

South Koreans protest Biden's visit to Seoul amid heavy police presence

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Protesters hold placards at an anti-US rally in Seoul with Biden's arrival. (Photo by Getty Images)

Seoul, May 21 (RHC)-- Hundreds of South Koreans gathered outside a hotel where U.S. President Joe Biden is staying in Seoul, protesting against the visit which they say is set to stoke tensions and war in the Korean Peninsula.

They crowded in front of both the Grand Hyatt Seoul hotel and the presidential office nearby in Seoul's Yongsan District, where Biden is staying during his state visit to the country.

The U.S. president arrived in Seoul on Friday as part of a six-day tour to South Korea and Japan with the aim of discussing various issues, including tensions with North Korea. Seoul's police said they had received about 50 different notices for street demonstrations mostly in objection to Biden's visit.

On Friday, a group of about 60 protesters objected to his presence. Some 200 protesters from a pro-Korean unification group and another 200 from a different group are set to hold a press conference and street demonstrations in front of the National Museum of Korea and the War Memorial of Korea on Saturday when the Seoul-Washington summit is held at President Yoon Suk-yeol's office.

Cordoning off the area in front of Biden's hotel, police said they had assembled some 7,200 officers from 120 divisions on Saturday for maintaining security as the two presidents held the summit.

Biden's visit is mainly about establishing "a strong personal relationship" with Yoon, who is less than two weeks into his presidency, a US official said, but added it also focuses on issues such as tensions over North Korea as well as the US-led campaign to sanction Russia for its military operation in Ukraine.

Biden's Asia trip "is about demonstrating unity and resolve and strengthening the coordination between our closest allies," the official told reporters on condition of anonymity.

However, the visit is overshadowed by what the US official called "saber-rattling" across the heavily fortified border in North Korea, which the White House believes might use the high-profile moment to test either a nuclear-capable missile or explosive.

Biden and Yoon said following their meeting that they would consider stepping up joint military exercises in response to what they claimed to be a "threat" from North Korea.

In a statement, the two leaders said: "Considering the evolving threat posed by" North Korea, they "agree to initiate discussions to expand the scope and scale of combined military exercises and training on and around the Korean Peninsula."

Yoon also noted he and his American counterpart are committed to the North's "complete denuclearization," adding that "nothing is more important than a strong deterrence against the North."

North Korea, which has been under rounds of crushing UN sanctions since 2006 over its nuclear and ballistic missile programs, has ramped up missile launches this year, conducting 16 weapons tests, including of an intercontinental ballistic missile (IBM) at full range for the first time since 2017.

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