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# South Korea to Sell Arms to U.S. for Ukrainian Forces Fighting Russia

Artillery units are to be supplied for at least several weeks of intensive combat



Ukrainian soldiers preparing shells.

PHOTO: JOSEPH SYWENKYJ FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

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South Korea will for the first time sell artillery shells destined for Ukrainian forces through a confidential arms deal between Seoul and Washington, a move that reflects a global scramble for munitions after months of war with Russia.

U.S. officials familiar with the deal said that the U.S. will purchase 100,000 rounds of 155 mm artillery that will be delivered to Ukraine, enough to supply Ukraine's artillery units for at least several weeks of intensive combat.

Routing the deal through the U.S. allows South Korea to stick to the letter of its public commitment not to send lethal military support to Ukraine while assisting Washington, Seoul's paramount ally in deterring North Korea.

The South Korean-provided arms will enable the U.S. to supply the Ukrainians without digging deeper into the American inventory of artillery stocks, which U.S. officials have acknowledged are dwindling quickly. In August, the stockpile

of U.S. 155 mm artillery rounds had fallen to levels that concerned the Pentagon as Ukraine engaged in fierce artillery duels with the Russian forces, and U.S. officials say the situation is considerably worse now.

South Korea Defense Minister Lee Jong-sup met with Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin earlier this month and agreed in principle to proceed with the artillery deal. Officials at the South Korean Embassy in Washington had no immediate comment.

South Korea's expected provision of ordnance for Ukraine comes shortly after the White House said North Korea was providing artillery shells for Russia, setting the unusual stage for armaments from the two Asian countries to be used by opposing forces in Europe. The arms deals highlight the limits of industrial bases in the U.S. and Russia, which have been stretched to the limit during the war in Ukraine.

Earlier this month, the U.S. sent a shipment of American artillery shells from its stocks in South Korea, a transfer that hasn't been previously reported or acknowledged by the Defense Department.

"United States Forces Korea has been requested to support this effort by providing some of its equipment," a spokesman for the U.S. command in South Korea said in a statement on the previous shipment. "This has zero impact on our operations and our ability to execute on our ironclad commitment to the defense of our ally, the Republic of Korea."

U.S. officials say that South Korea's provision of its own artillery for Ukraine won't undermine military readiness, even as tensions with North Korea intensify. While North Korea has enormous stocks of artillery, military experts say that South Korea has a range of systems to respond to the threat, including its own rocket force.

"South Korea's advancing missile force, but more generally its defense modernization and increasing defense industry capacity, may be providing it options to supply arms to Europe and other partners," said S. Paul Choi, a defense expert at the Rand Corp., a nonpartisan think tank.

Last month, Poland signed contracts with South Korea worth \$5.8 billion to buy

tanks, howitzers and rocket launchers. That deal will make it easier for Warsaw to send weapons to Ukraine without putting itself at risk.

Meanwhile, Russia has turned to North Korea for artillery shells, which are being sent through indirect routes that include shipments through third countries in the Middle East and North Africa, the Biden administration said recently.

White House National Security Council spokesman John Kirby said that while the U.S. has had indications for some time that Russia had requested artillery shells from North Korea, the administration now has information that shipments have been sent.

“It’s a significant number of artillery shells,” Mr. Kirby told reporters. “We’re still monitoring this to determine if the shipments have been actually received.”

North Korea has denied that it is sending the munitions

Russian President Vladimir Putin warned last month that South Korea would destroy relations with Moscow if it sends weapons and ammunition to Ukraine.

South Korea has provided bulletproof vests, helmets and medical supplies to Ukraine but hasn’t provided lethal arms.

“We’ve provided humanitarian and peaceful assistance to Ukraine in solidarity with the international community but never lethal weapons or any such things,” South Korea President Yoon Suk-yeol said last month, stressing the desire for good relations with Russia.

Tensions have soared on the Korean Peninsula in recent weeks as North Korea has conducted a series of aggressive missile tests and South Korea and the U.S. have extended a joint air exercise that involves 240 aircraft.

At a press conference earlier this month, Mr. Austin and his South Korea counterpart said that their countries would return to large-scale field exercises next year.

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