

Briefing Memo

In South Korea, NATO is a Reference for Tactical Nuclear Weapon Advocates

Takeshi Watanabe
Senior Research Fellow
Asia-Africa Division, Regional Studies Department

South Korea's proponents of US tactical nuclear weapon (TNW) deployment cite two cases in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO): the dual-track decision and the nuclear sharing arrangements. However, the two reflect different intentions and agendas. While the dual-track decision was made for arms control with an adversary, the US promoted the nuclear sharing arrangements for preventing an ally from nuclearizing. This paper will explain limitations behind the Korean Peninsula's denuclearization by examining the factor of South Korea's TNW advocacy, which refers to the two separate cases of NATO.

Tactical Nuclear Weapon for Denuclearization?

Members of the Liberty Party Korea and the People's Party, the second and the third largest parties in the National Assembly of South Korea (the Republic of Korea or ROK) in 2017, repeatedly called for TNW deployment for two main objectives: managing North Korean threats and creating bargaining chips. Such arguments show similarity with NATO discussions that led to the dual-track decision in 1979 to deploy US nuclear weapons for the European theater in order to offset decoupling concerns caused by SS-20 ballistic missiles of the Soviet Union and utilizing gradual deployments of the US weapons to create incentives for the Soviet Union to have arms control negotiations with the US. The NATO decision eventually led to the treaty to ban intermediate-range nuclear forces (INF), and this treaty is indeed cited by a Q-and-A article at the Liberty Party Korea website for explaining the rationale of deploying TNWs.

However, the arguments of South Korea have failed to address an important point for seriously preparing arms control negotiations: North Koreans would have incentives to talk about only missiles with equivalent ranges of TNWs deployed in South Korea, and thus the tactical nuclear talks could allow North Koreans the chance for ICBM negotiations with the US. The INF treaty in Europe was followed by the Strategic Arms Reduction Talks (START) between the US and the Soviet Union regarding ICBM. While North Korea's START-like negotiation would validate the nation's status as a nuclear power, South Korea's TNW proponents, who are highly critical of North Korea's nuclear program, are unlikely prepared to accept such a consequence.

The primary motivation for urging TNW deployment might not necessarily concern arms control or even deterrence. What North Korea's nuclear development meant for South Korea was competition among the two Korean regimes in seeking autonomy; only North Korea departed from the joint denuclearization declaration of 1992, which forbade the two Koreas from manufacturing, testing and deploying nuclear weapons in their respective territories, or possessing reprocessing and uranium enrichment facilities. Despite the fact that TNWs would be owned by the US, their presence in the peninsula would overturn the prohibition against South Korea's option of deploying nuclear weapons. Advocates are aware of this point. At the audit session of the Assembly's National Defense Committee on October

12, 2017, Kyeong Dae-soo, an assemblyman of the Liberal Party Korea, asserted that following the denuclearization principles, which North Korea already waived, would leave only South Korea with a non-nuclear status in surrounding region, pointing out that TNW would allow the nation to have the power to prevent a possible compromise between the US and the North. This strongly suggested that he considered the nation's greater voice in the region rather than focusing on deterrence to the North. At the same session, retired Army Brig. Gen. Kim Joong-ro, a leading proponent of TNW deployment in the People's Party, raised the issue of the North-South denuclearization declaration as an example of undermining the nation's "sovereignty," along with the US-ROK guideline restricting ranges and warhead weights of South Korea's ballistic missiles.

Even though the two Koreas are only signatories to the 1992 declaration, this denuclearization agreement has been seen for some South Koreans as a discriminatory restriction imposed by an outside power on Korea. Until the declaration, South Korea had sought a nuclear fuel cycle, and such attempts had been prevented by the US. About two years before the declaration, in October 1989, the Korea Atomic Energy Research Institute (KAERI) failed to receive agreement from the US to resume the cooperative research with the Atomic Energy Canada Limited about a nuclear cycle, which was also stopped by the US in 1983 (KAERI 2009, 92-93). It was after such an event that the then-President Roh Tae-woo of South Korea issued the statement promising the nation's restraint from a nuclear cycle on November 8, 1991, followed by the joint denuclearization declaration with North Korea.

Consistent with the above development, North Korea's first nuclear crisis in 1993 indeed led to South Korea's complaint to the supposed restraint by a great power. "Sadaejui," which meant following a great nation at the expense of Korea's national interest, was the term used for describing the denuclearization declaration by Lee Man-Sup, who became the Speaker of the National Assembly in the following month of this remark (the Foreign Affairs and Unification Committee on March 15, 1993). On October 8, 1993, the Minister of the Science and Technology testified before the National Assembly that the ministry did not engage in the process of signing the declaration and that the minister could recommend the President to alter the declaration, responding to an assembly member's demand for promoting nuclear reprocessing. The spokesperson of the Presidential Office reportedly regarded the minister's remark, which suggested change in the declaration, as a mistake. However, according to the document published by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) on November 11, 2004, the KAERI started atomic vapour laser isotope separation without required reporting to the IAEA during that same year. From 1993 to 1996, the government made failed attempts to convince the US to lift the strong restrictions of nuclear fuel reprocessing under the US-ROK agreement for nuclear cooperation (ANC) (Lee 2009, 396-399).

US Tactical Nuclear Weapon Believed to Improve South Korea's Autonomy

TNW proponents overlapped with those who sought the nation's greater autonomy, and thus they emerged along with the following: (1) the government's negotiations with the US for acquiring nuclear fuel cycle technology, which assumed a looser interpretation of the denuclearizing declaration, (2) calls for "nuclear sovereignty" (*haek jukwon*), which pushed such a move of the government, and (3) demands for a NATO-like nuclear sharing program, which would allow South Korea to have greater voice about the nuclear policy of the US-ROK alliance.

With respect to the first point, assembly members of the National Defense Committee on October 9, 2006, right after the North's first nuclear test, urged the Defense Minister to deploy US TNWs, citing the 1992 declaration as the reason why there was no such weapons. While the Minister did not accept such a demand to relinquish the declaration, in the December of the same year, the Ministry of Technology and Science (MST) proposed to the US Department of Energy a collaboration of studying pyroprocessing (The MST minister's testimony before the Science, Broadcasting and Communications Committee of the National Assembly on October 17, 2007). Pyroprocessing could be seen as a nuclear reprocessing technology, which was banned by the 1992 declaration; however, the ROK government insisted

otherwise. In early 2008, the government launched a task force for revising the ANC (The KAERI president's testimony before the Education, Science and Technology Committee of the National Assembly on October 10, 2008).

Secondly, during South Korea's contacts with the US for pyroprocessing, calls for improving "nuclear sovereignty" emerged and those voices were reflected in the advocacy of TNW. In 2009, the year before officially starting US-ROK negotiations for renewing ANC, conservative assembly members demanded the government secure "nuclear sovereignty" through the ANC negotiations on repeated occasions (the assembly committees on June 10, July 6, October 5 and 21).

The desire for "nuclear sovereignty" altered South Korea's priority more toward autonomy, which the MST or KAERI wanted. As the Foreign Minister said that he did not know the exact meaning of "nuclear sovereignty" and that his ministry had not used such a term (The Foreign Affairs, Trade and Unification Committee on July 6, 2009), the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (MOFA, the later Ministry of Foreign Affairs) seemingly did not regard "nuclear sovereignty" as the primary agenda for managing nuclear affairs. In the midst of the following ANC negotiations, at the National Assembly session on June 14, 2011, former Foreign Minister Song Min-soon, a then-assembly member and a retired career diplomat, said to the incumbent Foreign Minister Kim Sung-hwan, who was also a career diplomat, that the objective of the nation's scientific communities was pyroprocessing itself with a huge amount of financial resources. Foreign Minister Song argued that South Korea has no choice but to ask other nations to reprocess spent nuclear fuels. Foreign Minister Kim gave Song nods on both points. The former minister and the incumbent may have shared the view that seeking pyroprocessing as a right of South Korea was an objective of the MST or KAERI but not the MOFA. However, in the next year, the MOFA issued a press release about the ANC negotiation, which stated that the Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT) assured peaceful "nuclear sovereignty" (February 21, 2012).

With calls for "nuclear sovereignty" during the ANC negotiations, more TNW proponents emerged in the National Assembly. For proponents, autonomy was a shared agenda. At the Plenary Session of the assembly on February 25, 2011, Chung Mong-joon, a then-leading figure of the Grand National Party (the later Liberal Party Korea), strongly suggested that what he aimed by TNW deployment was reinforcing South Korea's status. According to his remarks, the reason why South Koreans wanted its own nuclear weapon was that the "US nuclear umbrella" could not let North Korea give up its nuclear program. TNW in this idea was a bargaining chip instead of "nuclear umbrella," namely extended nuclear deterrence. Also, this US weapon would be South Korea's bargaining chip because Chung regarded US TNW as a substitute to South Korea's nuclear weapons. According to him, "our own nuclear weapon program" was so sensitive that South Korea needs to consider "at least reintroducing tactical nuclear weapons" in the nation. At the same session, several other conservative politicians raised "nuclear sovereignty" in advocating TNW deployment as a substitute for South Korea's nuclear weapon program.

National Prestige in Nuclear Deterrence

In March 2011, when voices for "nuclear sovereignty" were growing in the ROK National Assembly, the US let South Korea join bilateral consultations for military response to weapons of mass destruction, including nuclear weapons, by launching the Extended Deterrence Policy Committee (EDPC) between the two nation's defense authorities. Yet, complaints were heard from South Korean political leaders about South Korea's status in the committee even before consultations began. At the National Defense Committee of the assembly on October 22, 2010, assemblyperson Kim Jang-soo, a former Defense Minister and a retired Army General, questioned the relevancy of the EDPC by pointing out that the committee "would only have consultations instead of making decisions" on the US extended deterrence, unlike the NATO's Nuclear Planning Group (NPG). In his argument, the reason why South

Korea failed to join decision making for nuclear deterrence was that the nation did not possess nuclear weapons, unlike the United Kingdom (UK) or France.

Later, South Korea's calls for TNW deployment led to the advocacy of making NATO-like nuclear sharing arrangements. Indeed, the US initiated the nuclear sharing arrangements of NATO in response to the demand from Federal Republic of Germany (FRG, known as West Germany) for equal status with UK and France, which were acquiring their own nuclear weapon capabilities (the NPG started in 1967). Before the arrangements, during the discussions about establishing the Multilateral Forces (MLF), FRG Chancellor Konrad Adenauer stressed that the Bundeswehr should be armed with the same weapons as the other NATO militaries and that his nation should not be discriminated against (Trachtenberg 1995, 236). The nuclear sharing arrangements among the NPG members for joint nuclear policy planning were established after abandoning the MLF plan for sharing capabilities, in order to make an agreement with the Soviet Union for the NPT (Arakaki 2016 and Alberque 2017).

In the ongoing debate, assemblyperson Kim Dong-Cheol of the People's Party repeatedly urged nuclear sharing as something similar to South Korea's own nuclear development in order to increase South Korea's bargaining power. On September 5, 2017, Hong Moon-Jong and Kim Moo Sung, long-serving leading assemblymen of the Liberal Party, jointly called for nuclear sharing. According to Hong, who raised concern over South Korea's lack of a leading role in the crisis situation, the Foreign Minister should consider tactical nuclear weapon deployment that would allow South Korea to participate in US nuclear weapon operations like NATO members.

During the early time of the Cold War, the US considered preserving prestige and equal status of the West Germany vis-à-vis the other NATO members as a key for keeping the FRG in the alliance and preventing the nation's nuclear weaponry (Arakaki 2016, 61-63, 96, 135-136). Like that case, the US-ROK alliance faces the question of the US ally's status as a nation state. The nuclear sharing arrangements for compensating non-nuclear status within the alliance, rather than the dual-track decision for arms control with the adversary, will be a real reference for TNW proponents in South Korea.

The UK and France, which the FRG considered as should-be-equal nations with it, were allies for West Germany. On the other hand, since North Korea is an adversary for South Korea, South Korea has been in competition with the North for achieving a higher status. North Korea's nuclear developments which prioritized the realizing of a great Korean nation (Watanabe 2017) stimulated South Korea's desire for autonomy in nuclear programs.

The renewed ANC, which was agreed upon for enabling collaborations about the "nuclear fuel cycle," took effect in 2015. On the other hand, the US-ROK Foreign and Defense Ministers' Meeting (2+2) in October 2016 replaced the EDPC between the defense authorities with the Extended Deterrence Strategy and Consultation Group (EDSCG). The EDSCG is "a way of NATO-like comprehensive consultations because the defense authorities and the diplomatic authorities jointly participate," according to the ROK Defense Ministry-affiliated the Korea Defense Daily (October 19, 2016). At the first official visit of ROK President Moon Jae-in to the US, the two nation's presidents released the joint statement on June 30, 2017, which said that they committed to "regularize a '2+2' ministerial meeting, as well as a high-level Extended Deterrence Strategy and Consultation Group."

Bibliography

Alberque, William, "The NPT and the Origins of NATO's Nuclear Sharing Arrangements," *Proliferation Papers* 57, Ifri (February 2017)

Arakaki, Hiromu, *Jyonson Seiken niokeru Kakufukakusanseisaku no Henyou to Shinten* [The Transformation and Development of US Non-proliferation Policy under the Johnson Administration] (Tokyo: Minerva Shobo, 2016)

Korea Atomic Energy Research Institute (KAERI), *Hankook Uwonjaryok Yongwon 50 Nyonsa* [The 50 Year History of the Korea Atomic Energy Research Institute], (Daejeon: The Korea Atomic Energy Research Institute, 2009)

International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) Director General, "Implementation of the NPT Safeguards Agreement in the Republic of Korea," GOV/2004/84, November 11, 2004.

Lee Junghoon, *Hankook e Haek Jukwon* [Korea's Nuclear Sovereignty] (Seoul: Gulmadang, 2009)

Sagan, Scott "Why Do States Build Nuclear Weapons? Three Models in Search of a Bomb," *International Security* 21, no. 3 (1996)

Trachtenberg, March, *A Constructed Peace: the Making of the European Settlement, 1945-1963*, (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1999)

Republic of Korea. National Assembly Records

Watanabe, Takeshi, "Without Incentives: North Korea's Response to Denuclearization," *NIDS Journal of Defense and Security* 18 (December 2017)

The views expressed in this column are solely those of authors and do not represent the official views of NIDS.

We do not permit any unauthorized reproduction or unauthorized copying of the article.

Please contact us at the following regarding any questions, comments or requests you may have.

Planning and Management Division, Planning and Administration Department, NIDS

Telephone: 03-3260-3011 ext.: 8-6-29171

FAX: 03-3260-3034 *NIDS Website: <http://www.nids.mod.go.jp/>