last July that stated a US president has unlimited power.

The court rejected several of Yoon's claims, including that the detention warrant was invalid, that

the CIO had no right to investigate Yoon, and that the police had engaged in illegal practices during the arrest. After a 48-hour period of questioning, the CIO will file for an extension of the arrest warrant today. This is a legal step before the case is sent to prosecutors, who have the authority to indict him.

The CIO first requested the arrest warrant from the Seoul Western District Court, which granted it on December 31. Yoon had three times refused to respond to summonses for questioning in relation to his martial law declaration on the evening of December 3.

On that evening, Yoon ordered military troops and the police to surround the National Assembly and drag lawmakers out of the building before they had an opportunity to vote to lift the martial law decree. However, this failed and parliament, controlled by the main opposition Democratic Party (DP), voted to end martial law. Only after several hours did Yoon agree to comply.

Yoon's arrest on Wednesday was the second attempt to detain the president after the Presidential Security Service (PSS) and military brigades under PSS control blocked investigators from arresting him on January 3. The president has repeatedly declared that the CIO has no right to investigate his martial law declaration.

Discussions on how to carry out the second attempt included suggestions that the police could send in special forces, raising the possibility of an armed battle between the PSS and the police. After his arrest, a pre-recorded video was released in which Yoon stated, "Although it is an illegal investigation, I decided to agree to appear at the CIO in order to prevent ugly bloodshed."

The police deployed thousands of officers to carry out the warrant and prevent clashes. Approximately 1,200 police personnel took part in the actual arrest, ten times the number during the first attempt. Lawmakers from Yoon's ruling People Power Party (PPP) and members

of his legal team attempted to block the entrance to the presidential residence. However, a CIO official told the media, “Unlike during the first attempt, there were no personnel or Presidential Security Service staff actively resisting the execution (of the warrant). There were practically no physical clashes today.”

The only clashes that did take place Wednesday were with Yoon’s supporters. Relatively small in number, they are a mob of far-right-wing and fascistic individuals, who have waved South Korean and American flags while carrying “Stop the steal” signs at pro-Yoon rallies in a direct appeal for support from United States imperialism and incoming President Donald Trump. They regularly denounce their political opponents as “communists,” including the CIO.

Despite his suspension from office and arrest, Yoon remains president. He can only be removed from power by the Constitutional Court, which has 180 days to rule on whether or not his martial law declaration violated the constitution. This means it is entirely possible that Yoon will return to office with all the powers he previously held, including over the military. The first and second formal hearings in the case took place on January 14 and 16 respectively, with which Yoon has largely refused to cooperate.

That Yoon is emboldened to stonewall the legal process is an indication that he feels he has enough support within the political establishment. Should he be reinstated, he would no doubt put an end to his criminal case and be in position to carry out retribution against his political opponents and attempt another imposition of martial law to strangle democratic rights.

His arrest is also not an indication that the president is throwing in the towel. No doubt, Yoon and his allies in the PPP were concerned that if bloodshed did occur, it would lead to the renewal of mass protests that would negatively impact the ability to maneuver in the courts and behind the scenes to stay in power.

Those mass protests peaked on December 14 when approximately two million people gathered outside the National Assembly to demand Yoon’s impeachment. Since then, the main opposition Democratic Party (DP), aided by the Korean Confederation of Trade Unions (KCTU), has demobilized the demonstrations, concerned that participants would begin advancing demands that went beyond the confines set by the political establishment, and about the impact on the

economy and big business.

Democratic Party floor leader Park Chan-dae released a statement on Thursday, claiming, “The arrest of Yoon Suk-yeol is a great achievement of the people who have risen up in the middle of winter to save democracy.” Yet the danger to democracy is not the result of the personal inclination for authoritarianism of one individual. It is the result of the crisis of capitalism that is occurring around the globe that is increasingly seeing far-right figures coming to power, notably Trump in the US.

The DP however covers this up while presenting Yoon’s removal from power as an already accomplished fact. It is the same type of rhetoric that the DP and its allies used when Yoon was impeached, yet his attempt to block his arrest demonstrated the serious crisis that continues to exist.

Democratic lawmaker Wi Seong-rak made clear the real concerns of the party when he recently told Bloomberg, “If the Trump administration applies across-the-board tariffs, that will be a big hit for our firms, the economy and employment when the (South) Korean economy is going slow. We need to give a signal to the market that the (South) Korean government is stabilized, and soon it will be normalized.” The South Korean won, for example, fell 5.3 percent in value against the US dollar in December and has continued to weaken throughout January.

The Democratic Party is not leading nor will it lead a defense of democratic rights in South Korea. The working class and youth should take the situation as a serious warning. The Democrats’ downplaying of the danger will only further embolden Yoon and the far-right in South Korea.



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