SOUTH KOREA’S NUCLEAR DECISION:
EXPLANATIONS FOR SOUTH KOREA’S
NUCLEAR MOTIVATION AND RENOUNCEMENT

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By

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ABSTRACT

Can U.S. security assurances dissuade South Korea from acquiring nuclear weapons capabilities despite domestic demands for nuclear sovereignty? What would make the security assurances more credible? Is the rising demand for nuclear sovereignty in South Korea an attempt to develop a latent nuclear capability? To answer these questions, this paper will examine the credibility and effectiveness of U.S security assurances as a deterrent against North Korea’s nuclear and conventional threats as well as South Korea’s pursuit of independent nuclear weapons capabilities.

U.S. security assurances toward its allies are an indispensable factor to be considered in the study of nuclear weapons proliferation in Northeast Asia. These guarantees have both provided deterrence to North Korea’s provocation of war and facilitated North Korea’s ambition to acquire nuclear weapons capabilities. Despite the dual effects of U.S. security assurances, its nuclear umbrella has been the most credible factor in dissuading South Korea
from acquiring nuclear weapons capabilities, despite rising domestic demands for “nuclear sovereignty.”

From the U.S. perspective, the worst-case scenario of nuclear proliferation in Northeast Asia could be South Korea’s acquisition of nuclear weapons capabilities. Based on its strategic alliance with South Korea, the United States has played a pivotal role in designing and employing South Korea’s military and security policies. If South Korea decides to go nuclear, the United States will lose ground in managing its regional security policies to balance North Korea and a rising China. Moreover, a standoff between nuclear-armed South and North Korea would greatly undermine regional stability as well as the credibility of U.S. security assurances as a whole.

Therefore, there should an overall reassessment of U.S. security assurances toward South Korea and a strengthening of U.S. commitments in order to improve the credibility and effectiveness of U.S. security assurances and to prevent nuclear sovereignty from becoming a rationale for South Korea’s attempt to develop a latent nuclear capability.
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CHAPTER I. INTRODUCTION

According to nuclear proliferation theories, three Northeast Asian states - South Korea, Japan, and Taiwan - are the most likely to reengage in their nuclear weapons programs as a result of the long-lasting regional security threats in the high intensity situation they face and technological/economic capabilities they possess. With such nuclear capabilities and motivations, these three Northeast Asian states are the most likely to acquire nuclear weapons within a relatively short period of time. The three most technologically capable states are located in Northeast Asia, and these states have strong incentives to go nuclear due to the region’s volatile security situation and the presence of several nuclear powers. The immediate external threats from North Korea and the rise of China as a regional power have been instigating those nuclear capable states’ aspirations for a nuclear buildup.\(^1\) The existence of three nuclear weapons states, along with these three technologically capable states in one region indicates Northeast Asia’s higher probability as a potential flashpoint in the near future.

As the Six-Party Talks between China, Japan, Russia, the United States, and the two Koreas have been deadlocked since December 2008, the North Korean nuclear issue has been pushed back on the priority list of the U.S. government despite the graveness of its potential threats to regional and global security. In the midst of this trend, there have been growing concerns over regional instability in Northeast Asia as a result of North Korea’s nuclear brinksmanship and repeated military provocations against South Korea. Continued North Korean proliferation, along with its concurrent aggressiveness in the region, could even raise the risk of

\(^1\) Besides the threats from North Korea, Japan has disputed over the islands with both China and Russia.
nuclear warfare in Northeast Asia or the trafficking of nuclear weapons to other rogue states or
even non-state actors like terrorist groups.

From the perspective of the United States, however, the worst-case scenario would be if the security situation deteriorates to such an extent on the Korean Peninsula that South Korea is compelled to pursue a self-defense capabilities through nuclear weapons development. As a result, Japan and Taiwan might follow suit, facilitating a nuclear arms race in the region. This security dilemma among the Northeast Asian states could bring back debates over what is seen as the obsolete theory of a “nuclear domino effect,” among theorists as well as policy makers of related countries, including the United States.

During the late twentieth century, in an atmosphere of nuclear weapons proliferation in South Asia and in the Middle East, after strong initial responses by the United States toward the potential nuclear weapons proliferators like India, Israel, and Pakistan, the United States ended up acquiescing to the fact of their status as nuclear weapons states. North Korea declared its possession of nuclear weapons in 2005, yet it is still not accepted as a nuclear weapons state by the United States or the international community.

North Korea’s nuclear weapons program would play the role as a root cause for nuclear weapons proliferation and a nuclear arms race in Northeast Asia. Some neorealist scholars may consider the decades-old domino theory as obsolete, yet the domino theory and the theory of the security dilemma still best explain the future course of nuclear weapons proliferation in the region.
In the current security situation, the North Korean nuclear program functions as a “provoker” of nuclear desire among its neighboring non-nuclear states. The strategic situation in Northeast Asia is fairly distinct from other conflict regions. Considering each state’s military strength, even a minor skirmish between the countries in the region might grow into a full-scale war. Although the likelihood of war is much lower than other conflict regions including the Middle East, it is quite probable a given state may employ nuclear weapons when a full-scale war breaks out.

U.S. security assurance toward its allies is another indispensable factor to be considered in the study of nuclear weapons proliferation in Northeast Asia. This factor has the paradoxical effect of providing deterrence to North Korea’s provocation of war and facilitating North Korea’s ambition to acquire nuclear weapons capabilities at the same time. Although past U.S. security assurance policies regarding the nuclear attempts of India, Israel, and Pakistan failed to deter further nuclear weapons proliferation, excluding this variable from this study could undermine the credibility of the overall research results.

**Deterrence to North Korea’s Provocation of War**

U.S. nuclear umbrella has been a solid form of protection for South Korea during and since the end of the Cold War. During the Cold War period, a nuclear balance between the United States and the Soviet Union deterred the recurrence of war on the Korean Peninsula. For North Korea, ROK-U.S. Combined Forces are not an easy target to counter with its inferior conventional and nuclear capability. North Korea still does not possess sufficient military
capabilities to exert a full-scale war due to the wide disparity between the United States and North Korea in terms of military and nuclear capabilities.

**Stimulant of the North Korean Nuclear Weapons Program**

While U.S. security assurances have deterred North Korea’s provocation of war, they simultaneously have stimulated North Korea’s ambition to acquire nuclear weapons capabilities as a deterrent to its perceived U.S. nuclear threats. During the Korean War, the then North Korean leader Kim Il Sung realized the potential threat of U.S. nuclear weapons capabilities and directed the launch of an independent nuclear weapons program since it had no substantial nuclear umbrella provided by the Soviet Union or China.\(^2\) Due to its wide disparity in conventional military capabilities with the United States, North Korea has pursued asymmetric military capabilities by developing the weapons of mass destruction, including most importantly nuclear weapons. North Korea has recognized nuclear weapons as a means to secure the regime’s survival, a countermeasure to the threat of U.S. military superiority, and a bargaining chip to coerce its adversaries into taking its desired course of action.

Despite the dual effects of U.S. security assurances, its nuclear umbrella has been the most credible factor in dissuading South Korea from acquiring nuclear weapons capabilities in spite of a rising domestic demand for “nuclear sovereignty.”\(^3\) However, much strengthened U.S. commitments are needed to improve the credibility and effectiveness of U.S. security assurances and to prevent nuclear sovereignty from becoming a rationale for South Korea’s attempt to develop a latent nuclear capability.


\(^3\) See p.35, Nuclear Sovereignty.
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

U.S. security assurances are one of the most crucial factors that have successfully deterred further nuclear weapons proliferation in Northeast Asia. Yet, faced with an imminent third North Korean nuclear test and its persistent military provocations, South Korean domestic public opinion has raised concerns over the credibility of U.S. security assurances. In Glenn Snyder’s seminal work on alliance politics, this is what he prefers to as a fear of “abandonment” by a depended-upon ally.\(^4\) This sense of insecurity has led to a domestic demand for self-defense through the acquisition of nuclear weapons capabilities in South Korea. Despite the official denials by both the South Korean and U.S. governments, some conservative South Korean politicians argue for the redeployment of U.S. tactical nuclear weapons in South Korea, while others insisting on a reinstatement of the independent nuclear weapons program which has been suspended since the late 1970s.\(^5\) In this sense, to explain South Korea’s past and current nuclear decision to renounce nuclear weapons capabilities and to reassure the international community that it will not reengage in developing an indigenous nuclear weapons program, this paper will focus on examining the credibility of U.S. security assurances toward South Korea and the influence of nuclear sovereignty issue on South Korea’s domestic public opinion.

Despite this growing nationalistic sentiment to demand nuclear weapons capabilities, the likelihood of South Korea’s acquiring nuclear weapons still remains relatively low. This is not only due to U.S. security assurances but also as a result of South Korea’s unique economic structure of having a great dependence on international trade. As Etel Solingen argues

\(^5\) See p. 35, Nuclear Sovereignty.
in her book *Nuclear Logics: Contrasting Paths in East Asia and the Middle East*, among other restraining factors, South Korea’s globally integrated economy, its concerns over losing existing economic benefits or suffering imposed sanctions for noncompliance to the international nonproliferation regime, and nonproliferation norms would likely exceed its ambition to go nuclear.  

### Research Questions and Hypothesis

To reassess the credibility of U.S. security assurances as a deterrent to South Korea’s nuclear aspiration in the midst of rising sentiment of nuclear sovereignty and to reaffirm its intention not to engage in nuclear weapons program, I will raise the following main research question and sub-questions:

#### Main Question

Can U.S. security assurances dissuade South Korea from acquiring nuclear weapons capability despite domestic demand for nuclear sovereignty?

#### Sub-questions

- What would make the security assurances more credible?
- Is the rising demand for nuclear sovereignty in South Korea an attempt to develop a latent nuclear capability?

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In his article “Reassessing Security Assurances in a Unipolar World,” 7 Joseph F. Pilat brings up the three questions as follows to be addressed regarding the future of security assurances:

- What security assurances have been offered and what is their current status?
- Can these or any other assurances timely ensure security, or are they merely paper pledges?
- Do security assurances, or the lack thereof, affect states’ decisions to proliferate?

In addition to my own research questions, I will borrow these questions as a guide to carry out my analysis on the credibility of current U.S. security assurances on the Korean Peninsula and to devise plausible options to improve their credibility.

My **hypothesis** to the above-mentioned research questions is as follows:

**U.S. security assurances are a credible option to dissuade South Korea from acquiring nuclear weapons capabilities despite its rising domestic demand for nuclear sovereignty. Yet strengthened U.S. commitments are required to improve the credibility and effectiveness of U.S. security assurances and to deter South Korea’s attempt to develop a latent nuclear capability.**

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To explain South Korea’s past course of action regarding its nuclear decisions, I will examine nuclear proliferation theories explaining states’ motivations for nuclear proliferation and nuclear reversal. Exploring those theories will provide a deeper understanding of South Korea’s past and current nuclear renouncement and its likely future nuclear course of action.

Then, as one of the two conflicting factors influencing South Korea’s decision whether to go nuclear or not, I will examine the credibility of U.S. security assurances by analyzing the following three documents: (1) the 2010 Nuclear Posture Review Fact Sheet, (2) the Joint Vision for the Alliance of the Republic of Korea and the United States, and (3) the 42nd U.S.-ROK Security Consultative Meeting (SCM) Joint Communiqué. Since the end of the Cold War, the role of U.S. security assurances have significantly changed, and questions have been raised as to whether they can fulfill contemporary security needs. The analysis on these documents will present the current status of ROK-U.S. bilateral alliance and the scope of the security assurances that the United States plans to provide to South Korea in the near future.

Conducting two contrasting case studies on past nuclear attempts by South Korea and Israel will also help to scrutinize how and to what extent U.S. security assurances may influence a state’s nuclear decision. The analysis on the failed efforts of the United States and the nuclear nonproliferation regime to compel Israel to renounce its nuclear weapons program will bring policy implications on future U.S. endeavors to deter nuclear attempts by South Korea. Examining the current status of U.S. security assurances and the two historical cases will clearly show the causal relationship between the scope and intensity of U.S. security assurances and the

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9 See Appendix I.
10 See Appendix II.
nuclear decisions of a state. A survey of the perceptions of U.S. security assurances among the South Korean populace can also be considered as a key criterion for the changing security perception in South Korea.

Therefore, I will analyze a final critical variable to South Korea’s nuclear decision a growing domestic sentiment of the desire for “nuclear sovereignty” demanding self-defense capabilities through the acquisition of nuclear weapons. Since the concept of “nuclear sovereignty” insists that South Korea should acquire nuclear weapons capabilities either by developing an indigenous weapons program or reintroducing the U.S. nuclear arsenal to South Korea, I will investigate the scope of its influence in shaping public opinion in South Korea by looking over surveys conducted by South Korea’s domestic news media and research institutions.

CHAPTEI RI II. THEORIES OF NUCLEAR WEAPONS PROLIFERATION

1. Theories of Nuclear Motivation

Since the beginning of the Cold War, an abundance of scholarly literature has been produced on potential nuclear weapons proliferation scenarios in Northeast Asia, focusing on the motivations of nuclear decisions and nuclear reversal in these countries. Neorealistscholars such
as Dong-joon Jo and Erik Garzke\textsuperscript{11} note that the three Northeast Asian countries - South Korea, Japan, and Taiwan - have already fulfilled the two most critical determinants toward going nuclear: technological capability and political will. Through their statistical analyses of the factors that are relevant to the decision to acquire nuclear weapons capabilities, Jo and Gartzke demonstrate that security concerns and technological capabilities are influential to state decisions, and put forth willingness and opportunity as the two major components of the decision of acquiring nuclear weapons programs. \textsuperscript{12}

According to the explanation of Kurt Campbell, Robert Einhorn and Mitchell Reiss,\textsuperscript{13} the states of Northeast Asia are approaching a so-called nuclear “tipping point” a situation that requires only a small amount of additional stimulant to accelerate nuclear weapons proliferation in the region. They consider external determinants to proliferation, such as regional and international security threats and changed attitudes of its security guarantor as critical in the case of South Korea.\textsuperscript{14} Authors assert that South Korea’s initial attempt to go nuclear was the result of its growing security anxiety and feelings of insecurity followed by the announcement of the Nixon Doctrine and President Carter’s campaign to withdraw the U.S. forces from South Korea. They also suggest that other determinants, such as a change in the ROK-U.S. alliance and the unification of the two Koreas, would greatly affect to South Korea’s nuclear decision.

\textsuperscript{12} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{14} Ibid.
Leif-Eric Easley argues that the issue of greater defense ownership in South Korea has stimulated its desire for nuclear weapons development in the midst of rising debates over national authority and strategic identity. In terms of Scott Sagan’s classification of proliferation motivations, this may fall into the third category, the “norms model,” which explains nuclear motivation as a result of the desire to reinforce national self-esteem. France is put forth as a classic case of deciding to go for nuclear weapons for reasons of national prestige.

Yet, Jacques E.C. Hymans has a different explanation for the nuclear behavior of states. He perceives a state’s nuclear decision as the one by its individual political leader’s conception of national identity and presents the empirical cases of Argentina, Australia, India, and France as a general model of “identity-driven foreign policy decision-making.” If we apply his argument to Kenneth Waltz’s “level-of-analysis” which seeks to “fix the location of the presumed principal cause of international political outcomes,” we can explain a state’s desire to go to nuclear based on “first image,” individual-level analysis. In addition, Hymans’ account of such nuclear decisions might act as a framework to detect and understand the

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17 See p. 35, Nuclear Sovereignty.
18 Hymans defines a “national identity conception” as an individual’s understanding of the nation’s identity - his or her sense of what the nation naturally stands for and of how high it naturally stands, in comparison to others in the international arena. (p. 13)
21 This individual-level analysis explains international politics as being driven primarily by actions of individuals, or outcomes of psychological forces. (excerpt from the Wikipedia) In the case of South Korea, the former President Park Jung-hee’s perception of nuclear weapons capabilities led to the launch of nuclear weapons program while it was suspended with a sudden death of the President.
intention of South Korea as a nuclear weapons-capable state. Within the Hymans’ framework of identity-driven proliferation, North Korea’s nuclear intentions can be understood by its “oppositional-nationalist” leader’s combined emotions of fear and pride, who considers nuclear weapons as an end in themselves, while the South Korean leader can be classified as an “oppositional-subaltern” type, who is desperate to secure the protection afforded by a superpower’s nuclear deterrent.

2. Theories of Nuclear Abandonment

Regarding a state’s decision to renounce nuclear weapons capabilities, Ariel Levite insists that domestic factors are critical to the decision of “nuclear reversal,” or the tendency for a state’s decision makers to renounce its “nascent nuclear weapons programs.” For example, domestic institutional constraints in Japan have been pivotal in the abandonment of its nuclear ambitions despite its technological capability and the willingness of a few political leaders. Stephen Meyer argues that domestic politics play a filtering role for all motives of nuclear behavior in its decision-making process. From his perspective, the Japanese public’s reluctance to go nuclear forced their political leaders to give up desires for a nuclear weapons program, while South Korea’s politicians and domestic populace aroused controversies over the issue of nuclear weapons capabilities.

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22 Hymans 13.
23 Hymans 38.
Meanwhile, T.V. Paul\textsuperscript{26} seeks to explain a state’s “nuclear forbearance” with a theory of “prudential realism,” which argues that a state tries to balance its interests and capabilities to minimize the chance of posing security challenges to others and to avoid intense security dilemmas.\textsuperscript{27} He claims that nuclear forbearance occurs “when technologically capable non-nuclear weapons states, especially non-great power states, seek to not create an intense negative security externality for other significant actors that will be most affected.” According to Paul’s analysis, South Korea is a technologically capable state in a high-conflict environment and engages in enduring rivalries and protracted conflicts, yet has credible security assurances provided by a great power, the United States. In spite of all this, according to Paul’s analysis, denounced its nuclear weapons program from the prudential realists’ perspective. Regarding South Korea’s nuclear decisions, he assumes that South Korea would have acquired nuclear weapons if it had not been for the U.S. nuclear umbrella and its comprehensive security assurances, and also speculates that South Korea’s nuclear propensity would be eliminated if the Korean Peninsula was peacefully reunified.

\textbf{CHAPTER III. SOUTH KOREA’S NUCLEAR DECISION}

In most literature of nuclear weapons proliferation, South Korea is classified as a state that renounced its nuclear weapons aspirations in exchange for U.S. security assurances


\textsuperscript{27} He believes that the cost-benefit analysis of developing nuclear weapons is posed as another constraining factor to go nuclear.
including a spot under its nuclear umbrella. Yet, there are some historical precedents that one-
time nuclear-renounced countries reversed their decision and went nuclear. A change in the
domestic and international security situation, a regime change or a change in leaderships’ or
populace’s nuclear perception might lead to a state’s nuclear reversal.

Currently, the North Korean nuclear threats are changing the security perception of
South Korea, which in turn could catalyze the state’s desire for nuclear weapons. Moreover, as
Easley\textsuperscript{28} argues, the sense of greater defense ownership in South Korea has brought about
debates on national authority regarding nuclear weapons capabilities and the strategic identity of
the state. This sense of defense ownership has emerged in the name of “nuclear sovereignty”
which embraces both nuclear weapons and energy capabilities, yet energy issues will not be dealt
with in this paper due to their irrelevance to my research topic.

Like in its other alliance relationships, U.S. alliance commitments to South Korea
have “assumed mandatory obligations to respond through military action or the provision of
other assistance”\textsuperscript{29} in the event of a security crisis. Since direct military intervention that the
United States employed during the Korean War or the Vietnam War had been criticized for
squandering tremendous amount of resources, it was replaced by a more-indirect form of military
and economic assistance to its allies and partners.\textsuperscript{30} While these alternatives could help to reduce
the U.S. defense budget and military engagement overseas, it can simultaneously undermine the

\textsuperscript{28} Leif-Eric Easley. “Defense Ownership or Nationalist Security: Autonomy and Reputation in South Korea and
Japanese Security Policies.” \textit{SAIS Review.} 27.2 (Summer/Fall 2007): 153-166

\textsuperscript{29} Joseph F Pilat. “Reassessing Security Assurances in a Unipolar World.” \textit{The Washington Quarterly.} 28. 2 (Spring

credibility of U.S. security assurances, leading to an increased desire for acquiring nuclear weapons capabilities among its allies.

History shows that South Korea’s nuclear desire emerged when it perceived serious security threats from North Korea or other adversaries, and there was concurrently no credible security guarantees against such threats. Although U.S. security assurances toward South Korea have been considerably successful in most cases, they have been discredited by a series of North Korean nuclear tests and its declaration as having become a nuclear weapons state. In this chapter, therefore, I will analyze how credible the U.S. security assurances to South Korea have been, and what role they have played in dissuading South Korea’s nuclear attempts by comparing it with the Israeli case.

1. Security Assurances

To contain further nuclear proliferation and diminish the likelihood of nuclear warfare, nuclear weapons states have provided security assurances to non-nuclear weapon states in both positive and negative terms. A positive security assurance is a pledge that nuclear weapons states will provide military aid to non-nuclear weapons states when those states are under the threat of being attacked by nuclear weapons. A negative security assurance is a declaration by nuclear weapons states that it will not use nuclear weapons against non-nuclear weapons states. Yet, both positive and negative security assurances as well as nuclear nonproliferation treaties in themselves have not been recognized as the best options for most non-nuclear weapons states.  

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Furthermore, the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT) has not been an effective deterrent to non-nuclear weapons states since it cannot act as a legally binding international instrument. Although the NPT emerged as a new international regime to counter nuclear proliferation in 1968, it has been criticized for its weaknesses as a security assurance for non-nuclear weapons states who decide to forgo nuclear weapons capabilities and sign the treaty. Despite the proposals to “strengthen the nuclear nonproliferation regime and confirm the role of the indefinitely extended NPT,” the treaty has not gained the necessary credibility, since some nuclear powers such as India, Israel, and Pakistan still remain outside of the treaty, and states like North Korea can pull out at will.

Being faced with nuclear threats, non-nuclear states might have the following four options: to seek positive/negative security assurances, establish a nuclear weapon-free zone, enter a strategic alliance, or nuclear armament. While South Korea chose the first option of being protected as a non-nuclear state by international nonproliferation regime and the third options of remaining under the protection of a reliable ally, North Korea took the last option of becoming a nuclear weapons state.

Current Situation of U.S. Security Assurances in South Korea

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32 Ibid.
33 Retrieved from www.sonnet.igloos.com
34 Besides the strategic alliance with the United States, South Korea had endeavored to establish a nuclear weapon-free zone while being protected by both positive and negative assurances.
Since the signing of the 1954 ROK-U.S. Mutual Defense Agreement in the aftermath of the Korean War, relations between South Korea and the United States has always been close even during a time of friction through much of the in the 2000s. Deteriorated bilateral relations during the bulk of the 2000s have recovered since the President Lee Myung-Bak and Barack Obama took office in 2008. In a summit held in June 2009, both sides adopted “the Joint Vision for South Korea-U.S. Alliance” to build a comprehensive strategic alliance of bilateral, regional, and global scope. It also stipulates U.S. reassurance of extended nuclear deterrence, including South Korea’s leading role in its combined forces supported by U.S. military force. This Joint Vision holds the following meaning:

- The Joint Vision is expected to enhance the credibility of U.S. commitment to the security of South Korea.
- As South Korea and the United States have agreed on the direction of the enhanced development of their alliance, the Joint Vision is expected to help reinforce the partnership.

In 2010, after a series of military provocations by North Korea and the threat of its third nuclear test, South Korea and the United States held a security consultative meeting to reaffirm the robustness of the alliance and to counter the changing security situation on the Korean Peninsula. In this meeting, the defense ministers of South Korea and the United States approved and signed the following three documents:

36 See Appendix I.
- “The Strategic Alliance 2015”\textsuperscript{37} to serve as a framework for returning wartime operational control\textsuperscript{38} to South Korea during next five years

- “The Guidelines for U.S.-ROK Defense Cooperation” to realize the vision of the future bilateral alliance on the basis of the ROK-U.S. Mutul Defense Agreement

- “The Strategic Planning Guidance” to provide the ROK-U.S. military committee meeting with the strategic guidance and authority needed to develop operational plans

These documents can be considered as part of U.S. efforts to improve the effectiveness of its current security assurances by providing extended and reinforced deterrence to South Korea through the institutionalization of an “extended deterrence policy committee.”

The United States also gave a guarantee of its continuous efforts to provide and reinforce the extended deterrence to South Korea by employing every possible military option in the case of emergency including U.S. nuclear use, conventional strike capabilities, and missile defense capabilities. In a joint statement after the ROK-U.S. summit, the United States stipulated the term “U.S. nuclear umbrella” to reflect the changing security situation in the Korean Peninsula and to verify the credibility of its security assurances.

\textit{The 2010 Nuclear Posture Review}\textsuperscript{39} released by U.S. Department of Defense explains “how the United States will sustain a safe, secure, and effective nuclear deterrent for the United States and its allies as long as nuclear weapons exist.” Among its five key objectives,\textsuperscript{40}

\begin{itemize}
\item (1) Preventing nuclear proliferation and nuclear terrorism;
\item (2) Reducing the role of U.S. nuclear weapons in U.S. national security strategy;
\item (3) Maintaining strategic deterrence and stability at reduced nuclear force levels;
\item (4) Strengthening regional deterrence and reassuring U.S. allies and partners; and
\item (5) Sustaining a safe, secure, and effective nuclear arsenal.
\end{itemize}

\textsuperscript{37} See \url{http://asiafoundation.org/resources/pdfs/CUSKPNewsletter29SepWEB.pdf}
\textsuperscript{38} See \url{http://www.brookings.edu/articles/2006/0914southkorea_richard-c--bush-iii.aspx}
\textsuperscript{39} See \url{http://www.defense.gov/npr/docs/2010%20nuclear%20posture%20review%20report.pdf}
\textsuperscript{40} (1) Preventing nuclear proliferation and nuclear terrorism; (2) Reducing the role of U.S. nuclear weapons in U.S. national security strategy; (3) Maintaining strategic deterrence and stability at reduced nuclear force levels; (4) Strengthening regional deterrence and reassuring U.S. allies and partners; and (5) Sustaining a safe, secure, and effective nuclear arsenal.
the fourth objective “strengthening regional deterrence and reassurance of U.S. allies and partners” reflects the U.S. commitment to strengthening deterrence against emerging threats to the United States, its allies, and its partners.

The three above-mentioned documents clearly illustrate U.S. commitments to provide extended security assurances to South Korea, regardless of its strategic vision of reducing the role of nuclear weapons, since the sole purpose of the U.S. nuclear arsenal is to deter potential nuclear attacks on the United States and its allies. Yet, such commitments seem to not have achieved great success in reassuring South Koreans to remain under U.S. security assurances.

According to a recent survey conducted by the independent Asan Institute for Policy Studies in Seoul, South Koreans show an increasing preference to possess nuclear weapons capabilities either through an independent weapons program or a “conditional nuclear rearmament” by redeploying U.S. tactical nuclear weapons to South Korea. The survey shows that 68.6 percent of respondents are for the development of an independent nuclear weapons program while just 28.9 percent of the questioned were against. Concerning “conditional nuclear rearmament,” 67.3 percent of respondents were in support of the argument while the other 30.1 percent opposed it.

Regarding the U.S. argument that it will provide extended nuclear deterrence through non-nuclear elements such as a conventional presence in the South and effective theater ballistic missile defenses, the South Korean government has expressed its concern that conventional military capabilities are insufficient to deter North Korean nuclear weapons.

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program in a sense that South Korea is not participating in the missile defense plan. From the perspective of South Korea, renewed U.S. commitments to provide extended nuclear deterrence to South Korea lack substantial action plans for implementation, which has resulted in the establishment of the “Extended Deterrence Policy Committee” in March 2011.

The Future of U.S. Security Assurances in the Korean Peninsula

Since South Korea and the United States concluded their bilateral security agreement in 1974, South Korea has been under the protection of U.S.-provided security assurances to counter North Korea’s continuous military provocations and threats. Without such security assurances, the single option for South Korea would be pursuing indigenous nuclear weapons capabilities. Although there have been several attempts of the South Korean government to develop nuclear weapons, most of them came from its recognition of the serious security threat of a U.S. withdrawal of its forces on the Korean Peninsula. Yet, security assurances have a significant impact not only on non-nuclear weapon states such as South Korea but also on the behavior of potential proliferators like North Korea.

The North Korean nuclear program has triggered the nuclear decisions of South Korea, which already has a strong sense of insecurity from the existing nuclear weapons states in the region, China and Russia. Consequently, North Korea’s nuclear weapons program has created negative impacts on U.S. security policies and its existing security treaties with South Korea.
During the Cold War, U.S. security assurances played a political and symbolic role to counter Soviet communist expansion and to suppress South Korea’s nuclear aspiration to engage in independent weapons program. At present, the United States has no match in military capabilities, security alliances, and power projection, and whether this trend lasts depends on the credibility of its alliances and security assurances.

There are two critical issues regarding the future of U.S. security assurances in South Korea. First, in South Korea there are concerns about the weakening of the U.S. nuclear umbrella in terms of its effectiveness and credibility since President Obama’s enunciation of his vision of a “world without nuclear weapons,” and a greatly reduced role for these weapons. Second, South Korea is also apprehensive about whether U.S. extended deterrence will remain solid, even after the return of the wartime operational control of South Korea’s armed force. Because the dissolution of the ROK-U.S. combined forces command indicates the loss of a unitary command system, it may also lead to considerable strategic losses in South Korean military strength.

1.1 The Background of South Korea’s Past Nuclear Attempts

During the last few decades, South Korea has been protected by the nuclear umbrella that the United States has provided from external nuclear threats. Yet, there have also been several attempts by South Korea to pursue its own nuclear weapons capabilities. South Korea launched its first nuclear attempt in response to the U.S. President Nixon’s announcement that the United States would reduce its forces stationed on the Korean Peninsula. According to
the so-called “Nixon Doctrine,” which expected its allies to be responsible for their own defense, South Korea had to increase its defense capabilities under a concept of “the Koreanization of Korean Security.” Meanwhile, South Korea’s second nuclear attempt was followed by the then U.S. President-elect Jimmy Carter’s plan to withdraw an additional 32,000 U.S. troops from Korea. As proliferation theorists like Kurt Campbell, Robert Einhorn, and Mitchell Reiss argue, South Korea’s initial nuclear attempts were the result of its growing security anxiety brought about by the announcement of the Nixon Doctrine and Carter’s force reduction plan.

There have been few more unofficial or suspected nuclear attempts, which are considered to be distinctive from the previous ones in their motivation. Rather than the realistic concern that the U.S. nuclear umbrella might suddenly be lifted, domestic factors and the national identity perception of an individual leader led to South Korea’s latter attempts. In its first attempts during the 1970s, under the dictatorship of the then President Park Jung-hee, South Korea also sought to develop nuclear power generation technology while simultaneously attempting to possess indigenous nuclear weapons capabilities. Yet, South Korea’s more recent nuclear attempts are less overtly security-based. Even conceding that these purported scientific experiments can be transformed into a nuclear weapons program, South Korea’s economic intention cannot be overlooked. Plutonium extraction tests undertaken during the early 1980s and

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42 (1) The United States will keep all of its treaty commitments; (2) We shall provide a shield if a nuclear power threatens the freedom of a nation allied with us or of a nation whose survival we consider vital to our security; (3) In cases involving other types of aggression, we shall furnish military and economic assistance when requested in accordance with our treaty commitments. But we shall look to the nation directly threatened to assume the primary responsibility of providing the manpower for its defense.

uranium enrichment tests in 2004 were, in part, South Korea’s attempts to possess full nuclear fuel cycle, which can bring enormous economic benefits, considering the country’s high dependence on nuclear energy and its booming nuclear power industry.

Domestically in South Korea, there is a growing sentiment demanding so-called “nuclear sovereignty.” This sentiment mostly comes from a sense of inequality regarding the 1974 ROK-U.S. Nuclear Cooperation Agreement and a similar feeling of inequality regarding South Korea’s lack of enrichment and reprocessing rights as compared to other NPT member states like Japan or the European Union. At the revision talks on the 1974 Agreement (set to expire in 2014) launched in 2009, this was raised as a critical issue for negotiation for South Korea’s ruling Grand National Party (GNP), and relevant government ministries are supportive of attaining “nuclear sovereignty.”

Considering South Korea’s renewed national sentiment in its bilateral relations with the United States, Campbell, Einhorn and Reiss seek to predict the future nuclear behavior of a unified Korea. They raise questions regarding how geography and history might ultimately shape a unified Korea’s long-term national identity. Based on Korea’s unique historical background of external threats and invasions, the authors insist that a unified Korea might pursue its own nuclear weapons program or decide to retain the North Korean legacy of nuclear weapons as a measure to ensure its autonomy and national destiny. They also mention Derek Mitchell’s claim that such factors as Korea’s status in the future ROK-U.S. alliance, Korea’s relations with China and Russia, and the future nuclear decisions of Japan might be determining factors as to

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44 Retrieved from http://cns.miis.edu/stories/041109.htm
45 Derek J. Mitchell is Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense, Asian and Pacific Security Affairs.
whether a unified Korea would go nuclear or not. The authors add that an “inclusive and mutually acceptable regional security arrangement might diminish the perceived necessity for large-scale, fully autonomous military capabilities, especially nuclear weapons.”

1.2 Comparative Analysis on Israel’s Nuclear Decision

While the case of Israel shares some commonalities with South Korea’s nuclear motivations, its situation is somewhat different from that of South Korea. Unlike South Korea which has been under the U.S. nuclear umbrella since the beginning of the Cold War, Israel could not procure the comprehensive U.S. security assurances that had been provided to the NATO member states and South Korea, Taiwan, and Japan. Surrounded by hostile Arab states holding numerical and material superiority over Israel, a form of strategic deterrence to the security threats from its neighbors was needed.

From the initial stages of its nuclear weapons program, Israel has maintained a policy of “ambiguity” despite international pressure to announce its status as a nuclear weapons state. Standing outside of the NPT, Israel has rejected international demands for the inspection of its secret nuclear facilities and the abidance by international nuclear nonproliferation norms. Confronting serious existential threats from neighboring Arab states with no extensive security assurances, Israel has instituted “self-help” and maintenance of a balance of power as its two major security policy lines to counter external security challenges. Instead of requesting strong

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international and political support, Israel decided to acquire independent nuclear weapons capabilities to offset its quantitative inferiority to the Arab neighbors.\textsuperscript{47}

The United States did not want to see an Israeli nuclear armament because of the potential of exacerbating regional instability and the possibility of leading to nuclear arms race in the region. Considering the strategic importance of the region as world’s largest energy supplier, the United States and the international community were intent on deterring nuclear proliferation in the Middle East and the Persian Gulf, which, in the case of Israel, has proven to be a failed effort.

Concerning the failed U.S. effort to contain Israel’s nuclear ambition, there are several explanations, which are as follows: (1) The United States could not detect any indication of Israel’s nuclear weapons development until 1960 when it was too late to force Israel to abandon its program.\textsuperscript{48} (2) The United States could not provide comprehensive security guarantees to Israel considering the strong oppositions from its neighboring Arab states, which left them with no other option but to “acquiesce” to Israel’s nuclear weapons program.\textsuperscript{49} (3) A lack of awareness of the need for a nuclear nonproliferation regime and an absence of an international control system left Israel free to develop nuclear weapons. (4) Israel’s deception strategy to conceal its nuclear weapons program was successful in keeping its nuclear facilities clandestine.

\textsuperscript{47} Retrieved from http://www.haaretz.com/culture/books/military-affairs-breaking-the-taboo-1.323130
\textsuperscript{49} Retrieved from http://www.dailian.co.kr/news/news_view.htm?id=240310
Even conceding that “acquiescence” was the only policy option for the United States at that time, the U.S. actions toward the Israeli nuclear weapons program that have followed cannot be justified by such explanations. This past U.S. course of action was highly controversial for its double standard on certain states’ nuclear attempts, and set a bad precedent for further international nuclear nonproliferation efforts. Under U.S. acquiescence, Israel came to possess nuclear weapons capabilities and still maintains a so-called “Neither Confirm Nor Deny” policy regarding its nuclear weapons program.

The major difference between South Korea and Israel’s nuclear decision lies in the presence of extensive security assurances provided by the United States. Since the United States had considerable interests at stake with many Arab countries in the Middle East and the Persian Gulf region, it could not provide overt, comprehensive security guarantees to Israel. From the U.S. perspective, unlike South Korea, Israel was not under direct threat of nuclear attack, which required the protection of U.S. nuclear umbrella. This stance toward Israel is well illustrated in a memorandum of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) to Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara addressing the question of U.S. security assurance to Israel. The JCS recommendations in this memorandum can be summarized as: (1) That no US security assurance to Israel be given beyond that enunciated by the President on 8 May 1963. (2) That joint contingency planning with Israel not be undertaken. (3) That present US arms policy in the Middle East be continued. (4) And that the United States continue to seek peaceful settlement of Arab-Israeli issues on a piecemeal basis.

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2. Nuclear Sovereignty

The concept of “nuclear sovereignty” is neither a newly invented nor an obsolete one, yet it remains as a legacy of the ideological confrontation between the two Koreas that remains long after the end of the Cold War. During the Cold War period, the crux of U.S.-Soviet confrontation was the nuclear arms race and deterrence of nuclear warfare. North Korea launched its first nuclear weapons program right after the Korean War under the direction of its leader Kim Il-sung in response to the perceived nuclear threats from the United States during the war.\(^53\) While South Korea was provided with a U.S.-imposed nuclear umbrella, North Korea could not get solid commitments from either the Soviet Union or China. Aside from other reasons, this sense of a U.S. nuclear threats led North Korea to engage in nuclear weapons development since the end of the Korean War.\(^54\)

U.S. security guarantees through the alliance and the physical presence of U.S. troops in South Korea have successfully deterred not only North Korea’s serious military provocations but also South Korea’s pursuit of self-defense through nuclear weapons capabilities. Yet, the U.S. announcement of its intentions to reduce military commitments to South Korea during the Nixon and the Carter administration and their demands for strengthened self-defense capabilities resulted in South Korea’s attempts to acquire nuclear weapons capabilities.\(^55\)

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\(^54\) North Korea has been speculated to have various reasons to pursue nuclear weapons capabilities other than a deterrence of U.S. nuclear threats. Its nuclear intention can be explained in part as political symbolism to be perceived as a nuclear power and as a bargaining chip against the United States and the international community to achieve its desired goals.

\(^55\) The Nixon Doctrine, President Carter’s force reduction plan, and the Nunn-Warner Amendment were based on the common perception that South Korea’s conventional military capabilities had improved considerably, which demanded South Korea for self-defense except for nuclear weapons capabilities.
Although the term “nuclear sovereignty” sounds aggressive in some sense, it came from South Korea’s distinct geopolitical environment surrounded by great powers possessing nuclear weapons or at least nuclear weapons capabilities. South Korea’s dilemma between the desire for “nuclear sovereignty” and the strong constraints of the international nonproliferation regime and the United States has remained as an ongoing conundrum.

Raising this issue of nuclear sovereignty has not been welcomed by both the South Korean and U.S. governments since it brings about another global proliferation concern. Due to South Korea’s several nuclear attempts since the 1970s, the international community considers even the nuclear energy issue of possessing reprocessing and enrichment capabilities as a stepping stone to nuclear weapons development for South Korea.  

Yet, recent media reports on some South Korean conservative politicians’ demanding the redeployment of tactical nuclear weapons in South Korea reflect a changing domestic situation in South Korea. Ahead of the renewal talks on the 1974 ROK-U.S. nuclear cooperation agreement and the return of the wartime operational control of South Korea’s armed forces, there have been rising domestic demands for “nuclear sovereignty” in South Korea. These demands come from widespread concerns over the absence of instant nuclear assurances from the United States in case of emergency after the current nuclear agreement is revised and the wartime operational control is returned to South Korea. Regarding demands for the redeployment of tactical nuclear weapons, the White House denied the possibility of redeployment, reaffirming U.S. President Barack Obama’s vision of a nuclear-free world.

After a series of recent military provocations by North Korea, lawmakers from South Korea’s ruling Grand National Party (GNP) are insisting that South Korea should reconsider a conditional return of U.S. tactical nuclear weapons.\footnote{Retrieved from \url{http://www.dailian.co.kr/news/news_view.htm?id=240666&sc=naver&kind=menu_code&keys=3}} They argue that the conditional return of nuclear weapons can be a deterrent to North Korea’s nuclear ambition and will pressure China to exert its influence on North Korea. They also assert that South Korea’s acquisition of nuclear weapons might paradoxically enable the total abolishment of North Korea’s nuclear weapons program and an eventual denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula. According to their argument, South Korea needs substantial self-defense capabilities in the current security situation with North Korea’s third nuclear test potentially just around the corner and the United States pronouncing no details about its nuclear guarantees against North Korea. But once reunification of the peninsula takes place, these programs, North and South, can be abandoned, leading to the total denuclearization of a unified Korea.

According to recent survey data on the nuclear perceptions of South Koreans, 69 percent of those questioned responded that South Korea should possess nuclear weapons capabilities to counter North Korea’s nuclear threats.\footnote{This survey was conducted by the Asan Institute for Policy Studies and released in March 2011.} Regarding “conditional nuclear rearmament,” which calls for the redeployment of U.S. tactical nuclear weapons in South Korea until the North Korean threats will disappear, 63 percent of respondents favored the idea. These survey results show a slight increase of 6.1 percent in the percentage of respondents who favored acquiring nuclear weapons capabilities, compared to a similar survey implemented two years
These results can be understood as the widespread perception of nuclear sovereignty among the populace in South Korea.

The logic of “conditional nuclear rearmament” is based on the two options: the development of South Korea’s independent nuclear weapons program or the redeployment of U.S. tactical nuclear weapons in South Korea, both of which are to possess minimal deterrence for countering North Korea’s nuclear threats by publicly announcing that the weapons developed

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60 This survey was carried out by East Asia Institute in March 2009.
or redeployed will be dismantled when the two Koreas are reunified. For this purpose, South Korean lawmakers have requested a revision of the ROK-U.S. nuclear cooperation agreement, which is set to expire in 2014, and the ROK-U.S. missile agreement to allow the development of missiles having a range of longer than 1,000 kilometers as well as the possession of nuclear weapons on its territory.\footnote{Currently, there are 300 kilometers of range limitation of missiles under the revised 2001 U.S.-ROK ballistic missile agreement.} In his recently published memoir, *Known and Unknown*, former Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld argues that South Korea and Japan’s nuclear armament might press China and Russia to actively participate in the Six-Party Talks to contain North Korea’s nuclear weapons capabilities, echoing the sentiments of a number of South Korean politicians.

The South Korean concept of “nuclear sovereignty” evolved from the security threats they faced during 1970s when the Nixon Doctrine and the Carter administration’s plan to reduce U.S. troops in South Korea were announced. The demand for nuclear sovereignty at that time was to possess self-defense capabilities against North Korea’s security threats in case the United States was to lift its nuclear umbrella. South Korea’s latest nuclear attempts, on the other hand, hold a more political meaning of defense ownership, as Easley argues.\footnote{Leif-Eric Easley. “Defense Ownership or Nationalist Security: Autonomy and Reputation in South Korea and Japanese Security Policies.” *SAIS Review*. 27.2 (Summer/Fall 2007): 153-166} Despite continued controversies over the issue of “nuclear sovereignty,” this idea seems to remain at the center of South Korea’s nuclear debates for the present.
CHAPTER IV. CONCLUSIONS

Unlike John F. Kennedy’s prediction that the number of nuclear weapons states would reach up to 15 to 25 by the year 1973, only three or four states have added their names on the list of the so-called nuclear club. This relatively slow pace of nuclear proliferation can be explained partly by the efforts of international nonproliferation regime such as Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty and existing nuclear weapons states’ ability to contain other states’ acquisition of nuclear weapons capabilities. In Northeast Asia, U.S. security assurances have played a particularly crucial role to deter further nuclear proliferation during the last few decades. Yet, an aggravated regional security situation mostly from the North Korean nuclear weapons program has raised questions about the credibility and effectiveness of U.S. security assurances in the region.

Since the end of the Cold War, the North Korean nuclear program has been a primary reason for the worsening of regional instability and increasing defense budgets among the Northeast Asian states, perhaps excluding China. Failed diplomatic efforts through the Agreed Framework and the Six-Party Talks and ineffective sanctions imposed by the international community or the nuclear nonproliferation regime have even increased the security concerns of the states in the region, stimulating aspirations for self-defense through acquiring nuclear weapons capabilities.

From the U.S. perspective, the worst-case scenario of nuclear proliferation in Northeast Asia might be South Korea’s acquisition of nuclear weapons capabilities. Based on its
strategic alliance with South Korea, the United States has played a pivotal role in designing and employing South Korea’s military and security policies. If South Korea acquires nuclear self-defense capabilities, the United States would lose ground to manage its regional security policies to balance North Korea and China. Moreover, the situation that nuclear-armed South and North Korea is confronting would greatly undermine regional stability and decrease U.S. interests in the region.

To prevent this worst-case scenario from occurring, the United States has endeavored to reassure South Korea with the commitments of extended security assurance. Although there are controversies over the credibility and effectiveness of this security assurance, it has been successful in deterring the recurrence of war and the employment of nuclear arsenal in the regional warfare. It has succeeded in containing serious military provocations by North Korea while it has failed to compel North Korea to renounce nuclear weapons program. It has also succeeded in dissuading South Korea’s aspiration for nuclear weapons capabilities while it is witnessing a rise in South Korea’s domestic demand for “nuclear sovereignty.”

The North Korean nuclear weapons program and its recent military provocations have undermined the credibility of U.S. security assurances. A growing sense of insecurity from the threats of North Korea has led to a decreased credibility of U.S. security assurances among South Koreans since they believe that U.S. security assurances failed to deter the North Korean nuclear weapons program and recent attacks against South Korea. Although South Korea is less likely to pursue independent nuclear weapons capabilities considering its interests at stake as a member of
international community, such domestic sentiments demanding nuclear sovereignty or defense ownership might have a negative influence on the ROK-U.S. alliance.

U.S. security assurances have been perceived as the most credible option to deter North Korea’s military attacks and to dissuade South Korea from pursuing nuclear weapons capabilities. Yet, strengthened U.S. commitments are required to improve the credibility and effectiveness of U.S. security assurances and to deter South Korea’s attempt to develop a latent nuclear capability. For this purpose, there should be an overall reassessment of current U.S. security assurance whether it provides sufficient credibility and effectiveness to its allies and partners.

CHAPTER V. POLICY IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The United States, as a single superpower, has significantly influenced Northeast Asia, providing a nuclear umbrella to South Korea, Japan, and Taiwan. The United States has considerable interests at stake in the region. If these non-nuclear weapons states decide to go nuclear, U.S. influence as a security guarantor in the region would be greatly diminished. Yet, it seems hard to predict the future nuclear map in Northeast Asia. It depends on the decisions of the states with nuclear ambitions, especially the decisions of North Korea as a potential root cause of nuclear proliferation in the region.
As the existing bilateral nuclear agreement between South Korea and the United States will expire in 2014, regaining “nuclear sovereignty” has emerged as one of the most controversial issues in South Korea. Some South Koreans are even questioning the U.S.’s underlying intention to contain South Korea’s efforts to acquire nuclear weapons capabilities and are raising concerns over the effectiveness of the U.S. nuclear umbrella as a countermeasure to a North Korea’s preemptive nuclear strike. For the United States, a lifting of its existing nuclear umbrella would indicate its diminishing influence and the limited security role in the region. Since the United States has considerable stakes in the region, reduced influence would greatly undermine its national interests. Yet, these kinds of concerns are not limited to the political arena. It may also damage U.S. economic interests in the sense that the Northeast Asian countries are major U.S. trade and investment partners.

With an increasing demand for self-defense ownership in South Korea, the United States is losing ground in a new security order emerging in the region. Therefore, this paper suggests that the United States should clearly recognize the current security status and the changing security perceptions in South Korea, and reestablish its policy direction to simultaneously embrace and counter these changes. Without fully understanding the underlying security perceptions of South Korea, the United States only makes way for its competitors in the region to witnessing its greatly diminished security role in the region. Decades-old security agreements cannot fulfill the increasing desires of many South Koreans for self-defense capabilities, and the revision of existing security agreement with the United States is under discussion. By allowing some extent of self-defense capabilities and nuclear sovereignty within the limits of the proper nuclear nonproliferation context, the United States can remain as a
coordinator or a mediator of the region’s nuclear order. The United States should take the lead to revise and complement the regulations of the current nuclear nonproliferation regime to keep abreast of recent security situations and to reflect emerging threats to the nuclear nonproliferation regime posed by terrorist groups or newly-inspired nuclear aspirants.

Security experts have different views on the future nuclear prospects in the region. In most cases, such disparities come from different perception on the role of external factors such as the efforts of the international community or the global powers to deter nuclear proliferation. Despite such conflicting opinions on the issue, most experts agree on the need for the strengthening of the nonproliferation regime and extended U.S. security assurance to denuclearize the Korean Peninsula.

**Reinforced Nuclear Nonproliferation Regime**

Although the number of nuclear weapons states remained low during the last few decades, there is an increasing number of nuclear aspirants that might facilitate a trend of nuclear proliferation. To deter further nuclear weapons proliferation, there should be internal reformation of the existing nuclear nonproliferation regime. Along with deterring “horizontal proliferation” (spread), the measures to prevent “vertical proliferation” (buildup) of existing nuclear weapons states should also be designated. Furthermore, proper actions towards the non-NPT nuclear weapons states such as India, Israel, and Pakistan should be provided to calm controversies over the “double standards” of the nuclear nonproliferation regime. By improving transparency and efficacy, the nuclear nonproliferation regime may remain as an international controlling power of nuclear nonproliferation.
**Strengthened U.S. Security Assurances**

Strengthened U.S. security assurance does not mean a quantitative increase in security guarantees: rather it implies a qualitative improvement in establishing mutual trust and respect. Considering South Korea’s increasing sentiment of defense ownership, the revision talks on the bilateral nuclear cooperation agreement between South Korea and the United States is expected to reflect South Korea’s growing desire for “nuclear sovereignty.” According to this argument, South Korea’s dependence on the United States will decrease by allowing some extent of nuclear defense capabilities, and therefore current U.S. military capability might be diverted to other regions as required. Yet, improving the credibility and the effectiveness of U.S. security assurance is an essential prerequisite for this change in its security role.

- **Establishment of an “extended deterrence policy committee”**

For this purpose, South Korea and the United States agreed on the establishment of an “extended deterrence policy committee” during the ROK-U.S. security consultative meeting held in October 2010. Since South Korean concerns about a vacuum of deterrence against North Korea as a result of the reduced role of U.S. nuclear weapons on the peninsula, the United States devised this cooperative mechanism to reassure its commitments of extended nuclear deterrence toward the South. The Committee will be responsible for (1) the regular observation and evaluation of the effectiveness of U.S. extended nuclear deterrence, conventional military capabilities, and the missile defense plan, (2) the expansive sharing of information on extended deterrence measures, and (3) the provision of the nuclear umbrella and conventional military
capabilities. Yet, the effectiveness of establishing such a cooperative body is not verifiable at the present, and the following can be considered as alternative options to strengthen current U.S. security assurances.

- **Promoting an “alliances network”**

By combining specialties and superiorities that the U.S. allies and partners have, an extensive global alliance system can be established. This would enable U.S. allies and partners to cooperate among themselves as “quasi-allies,” both directly and indirectly.

- **Establishing a multilateral security cooperative body at the regional level**

This option is mentioned in the 2010 Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR) as a complementary measure to the existing alliances system. In Northeast Asia, South Korea, the United States, and Japan might establish a multilateral security cooperative body to strengthen regional security cooperation through diplomatic channels.

- **Providing concrete action plans for extended nuclear deterrence**

Regarding its plans for projecting extended nuclear deterrence, concrete action plans for its use of conventional forces and missile defense should be devised. Without a clear statement of the scope and the degree of extended U.S. nuclear deterrence, it is highly unlikely to improve the credibility of U.S. security assurances.

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- **Demanding China play an active role as a regional power**

An expanded cooperation with China has two positive meanings in terms of the strengthening U.S. security assurances. The United States can compel China to influence North Korea to comply with the international nonproliferation norms and to abandon its nuclear weapons program, while the mood of cooperation with China can help reduce the U.S. defense budget either through a division of regional defense or through joint measures with other great powers.
APPENDIX I. Joint Vision for the Alliance of the Republic of Korea and the

United States of America

The Republic of Korea and the United States of America are building an Alliance to ensure a
peaceful, secure and prosperous future for the Korean Peninsula, the Asia-Pacific region, and the
world.

Our open societies, our commitment to free democracy and a market economy, and our sustained
partnership provide a foundation for the enduring friendship, shared values, and mutual respect
that tightly bind the Korean and American peoples.

The bonds that underpin our Alliance and our partnership are strengthened and enriched by the
close relationships among our citizens. We pledge to continue programs and efforts to build even
closer ties between our societies, including cooperation among business, civic, cultural,
academic, and other institutions.

The Republic of Korea-United States Mutual Defense Treaty remains the cornerstone of the
ROK-U.S. security relationship, which has guaranteed peace and stability on the Korean
Peninsula and in Northeast Asia for over fifty years. Over that time, our security Alliance has
strengthened and our partnership has widened to encompass political, economic, social and
cultural cooperation. Together, on this solid foundation, we will build a comprehensive strategic
alliance of bilateral, regional and global scope, based on common values and mutual
trust. Together, we will work shoulder-to-shoulder to tackle challenges facing both our nations on behalf of the next generation.

The Alliance is adapting to changes in the 21st Century security environment. We will maintain a robust defense posture, backed by allied capabilities which support both nations' security interests. The continuing commitment of extended deterrence, including the U.S. nuclear umbrella, reinforces this assurance. In advancing bilateral plan for restructuring the Alliance, the Republic of Korea will take the lead role in the combined defense of Korea, supported by an enduring and capable U.S. military force presence on the Korean Peninsula, in the region, and beyond.

We will continue to deepen our strong bilateral economic, trade and investment relations. We recognize that the Korea-U.S. (KORUS) Free Trade Agreement could further strengthen these ties and we are committed to working together to chart a way forward. We aim to make low-carbon green growth into a new engine for sustainable economic prosperity and will closely cooperate in this regard. We will strengthen civil space cooperation, and work closely together on clean energy research and the peaceful uses of nuclear energy.

Through our Alliance we aim to build a better future for all people on the Korean Peninsula, establishing a durable peace on the Peninsula and leading to peaceful reunification on the principles of free democracy and a market economy. We will work together to achieve the complete and verifiable elimination of North Korea's nuclear weapons and existing nuclear
programs, as well as ballistic missile programs, and to promote respect for the fundamental human rights of the North Korean people.

In the Asia-Pacific region we will work jointly with regional institutions and partners to foster prosperity, keep the peace, and improve the daily lives of the people of the region. We believe that open societies and open economies create prosperity and support human dignity, and our nations and civic organizations will promote human rights, democracy, free markets, and trade and investment liberalization in the region. To enhance security in the Asia-Pacific, our governments will advocate for, and take part in, effective cooperative regional efforts to promote mutual understanding, confidence and transparency regarding security issues among the nations of the region.

Our governments and our citizens will work closely to address the global challenges of terrorism, proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, piracy, organized crime and narcotics, climate change, poverty, infringement on human rights, energy security, and epidemic disease. The Alliance will enhance coordination on peacekeeping, post-conflict stabilization and development assistance, as is being undertaken in Iraq and Afghanistan. We will also strengthen coordination in multilateral mechanisms aimed at global economic recovery such as the G20.

The Republic of Korea and the United States of America will work to achieve our common Alliance goals through strategic cooperation at every level. Proven bilateral mechanisms such as the Security Consultative Meeting and the Strategic Consultations for Allied Partnership will remain central to realizing this shared vision for the Alliance.
APPENDIX II. Joint Communiqué(The 42nd U.S.-ROK Security Consultative Meeting)

1. The 42nd United States – Republic of Korea Security Consultative Meeting (SCM) was held in Washington D.C. on October 8, 2010. U.S. Secretary of Defense Robert M. Gates and ROK Minister of National Defense Kim, Tae Young led their respective delegations, which included senior defense and foreign affairs officials. Before the SCM, the U.S. Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Admiral Michael G. Mullen and the ROK Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Han, Min Koo, presided over the 32nd U.S.-ROK Military Committee Meeting (MCM) on October 7, 2010.

2. The Secretary and the Minister reaffirmed the commitment of the U.S. and ROK Presidents to build a comprehensive strategic Alliance of bilateral, regional, and global scope, based on common values and mutual trust, as set forth in the June 2009 Joint Vision for the Alliance of the ROK and the U.S. They also reaffirmed their shared view expressed at the ROK-U.S. Foreign and Defense Ministers’ Meeting in July that the scope of Alliance cooperation should continue to broaden and deepen to encompass both closer security cooperation and more comprehensive cooperation in other areas.

3. The Secretary and the Minister reaffirmed their shared view expressed at the ROK-U.S. Foreign and Defense Ministers’ Meeting in July that both sides acknowledged the close bilateral
cooperation regarding the North Korean nuclear issue, and urged North Korea to carry out the complete and verifiable abandonment of all its nuclear programs and pursuit of nuclear weapons and demonstrate through concrete actions its genuine will to denuclearize. They reiterated that the ROK and the U.S. will not accept North Korea as a nuclear weapon state. The Secretary and the Minister also confirmed that they would continue to cooperate closely on the implementation of UN Security Council resolutions 1718 and 1874 as well as unilateral sanctions against North Korea.

4. The Secretary and the Minister reaffirmed that North Korean aggression and provocation are not to be tolerated and that the U.S. and ROK intend to work shoulder to shoulder to demonstrate our combined resolve. They also reaffirmed their shared view that the ROK ship Cheonan was sunk by a North Korean attack, and welcomed the publication of the final joint investigation report on the Cheonan incident, as well as a special report prepared by the United Nations Command on the special investigation of the sinking of Cheonan, which was submitted to and formally circulated as an official document of the UN Security Council. They further discussed North Korean military activity in the post-Cheonan security environment as well as countermeasures that include U.S.-ROK Combined Exercises on the Peninsula and in the East and West Seas. Both sides agreed to increase the combined watch activities on the North Korean situation, especially leading up to the G20 Summit in Seoul this year. The Secretary and the Minister reaffirmed that close continued bilateral planning for various situations, as well as an extensive combined training and exercises, were critical to adequately prepare for future challenges on the Peninsula.
5. The Secretary and the Minister reaffirmed the two nations’ mutual commitment to the fundamental mission of the Alliance to defend the Republic of Korea through a robust combined defense posture, as well as to the enhancement of mutual security based on the Mutual Defense Treaty. They also reaffirmed that the U.S.-ROK Alliance remains vital to the future interests of both nations in securing peace and stability on the Korean Peninsula and in Northeast Asia, and stressed their determination to ensure sufficient capabilities of the combined forces for the security of the Republic of Korea. Secretary Gates reiterated the firm and unwavering U.S. commitment to the defense of the ROK using both capabilities postured on the Korean Peninsula and globally available U.S. forces and capabilities that can deploy to augment the combined defense in case of crisis. Secretary Gates and Minister Kim acknowledged that the U.S. commitment is to be further demonstrated and strengthened by extending and normalizing tour lengths for all service members assigned to Korea, along with the commitment to maintain the current U.S. troop level in Korea.

6. Secretary Gates reaffirmed the continued U.S. commitment to provide and strengthen extended deterrence for the ROK, using the full range of military capabilities, to include the U.S. nuclear umbrella, conventional strike, and missile defense capabilities. Moreover, the Secretary and the Minister agreed to institutionalize an Extended Deterrence Policy Committee, which will serve as a cooperation mechanism to enhance the effectiveness of extended deterrence.

7. The Secretary and the Minister pledged that the ROK and the U.S. are to continue to enhance close Alliance cooperation to address wide-ranging global security challenges of mutual interest, including through peacekeeping activities, stabilization and reconstruction efforts,
humanitarian assistance, and disaster relief. Secretary Gates expressed appreciation for the ROK’s past contribution in Iraq as well as the recent contribution that the ROK has made in Afghanistan through the deployment of their Provincial Reconstruction Team this year. The Secretary also positively remarked on the ROK’s contribution to Haiti disaster relief operations, its anti-piracy efforts in the Gulf of Aden, as well as contribution to UN mission in Lebanon. He also expressed appreciation for the Korean government’s continued active participation in the Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI). In particular, ROK’s hosting of the PSI Exercise Eastern Endeavor 10 later this month is expected to be a significant step forward in the global cooperative effort to prevent the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD).

8. The Secretary and the Minister received a report on the results of the U.S.-ROK Military Committee Meeting from the Commander of the ROK-U.S. Combined Forces Command (CFC), General Walter L. Sharp, which highlighted that the combined defense posture is capable and ready to "Fight Tonight," and that it is prepared to effectively respond to any provocation, instability or aggression.

9. The Secretary and the Minister received a report on the results of the ROK-U.S. Security Policy Initiative (SPI) meetings over the past year, and expressed satisfaction that, through close consultations, the ROK and the U.S. are making significant progress on important issues in further developing the Alliance, including: ensuring an effective combined defense, proceeding with the implementation of U.S. Forces Korea (USFK) relocation and camp returns, and articulating a shared future vision for the Alliance. The Secretary and the Minister pledged to
continue SPI consultations in 2011 and beyond, based on the significant accomplishments of the past six years and the mutual desire to continue to enhance the U.S.-ROK Alliance.

10. The Secretary and the Minister confirmed a comprehensive strategy to strengthen the Alliance in years to come, including achieving the transition of wartime operational control (OPCON) for the combined warfight to the ROK Joint Chiefs of Staff in 2015. The transition of OPCON should sustain and enhance the Alliance’s combined defense posture and capabilities, and support both the Alliance’s bilateral defense priorities and its future development. The Secretary and the Minister affirmed and signed the Strategic Alliance 2015, which provides the framework for the transition of OPCON to the ROK Joint Chiefs of Staff over the next five years. The Secretary and Minister reaffirmed their intent for the transition to occur in December 2015. They also reaffirmed that the implementation of the Strategic Alliance 2015 plan is to be regularly assessed and reviewed at the annual SCM/MCM, paying particular attention to evolving North Korean threats, and reflected in the transition process. In this regard, they further noted the importance of the OPCON Certification Plan in ensuring the transition is implemented methodically to validate that the combined defense posture remains strong and seamless. The Secretary reaffirmed that the U.S. will provide specific and significant bridging capabilities until the ROK obtains full self-defense capabilities, and further noted the U.S. commitment to contribute enduring capabilities for the life of the Alliance.

11. The Secretary and the Minister acknowledged the progress on USFK base relocation and camp returns. They committed to work closely together to successfully complete base relocation and camp returns, noting that the efficient and effective completion of these cooperative joint
efforts is in the best interest of both nations. The Secretary and the Minister pledged to minimize challenges and to strive for rapid completion of the Yongsan Relocation Plan (YRP) and Land Partnership Plan (LPP). The two also concurred that the Joint Environmental Assessment Procedure (JEAP) is useful in facilitating bilateral cooperation for camp returns.

12. The Secretary and the Minister affirmed and signed the Guidelines for U.S.-ROK Defense Cooperation, a document that seeks to embody the future vision of the U.S.-ROK Alliance, as agreed through the Joint Vision Statement last year and based on the ROK-U.S. Mutual Defense Treaty of 1953. They confirmed that the guidelines provide the future direction of the U.S.-ROK defense relationship to strengthen our combined defense and strategic contribution to the regional and global security in the 21st century.

13. The Secretary and the Minister affirmed and signed the Strategic Planning Guidance which provides the U.S.-ROK Military Committee with the strategic guidance and authorization necessary to direct the development of operational planning. The Secretary and the Minister confirmed that this strategic planning guidance was a useful measure in deterring a wide range of threats against the Republic of Korea and establishing military preparation plans. The Secretary and the Minister noted that the two militaries have made substantial progress in the development of military plans related to a range of situations on the Korean Peninsula and that this document is to further ensure an effective Alliance response to potential crisis.

14. Minister Kim expressed sincere appreciation to Secretary Gates for the courtesy and hospitality extended to him and his delegation by the U.S. Government, and for the excellent
arrangements which contributed to the success of the meeting. The Secretary and the Minister affirmed that the discussions during the 42nd SCM and 32nd MCM contributed substantively to strengthening the U.S.-ROK Alliance and further enhanced the development of the bilateral defense relationship into a comprehensive strategic Alliance. Both sides expect to hold the 43rd SCM in Seoul, ROK at a mutually convenient time in 2011.
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**Additional web sources (most are listed as footnotes)**
