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### **South Korea Politics & Policy**

## South Korean president snubs Nancy Pelosi as China tensions rise

Seoul accused of trying to placate Beijing after US House Speaker's controversial visit to Taiwan



US House of Representatives Speaker Nancy Pelosi at a news conference in Seoul on Thursday © Lee Young-ho/Sipa/Bloomberg

**Christian Davies** and **Song Jung-a** in Seoul 4 HOURS AGO

South Korean president Yoon Suk-yeol is facing domestic criticism after he declined to meet Nancy Pelosi during her visit to Seoul on Thursday, in what analysts said amounted to the only snub from a leader of a host nation during the US House Speaker's Asian tour this week.

When [Pelosi](#) last visited South Korea as House Speaker in 2015, she met then president Park Geun-hye and South Korea's then foreign minister.

But Yoon's office said this week that he was unable to meet Pelosi because he was on holiday, while foreign minister Park Jin is in Cambodia for a meeting of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations.

Yoon, who is believed to be at home in Seoul, instead spoke to Pelosi by phone on Thursday afternoon. When Pelosi arrived in [South Korea](#) on Wednesday evening, Yoon was at the theatre and then had dinner with some actors.

"I can't understand that the parliamentary leader of our ally visited Korea and our president is not meeting her. Being on vacation cannot be an excuse," Yoo Seung-min, a high-profile former lawmaker from Yoon's conservative ruling People's Power party, wrote on Facebook on Thursday.

"What can we make of the fact that he watched a play at a theatre and had a gathering

[with the actors], but is still not meeting the US House Speaker?”

Yoon took office in May on a platform widely regarded as more hawkish on China than that of his left-leaning predecessor, Moon Jae-in. But his administration has come under increasing pressure from Chinese officials in recent months over South Korea’s intensifying commercial and defence ties with the US.

China has launched an unprecedented series of [live-fire drills around Taiwan](#) in response to Pelosi’s visit to the island on Tuesday and Wednesday, which Beijing regards as part of its sovereign territory.

Pelosi met Taiwanese president Tsai Ing-wen during the visit and also met Singaporean prime minister Lee Hsien Loong earlier in the week. She is expected to meet Japanese prime minister Fumio Kishida in Tokyo on the next and final leg of the tour.

Kim Jae-chun, a professor of political science at Sogang University in Seoul and a former adviser to Park’s conservative government, said Yoon “seems reluctant to meet Pelosi as he feels burdened by Beijing’s growing criticism of Seoul’s diplomatic and security policies”.

Kim added: “This gives the wrong impression, both domestically and internationally, that he is trying to curry favour with Beijing. Pelosi is a very important US figure. When the leaders of Taiwan and Japan all meet her, Yoon not meeting her is not a good choice.”

Yoon attended the Nato summit in Madrid in June — a first for a South Korean leader and a move widely interpreted as signalling Seoul’s emergence as a more active regional security ally of the US.

“I am not convinced that we are going to be affected much by China’s complaints,” South Korean prime minister Han Duck-soo said while Yoon was at the Nato summit. “Our priorities in values and national interests are changing.”

But last month, Chinese foreign ministry spokesperson Zhao Lijian urged South Korea to retain a commitment made by Moon not to deploy any more US Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (Thaad) missile interceptors.

South Korea’s deployment of the Thaad system in 2017 prompted a fierce economic backlash from Beijing, which is widely regarded as having contributed to a steady rise in [anti-China sentiment](#) in South Korea in recent years.

The Chinese ambassador to Seoul issued in a speech last month against “decoupling”

The Chinese ambassador to Seoul warned in a speech last month against decoupling from the Chinese economy.

South Korean companies have moved in recent years to reduce their exposure to the Chinese market and to diversify supply chains in key sectors including semiconductors and electric vehicle batteries.

The Financial Times reported this week that leading chipmaker Samsung Electronics is [re-evaluating its investments in China](#) in response to so-called guardrails contained in the Chips and Science Act passed by the US Congress last month.

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