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This is a great time to study nuclear history. Thanks to the declassification of documents from various countries, scholars can now pull back the curtain and better understand the decision-making process of leaders on hitherto nontransparent nuclear weapons policies. The program of the Republic of Korea (here after ROK or South Korea) program is no exception. While the secret research program ended during the Park Chung Hee regime in the 1970s, and Korea today does not possess nuclear weapons, understanding South Korea's past attempt to pursue nuclear weapons allows us to grasp when and why junior allies consider developing indigenous weapons programs even while under a patron ally's nuclear umbrella. It also helps us better understand the factors that influence the decision to halt the program. Moreover, understanding the development of a weapons program from its inception to termination will have considerable policy implications for the United States as it tries to manage its alliances with credible extended deterrence, as well as for the current administration's policy goal of a Nuclear-Free World. While states have been much more sensitive about their enemies obtaining nuclear weapons, it is also not ideal if their allies acquire them.¹ Not only can it reduce the patron ally's freedom of action, but it can also cause additional proliferation among regional players. Thus, researching the history of South Korea's nuclear program through these newly available archival documents is a valuable endeavor

¹ On the variation of great power nonproliferation policy, see Matthew Kroenig, "Force or Friendship: Explaining Great Power Nonproliferation Policy," *Security Studies*, 23:1, 1-32. Kroenig tests two competing theories. Political-relations theory argues that states oppose their enemies from acquiring nuclear capabilities, and power-projection theory argues that states' oppose countries over which they have the ability to project power from gaining nuclear weapons because nuclear weapons would limit the great powers' freedom of action over them after weapons have been proliferated. This includes allies (friends).

for scholars who study nuclear history and nuclear nonproliferation. Lyong Choi's article contributes to this agenda.

The article traces the development of South Korea's nuclear weapons program during the Park Chung Hee era, especially from 1975 to 1976. Choi identifies a few principal triggers that first interested the Park regime in the program and accelerated its pursuit. The first of these was the U.S. preoccupation with the Vietnam War during the Johnson and Nixon administrations. While the U.S. was planning to modernize the ROK's armed forces through aid in order to improve its national security, Park began to believe that nuclear weapons would be the ultimate guarantor of South Korea's national security.

Second, the collapse of South Vietnam and another victory by revolutionary forces in Cambodia in 1975 made the Park regime speed up the program. A combination of the events in Southeast Asia, along with President Richard Nixon's Guam Doctrine which indicated that U.S. allies would have to provide the ground forces in any conflict, alerted President Park Chung Hee that "South Korea could be another South Vietnam" (73). Related to this thinking, Park was afraid that the defeat of the U.S. in Indochina (U.S. withdrawal from Vietnam in 1973 and the collapse of Saigon in 1975) would inspire North Korea to adopt a more adventurist policy. As the Ford administration might potentially continue Richard Nixon's policy of troop reduction, South Korea needed to defend itself with a new type of weapons system.

Choi's article is a welcome addition to the field of nuclear history and alliance politics. First of all, the article is comprehensively researched, utilizing newly obtained declassified documents from a diverse number of international archives. Choi uses CIA documents, materials from the Gerald Ford and Jimmy Carter Presidential libraries, former socialist camp records and oral history transcripts that have been released by the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars' Cold War International History Project and North Korea International Documentation Project, and documents from the Diplomatic Archives of the Republic of Korea, to name a few. Choi's article provides scholars with a much more nuanced understanding of the bargaining and negotiations going on behind the scenes between ROK and U.S. officials.

Choi's thesis ultimately comes down to a bargaining argument. He contends that Park was not serious about the nuclear plan since he understood that South Korea was not capable of building a nuclear missile in the short term. He was using the nuclear option as leverage to prevent the withdrawal of more American troops from Korean soil. Choi further argues that "Park did not have anything to lose: he could give up his slow moving nuclear project in return for Ford's commitment to keep U.S. troops stationed in South Korea for the long term and maintain the protection of the nuclear umbrella" (81).

While granting that we cannot be absolutely sure about Park's intentions and calculations, as well as the fact that scholars still have limited materials for drawing a comprehensive picture, Choi could have more clearly laid out the turning points in the

decision-making process. Choi does not trace the switch of policy with sufficient analysis because if Park's nuclear program was mainly intended to hold Washington hostage and to be used as a bargaining tool with the U.S. government, South Korea's lack of credibility (due to the United States' policy in Southeast Asia) and need for the ultimate weapon for national security cannot be considered important motives. Even if the United States had promised not to withdraw additional troops from South Korea in the near term, this did not mean that the U.S. nuclear umbrella would automatically regain credibility because of its policy in Southeast Asia, and also there is no guarantee that it would not have abandoned South Korea in the future. Furthermore, Choi argues that South Korea pushed ahead with its nuclear project to prepare for the *eventual* withdrawal of U.S. troops (emphasis added). Therefore, the question remains: did Park pursue the weapons program to bargain to prevent troop reductions, or was he planning to maintain the program because the U.S. might pull out in the future, if not at the time. Therefore, two questions arise. The first is whether Park started the nuclear program because of the fear of troop reductions or because of the lack of credibility even with the same number of U.S. troops in the ROK. Second, did Park end the program because the U.S. did not reduce troops, or did Park give up because the U.S. threatened to pull out entirely if the ROK did not halt the program? This article does not make a thorough attempt to address these questions.

This seemingly paradoxical manner becomes more salient when Choi introduces America's domestic politics as a variable that influenced the ROK's nuclear policy. Choi argues that the ROK had to give up the weapons program because Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld pushed hard for South Korea to abandon the program. Choi argues that the abandonment of the program occurred before Washington provided a security guarantee. Therefore, the chicken or the egg dilemma is whether the lack of a security guarantee caused the nuclear program. But if the program ended without the security guarantee, does this mean that as long as the patron ally threatened, the junior ally will give up the program? What is the threshold where a junior ally starts a program and abandons the program? What is the right amount of threat and guarantee that stops the program?

Many of the questions raised here are more comprehensively addressed by Sung Gul Hong,² who wrote on Park's nuclear option a few years ago. Hong better outlines how Park wanted to have a nuclear program to deter North Korea because until the late 1970s, North Korea had a stronger conventional military force than South Korea, and Park believed the only deterrent to North Korea starting a war was U.S. armed troops in the ROK. However, due to the Guam doctrine and the end of the Vietnam War, Park began to question the commitment and credibility of the United States. Park then realized that

² Sung Gul Hong "The Search for Deterrence: Park Nuclear Option," in *The Park Chung Hee Era: The Transformation of South Korea*, ed. Byung-Kook Kim and Ezra F. Vogel (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011).

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when the clandestine program was discovered by the U.S., there would be no negotiation with the U.S. on nuclear terms, but used the program as a bargaining chip to keep U.S. troops on the ground. It is surprising that Choi does not cite Hong's book chapter in his article.

Having said that, Choi contributes to the literature by adding to the narrative the so-called Axe Murder Incident, the 1976 tree-trimming operation in the Joint Security Area that led to a conflict between U.S. and North Korean soldiers, resulting in the deaths of two Americans. Choi's article seems to suggest that the actual trigger that solved all of the issues was Axe Murder Incident, which was provoked by North Korea. The incident provided a chance for the U.S. to redeem itself and prove that it was a reliable ally. Choi says this commitment (that when there is a conflict between the two Koreas the U.S. would not overlook but intervene on behalf of South Korea) contributed to the end of Seoul's nuclear plan. It seems as though U.S. policy in Southeast Asia and the troop reduction in 1971 perhaps first triggered the nuclear program. And the program decisively ended with one incident during which the U.S. was able to show its commitment, because the overall threat level of the ROK was probably not changed, and the fact that the U.S. might pull out the troops eventually had not changed either.

One of the reasons it is difficult to have a full narrative on South Korea's nuclear program is that we are dealing with counterfactuals. Due to the limited documents available we cannot be certain whether Park gave up the program due to threats from the U.S., or whether he would have abandoned it in any case. Perhaps in future studies and with more documents available, scholars will be able to attempt to address the questions that remain from this article. Regardless, Choi contributes enormously to the literature of nuclear history and alliance politics and this article is a must-read for scholars working on these issues.

Joeun Kim is a Ph.D. student in Government at Georgetown University. Her research interests include alliance management and nuclear proliferation. Her dissertation examines the variation in junior allies' decisions to proliferate while under a nuclear umbrella and the credibility of patron allies vis-à-vis crisis management.

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