

The U.S.-ROK Alliance and the ROK's Choices:

Considerations on Extended Deterrence and Nuclear Armament

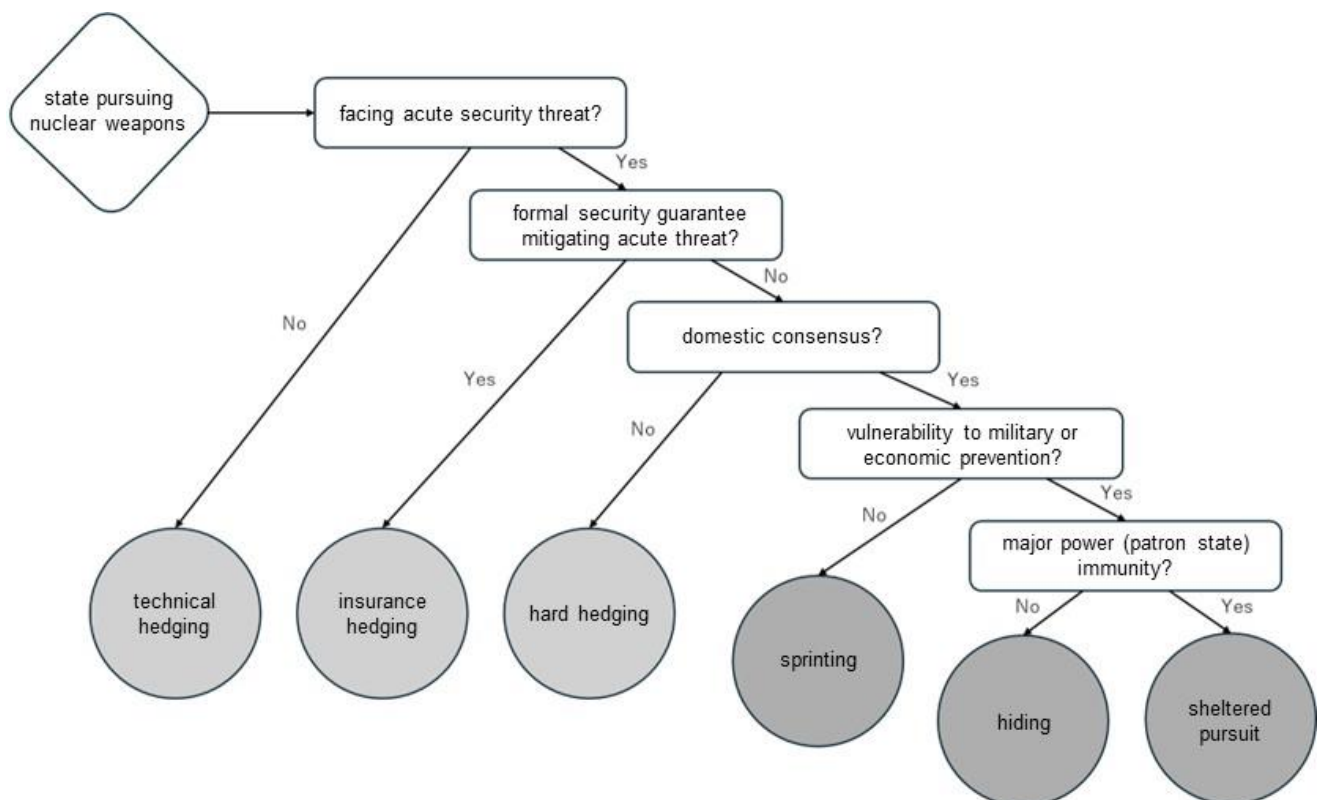
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Introduction

At the end of 2022, President Yoon Suk Yeol of the Republic of Korea (ROK) stated in an interview with *The Chosun Ilbo*, "The ROK and U.S. are in talks about a plan for U.S. nuclear forces operations under a 'joint planning and joint exercises' concept."¹ He expressed unease with extended deterrence, saying, "It is difficult to convince our people with just that [current extended deterrence policy] at this moment."² Later, during a policy briefing by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Ministry of National Defense, he mentioned the possibility of nuclear armament, stating, "If the [DPRK nuclear] issue intensifies, the ROK could deploy tactical nuclear weapons or possess its own nukes... If that happens, we'll be able to get hold of them sooner with our science and technology."³ It goes without saying that the reason the United States provides extended deterrence to the ROK is to deter the DPRK. However, the ROK is now moving beyond extended deterrence to actively discuss the redeployment of tactical nuclear weapons and independent nuclear armament. The reason is the major impact of the intensification of the DPRK's military provocations. In 2022, the DPRK conducted more missile launches than ever before, and adopted a new nuclear doctrine titled "On the DPRK's Policy on the Nuclear Forces" in September of that year. These actions lower the threshold for nuclear use by the DPRK, and it is only natural that the ROK is vigilant. Despite the United States' clear statements on provision of extended deterrence to the ROK by all possible means, President Yoon's reference to nuclear armament suggests the ROK's potential intent to possess nuclear weapons. Drawing on Vipin Narang's Nuclear Acquisition Theory, this paper examines the choices the ROK has made and could make in the context of extended deterrence and discourse on nuclear armament.

What is the Nuclear Acquisition Theory?

Narang proposed the Nuclear Acquisition Theory to explain how states pursue possession of nuclear weapons and why they come to adopt specific strategies.⁴ According to this theory, when states aim to acquire nuclear weapons, they adopt one of four major strategies: (1) hedging, (2) sprinting, (3) hiding, and (4) sheltered pursuit. (1) Hedging can be further categorized into (a) technical hedging, (b) insurance hedging, and (c) hard hedging. Hedging is a strategy that does not immediately aim for the possession of nuclear weapons but does not deny the possibility of future nuclear armament. Within hedging strategy, (a) technical hedging is a stage in which nuclear processing capabilities are emphasized for energy use rather than for military purposes, (b) insurance hedging is a stage in which greater importance is placed on the military use of nuclear capabilities and a state is maintained where nuclear weapons can be developed at any chosen time, and (c) hard hedging indicates a state of having a stronger latent intention to possess nuclear weapons, yet consciously stopping short of weaponization.⁵ Thus, hedging can be described as a strategy that avoids explicitly denying the intention to possess nuclear weapons, while maintaining ambiguity regarding the timing and conditions of nuclear development. (2) Sprinting is a more proactive strategy that seeks nuclear development as quickly as possible. That mainly represents the actions taken by the five major nuclear states during the Cold War. (3) Hiding is a strategy where nuclear development is conducted in complete secrecy until sufficient deterrent capability is achieved, at which point nuclear armament is established as a *fait accompli*. Examples include Iran (1987–2003) and the DPRK (1992–2006). (4) Sheltered pursuit refers to nuclear development conducted under the protection of a major power (a patron state). These strategies are summarized in Figure 1.



[Figure 1] Nuclear Acquisition Theory

Adapted from Figure 2 on p. 126 in Vipin Narang, "Strategies of Nuclear Proliferation: How States Pursue the Bomb"

Here, this paper will focus on the process of transitioning from insurance hedging to hard hedging. According to Narang and his theory, the ROK has been pursuing an insurance hedging strategy from 1975 to the present. As shown in Figure 1, insurance hedging is characterized by a state facing an acute security threat while there is a “formal security guarantee mitigating [the] acute threat.” This security guarantee ensures the state remains in the insurance hedging stage. However, if this situation deteriorates—that is, if the security guarantee weakens or the threat exceeds the capacity of the guarantee—the state will decide to adopt a more proactive stance toward nuclear possession. In short, the state transitions from insurance hedging to hard hedging. Furthermore, if there is domestic consensus on nuclear possession, the state will proceed further to a sprinting or hiding strategy.

Based on this theory, it can be interpreted that the ROK remains within the framework of the insurance hedging strategy because the “formal security guarantee” provided by the U.S.-ROK alliance and the ROK’s own strengthened national defense capabilities are in place. At the same time, it suggests that the weakening or loss of credibility of the alliance could make the ROK shift toward a more proactive nuclear possession strategy. Additionally, the military threats posed by the DPRK could act as a trigger for the ROK to transition to the hard hedging stage or sprinting strategy.

In this way, states have the potential to change their nuclear possession strategies depending on their specific conditions. This paper examines the security challenges faced by the ROK, with a particular focus on debates related to extended deterrence and nuclear possession, and ultimately discusses the possibility of the ROK acquiring nuclear weapons.

The ROK’s Nuclear Development and Hiding Strategy in the 1970s

Discussions regarding nuclear possession in the ROK trace back to the 1970s. Narang categorizes the ROK during this period (up to 1974) as following a hiding strategy.⁶ At the time, the administration of President Park Chung Hee was secretly advancing a nuclear weapons program.⁷ The primary reason for this was mistrust in the United States’ commitment. The Nixon administration decided in the early 1970s that it would reduce the U.S. military presence in the ROK by 20,000 troops, one-third of the 63,000 stationed there.⁸ This reduction heightened concerns in the ROK that it might send the wrong signal to the DPRK. At the time, the DPRK’s military strength was estimated to be three times that of the ROK, and fears spread in the ROK that if the U.S. forces were to withdraw, maintaining deterrence with conventional forces would become difficult and leave the ROK unable to counter the DPRK.⁹ Furthermore, the ROK’s dissatisfaction grew stronger as despite frequent clashes with the DPRK in the late 1960s,¹⁰ the United States took unsatisfactory responses.¹¹

In the early 1970s, the Park administration initiated a hidden independent nuclear development program

known as "Project 890."¹² The administration established the Weapons Exploitation Committee in the Blue House and began allocating scientific resources from the military, industry, and academia to nuclear development.¹³ In 1972, the Ministry of Science and Technology visited France and the United Kingdom seeking technical cooperation for a reprocessing facility. In 1973, the ROK signed a contract with a French engineering firm for theoretical design cooperation on a reprocessing facility, and the following year decided to purchase a reprocessing facility for MOX fuel from Belgium.¹⁴ Alongside plans to acquire a nuclear fuel processing facility for plutonium production, the ROK also began developing surface-to-surface missiles.¹⁵ All of these plans were conducted in secret but eventually became known by the United States. In November 1974, the U.S. Embassy in the ROK reported to Washington that the ROK's nuclear weapons development program was in its early stages.¹⁶ The United States began to suspect the ROK of developing nuclear weapons following India's nuclear tests, which prompted an inspection of information related to nuclear materials.¹⁷ In response, the United States took various direct and indirect actions to block the ROK's access to nuclear weapons technology. Initially, the ROK government denied that it was conducting nuclear development, claiming its program was for "peaceful purposes."¹⁸

During this period, the ROK's perception of the threat from the DPRK intensified further. After the U.S. military withdrew from the Vietnam War, the fall of Saigon occurred in April 1975, and the Park administration's trust in the United States declined inversely proportional to the heightened threat perception. President Park was wary that after witnessing the modernized U.S. military's ineffectiveness in battle against the Viet Cong, the DPRK might erroneously conclude that there was a decline in the U.S. commitment to its allies and believe that it could also eliminate the 40,000 U.S. troops stationed in the ROK.¹⁹ In addition, President Park was concerned that the reduction of U.S. forces might lead to the removal of tactical nuclear weapons²⁰ deployed in the ROK. He even made a statement that could be interpreted as a declaration of intent to develop nuclear weapons, saying, "If the United States were to withdraw its nuclear umbrella, the ROK would probably develop nuclear weapons."²¹ However, even after making this statement, President Park continued to deny the existence of any nuclear weapons development program.²²

The United States urged the ROK government to cancel its contract with France for a reprocessing facility, proposing alternative measures such as support for the ROK's civilian nuclear industry and partial provision of U.S. nuclear technology. Furthermore, during negotiations in May 1976, U.S. Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld pressured ROK Defense Minister Seo Jong-cheol that if the ROK continued its nuclear weapons development, the United States would "review the entire spectrum of its relations with the ROK" in terms of security and economic fields.²³ Former CIA Seoul station chief Donald Gregg (later U.S. Ambassador to the ROK) recalled persuading the ROK that nuclear weapons were unnecessary because the United States would protect the ROK from any attack by the DPRK.²⁴ Gregg claimed that the ROK halted its nuclear weapons development around 1977. In reality, the Park administration did not disband its secret nuclear team and resumed discussions with France over the reprocessing facility in 1978.²⁵ However, this deal ultimately was also deadlocked due to U.S. intervention. The United States continued to closely monitor the ROK, revealed its tactical nuclear deployments, and shifted its approach toward enhancing the credibility of its "nuclear umbrella."

This marked the end of the hiding strategy pursued by the Park administration. Given that the United States had detected the ROK's nuclear development following India's nuclear test, it can be said that the ROK's hiding strategy reached an impasse in 1974. As previously noted, security concerns were a significant factor behind President Park's reasoning to pursue nuclear weapons development. However, other factors also pushed his administration toward a hiding strategy. As shown in Figure 1, when a state faces an acute security threat, it adopts one of the stages of a hedging strategy. If domestic consensus is achieved and the state is also vulnerable to economic and military prevention, it will take a more proactive approach toward acquiring nuclear capabilities. In the absence of protection from a major power (the United States in the ROK's case), it could be said that the Park administration was compelled to adopt a hiding strategy for nuclear development. Considering that the Park administration was in power before the ROK's democratization, it is easy to imagine that there were no significant hurdles to progressing with nuclear weapons development in secrecy, regardless of whether there was a public consensus. In addition, the ROK in the 1970s was in the early stages of economic development and lagged behind the DPRK in military force, which facilitated its shift from a hedging strategy to a more proactive one. Once its nuclear development became known to the United States, the result was as described above. In any case, it is clear that security threats and distrust toward the United States were major motivations for the ROK's nuclear development.²⁶

Strengthening Extended Deterrence and Insurance Hedging Strategy

The recognition of security threats significantly influenced the ROK's nuclear weapons development, which provides important insights into the growing discourse on nuclear armament within the ROK today. Following the failure of its hiding strategy, the ROK has maintained an insurance hedging strategy. As previously mentioned, insurance hedging refers to a state of maintaining the capability to develop nuclear weapons at any chosen time while there is a security guarantee mitigating a security threat. Therefore, the ROK's adherence to insurance hedging can be attributed to the security guarantees—primarily the U.S.-ROK alliance—that mitigate threats (perception) from the DPRK.

After the resolution of the issue of the ROK's nuclear weapons development, the United States strengthened its provision of a nuclear umbrella to the ROK. The 1978 joint communiqué of the 11th U.S.-ROK Security Consultative Meeting (SCM) explicitly stipulated the provision of a "nuclear umbrella" from the United States to the ROK for the first time. In 2006, following the DPRK's first nuclear test, the term "extended deterrence" was referenced for the first time in an SCM joint communiqué. The communiqué stated, "Secretary Rumsfeld offered assurances of firm U.S. commitment and immediate support to the ROK, including continuation of the extended deterrence offered by the U.S. nuclear umbrella, consistent with the Mutual Defense Treaty."²⁷ The mention of "extended deterrence" was at the strong request of the ROK side, showing concerns about the United States' commitment to providing a nuclear umbrella.²⁸

Furthermore, the 41st SCM joint communiqué included the “U.S. commitment to provide extended deterrence for the ROK, using the full range of military capabilities, including the U.S. nuclear umbrella, conventional strike, and missile defense capabilities.”²⁹ However, each nuclear test of the DPRK heightened the ROK’s threat perception and further eroded confidence in extended deterrence. To enhance credibility, the United States and the ROK established consultative bodies and deployed strategic assets. For example, in 2016, the United States and the ROK established the Extended Deterrence Strategy and Consultation Group (EDSCG), a vice-ministerial-level consultative body involving the foreign affairs and defense departments (ministries) of both countries. In addition, the SCM joint communiqué in 2016 highlighted that the deployments of strategic assets, as well as the B-52, Ground-Based Interceptor Launchpad, and Minuteman III missile demonstrations at Vandenberg Air Force Base, contributed to promoting understanding and confidence in extended deterrence.³⁰ On the other hand, the ROK expressed concerns that such one-off missions were insufficient to counter threats from the DPRK.³¹ The ROK desired the permanent deployment of U.S. strategic assets. Despite strengthened cooperation, the ROK consistently harbored concerns regarding the United States’ commitment to extended deterrence.

Now, here is an introduction of the efforts in recent years under the Yoon administration to strengthen extended deterrence. In 2022, the EDSCG was convened for the first time in about four years. In addition, the 54th SCM joint communiqué mentioned the Kim Jong Un regime for the first time. U.S. Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin stated that “any nuclear attack against the United States or its Allies and partners, including the use of non-strategic nuclear weapons, is unacceptable and will result in the end of the Kim regime.”³² The joint communiqué also mentioned the revision of the Tailored Deterrence Strategy (TDS).³³ Moreover, the Washington Declaration presented a significant opportunity in U.S.-ROK extended deterrence policy. This declaration was noteworthy as it represented a commitment to extended deterrence at the summit level between the United States and the ROK.³⁴ The declaration also established the Nuclear Consultative Group (NCG). Unlike the irregular EDSCG meetings at the deputy minister level involving the U.S. defense department and ROK defense ministry, the NCG operates at the assistant secretary level and conducts discussions focused more on nuclear-related issues four times a year. In the NCG, a new workstream called U.S.-ROK conventional and nuclear integration (CNI) was added, which signifies cooperation of the ROK’s conventional forces in U.S. nuclear operations.³⁵ Unlike NATO’s nuclear sharing concept, CNI focuses on enhancing U.S.-ROK communication regarding operations, joint planning, information sharing, joint exercises, and force integration.³⁶ In 2024, the defense agencies of both countries signed joint guidelines.³⁷ Furthermore, the Washington Declaration mentioned the deployment of U.S. strategic assets. In this context, the U.S. military’s strategic missile submarine (SSBN) *Kentucky* docked at Busan for the first time in 42 years, and a U.S. B-52H strategic bomber landed in the ROK for the first time ever.³⁸ These developments reflected strengthened cooperation on U.S.-ROK extended deterrence between the Yoon administration and the Biden administration.

On the other hand, these U.S.-ROK initiatives have not led to reassurance for the ROK. According to a public opinion poll released by the Korea Institute for National Unification in June 2024, 66% of respondents expressed support for nuclear armament.³⁹ While this figure dropped to around 60% in 2023, partially due to the impact of the Washington Declaration, it began to rise again in 2024.⁴⁰ Furthermore,

in response to a question about choosing either hosting U.S. forces in the ROK or possessing nuclear weapons for national defense, 44.6% of respondents chose nuclear weapons, surpassing the 40.1% who chose hosting U.S. forces.⁴¹ These results undermine the credibility of U.S. extended deterrence. Moreover, there could be disruption of the equation in which the ROK remains in the insurance hedging category in Nuclear Acquisition Theory because of mitigation of the DPRK threat due to the security guarantee. This raises the question of whether the ROK could shift toward a hard hedging or sprinting strategy. The next section will consider this puzzle.

Domestic Discourse in the ROK and Implications for Hard Hedging Strategy

The next stage after insurance hedging in Nuclear Acquisition Theory is hard hedging. Hard hedging is a state that maintains latent stronger intention to possess nuclear weapons yet consciously stops short of weaponization, taking the position of not now, but not never. Transitioning to hard hedging is influenced by the presence or absence of domestic consensus. If consensus is achieved, the state is likely to shift to a sprinting strategy, aiming for nuclear acquisition as quickly as possible. Thus, to what extent can it be said that the ROK currently has a consensus on nuclear acquisition?

As mentioned earlier, a recent public opinion poll showed that support for nuclear possession has reached 66%. However, this figure alone cannot fully gauge the ROK's intent regarding nuclear possession. In April 2024, the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) released a report on public opinion surveys concerning the ROK's nuclear possession.⁴² According to this report, across 36 surveys conducted between 2017 and 2023, an average of 61% of the public expressed a desire for nuclear possession. However, a separate survey conducted by CSIS targeting political elites showed results differing from those of the general public.⁴³ 34% of political elites expressed support for nuclear possession, while 55% opposed it. The reasons for opposition included potential criticism or sanctions from the international community due to violations of the NPT and adverse impacts on the U.S.-ROK alliance, with the former reason being more strongly reflected. Support rates were higher among conservatives than progressives. In a national policy survey conducted in October 2024, the ruling conservative party (People Power Party) argued that denuclearization of the DPRK had effectively failed, necessitating the ROK's nuclear armament or the redeployment of U.S. tactical nuclear weapons. Meanwhile, the opposition parties (mainly the Democratic Party of Korea) emphasized the need for the ROK's voice to be more reflected through the NCG.⁴⁴ As seen above, ideological differences in politics have created significant disparities in perceptions of nuclear possession.

Differences in positions due to ideology are also evident at the public level. According to a report by the Korea Institute for National Unification, when asked whether they support nuclear possession, 63.4% of conservatives and 55.6% of progressives responded affirmatively.⁴⁵ In addition, when asked whether they trust the U.S. extended deterrence, 85.3% of conservatives expressed trust, compared to only 63.4% of

progressives. This reveals an intriguing result regarding conservative perceptions: despite conservatives having more trust in U.S. extended deterrence than progressives, a higher percentage of conservatives (63.4%) support nuclear possession. In another survey, when asked about the most desirable means to counter the DPRK, 45.69% of conservatives advocated for strengthening national defense capabilities, while only 15.39% supported strengthening extended deterrence. (26.61% of progressives supported strengthening national defense capabilities, while 5.08% favored enhancing extended deterrence.)⁴⁶ Thus, conservatives appear to prefer strengthening national defense—including nuclear possession—over strengthening extended deterrence. In summary, public perceptions and significant shifts regarding nuclear possession are heavily influenced by domestic politics and ideological differences.⁴⁷

Considering the above, public opinion on nuclear possession is likely to be significantly influenced by the policies of the administration in power. However, as mentioned earlier, support for nuclear possession among political elites remains at only 34%. Therefore, the discourse over nuclear possession in the ROK is not as unified as “public opinion” suggests. In addition, the approval rating for the Yoon administration has dropped to 19% in the latest public opinion polls.⁴⁸ In the April 2024 legislative elections, the opposition bloc (the Democratic Party of Korea and the Democratic Alliance of Korea) won 175 seats, defeating the ruling bloc (People Power Party and People Future Party). As a result, the split in the National Assembly during the Yoon administration continued.⁴⁹ It is also evident from this perspective that it would be difficult for the Yoon administration to achieve domestic consensus on nuclear possession. Thus, even if domestic discourse on nuclear possession gains further traction during the Yoon administration, the lack of domestic consensus makes it unlikely that the country would move beyond the hard hedging strategy to shift to the sprinting strategy. In the first place, there are only very rare cases of sprinting strategy, as it was adopted by the five major nuclear powers during the Cold War.⁵⁰ Moreover, the ROK is constrained by its agreement on nuclear energy with the United States, which limits nuclear fuel reprocessing and uranium enrichment, making it technically challenging to adopt the sprinting strategy.⁵¹ Therefore, although the ROK transitioning from the insurance hedging strategy to the hard hedging one may indicate increased potential capability and intent toward nuclear weapons development, it is unlikely to progress beyond that stage.

Conclusion

Based on the Nuclear Acquisition Theory, this paper examined the ROK’s nuclear weapons development program in the 1970s, subsequent U.S.-ROK efforts to strengthen extended deterrence, and recent discourse on nuclear possession within the ROK. The conclusion is that the ROK is unlikely to take actions more proactive and concrete than the hard hedging strategy, and there is a low likelihood of the ROK acquiring nuclear weapons. Under the current circumstances, the best course of action for the U.S.-ROK alliance is to enhance the credibility of extended deterrence, particularly through frameworks like the

EDSCG and NCG, while exploring effective measures such as CNI. In addition, the ROK's efforts to strengthen its conventional forces, especially the establishment of its "three-axis system,"⁵² will not only deter the DPRK but also contribute to strengthening CNI. Efforts to mitigate the threat itself are also essential. Currently, inter-Korean dialogue remains stalled, and the DPRK has even gone so far as to assert a "two-state theory" on the Korean Peninsula.⁵³ The DPRK has remained silent regarding the "August 15 Unification Doctrine,"⁵⁴ announced by the Yoon administration in August 2024. Under these circumstances, a thaw through dialogue appears difficult. On the other hand, it must be noted that the possibility of the ROK seriously pursuing nuclear possession is not entirely zero. Even if the U.S.-ROK alliance strengthens and extended deterrence is enhanced, and even if the ROK gains superiority in conventional forces over the DPRK, the fact remains that the ROK faces an effective "nuclear-weapon state." If the gap in threat perception between the United States and the ROK widens further, domestic discourse for nuclear possession in the ROK will likely intensify. In addition, if a president with a proactive approach to nuclear possession take office in the ROK, or if the conservative bloc gains a majority, the country could suddenly accelerate toward nuclear armament. Such a development would create a new state of tension, with two "nuclear-weapon states" confronting each other on the Korean Peninsula. This would affect the security environment not only in East Asia but also globally. Although this is a hypothetical discussion, these possibilities cannot be dismissed, and it is imperative to continue discussions on them.

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¹ 윤대통령 "美 핵전력, 한미 공동으로 기획·연습하겠다" [President Yoon: "ROK-U.S. joint planning and exercises to be conducted for U.S. nuclear forces"], *Chosun Ilbo*, January 2, 2023.

² Clarification added by the author.

³ 핵무장尹언급 주목...대통령실"안보의지 보달라" 확장억제 강조 [Attention on Yoon's mention of nuclear armament: Office of the President emphasizes "wanting to see determination for security" and strengthening of extended deterrence], Yonhap News Agency, January 12, 2023.

⁴ Vipin Narang, "Strategies of Nuclear Proliferation: How States Pursue the Bomb," *International Security*, vol. 41, no. 3 (January 2017): 110-150.

⁵ Technical hedging is described as "explicitly not now, but implicitly not never," insurance hedging is described as "explicitly not now, but explicitly in the future if X happens," and hard hedging is described as "explicitly not now, but explicitly not never." (Narang, "Strategies of Nuclear Proliferation," 117-120.)

⁶ Narang, "Strategies of Nuclear Proliferation," 134.

⁷ William Burr, "The United States and South Korea's Nuclear Weapons Program, 1974-1976," March 2017, <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/article/the-united-states-and-south-koreas-nuclear-weapons-program-1974-1976>.

⁸ National Security Archive, "Stopping Korea from Going Nuclear, Part 1," Edited by William Burr, <https://nsarchive.gwu.edu/briefing-book/henry-kissinger-nuclear-vault/2017-03-22/stopping-korea-going-nuclear-part-i>.

⁹ Seung-young Kim, "Security, Nationalism and the Pursuit of Nuclear Weapons and Missiles: The South Korean Case, 1970-82," *Diplomacy & Statecraft*, vol. 12, no. 4 (December 2001): 55-56.

¹⁰ Examples include incidents such as the Blue House raid (January 1968), the Pueblo incident (January 1968), the Ulchin-Samcheok armed guerrilla landings (October–November 1968), and the EC-121 shootdown incident (April 1969).

¹¹ Kim, "Security, Nationalism and the Pursuit of Nuclear Weapons and Missiles," 55.

¹² National Security Archive, "Stopping Korea from Going Nuclear, Part 1"; [여의도 TALK] 북한 핵폭탄과 박정희의 '암호명 890 계획' [[Yeouido TALK] North Korea's nuclear bomb and Park Chung Hee's "Project 890"], *Chosun Ilbo*, January 8, 2016, https://www.chosun.com/site/data/html_dir/2016/01/08/2016010801434.html.

¹³ Kim, "Security, Nationalism and the Pursuit of Nuclear Weapons and Missiles," 58.

¹⁴ Ibid., 58-59.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Don Oberdorfer, *The Two Koreas: A Contemporary History*, trans. HISHIKI Kazuyoshi (Kyodo News, 2002), 90–91.

¹⁷ Ibid.

- ¹⁸ Burr, "The United States and South Korea's Nuclear Weapons Program, 1974-1976."
- ¹⁹ 北傀 來年에 南侵할지도 [The North Korean puppet regime may invade the south next year], *Dong-A Ilbo*, June 12, 1975.
- ²⁰ Nuclear weapons began to be deployed to the ROK in January 1958, but the United States maintained a "neither confirm nor deny" stance on the presence of nuclear weapons in the ROK. (See Se Young Jang, "The Evolution of US Extended Deterrence and South Korea's Nuclear Ambitions," *Journal of Strategic Studies*, vol. 39, no. 4 (2016): 502-520.)
- ²¹ 美國이 核우산 꺼버가면 韓國도 核武器開發 [If the United States removes the nuclear umbrella, South Korea will also develop nuclear weapons], *Dong-A Ilbo*, June 13, 1975.
- ²² Oberdorfer, *The Two Koreas*, 93.
- ²³ Ibid., 94.
- ²⁴ "박정희 1972 년 핵개발 착수...1977 년 포기했다" [Park Chung Hee began nuclear development in 1972 and abandoned it in 1977], *Hankyoreh*, May 12, 2011.
- ²⁵ Oberdorfer, *The Two Koreas*, 95.
- ²⁶ Kim, "Security, Nationalism and the Pursuit of Nuclear Weapons and Missiles"; Jang, "The Evolution of US Extended Deterrence and South Korea's Nuclear Ambitions," 502-520.
- ²⁷ ROK Ministry of National Defense, 제 38 차 SCM 공동성명 [38th Security Consultative Meeting Joint Communiqué], October 22, 2006.
- ²⁸ Terence Roehrig, *Japan, South Korea, and the United States Nuclear Umbrella: Deterrence After the Cold War* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017), 127.
- ²⁹ ROK Ministry of National Defense, 제 41 차 SCM 공동성명 [41st Security Consultative Meeting Joint Communiqué], October 22, 2009.
- ³⁰ U.S. Department of Defense, "Joint Communiqué of the 48th U.S.-ROK Security Consultative Meeting," October 20, 2016.
- ³¹ "(5th LD) S. Korea, U.S. agree to launch high-level 'extended deterrence' dialogue," Yonhap News Agency, October 20, 2016, <https://en.yna.co.kr/view/AEN20161019010455315>.
- ³² ROK Ministry of National Defense, 제 54 차 SCM 공동성명 [54th Security Consultative Meeting Joint Communiqué], November 3, 2022.
- ³³ Formulated in 2013 as a counter-strategy against North Korea's nuclear weapons and weapons of mass destruction attacks, but the contents were not disclosed. It underwent its first revision in a decade. The "2023 TDS" was approved at the 55th SCM in 2023.
- ³⁴ White House, "Washington Declaration," April 26, 2023.
- ³⁵ White House, "Joint Press Statement on Nuclear Consultative Group Meeting," December 16, 2023.
- ³⁶ Jo Bee Yun, "Conventional-Nuclear Integration (CNI) as Alliance Practice for Extended Deterrence and Assurance," *Journal of Peace and Unification*, vol. 4, no. 1 (February 2024): 113-130.
- ³⁷ ROK Ministry of National Defense, 한미 핵협의그룹 대표, '공동지침'에 서명 [Representatives of the U.S.-ROK Nuclear Consultative Group Sign "Joint Guidelines"], July 12, 2024.
- ³⁸ 핵탄두 탑재하고 쓱~ 와버린 '최종핵병기', '워싱턴 선언'의 결과물[청계천옆사진관] [The "ultimate nuclear weapon" equipped with a nuclear warhead: A product of the Washington Declaration (Cheonggyecheon Photo Studio)], *Dong-a Ilbo*, July 19, 2023; ; 「美폭격기 B-52 첫 국내 착륙 현장공개...대북 경고 메시지 [U.S. B-52 bomber's first landing in Korea: A warning message to North Korea], Yonhap News Agency, October 19, 2023. KURATA Hideya notes, "The purpose of submarines docking at allied nations is limited to maintenance, resupply, and crew rest. Even if submarines are armed with nuclear warheads, it is inconceivable for them to dock at a port and then launch them, so there is no operational significance. The act of visualizing SSBNs, a hidden form of deterrence, does not itself constitute a new deterrent. It should be understood as a measure to provide reassurance to control the rising discourse on nuclear armament in the ROK." (KURATA Hideya, "Asymmetric Deterrence Against North Korea's Tactical Nuclear Weapons," Research Report, September 15, 2023.)
- ³⁹ "Support" here refers to both responses of "Strongly support" and "Somewhat support." Korea Institute for National Unification, KINU 통일인식조사 2024: 요약보고서 [KINU Unification Survey 2024: Executive Summary], June 27, 2024.
- ⁴⁰ Ibid., 54.
- ⁴¹ Ibid., 55.
- ⁴² Victor Cha, "Breaking Bad: South Korea's Nuclear Option," April 29, 2024.
- ⁴³ The term "political elites" includes academics, think tank experts, business elites, legislators, and government officials (both current and former).
- ⁴⁴ "자체 핵무장". "美핵자산 운용에 목소리내야"...북핵대응 견해차(종합) ["Independent nuclear armament" and "We must raise our voice on the U.S. nuclear asset management" ... Diverging views on North Korea's nuclear issue (comprehensive)], Yonhap News Agency, October 12, 2024.
- ⁴⁵ Lee Sang-shin, Antonio Fiori, and Marco Milani, 한국의 자체적 핵보유 논쟁의 정치적·이념적 차원 [The political and ideological dimensions of South Korea's independent nuclear armament debate]; KINU 통일인식조사 2023: 한국의 자체적 핵보유 가능성과 여론 [KINU Unification Survey 2023: Public Opinion on South Korea's Nuclear Armament], December 29, 2023: 97-98.
- ⁴⁶ Chun Kuyoun, "South Korean Public's Threat Perception of North Korea and Support for the US Extended Deterrence," *Korea Observer*, vol. 55, no. 1 (2024): 65.
- ⁴⁷ Lee Sang-shin et al., 한국의 자체적 핵보유 논쟁의 정치적·이념적 차원 [The political and ideological dimensions of South Korea's independent nuclear armament debate], 112.
- ⁴⁸ 취임 뒤 최저 지지율 19%...'육성 파장' 채 반영되지도 않았다 [Approval rating at a post-inauguration low of 19%: "Voice impact" not yet reflected], *Hankyoreh*, November 1, 2024, https://www.hani.co.kr/arti/politics/politics_general/1165374.html.
- ⁴⁹ 제 22 대 국회의원선거 [22nd National Assembly election], *Chosun Ilbo*, April 11, 2024, <https://www.chosun.com/election2024/vote/>.
- ⁵⁰ Narang, "Strategies of Nuclear Proliferation," 120-121.
- ⁵¹ 대한민국 정부와 미합중국 정부 간의 원자력의 평화적 이용에 관한 협력 협정 [Agreement for Cooperation Between the Government of

the United States of America and the Government of the Republic of Korea Concerning Peaceful Uses of Nuclear Energy] (Revised June 16, 2015). For details regarding nuclear fuel reprocessing and uranium enrichment, see Articles 7 and 11. Excluding considerations of the nuclear energy agreement, there are also estimates suggesting that the ROK could develop nuclear weapons within 1–2 years. 맘만 먹으면 금방이라는 자체 핵무장... 얼마나 걸릴까? [“If they decide, it is immediate”: How long would it take for the ROK to arm itself with nuclear weapons?], *Dong-A Ilbo*, February 8, 2024, <https://www.donga.com/news/Politics/article/all/20240208/123447105/1>. 한국 ‘1 년내 핵무장’ 가능할까...“현실성 따져야 [Could the ROK “arm itself with nuclear weapons within a year”? “Practical feasibility must be considered”], (Yonhap News Agency, May 3, 2023, <https://www.yna.co.kr/view/AKR20230503116200009>.

⁵² Kill Chain, Korea Air and Missile Defense (KAMD), and Korea Massive Punishment and Retaliation (KMPR).

⁵³ 경애하는 김정은동지께서 조선민주주의인민공화국 최고인민회의 제 14기 제 10차회의에서 강령적인 시정연설을 하시었다 [Respected Comrade Kim Jong Un Makes Policy Speech at 10th Session of 14th SPA], *Rodong Sinmun*, January 16, 2024.

⁵⁴ Office of the President of the Republic of Korea, “Address by President Yoon Suk Yeol on the 79th Liberation Day,” August 15, 2024.

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