

South Korea's Unsuccessful Self-Coup Could Complicate America's "Pivot (Back) to Asia"

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Region: [Asia](#)

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*The world is trying to make sense of South Korea's [six-hour-long](#) period of martial law that was imposed on Tuesday night until early Wednesday morning local time. It was the first time that the country experienced such since 1980. **President Yoon Suk Yeol** [claimed](#) that the opposition was conniving to overthrow him as part of an anti-state plot that he connected to North Korea. They control parliament, had [tried to impeach him](#) multiple times already, and were obstructing his legislative efforts.*

This same opposition then raced to the National Assembly and voted to lift martial law. The military then stopped trying to storm the premises once that motion passed, and Yoon relented after he and his Cabinet complied with their demand. While it was still in effect, some on social media lent credence to his claims of an anti-state plot, while others speculated that the US had something to do with this even though a National Security Council spokesperson told [Axios](#) that they didn't receive any advance notice.

There are now calls for his resignation [and](#) to even charge him with treason. His political career is likely over. Yoon's wife, Kim Keon-hee, might also go down with him due to her numerous scandals that he refused to investigate. Readers can learn more about them [here](#) and [here](#). In hindsight, it compellingly appears as though Yoon wanted to stage a self-coup on predictable national security pretexts connected to North Korea out of desperation to keep himself in power and his wife out of trouble.

The implications of this hypothesis are many but what follows are the most immediate:

1. Even Traditional Allies Aren't Fully Under America's Control

It's understandable why some speculated during the height of this crisis that the US had something to do with it since South Korea is one of the US' longest allies over which it wields enormous influence, but Yoon's arguably rogue actions show that even traditional allies aren't fully under America's control.

2. The World Is Reminded Of South Korea's Elite Political Corruption

Few outside the country know that "[half of all living former South Korean presidents are now in prison](#)" since South Korea's international reputation prioritizes its economic strength and cultural appeal, but it's six-hour-long period of martial law reminded the world of its elite political corruption.

3. The Defense Minister Is Either Equally Corrupt Or Knows Something

It's now [confirmed](#) that Defense Minister Kim Yong-hyun personally proposed martial law to his former schoolmate Yoon, so either he's equally corrupt or perhaps there's more than meets the eye to Yoon's accusation of North Korean influence over the opposition, even if that doesn't justify what he did.

4. The New Cold War Isn't Really About Democracy vs. Dictatorship

What happened also debunks the false narrative pushed by the US about the [New Cold War](#) being about democracy vs. dictatorship since the unsuccessful self-coup in one of America's traditional allies shows that anti-democratic and pro-dictatorship tendencies are alive and well in the US' sphere of influence.

5. Yoon's Fall Might Complicate The US' "Pivot (Back) To Asia"

Yoon is [hawkish on North Korea](#), is [considering arming Ukraine](#), and went along with the US' plans to organize a [trilateral alliance](#) between them and Japan, but all this might change if he's impeached and the opposition replaces him after early elections, thus complicating the US' "[Pivot \(back\) to Asia](#)".

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More clarity will be forthcoming, but for now, it does indeed appear as though Yoon cooked up an unsuccessful self-coup in cahoots with the Defense Minister. The most important consequence of their actions is that the US might now be forced to change aspects of its "Pivot (back) to Asia" if the opposition soon comes to power as expected and reforms South Korea's foreign policy. This, much more than the ignominy that those two now face at home, might therefore be their longest-lasting legacy.

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