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Yoon Threatens That South Korea

Could Acquire Its Own Nuclear Weapons

The comments marked the first time a South Korean leader mentioned the idea of Seoul obtaining its own nukes in decades

South Korean President Yoon Suk-yeol on Wednesday threatened that South Korea could obtain its own nuclear weapons if threats from the North grow, marking the first such comments from a South Korean leader in decades.

“It’s possible that the problem gets worse and our country will introduce tactical nuclear weapons or build them on our own,” Yoon said at a policy briefing with his foreign and defense ministers. “If that’s the case, we can have our own nuclear weapons pretty quickly, given our scientific and technological capabilities.”

Yoon’s warning comes as tensions are soaring on the Korean Peninsula, and the prospect of the South obtaining nukes will inflame tensions even more.

According to *The New York Times*, Yoon’s comments were the first time a South Korean leader officially mentioned arming the country with nuclear weapons since the US withdrew its nukes from the Korean Peninsula in 1991. Yoon added that he could ask the US to redeploy those weapons and said increasing military cooperation with Washington was another way he could deal with the growing threats from Pyongyang.

He also said that acquiring nuclear weapons was not yet an official government policy, but his office did not walk back his comments when asked to clarify them the following day.

“The most important part of his comments yesterday was that, as a realistic measure at the moment, it’s important to effectively strengthen extended deterrence within the security alliance between South Korea and the United States,” Yoon’s office said Thursday.

“However, when it comes to security, the worst-case scenario must always be taken into consideration, and from that perspective, he was making his commitment and determination

ever clearer to protect the people as commander-in-chief against the escalating threat of North Korea's nuclear weapons," the office added.

South Korea is a signatory to the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), which bans non-nuclear armed states from acquiring nuclear weapons. Yoon's office said that Seoul still abides by the NPT.

North Korea launched a record number of missile tests in 2022 as the US and South Korea resumed massive war games. North Korean Leader Kim Jong-un recently ordered his country [to expand its nuclear arsenal](#), and Yoon said shortly after that he was in talks with the US on [expanding military exercises to include US nuclear forces](#).

The Biden administration has made virtually no effort to defuse tensions on the peninsula, at least publicly, and has only ramped things up by [deploying bombers to South Korea for the first time since 2017](#). The administration maintains it's open to talks with Pyongyang but hasn't offered any incentive to bring North Korea to the table.

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