

US to Send Nuclear-Armed Submarine to South Korea in Show of Resolve

The United States will send a nuclear-armed ballistic missile submarine (SSBN) to South Korea, marking the first time since the 1980s that such a vessel has made a public stop in a foreign port. The submarine's visit is intended to demonstrate US commitment to protecting South Korea from a North Korean attack and reassure the country amid discussions of developing a homegrown nuclear weapons program.

The announcement was made in a joint declaration during a summit between South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol and US President Joe Biden in Washington on Wednesday. The US Navy's SSBNs rely on secrecy and stealth for their survival and, therefore, rarely make public stops in foreign ports.

The United States has promised to deploy more "strategic assets" to South Korea to deter North Korea, which has developed increasingly powerful missiles capable of hitting targets from South Korea to the mainland United States. This includes submarines, aircraft carriers, and long-range bombers.

The submarine visit is considered a significant symbol of US commitment to the region and a way to apply pressure on North Korea, as it is unusual for SSBNs to visit foreign ports. The US Navy fields 14 SSBNs, each of which carries 20 Trident II D5 missiles capable of delivering up to eight nuclear warheads to targets as far away as 12,000 kilometers (7,500 miles).

Although no further details were provided about the visit, a senior US official clarified that it would be part of more frequent trips to the Korean Peninsula by strategic assets, with no plans for regular stationing or basing of those assets, and certainly not nuclear weapons in South Korea.

The move comes after Pyongyang condemned the recent deployment of US aircraft carriers and joint South Korea-US military drills as evidence of the allies' hostile intent. In the 1970s, regular SSBN visits occurred during another period when South Korea debated the strength of US commitments and the need for its own nuclear arsenal. According to a report by the Federation of American Scientists, the boomers arrived almost every month for a few years until the visits stopped in 1981.

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