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THE PENINSULA

[Ongoing] South Korea's Political Turmoil: a Timeline

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This timeline highlights major events in the aftermath of South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol's declaration of martial law on December 3, 2024. The timeline will periodically update in reverse chronological order with brief descriptions and sources linked to each event. Time stamps follow Korea Standard Time.

December 10, 2024

16:16 – The National Assembly adopts a resolution demanding the arrest of President Yoon Suk Yeol and seven others on charges of insurrection.

15:07 – The National Assembly passes a bill to appoint a special counsel probe on President Yoon's martial law declaration. Of 287 members present, 210 were in favor and 14 abstained. There are 192 votes in the opposition voting bloc and 108 in the ruling party; the 210 votes in favor of the special counsel indicates divisions in the President's party.

10:23 – The National Assembly Armed Forces Committee convenes for a hearing on the events of the 3rd. Special Warfare Commander Kwak Jong-geun reveals that he had orders to prevent the National Assembly from being quorate for the vote to lift the martial law declaration. Chief of the Defense Intelligence Command Maj. Gen. Moon Sang-ho also

revealed that he had acted on the instructions of the Minister of National Defense when soldiers from his unit were seen breaching the premises of the National Election Commission headquarters on December 3rd shortly after the martial law declaration.

09:49 – PPP Assembly Member Kim Sang-Wook addresses the press to publicly support impeachment. Rep. Kim had previously broken the PPP boycott of the impeachment vote on the 7th and voted against the impeachment. In his address to the media, Rep. Kim indicates support for the upcoming impeachment vote on the 14th and urges his colleagues in the PPP to support impeaching President Yoon.

05:16 (12/9 14:16 EST) – The US Department of State holds a press briefing. Department Spokesperson Matthew Miller addresses the press to reveal that key lines of communications remain open, and remarks that “legal process and the political process should play out there consistent with the rule of law.” The Department of State reaffirms that President Yoon remains president of Korea, and reasserts that political processes will play out “under Korea’s laws and Korea’s constitution.”

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December 9, 2024

23:59 – Prosecution Office charges ex-Defense Minister Kim with “co-conspiracy with President Yoon in an insurrection for the purpose of violating the constitution.”

15:35 – The Ministry of Justice announces that a travel ban on President Yoon is in effect.

15:17 – The Senior Civil Servants Investigation Office (SIO) announces that it has applied for a travel ban on President Yoon to prevent him from leaving the country.

11:30 – The Senior Civil Servants Investigation Office (SIO) forms a Martial Law Emergency Investigation Task Force led by Lee Dae Hwan – Division 3 Investigative Unit.

09:26 – The Democratic Party proposes the Special Prosecutor’s Act on Insurrection and Fourth Special Prosecutor’s Act on First Lady Kim Keon-hee.

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December 8, 2024

18:02 – People Power Party Leader Han Dong-Hoon responds to National Assembly Speaker Woo and Democratic Party Leader Lee by stating that “the party leader cannot exercise state authority.” PPP Leader Han appears to reject the proposal for a bipartisan talk on suspending presidential power by stating that “the Prime Minister will directly oversee state affairs.” He further added that “the Democrats including (then NA MP and current NA Speaker) Woo, proposed delegating state affairs to the Prime Minister when President Park Geun-hye was impeached.”

16:45 – Democratic Party Leader Lee Jae-myung accepts Speaker of the National Assembly Woo Won-shik’s proposal for bipartisan talks with the ruling party on suspending presidential power.

16:26 – The Association of Lawyers for a Democratic Society denounces the joint address by PPP Leader Han and Prime Minister Han, refuting their proposal for interim rule as “unconstitutional” and “lacking legal grounds.” The Association raised concern that the Prime Minister’s alleged complicity in the plot had not yet been cleared, and that PPP Leader Han could not assume such authority as an unelected public figure. They denounced the move as a “second martial law declaration attempt.”

15:03 – Speaker of the National Assembly Woo Won-shik proposes talks with two major parties to immediately suspend the president’s duties. Speaker of the National Assembly Woo states that “the Prime Minister and ruling party proposal to assume presidential authority is undoubtedly unconstitutional.” Woo proposes talks with the two major parties to immediately suspend the president’s duties.

13:30 – Head Special Prosecutor states that he “will spare no effort to leave no doubt.” Chief Special Prosecutor Park Se-hyun states, “We are conducting a thorough investigation strictly based on law and principles, regardless of rank or status.” He added, “We will spare no effort to ensure that no doubts remain regarding this case.... We ask the people to trust and watch over the process.”

11:22 – PPP Leader Han Dong-Hoon and Prime Minister Han Duck-soo address the nation. They announce that President Yoon will relinquish the authorities and duties of president effective immediately. He will not, however, leave office until an unspecified date; until which point Leader Han and Prime Minister Han will assume the affairs of state.

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December 7, 2024

21:40 – Ruling Party Floor Leader Choo Kyung-ho announces his resignation from floor leader.

21:22 – National Assembly ends no roll-call impeachment vote for President Yoon. South Korea’s National Assembly fails to secure the quorum necessary (200 out of 300 representatives present) to impeach President Yoon. The ruling People Power Party boycotts the motion, with only three of its lawmakers showing up to vote.

17:44 – Special investigation bill for the First Lady rejected by National Assembly. A special bill to investigate First Lady Kim Keon-hee fails to pass with just two votes short of the 200 required to reach a two-thirds majority. The ruling People’s Power Party votes against the bill before walking out of the building, boycotting the subsequent impeachment bill against President Yoon.

16:31 – Ruling party confirms party stance opposing the impeachment and special investigation bills. The ruling People’s Power Party confirms its official stance to oppose the impeachment and special investigation bills against President Yoon Suk Yeol and First Lady Kim Keon-hee. The decision will hamper attempts to bring the President and First Lady to justice. Currently, the ruling party’s possession of 108 seats means that at least 8 members of the party must diverge from the official stance for any bill to pass.

13:13 – A meeting between PPP Party Leader Han Dong-Hoon and Prime Minister Han Duk-soo results in an agreement to maintain communications and look after people’s livelihoods. PPP Party Leader Han Dong-Hoon meets with Prime Minister Han

Duck-soo in the Prime Minister's office just after President Yoon Suk Yeol issued an official apology to the nation. The two leaders discussed ways to address the sharp decline in public support and how to salvage public affairs. The Prime Minister vowed to "look after people's livelihoods in close consultation with the party."

10:01 – President Yoon Suk Yeol addresses the nation. President Yoon states that he is "deeply sorry for the fear and discomfort [his martial law order] caused... [and that he] will not evade the legal and political responsibilities associated with the declaration of the martial law.... Rumors are circulating about the possibility of another martial law... there will be no recurrence of such measures. From now on, [his] party and the government will jointly assume responsibility for national administration."

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December 6, 2024

17:00 – A Special Prosecution Unit is installed in Seoul Eastern District Prosecutors' Office to investigate the martial law incident.

16:18 – The Ministry of National Defense announces suspension of duties for the Minister of Defense, Commander of the National Defense Command, Commander of the Special Forces Command, and Commander of the Counterintelligence Command.

14:19 – Conflicting reports surface about President Yoon ordering the National Intelligence Service to arrest politicians. Director of NIS, Cho Tae-yong states that President Yoon "has not given orders for an arrest before or after the martial law declaration." This claim conflicts with the statement made by Deputy Director Hong Jang-won who claimed that the President has ordered him to do so.

13:36 – The Supreme Prosecutor's Office announces that "the martial law case will be jointly investigated with the military prosecutor's office." The Supreme Prosecutors' Office announces that the Special Investigation Headquarters will collaborate with military prosecutors and personnel from the military prosecution to advance the investigation into the martial law case. This joint effort aims to ensure a comprehensive examination of the case, which involves allegations of misconduct by key military and government officials.

13:31 – The Deputy Minister of Defense (Acting Defense Minister) announces that "even if there is a demand for a second martial law, we will absolutely not accept it." Acting Defense Minister Kim Seon-ho rejects rumors of a potential second martial law declaration, clarifying that both the defense ministry and the Joint Chiefs of Staff would not comply with any such orders. His statement comes in response to concerns raised by opposition lawmakers and the Center for Military Human Rights Korea, which claimed that some Army units had been ordered to prepare for an emergency.

11:40 – Special Warfare Commander announces that he is against another martial law decree, and he "will reject" such a measure "even if orders are given." He fielded questions from Democratic Party Assembly Member Kim Byung-joo in a YouTube livestream.

10:52 – Police: “A Special Investigation Team of Over 120 Members Formed for ‘Martial Law’ Case.” Police announced the formation of a dedicated investigation team comprising approximately 120 personnel to examine four complaints alleging treason, mutiny, and abuse of power related to President Yoon’s declaration and subsequent lifting of martial law on Tuesday.

10:51 – Foreign Minister Cho Tae-yul meets with the US Ambassador to South Korea, explaining the situation following the declaration of martial law. Foreign Minister Cho Tae-yul met with U.S. Ambassador Philip Goldberg to discuss the recent martial law declaration by President Yoon Suk Yeol and its subsequent withdrawal. Both officials emphasized the importance of South Korea’s democracy, the strength of the US-South Korea alliance, and the US commitment to South Korea’s defense. They agreed to collaborate closely to uphold these shared values and reassure the international community that the situation had minimal impact on South Korea’s economic and diplomatic activities.

10:36 (02:36 CET) – US and South Korean chief diplomats speak on the phone, and Secretary of State Blinken “welcomes lifting of martial law.” During the first phone call since President Yoon Suk Yeol’s declaration of emergency martial law with Republic of Korea (ROK) Foreign Minister Cho Tae-yul, Secretary of State Antony Blinken expressed concern over the declaration of martial law in South Korea but welcomed its lifting following a unanimous vote in the National Assembly. He reaffirmed the strength of the US-South Korea alliance, highlighted progress in their bilateral relationship, and emphasized the continued commitment to regional stability and security.

09:47 – Cho Kyung-tae becomes the first ruling party lawmaker to publicly support the impeachment of President Yoon. Cho Kyung-tae became the first lawmaker from the ruling People Power Party to publicly support President Yoon Suk Yeol’s impeachment, following remarks in favor of impeachment earlier on Friday by Han Dong-Hoon, the party’s leader.

09:28 – People Power Party Leader Han Dong-Hoon states that President Yoon must suspend all executive duties. During a meeting with the party leadership Han Dong Hoon states that he would do his best “to prevent this impeachment from passing in order to prevent damage to the people and supporters due to unprepared confusion.” But after considering the newly revealed facts, he believes “it is necessary to immediately suspend President Yoon from his duties in order to protect the Republic of Korea and its people.”

03:06 (12/5 13:06 EST) – Reuters reports that US Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin cancels his trip to South Korea.

02:38 (12/5 12:38 EST) – The US Department of State holds a press briefing. Deputy Spokesperson Vedant Patel states during the briefing that “the impeachment process... is an internal process within the ROK, which... will be handled in accordance with the ROK constitution... [and the] alliance... transcends any particular president or government on both sides.”

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December 5, 2024

17:43 – Prosecutor General Sim Woo-jung orders direct investigation into “insurrection charges against President Yoon.”

14:22 – The Police impose a travel ban on Minister of Defense Kim Yong Hyun.

09:04 – Ruling party leader Han Dong-hoon states that he “will work to ensure President Yoon’s impeachment motion *does not pass*.” Han reiterates that “President Yoon’s perception of this situation differs greatly from [his view] and that of the public... once again calling for the President to leave the party.” He has also stated that he “will take responsibility and work to resolve the situation

07:37 (12/4 17:37 EST) – US Deputy Secretary of State Kurt Campbell states that President Yoon “badly misjudged” his decision to declare a martial law.

05:14 (12/4 13:14 EST) – US National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan states that the United States is “going to continue to speak out publicly and engage privately with South Korean counterparts to reinforce the importance of that continuing.”

00:18 – Ruling Party convenes to approve party line *opposing* President Yoon’s impeachment but there are disagreements among factions. Some are calling for the President’s withdrawal from the party, constitutional amendments to shorten the presidential term, or pushing for the President’s resignation.

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December 4, 2024

22:30 – President Yoon Suk-yeol meets with PM Han Duk-soo, PPP Leader Han Dong-hoon, PPP Floor Leader Chu Kyung-ho, National Assembly Vice Chairman Joo Ho-young, NA MP Kim Ki-hyun, and NA MP Na Kyung-won at the Yongsan Presidential Office to discuss follow up measures after the failed martial law.

21:30 (13:30 CET) – Secretary of State Antony Blinken issues a statement during an interview at NATO meeting in Brussels. During an interview in Brussels on the sidelines of a meeting of NATO foreign ministers, Secretary Blinken said “South Korean democracy is one of the most powerful stories anywhere in the world. It’s very important that any disputes, differences, political differences, be resolved peacefully and pursuant to the rule of law. That’s what we’re seeing now. That’s what’s so important to sustain.”

17:48 – Democratic Party files impeachment motion against Defense Minister Kim Yong-hyun. Defense Minister Kim Yong-hyun states “I apologize to the public... I have submitted my resignation to the President.”

14:30 – Opposition bloc of six parties including the submits impeachment motion against President Yoon to the National Assembly. Impeachment proposal to be voted on the 6th or the 7th

11:21 – Democratic Party files charges of treason against President Yoon, Defense Minister, and Minister of the Interior and Safety, pushing for impeachment. The main opposition Democratic Party (DP) announced plans to file treason charges against President Yoon, as well as his defense and interior ministers, and pursue their impeachment. For the impeachment motion to proceed, parliament must vote within 72

hours of its submission to the plenary session. A two-thirds majority in the 300-member National Assembly is required for approval. With the DP and smaller opposition parties holding 192 seats, at least eight members of the ruling PPP must support the motion for it to pass.

09:37 – Presidential office announces resignations of chief of staff and senior secretaries. The presidential office confirmed that the chief of staff and other senior secretaries had collectively offered their resignations. According to reports, the decision was made during a meeting of senior aides, convened by Chief of Staff Chung Jin-suk, earlier that morning. The resignations come in the aftermath of the political fallout triggered by the surprise decree and its swift withdrawal, highlighting the internal consequences of the president's actions.

05:03 – The cabinet rescinds the martial law decree. The decision officially ends the unexpected order that plunged Seoul into political turmoil and triggered strong opposition from lawmakers across the political spectrum. The cabinet's decision followed Yoon's reversal of the decree early Wednesday morning, during which he also withdrew the troops initially deployed to enforce the measure.

04:28 – President Yoon announces he will lift martial law after an official cabinet review. Nearly six hours after the declaration of martial law, President Yoon returns on air to deliver an address announcing that martial law will be lifted in accordance with the National Assembly resolution. Yoon qualifies the announcement that he will need the cabinet to convene in order to officially lift martial law.

04:12 (14:12 EST) – The US Department of Defense holds a press briefing. Pentagon Press Secretary Maj. Gen. Pat Ryder, USAF, holds a press briefing. Maj. Gen. Ryder reaffirms that the US government “writ large is in contact with the Republic of Korea” and that there “have been no changes” to US force posture on the Peninsula.

03:57 – The Ministry of National Defense calls off the emergency summons issued by the Minister of Defense. The Ministry of National Defense officially calls off emergency mobilization and stands down employees who had been ordered to come to work for the purpose of the mobilization.

03:41 – Martial law forces begin withdrawing from the National Assembly building. Citizens who had been protesting at the premises make way for troops to withdraw. Troops move on foot to board vehicles in a nearby parking lot. Approximately 2 and a half hours have elapsed since the declaration of martial law.

03:14 (13:14 EST) – The US Department of State holds a press briefing. Principal Deputy Spokesperson Vedant Patel addresses the press, reaffirming the US-Korea alliance and expressing hope that “any political disputes will be resolved peacefully and in accordance with the rule of law.” Patel revealed that the United States is staying in “close appropriate touch” with ROK counterparts.

03:14 – Democratic Party reveals that they have “confirmed CCTV footage of troops attempting to arrest” key political figures. The Democratic Party revealed to the press that that they have confirmed CCTV footage of martial law forces attempting to arrest DP leader Lee Jae Myung, PPP leader Han Dong-Hoon, and Speaker of the National Assembly Woo Won-shik.

03:01 (13:01 EST) – National Security Council spokesperson reveals that the White House was “not notified in advance” of Yoon declaring a martial law. The spokesperson remarked that “the administration is in contact with the ROK government and is monitoring the situation closely as we work to learn more. The US was not notified in advance of this announcement. We are seriously concerned by the developments we are seeing on the ground in the ROK.”

02:01 – Speaker Woo announces that the National Assembly has “notified President Yoon and the Ministry of National Defense demanding an end to martial law.” The National Assembly voted to lift the declaration, with Speaker Woo Won-shik declaring that the martial law was “invalid” and that lawmakers “will protect democracy with the people.” Police and military personnel were seen leaving the Assembly’s grounds after Woo called for their withdrawal.

01:53 (12/3 11:53 EST) – US lawmakers strongly criticize the declaration of martial law and the U.S. Department of Defense announce that the 4th ROK-U.S. Nuclear Consultative Group (NCG) meeting and the 1st NCG Table-Top Exercise (TTX), scheduled for Dec 4 and 5, have been postponed. Congressman Andy Kim stated that “declaring martial law in the manner done undermined the fundamental foundation of governance of the people and dramatically raised South Korea’s fragility.” Senator Chris Murphy stated that “President Yoon’s decision to declare martial law... was extraordinarily misguided and the National Assembly was right to quickly vote to reverse it.”

01:31 (12/3 11:31 EST) – US Deputy Secretary of State says that he is watching the situation in the ROK “with grave concern” and hopes that any political disputes will be resolved “peacefully, in line with the rule of law.” White House spokesperson said the United States was not notified in advance of Yoon’s announcement and added: “We are seriously concerned by the developments we are seeing on the ground.” Campbell said President Joe Biden, National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan and Secretary of State Antony Blinken were being kept apprised of the situation as it developed. He stressed that the US alliance with South Korea was “ironclad.”

01:15 – Speaker Woo Won-shik states “All soliders who entered the National Assembly building have left.”

01:01 – The National Assembly unanimously passes a resolution to lift martial law. All 190 members present for the vote is in favor.

00:49 – The National Assembly convenes, with Speaker Woo Won-shik vows “urgent response to martial law.”

00:45 – Martial law forces gain entrance to the National Assembly main building and clash with Assembly staff. Soldiers break the windows of some of the offices on the first floor of the building and gain entry to the National Assembly main building.

00:22 – Martial law forces blockade the entrance of the National Assembly’s main building. Police block off the entrances to the National Assembly compound. Footage reveals that even some National Assembly lawmakers were denied entry, causing some such as Speaker Woo Won-shik to climb over the walls of the compound to gain access to the main building.

00:07 – Martial law forces enter the premises of the National Assembly and attempt to enter the main building. Soldiers transported by military helicopter land on the compound of the National Assembly while other troops enter on foot, with a later brief by the National Assembly claiming that a total of 280 soldiers were deployed. At the main gate of the premises, the troops moving on foot are denied entry by staffers, employees, and other civilians, upon which the troops scale the walls to enter the compound. At the doors of the main building, the troops encounter National Assembly staffers attempting to deny them entry.

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December 3, 2024

23:55 – The Democratic Party issues a text message to all party members to gather at the National Assembly and the Central Party Headquarter in Yeouido.

23:25 – Martial Law Commander General Park An-soo makes an announcement. Army Chief of Staff and Martial Law Commander General Park issues a proclamation that “1) National Assembly, local council, and all political party activities are prohibited; 2) political activities such as political associations, rallies, and demonstrations are prohibited; 3) all media and publications are under martial law control; 4) all medical personnel, including residents, must return to their jobs in 48 hours; 5) violators of martial law can be arrested without a warrant.”

23:18 – Foreign Minister Cho Tae-yul convenes a high-level meeting on the martial law.

23:10 – Police Commissioner Cho Ji-Ho calls for an emergency executive meeting at midnight. Minister of Strategy and Finance Choi Sang-mok calls for an urgent high level meeting to discuss the martial law.

23:04 – The National Assembly main entrance is closed and the member’s entrance is blocked.

22:56 – Democratic Party Leader Lee Jae-myung urges the people to “come to the National Assembly... [and] prevent democratic breakdown” and that “President Yoon’s declaration of martial law is unconstitutional.”

22:49 – People Power Party Leader Han Dong-hoon declares that the president’s “proclamation of emergency martial law was wrong... and will oppose it with the people.”

22:41 – Minister of National Defense Kim Yong-hyun summons all military commanders and orders to strengthen emergency alert and preparedness.

22:25 – President Yoon Suk Yeol addresses the nation. President Yoon announces from his office that he “declare[s] martial law... to eradicate pro-North Korea forces and protect constitutional order.” The president states that the martial law seeks to protect the nation and future generations by preventing system subversion and paralysis of South Korea’s judicial and administrative systems.

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