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President Yoon wants South Korea to become one of world's top weapons suppliers

Президент Юн хоче, щоб Південна Корея стала одним із провідних світових постачальників зброї

Південна Корея планує стати одним із чотирьох найбільших постачальників зброї у світі, заявив президент Корея Юн Сук Йоль, звертаючись до журналістів у промові, присвяченій його першим 100 дням перебування на посаді. У 2021 році Південна Корея посіла 10 місце у світі за постачанням зброї, за даними авторитетного Стокгольмського міжнародного інституту дослідження проблем миру. Експорт зброї Південної Кореї минулого року оцінюється в 566 мільйонів доларів, Сеул значно відстав від експортера № 4, Італії, яка продала зброї на суму 1,7 мільярда доларів. Проте Південна Корея вже зробила кроки для досягнення своїх амбіцій. Наприкінці минулого місяця вона підписала найбільшу в історії угоду про постачання Польщі майже 1000 танків K2, понад 600 одиниць артилерії та десятків винищувачів.

<https://edition.cnn.com/2022/08/17/asia/south-korea-arms-exports-yoon-intl-hnk-ml/index.html>



A South Korean-built K9 Thunder 155mm self-propelled howitzer of the Finnish military participates in military exercises on May 23, 2022, near Rovaniemi, Finland.

Seoul, South Korea (CNN) South Korea plans to become one of the world's top four weapons suppliers, President Yoon Suk Yeol said Wednesday as he addressed reporters in a speech marking his first 100 days in office.

"By entering the world's top four defense exporters after the United States, Russia and France, the (South Korean) defense industry will become a strategic industrialization and a defense powerhouse," Yoon said at the presidential office.

In 2021, South Korea ranked 10th in the world in arms transfers, according to the authoritative Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI).

With arms exports valued at \$566 million, according to SIPRI's unique trend-indicator value monitoring system, Seoul was well behind last year's No. 4 exporter, Italy, which sold arms worth \$1.7 billion.

For comparison, US arms transfers were calculated to be \$10.6 billion. South Korea has already taken steps to achieve its top four ambitions. Late last month, it [signed its biggest-ever arms deal](#) to supply Poland with almost 1,000 K2 tanks, more than 600 pieces of artillery and dozens of fighter jets.



A South Korean-made FA-50 multirole light fighter aircraft of the Philippine Air Force performs a fly-past during a ceremony prior to landing at the Clark Air Base in Angeles City on November 28, 2015.

And in February it inked a \$1.7 billion deal with Egypt to supply it with K9 self-propelled howitzers and support vehicles.

Late last year, South Korea made another massive deal to supply Australia with K9s.

If South Korea meets Yoon's goal, it will surpass not only Italy, but regional power China as well as Germany, Spain, Israel and the United Kingdom, according to the SIPRI rankings.

"I believe this is a very ambitious goal," said Chun In-Bum, a retired South Korean general turned military analyst.

"South Korea and its arms industry have to do a lot of work," he said.

'Defense major league'

Yoon is largely building on initiatives started under his predecessor, Moon Jae-in, whom Yoon succeeded in May.

Eunwoo Lee, a former translator at the South Korean Defense Ministry, [writing in The Diplomat in March](#), said Moon "changed topography of the nation's military," increasing its defense budgets by about 7% a year.

At a defense exhibition near Seoul last October, Moon vowed to innovate "in line with changes in the security environment and technological progress."

The investments begun by Moon are paying off, analysts say.

[Writing in the online journal War on the Rocks](#) this week, researchers Peter Lee and Tom Corben of the United States Studies Centre at the University of Sydney said sales like the tanks and warplanes to Poland and howitzers to Australia have already pushed Seoul into the "defense major league" with what they called its "K-arsenal."

Seoul's military hardware provides a less expensive but extremely capable alternative to Washington's weapons systems and that's something the US should embrace, the University of Sydney researchers said.

Those systems include [the KF-21 fighter jet](#).

The homegrown supersonic fighter, which had its first successful test flight in July, is expected to provide a boost of about \$18.3 billion to the South Korean arms industry, Yoon said Wednesday.



President Yoon Suk Yeol on balancing relations with the US, China and North Korea 21:03

Budget stretchers

For buyers, the South Korean weapons can be a way to stretch defense budgets.

The South Korean K2 tanks, for instance, are comparable to pricey top-of-the-line main battle tanks like the American M1A2 Abrams, said Chun, the former South Korean general.

Poland announced earlier this year it would buy 250 Abrams, but US production lines are limited and US military needs come first. The purchase of almost 1,000 Korean K2s allows Warsaw to add significant numbers quicker than it could get new US-made tanks, analysts say.

That's good news for US interests even if US defense companies aren't profiting, they say.



A South Korean K2 tank fires during a live fire demonstration at the Defense Expo Korea 2018 in Pocheon, South Korea.

"Cast in a strategic light, Seoul's growing ability and willingness to supply advanced capabilities to other US allies should be welcomed, particularly as the Biden administration grapples with the parallel challenges of resourcing military strategies in Europe and the Indo-Pacific while shoring up America's own defense industrial capacity," Lee and Corben wrote.

Questions have been raised about how close Seoul and Washington really are on key challenges. For instance, after US-China tensions spiked over the visit of [US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi to Taiwan](#) earlier this month, when Pelosi visited South Korea afterward, Yoon did not meet in person with her, opting instead for a phone call. That led to speculation South Korea was trying not to upset China.

"Even if questions remain over the true extent of South Korea's strategic alignment with the United States, Seoul is nevertheless generating strategic effects by arming states facing Chinese and Russian coercion," Lee and Corbin wrote.

Chun said the recently announced sale of tanks to Poland could bring benefits for the South Korean military, too.

The K2 tanks in South Korea's inventory are not as capable as those the Poles will be getting because significant improvements -- including better defenses -- have been made since the K2s were introduced in 2014, he said.

"I hope this is going to be a catalyst for Koreans. We have 2,000 tanks, but if you have legacy tanks, they're not worth a thing. We saw this in Ukraine. We need state of the art tanks to overcome state-of-the-art antitank missiles. I'm hoping that this would be a catalyst for that," Chun said.