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The Failed Plan: South Korea's Pursuit of Nuclear Weapons and the U.S. Nonproliferation Policy in the 1970s [*]

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Refereed Article

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Abstract

This paper studies the conditions under which South Korea ceased its attempts to acquire nuclear weapons. It seeks to answer the question: How did Washington persuade Seoul to give up its nuclear pursuits? Existing literature has thus far only discussed the U.S. influences on South Korea, but it has not fully explained how U.S. nonproliferation policies effectively prevented South Korea from going nuclear. This paper examines what policies were most effective in discouraging the development of nuclear weapons. The U.S. approached Canada and France to create a negotiating environment that made it easier to implement its nuclear nonproliferation policy. Then the U.S. promised technical cooperation in the nuclear field in a form in which South Korea would not have the capability to build nuclear weapons. The history of how the export control policy was implemented while promising technical cooperation in the nuclear field provides us with an important case study in how it may be possible to persuade today's nuclear-weapons-developing nations to give up their nuclear weapons. This paper has salience today, as North Korea has become a de facto nuclear weapons state through its continuous nuclear testing, meanwhile, many South Korean people are in favor of their country developing nuclear weapons. Reviewing the historical process of U.S. nonproliferation policies that helped prevent the South Korean program will help us determine what policies could effectively prevent nuclear proliferation in East Asian countries in the future.

Keywords : Nuclear Weapons Development, Nuclear Nonproliferation, the United States, South Korea

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1. Introduction

Nuclear weapons have continued to be important even after the end of the Cold War, especially in East Asia, where the proliferation of nuclear weapons has remained a hot political issue. For example, North Korea has been seeking to develop nuclear weapons since the 1990s. U.S. President Donald Trump attempted to negotiate directly with North Korean leader Kim Jong Un, but the denuclearization of North Korea is yet to be achieved. North Korean nuclear development has sparked debate in South Korea about its own nuclear development. In a poll conducted in 2021, 60.1 percent of South Koreans favored their country developing nuclear weapons (The Genron NPO 2021). It is noteworthy that the development of nuclear weapons has so much public support in South Korea.

However, the argument for the development of South Korea's nuclear weapons is not new. In the 1970s, the South Korean government discussed developing nuclear weapons. The South Korean leader Park Chung-hee attempted to develop nuclear weapons. However, the plan failed due to the intervention of the United States.

This paper explores why South Korea gave up its nuclear weapons program and focuses on the influences of the nuclear nonproliferation policy of the United States. Studying the problem of nuclear proliferation in East Asia during the Cold War can help to resolve the issues caused by North Korea's development of nuclear weapons. A study of the South Korean plan will provide a perspective that few studies have explored. The literature only discusses U.S. influences on South Korea without explaining why and how the U.S. nonproliferation policy prevented South Korea from going nuclear. In contrast, this paper traces the evolution of the U.S. nonproliferation policy and examines why the U.S. policy was effective.

Unlike previous studies, this study uses primary sources to investigate how Washington forced Seoul to abandon its nuclear weapons development program. The U.S. consulted with Canada and France to create a negotiating environment that was conductive to the implementation of U.S. nuclear nonproliferation policy. Then the U.S. promised South Korea technical cooperation in the nuclear field so that South Korea would not have the capability to build nuclear weapons. This history of the export control policy being implemented while promising technical cooperation is an important case study on how to persuade states with their own nuclear weapons programs to give them up.

2. Literature Review

There has been a renewed interest in South Korea's nuclear ambitions given North Korea's development of nuclear weapons. In addition, the declassification of historical documents in the U.S. archives has given researchers an incentive to study this topic. The literature has focused on the U.S. influence on South Korea in preventing the development of nuclear weapons.

In one of the earliest studies, Mitchell Reiss argued that "Washington's reaction would have been to threaten to terminate its military support unless the ROK ceased its activities" (Reiss 1988, 98). Michael Siller made a similar argument that "South Korea faced strong U.S. sanctions throughout the 1960s, 1970s, 1980s, and early 1990s not to go nuclear, as well as equally intense U.S. inducements" (Siller 1998, 43). These studies were based on newspaper articles or interviews with the U.S. Embassy staff in Seoul. However, these studies are inadequate because they rely on speculation resulting from a lack access to primary sources.

Seung-Young Kim conducted a detailed historical study on the issue and concluded that the South Korean

government slowed its nuclear weapons program when faced with "the U.S. threat to withdraw security and economic assistance" (Kim 2001). Kim relies on secondary sources such as interview recordings to reach this conclusion.

Reiss (1988), Siller (1998), and Kim (2001) were unable to consult the primary literature. Their conclusions about how Washington forced Seoul to give up the nuclear weapons option are inferred from secondary sources. Therefore, to understand what actually happened, it is necessary to reconstruct the diplomatic negotiations between the two countries.

The declassification of historical documents has led to several new studies. Se Young Jang examined why South Korea initiated a nuclear weapons program even though U.S. tactical nuclear weapons were already stationed in South Korea (Jang 2016). Sun-Gul Hong (2011) studied South Korea's reason of wanting nuclear weapons and how the U.S. thwarted this. Hong discussed the evolution of South Korean plans, the U.S.-ROK negotiations, and the formation of U.S. policies toward South Korea based on both U.S. archives and South Korean testimonies. Hong identified some factors that enabled the United States to stop the South Korean program, but did not clarify which were most effective.

Lyong Choi (2014) explored how and why South Korea pursued its nuclear program despite the U.S. opposition. Choi examined the South Korean nuclear weapons program and the U.S. response from the perspective of "U.S. policy in the post-Vietnam War era." Choi claimed that South Korea used the program as a "bargaining chip" in its negotiations with over the U.S. military commitment in South Korea. So South Korean leadership gave up the program when the United States promised "continuous military cooperation." Choi concluded that although South Korea was not able to acquire nuclear warheads, it did retain the U.S. military commitment. Like Choi, Alexander Lanoszka contended that the continued U.S. military support convinced South Korea to shelve its nuclear weapons program (Lanoszka 2018, 124). Bleek and Lorber (2014) have made a similar argument.

However, there are flows in the claim of Choi (2014), Lanoszka (2018), and Bleek and Lorber (2014) that U.S. security cooperation stopped South Korea from developing nuclear weapons. It is not possible to determine whether Washington's security cooperation was in exchange for Seoul giving up its nuclear weapons. These studies merely chronicle the negotiations in which Washington pledged defense cooperation and the timing of Seoul's abandonment of its nuclear weapons, without proving a causal link between the two. These studies are therefore worthy of scrutiny.

Studies based on primary historical sources have failed to explain how South Korea came to give up its nuclear weapons or discuss which U.S. policies led to this decision. Furthermore, the claim that U.S. security cooperation led to South Korea's abandonment of nuclear weapons has little historical basis. In this paper, I will argue that the U.S. convinced South Korea to give up its nuclear ambitions not by offering security cooperation but rather cooperation in the development of nuclear energy. Unlike previous studies, this paper does not only focus on Washington's policy toward Seoul, but also on its policy toward Paris and Ottawa and its nuclear technology policy. In this way it will pain a complete picture of Washington's nuclear weapons nonproliferation policy.

3. Theoretical Discussion

Dong Joon Jo and Erik Gartzke categorized (2007) pinpoint two causes of nuclear proliferation: a state's "nuclear willingness" and its "nuclear opportunity." They define "nuclear willingness" refers to "a set of factors leading to

the eagerness of a country to possess nuclear weapons" including "domestic and geopolitical conditions that influence the decision to seek nuclear weapons" (Jo and Gartzke, 168). A "nuclear opportunity" consists of the "environmental constraints and also the potential for a country to manufacture nuclear weapons" (Ibid). It is essential to analyze a state's capability to develop nuclear weapons because a state that lacks this capability will be excluded from potential proliferators (Ibid.). However, most research has focused on the factors that drive states to acquire or abandon nuclear programs. According to Matthew Kroenig, the analysis of a state's demand for nuclear weapons provides only a partial explanation because a state cannot develop nuclear weapons without "the technology, resources, and expertise required to build them" (Kroenig 2010, 153-154).

Francis J. Gavin states that there are three strategies of nuclear nonproliferation strategies: assurance, legal/normative, and coercive (Gavin 2015). This paper defines U.S. nonproliferation policies toward South Korea with reference to this framework.

To influence a state's decision to develop nuclear weapons, a nonproliferation policy needs to make the development of nuclear weapons impossible. Assurance policies can extend security guarantees such as long-term basing arrangements or troop deployments. These policies improve a country's security environment and remove the incentive to possess its own nuclear weapons arsenal. The premise is that if the United States eliminated South Korea's incentive to develop nuclear weapons, then South Korea would give up its nuclear ambitions. Therefore, nuclear nonproliferation can be achieved by attacking the insecurity and instability that create the desire for nuclear weapons (Kokoski 1995). Lanoszka (2018) argues that the more credible the security guarantee the U.S. government can offer an ally, the less likely this ally will be to start or continue a nuclear weapons program. Security guarantees can reinforce the security commitment to an ally through a formal defense treaty, extending a nuclear umbrella over an ally with the goal of convincing the ally that does not need a nuclear deterrent of its own. Thus, the U.S. military alliances and security commitment are the most critical tools for assurance strategies.

Legal/normative strategies can prevent a state from obtaining the capability to develop nuclear weapons. These strategies entail making arms control treaties and establishing norms to dissuade states from acquiring nuclear weapons. For example, the U.S. government has employed legal/normative measures to emphasize the dangers of nuclear weapons; encourage a norm against the development and use of nuclear weapons; reiterate the horrors of nuclear war; warn of the threats of a nuclear arms race; and call for international efforts to limit the spread of nuclear weapons (Gavin 2015, 25). In 1957, the U.S. government, in cooperation with the Soviet Union, established the International Atomic Agency (IAEA) to control the development of nuclear energy. It monitors and regulates nuclear activities around the world. The IAEA applies safeguards to civil nuclear facilities to confirm that they are used for peaceful purposes. A decade later, in 1970, the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT) took effect. The NPT codified a division among the five signatories that had detonated nuclear devices before 1967 and others that had signed the NPT as non-nuclear weapons states. The NPT has set the norms, rules, and institutions to enforce the guidelines for the global nonproliferation regime (Fitzpatrick 2012, 41-43). Thus, the U.S. policymakers has used legal/normative strategies to discourage the possession of nuclear weapons through international treaties and organizations.

In addition, the United States has used coercive strategies to prevent a country from acquiring the capability to develop nuclear weapons. Coercive methods include: technology and export controls; economic sanctions; threats of abandonment; and even preventive military strikes against nuclear programs (Gavin 2015; Reardon 2010, 22).

These policies are designed to limit and control the availability of technologies, equipment, and expertise for nuclear weapons by convincing states not to start a nuclear weapons program, or by thwarting an existing program. The U.S. government has controlled its exports through the use of banned items lists, requirements for licenses and government approval, and has expanded and deepened international controls with the cooperation of other countries. It has also used the threat of withdrawing military and civilian nuclear cooperation. Additionally, it has launched military strikes against nuclear targets or the states with nuclear aspirations, removing the regime from power or invading and taking over the government (Reardon 2010, 33-40).

4. Primary Sources

This paper cites the U.S. government documents that are available on the websites of the National Security Archive at the George Washington University, the Wilson Center, and the Nautilus Institute.[1] The National Security Archive's page has declassified 63 documents in the sections "Stopping Korea from Going Nuclear, PartI" and "Stopping Korea from Going Nuclear, Part II."[2] These two electoral briefing books, edited by William Burr contain records released through mandatory declassification review, offering an account of the U.S. effort to dissuade South Korea from developing nuclear weapons. Some documents show how the National Security Council and the State Department responded to South Korea's nuclear weapons program. These documents paint a comprehensive picture of Washington's policy toward Seoul, Ottawa, and Paris, and the ways in which Washington sought to cooperate with Seoul on nuclear technology. The Wilson Center also has released U.S. documents, but some of them are also found in the electoral briefing books of the National Security Archive.[3]

The Nautilus Institute has released some primary documents. On its website, one can download the Central Intelligence Agency's report "South Korea: Nuclear Developments and Strategic Decision-making" made in June 1978 (U.S. Central Intelligence Agency 1978).[4]

According to Se Young Jang, there are very few South Korean archival documents from the 1970s due to the President Park Chung-hee's insistence on opaque documentary management practices (Jang 2017). This paper analyzes some articles which contain interviews and testimonies by former South Korean officials who worked for the South Korean program and President Park Chung-hee himself.

5. The South Korean Case

5.1. South Korea's Willingness to Develop Nuclear Weapons

To understand when and why South Korea started to develop nuclear weapons, it is necessary to explore the

[1] National Security Archive, https://nsarchive.gwu.edu/ . Wilson Center, https://www.wilsoncenter.org/ . Nautilus Institute for Security and Sustainability, https://nautilus.org/ . (accessed 25 November, 2022).

[2] William Burr ed., "National Security Archive Electronic Briefing Book no.582: Stopping Korea from Going Nuclear, Part I." National Security Archive, March 22, 2017. https://nsarchive.gwu.edu/briefing-book/henry-kissinger-nuclear-vault/2017-03-22/stopping-korea-going-nuclear-part-i. (accessed 25 November, 2022). William Burr ed., "National Security Archive Electoral Briefing Book no. 584: Stopping Korea from Going Nuclear, Part II", National Security Archive, April 12, 2017. https://nsarchive.gwu.edu/briefing-book/henry-kissinger-nuclear-vault/2017-04-12/stopping-korea-going-nuclear-part-ii (accessed 5 April, 2022)

[3] Wilson Center Digital Archive, "South Korean Nuclear History," https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/collection/128/south-korean-nuclear-history (accessed 25 November, 2022).

[4] Nautilus Institute, "Park Chung Hee, the CIA, and the Bomb," https://nautilus.org/napsnet/napsnet-special-reports/park-chung-hee-the-cia-and-the-bomb/ (accessed 25 November, 2022)

provocations from North Korea and U.S. foreign policy from the late 1960s to the early 1970s. These events informed Park Chung-hee's view of South Korea's security environment. This paper analyzes the connection between South Korea's nuclear pursuit, North Korea's escalation of tensions, and U.S. troop reductions in South Korea.

From the 1960s, North Korea attempted to force confrontations on South Korea (U.S. House of Representatives 1978, 54). For example, from 1968 to 1972, there were 722 incidents in the DMZ and 294 in the rear area (Cha 1999, 64). Pyongyang formulated an aggressive unification strategy toward Seoul to foster revolutionary conditions in the South. The critical elements of this strategy were "propaganda," "psychological warfare," "armed raids," "attempts on the life of President" Park Chung-hee, "efforts to isolate Seoul internationally," "agent infiltration to collect intelligence," "build Communist cells," and "subvert officials" (U.S. Central Intelligence Agency 1978, 1).

There were three critical events in the late 1960s. In January 1968, North Korean commandos tried to attack the Blue House, the home of South Korea's president and assassinate President Park Chung-hee and U.S. Ambassador Porter. The attack on the Blue House was the first terrorist raid in South Korea since the Korean War. The mission was prevented by South Korean forces only a kilometer away (U.S. House of Representatives 1978, 54-55). In reaction to this incident, the government insisted on retaliating against North Korea, but Ambassador Porter cautioned President Park that the U.S. would oppose any confrontation with North Korea (Cha 1999, 63).

Only two days after the abortive attack on the Blue House, a U.S. naval intelligence ship, the U.S.S. Pueblo was seized by North Korea near the port of Wonsan. The vessel was gathering information on North Korean and Soviet submarines in the Sea of Japan (East Sea). The ship was "15 miles from shore, 3 miles outside DPRK territorial waters" (U.S. House of Representatives 1978, 55). One crew member was killed, and the other 82 were captured and tortured in North Korea. The United States could not recapture the ship, but "350 American warplanes were flown into South Korea without prior approval" by the South Korean government, and "the carrier U.S.S. Enterprise was positioned off the North Korean coast" (Ibid., 56). U.S. President Lyndon B, Johnson activated over 14,000 Air Force and Navy reservists. The South Korean government viewed the Pueblo incident less important than that attack on the Blue House. In February 1968, President Johnson sent former Deputy Secretary of Defense Cyrus Vance to Seoul as "a special Presidential envoy to talk to the South Korean President Park," who wanted to see military retaliation against North Korea (Ibid., 57). Vance and Park agreed to avoid a military response and instead to increase U.S. military assistance to South Korea. Vance expressed "renewed confidence in the solidarity of the alliance" (Ibid.).

However, Washington declined all requests from Seoul for retaliatory airstrikes against Pyongyang. Vance later recalled that if Seoul had retaliated, Washington would have reevaluated its relationship with Seoul (Cha 1999, 63).

In April 1969, a U.S. naval intelligence plane on a routine mission was shot down by North Korean MiG fighters over the Sea of Japan, killing all 31 crewmembers. President Richard Nixon chose not to antagonize the Soviet Union and China (U.S. House of Representatives 1978, 58). Thus, in the late 1960 and the early 1970s, U.S. foreign policy refused to engage North Korea over its provocations (Jack 1978). These responses reflected U.S. intentions to downgrade its defense commitments in Asia. As a result, its lack of response to North Korea undermined "South Korea's confidence in American defense commitments" (Cha 1999, 63-64).

President Nixon announced a new foreign policy that would reduce U.S. commitment to Asia. National Security

Adviser Henry Kissinger controlled the planning function for the National Security Council and set up special working groups to coordinate policies on Vietnam, southern Africa, and the Middle East (Schulzinger 2008, 250-251). This critical shift in foreign policy was a reaction to domestic pressures produced by budgetary constraints and widespread opposition to the Vietnam War. International developments such as Japanese and German economic growth also had a significant influence on the reconsideration of U.S. diplomacy (Cha 1999, 60).

In July 1969, Nixon stated his policy. The tenets of the Nixon doctrine were (1) "The U.S. would honor its treaty commitments;" (2) "The U.S. would provide a shield if a nuclear power threatened the freedom of certain nations;" and (3) "In cases of other types of aggression, the U.S. would furnish military and economic assistance when requested and appropriate, but nations directly threatened should assume primary responsibility for their own defense" (U.S. House of Representatives 1978, 59). U.S. foreign policy changed from engaging in military conflicts to intervening indirectly through arms transfers and other means.

Under the Nixon administration's retrenchment policy in Asia, the number of American military personnel in Asia dropped from "727,300 in January 1969 to 284,000 by December 1971" (Cha 1999, 61). The Nixon administration withdrew 390,500 personnel from Vietnam by December 1971. Nixon's policy was applied also in South Korea. In February 1969, Nixon authorized the continuation of a National Security Council study, which had started under the Johnson administration, about the phased troop reduction in South Korea. After the National Security Council (NSC) discussion, National Security Decision Memorandum 48 was issued in March 1970. President Nixon cut the U.S. military presence in South Korea by 20,000 personnel by the end of 1971. As a result, the number of U.S. troops in South Korea was reduced from 63,000 to 43,000. Despite South Korea's opposition, the U.S. withdrawal plan was completed in 1971 (Cha 1999, 61-62).

South Korean President Park Chung-hee had made "self-reliance" his political slogan since the early 1960s. Especially after the increase in North Korean provocations and the U.S. decision to withdraw troops, Park began to advocate self-reliance in national defense policy. Park saw self-reliance as the only way for South Korea to defend itself in light of a complete withdrawal of U.S. forces (Kim 2001, 56-57).

To achieve self-reliance in the defense field, the government established two defense agencies in late 1970: the Agency for Defense Development (ADD) and the Weapons Exploitation Committee (WEC). When the U.S. troops' withdrawal plan was announced, Park spoke about his interest in nuclear weapons development. ADD was an open research agency that developed "weapons, weapons systems, equipment, and material" for the South Korean military. WEC was "a covert, ad hoc governmental committee" responsible to the Blue House to obtain and produce weapons. "Oh Won-chul, Second Secretary for Economic Affairs, and other high-ranking governmental officers" participated in WEC (U.S. House of Representatives 1978, 79).

In addition, Nixon tried to normalize U.S. relations with China. These new policies toward Asia were shrouded in secrecy even from allies such as South Korea (Oberdorfer and Carlin 2014, 9-13). President Park viewed these policy changes as a threat to South Korea's national security.

In 1972, there was a superficial détente between South Korea and North Korea, but nothing definitive was achieved. In July 1972, the South Korean and North Korean governments issued the July 4 North–South Korea Joint Statement, in which they agreed on three principles for reunification: independence, peace, and national unity. A commission was formed, and it seemed as if dialogue between North and South Korea would proceed. However, North Korea suspended the dialogue in 1973. Thus, the competitive relationship between North and South Korea resumed, so South Korea continued strengthening of domestic regime and military power (Kimiya 2012, 78).

Park reformed the constitution in October 1972, suppressing political freedom. Park also began to reinforce the South Korean forces and develop defense industries, including a covert nuclear weapons program (Gleysteen Jr 1999, 12-13).

At the core of Park's self-reliance policy was a nuclear weapons program, "Project 890" (National Foreign Assessment Center 1978, 1). There are only a few documents on Project 890 in South Korean archives, so this paper also has to rely on interviews. However, thanks to Jang's (2017) article, this paper can quote some important South Korean officials (Jang 2017). President Park started the nuclear weapons development program. According to Oh Won-chul, who was responsible for South Korea's nuclear weapons program, in 1972 President Park told him, "We need nuclear weapons to keep the peace." Consequently, Oh Won-chul wrote a report defending South Korea's development of nuclear weapons (Kim 2010).

According to another former South Korean official, the 1972 report concluded that the Ministry of Science and Technology and the Korea Atomic Energy Research Institute (KAERI) would start to develop basic nuclear technology from 1973, and embark on a construction plan to produce high-purity plutonium from 1974 to the early 1980s (Kim Kwang-mo 2017).

Prime Minister Kim Jong-pil described Park's attempt to develop nuclear weapons. According to him, after the announcement of the Nixon Doctrine in July 1969, Park Chung-hee started to think that South Korea should develop nuclear weapons. In 1970, after the U.S. government announced that "all U.S. forces in South Korea will be withdrawn within five years," President Park told Kim that "We also have to research atomic bombs. We do not know when the U.S. military will withdraw, so we need weapons to protect South Korea." Kim Jong-pil agreed. According to him, obtaining nuclear weapons capability was the critical goal for South Korea's defense and heavy chemical industries (Kim Jong-pil 2017, 362-363).

In 1973, Park sent Kim Jong-pil to France to discuss the import of a French nuclear reprocessing facility (Kim Jong-pil 2017, 364). It is not known when Park began to consider the development of nuclear weapons. However, South Korea most likely started considering the secret program in 1972 and began implementing it a year later.

Thus, North Korean aggression and the decline of U.S. presence motivated South Korea to offset its nuclear weapons program. This view has much in common with literature on South Korea's decision to start its nuclear weapons development program. Se Young Jang argued that President Park began to fear abandonment by the United States in the late 1960s (Jang 2016, 517-518). Moreover, Park considered Nixon's decision to withdraw one military division from South Korea to be weakening the U.S. extended deterrence on the Korean Peninsula (Kim 2001, 54-59). As a result, he realized that the U.S. might leave South Korea to protect its own broader strategic interests. This new threat made Park's self-reliance policy all the more urgent.

However, North Korean aggression and the decline of the U.S. presence can explain South Korea's security crisis but not why it resorted to the development of nuclear weapons. To understand why President Park tried to develop nuclear weapons, it is necessary to think about the vulnerability of South Korea and the importance of nuclear capability to national security. As Hong argued, Seoul, South Korea's political and economic center and home to one-third of its population, was only 30 miles from the DMZ, the border between North and South Korea. A surprise attack from North Korea could quickly destroy Seoul. Because of the country's strategic vulnerability, Park thought South Korea had to have the nuclear option. Therefore, Park might have considered that possessing or being able to produce a nuclear weapon could deter a North Korean surprise attack (Hong 2011,503-504).

5.2. The South Korean Nuclear Capability

To develop nuclear weapons, a country needs fissile materials, weapons fabrication, and delivery systems. South Korea had sufficient nuclear experts and was developing missiles to carry nuclear warheads. In 1976, there were about 1,000 atomic experts in South Korea. South Korea began to develop surface-to-surface missiles in 1971 and succeeded in the test launch of a missile with a range of 100 miles (Ha 1983, 123; Kim 2001,68). Therefore, in 1978, if South Korea had decided to develop nuclear weapons, it would not have had to look far for engineers and expertise (Ha 1983, 121-122). Thus, South Korea's ability to develop nuclear weapons depended upon its ability to obtain the weapons-grade plutonium from a reprocessing facility.

The acquisition of fissile materials is the chief obstacle to the first production of nuclear weapons. Three types of fissile materials are available: uranium-233 (U-233), uranium-235 (U-235), and plutonium-239 (P-239). U-233 and U-235 were more difficult to acquire than P-239 because of the sophisticated technology and the high production cost. A plutonium production reactor or a reprocessing plant can produce weapons-grade plutonium. A country hoping to build a nuclear weapons development program requires a reprocessing plant to extract the weapons-grade material from spent nuclear fuel (Ibid., 119). A small reprocessing plant for weapons is easier to design and build than a commercial one (Office of Technology Assessment 1977, 230-231). On September 8, 1972, a South Korean official responsible for the nuclear development program concluded that South Korea had the technology to develop plutonium warheads (Kim 2010). Therefore, this paper focuses on how South Korea developed the nuclear power program and the plan to introduce the reprocessing facility.

South Korea established its first nuclear power program in the 1950s. Soon after U.S. President Eisenhower's speech on "Atoms for Peace" in 1956, the ROK government sent delegations to the First International Conference on Peaceful Use of Atomic Energy in 1956. It started to show national interest in peaceful nuclear energy, including power generation and medical, agricultural, and industrial applications. In 1956, Seoul signed a bilateral agreement with the U.S. for cooperation on the peaceful use of atomic energy and joined the IAEA the next year. In 1958, it enacted the Atomic Energy Act to start a nuclear reactor program. As a result, the Atomic Energy Department was established under the Ministry of Education. The ROK government contracted to build the first research reactor (TRIGA Mark-2) with the support of the U.S. government. The KAERI was opened with the introduction of the first research reactor (Choi et al. 2009, 5496). At that time, South Korea was mired in poverty and hunger after the Korean War. With domestic energy resources limited, it expressed great interest in nuclear energy. Nuclear power was considered an effective means to achieve a stable electricity supply and to reduce the heavy dependence on imported oil. Thus, the South Korean government decided to introduce nuclear power generation (Lee and Lee 2016, 95-100).

In the 1960s, South Korea began its full-scale development of nuclear power reactors. In 1968, a long-term nuclear power development plan for the next 20 years was formalized. In the same year, the ROK government signed NPT and invited bids for the first nuclear power plant (Choi et al. 2009, 5496).

In the early 1970s, the South Korean government formulated a new policy to strengthen defense and heavy industry. Emphasis was placed on dual-use nuclear technology; South Korea sought alternatives to oil for their evolving energy requirements. However, South Korea had to import all technology to construct, operate, and maintain nuclear power plants. Therefore, to reduce the costs of managing nuclear power plants, nuclear fuel technology attracted government attention. According to Seong-Jun Kim, once nuclear power plants were operational, nuclear fuel technology would be reliable and economically sensible. An additional benefit was that

the technology was easy to acquire (Kim 2009, 187).

In 1970, South Korea signed a contract with the U.S. company Westinghouse Electric International Company (WEICO) to construct the first nuclear power plant in Kori, at the southern end of the Korean Peninsula. The government-owned Korea Electric Company (KECO) also signed a contract with the Export-Import Bank of the United States, WEICO, Bank of America, Lazards Brothers Bank (UK), English Electric, and George Whimpey Group (UK). Thus, the construction of Kori-1, a pressurized water reactor, started in 1970. Kori-1, the first nuclear power plant in South Korea, became operational in 1978. Moreover, South Korea introduced the policy to construct other nuclear power plants. KECO formulated the construction plan of Kori-2 in 1973. South Korea selected WEICO again as the prime contractor (Ha 1983, 89-91).

South Korea tried to diversify the manufacturers of the nuclear power reactor. In the early 1970s, the government started negotiating with Canada on the contract for the Canada Deuterium Uranium (CANDU) reactor, which used heavy water as a moderator and uranium as a fuel. Its third nuclear power plant was constructed in November 1973 by importing the CANDU reactor. On January 27, 1975, KECO and Atomic Energy of Canada Ltd. signed a construction contract. However, there were many struggles until the completion of the bilateral agreement in January 1976 (Ibid., 93-94).

In addition to the plans to construct nuclear power plants, the South Korean government attempted to obtain nuclear fuel cycle-related technology. In the early 1960s, the United States dominated the international nuclear technology market. However, from the mid-1960s, the United Kingdom, West Germany, France, and Canada started to compete with the U.S. by exporting their nuclear technologies (Ibid., 69). In the 1970s, many developing countries such as South Korea, Taiwan, Pakistan, Iran, Brazil, and Argentina tried to use this environment to import nuclear fuel technologies to strengthen their weak economies and increase their military power. Thus, South Korea tried to import nuclear fuel technology for nuclear reprocessing and fabrication for fuel (Kim 2009, 185-188).

In May 1972, KAERI set up the “Third Five-Year Nuclear Energy Development Plan (1972-1976).” It had a detailed schedule of the construction of a reprocessing plant by 1977. In that same month, Choi Hyung-Sup, the South Korean Minister of Science and Technology, visited France to discuss nuclear fuel fabrication and reprocessing plants with French officials (Ha 1983, 179). In early 1973, South Korea and France started working-level talks on the projects. South Korean and French officials began to discuss bilateral cooperation on nuclear research institutes. After two years of negotiation, in October 1974, the “Agreement for Technical Cooperation in Atomic Energy” was concluded. Although there are several subfields of nuclear fuel cycle-related technology, nuclear fuel reprocessing and uranium enrichment processes are two significant areas. They are closely related to the development of a nuclear weapons program since nuclear fuel reprocessing produces weapons-grade plutonium (Ibid., 72). In other words, reprocessing is an essential process in the nuclear fuel cycle (Ibid., 118). As a result, South Korea’s plan to purchase the French reprocessing facility provoked serious diplomatic discussion on the potential for nuclear proliferation. Thus, South Korea’s purchase of the French nuclear reprocessing facility became controversial.

6. The U.S. Nonproliferation Policy toward South Korea

6.1. The U.S. Detection and the Formation of the U.S. Nonproliferation Policy

As South Korea strengthened its economic power, the balance of power between North and South Korea

gradually began to tilt in favor of South Korea. In 1973, South Korea abandoned the Hallstein Principle and allowed itself to establish diplomatic relations with states that already had diplomatic relations with North Korea. This intensified the diplomatic competition between North and South Korea. The struggle for leadership between North and South Korea over North-South relations and unification likewise became more intense, so the two sides fought even more fiercely over which was the superior regime. In August 1974, Moon Se-kwang, a South Korean living in Japan and a member of a pro-North Korean group, shot at President Park, killing his wife. As in the early 1970s, the threat from North Korea continued in the mid-1970s (Kimiya 2012, 83-99).

When did the U.S. government discover South Korea's nuclear weapons program? As argued in Section 5, South Korea probably started its secret program around 1972. However, Washington had not noticed the South Korean activities until 1974 (Pollack and Reiss 2004, 262). Washington became alert to clandestine nuclear efforts following India's peaceful nuclear explosion (PNE) in May 1974. India tested its first nuclear device on May 18, 1974, shocking the world. PNEs are technically indistinguishable from nuclear explosions for a military nature and are not banned under Article V of NPT. Since the plutonium for the device was extracted from the research reactor supplied by Canada, the Canadian government ended its nuclear assistance to India. The Indian PNE made nuclear technologically advanced countries such as the United States and Canada aware of the possibility and danger of the proliferation of nuclear weapons in developing countries.

In July 1974, some U.S. officials began questioning South Korea's nuclear weapons program. The outgoing U.S. Ambassador to Seoul, Philip Habib, reported that South Korea was attempting to become independent from the U.S. in the defense field, so he expressed "visceral feelings" that South Korean defense planners had a "desire to obtain capability eventually to produce nuclear weapons."[5] Finally, in November 1974, U.S. officials at the Office of Intelligence and Research concluded that South Korea had ambitions to develop nuclear weapons based on information that President Park privately told South Korean journalists the previous August.[6] The intelligence report also pointed out that South Korea was negotiating with a French farm for the purchase of the reprocessing facility. In addition, it warned that South Korea's move to develop the nuclear capability could have a volatile effect on the regional stability and the U.S. nonproliferation strategy. The suggestion was that "the cooperation among key nuclear suppliers," particularly France, would be important in inhibiting South Korea.

In March 1975, the NSC started to study the impact of the South Korean program on regional security relationships.[7] According to the NSC memorandum, it would take ten years for South Korea to produce nuclear weapons, but the South Korean program would have a significant impact on North Korea, Soviet Union, China, and Japan. South Korea's possession of nuclear weapons could lead to "the Soviet or Chinese assurances of nuclear support to North Korea in the event of conflicts" (Ibid.). According to the memorandum, the impact on U.S.-ROK relations would be complicated since the South Korean program was in part a reflection of its diminished confidence in the U.S. security commitment. Therefore, the NSC defined its primary policy objective as discouraging South Korea's effort to develop nuclear weapons.

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[5] U.S. Embassy in Republic of Korea telegram 4957 to Department of State, "Korean Accession to NPT," 30 July 1974; Record Group 59, Department of State Records (RG 59), Access to Archival Databases (AAD).

[6] Winston Lord, director, Policy Planning Staff, and Martin Packman, deputy director, Office of Intelligence and Research, "Second Alert Report," 20 November 1974, Secret, enclosing "Alert Report for the Secretary."; RG 59, Records of the Policy Planning Staff, Director's Files (Winston Lord), 1969-1977, box 348, November 1974.

[7] U.S. National Security Council Memorandum, "ROK Weapons Plans", March 3, 1975, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, Gerald R. Ford Presidential Library, National Security Adviser Presidential Country Files for East Asia and the Pacific, Box 9, Korea (4). Obtained by Charles Kraus.

This goal could be achieved in two ways. One way for the U.S. was to block South Korean access to sensitive nuclear technology and equipment through unilateral and multilateral action with nuclear supplier nations. Through cooperation with France and Canada in the Nuclear Suppliers groups, Washington sought to prevent Seoul from developing nuclear weapons. The second way was to press South Korea to ratify the NPT (Ibid.). However, as Se Young Jang argued, a consensus to ratify the NPT was reached within the ROK government by early March 1975. The short time between the introduction of the resolution to the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations on March 7 and the notification of ROK President Park's decision to ratify the NPT by the Korean Ministry of Foreign Affairs on March 8, suggest that the events were not directly related (Jang 2017). Therefore, the Korean National Assembly ratified the NPT in March 1975, but the South Korean government continued its military nuclear pursuits. In other words, it did not regard the NPT ratification as the end of the nuclear development program. Thus, the focal point of the problem was whether South Korea could obtain the weapons-grade plutonium produced from the nuclear reprocessing facility.

In early June 1975, Seoul announced negotiations with France to purchase a reprocessing facility (Tzeng 2013, 477). On June 26, in an interview with the Washington Post, President Park Chung-hee denied ordering South Korea's Defense Development Agency to study the development of nuclear weapons. However, at the same time, he said that South Korea would do everything to defend itself, including developing nuclear weapons, if the United States withdrew its nuclear umbrella (Oberdorfer 1975). Given that the U.S. intelligence report already pointed out the South Korean program, Park's remark was taken as extremely dangerous. The NSC officers assessed Park's statement that South Korea's policy toward developing nuclear weapons seemed clear.[8] They evaluated that South Korea's acquisition of nuclear weapons would damage U.S. interests.

After Park's interview, the South Korean attitude toward the option of nuclear development became well known both in Congress and in the international arms control community. Inevitably, it became difficult for the U.S. to continue its nuclear commerce with South Korea unless some specific protective measures were to be taken.[9] Therefore, the NSC, the Department of State, and the U.S. embassy in Seoul continued to improve the nonproliferation policy toward the South Korean nuclear weapons program.

In response to these circumstances, the U.S. government took a closer look at nonproliferation policies. Two options were reviewed in July and August 1975.[10] The first option was that the U.S. would continue to deter the ROK's acquisition of a reprocessing plant. The second option was that the U.S. would not continue to deter the ROK's acquisition of a reprocessing plant and would rely instead on the ROK's NPT obligations, IAEA safeguards, and Suppliers Conference controls to ensure that ROK would not develop nuclear weapons. In other words, the U.S. considered using export control policy to prevent the acquisition of plutonium itself or the use of the normative framework of nuclear nonproliferation to deter South Korea from developing nuclear weapons. Before taking any action, however, the U.S. needed to determine whether or not to halt the introduction of the facility from France or to monitor and control it through nonproliferation norms and international frameworks.

State Department officials assessed that although South Korea ratified NPT in May, undertakings such as

[8] John Marcum to Brent Scowcroft, 24 July 1975, enclosing Jan M. Lodal and David Elliott memorandum to Secretary Kissinger, "Approach to South Korea on Reprocessing," 24 July 1975; Excised copy, National Security Archive, Don Oberdorfer Papers, box 2, South Korean Nuclear Weapons Program, original at Gerald R. Ford Presidential Library.
[9] U.S. Department of State Memorandum, Approach to South Korea on Reprocessing, July 02, 1975, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, Gerald R. Ford Presidential Library, National Security Adviser Presidential Country Files for East Asia and the Pacific, Box 9, Korea (9). Obtained by Charles Kraus.
[10] John Marcum to Brent Scowcroft, "Approach to South Korea on Reprocessing."

safeguards in its facilities, nuclear explosive deployment prohibitions, and its assurances not to reprocess the spent nuclear fuel from Canadian or the U.S. reactors could be considered "paper assurances." In other words, if South Korea abrogated safeguards agreements in NPT and went ahead with the development of nuclear weapons, no safeguards and agreements would be able to contribute to nuclear nonproliferation.[11] Consequently, if South Korea were to introduce a reprocessing facility, its neighbors would infer that South Korea had acquired the capability to develop nuclear weapons. To put it differently, the U.S. government considered that having the nuclear reprocessing facility in South Korea would destabilize the region. Therefore, the U.S. government believed that using the normative approach and the international nonproliferation framework would not deter South Korea's attempt. Thus, it emphasized the necessity of preventing South Korea from acquiring the capability to develop nuclear weapons and to obtain plutonium. In other words, the U.S. chose the export control policy to prevent South Korea from gaining nuclear technology.

The NSC and the State Department sent three directives to the U.S. embassy in Seoul (Ibid.). First, the U.S. embassy was authorized to ask South Korea not to proceed with their planned purchase of the French nuclear reprocessing plant. Second, the embassy was authorized to point out that South Korean reprocessing would jeopardize the U.S.'s peaceful nuclear assistance to South Korea. Third, the U.S. officials offered nuclear cooperation with South Korea. The embassy in Seoul was also authorized to promise South Korea that it could participate in a future multinational reprocessing plant in East Asia.

6.2. The Stalled U.S.-South Korean Negotiations

The U.S.'s coercive strategy did not go well until October 1975. South Korea insisted that it could not cancel the contract with France, despite U.S. opposition to the reprocessing plant. South Korea did not want to abandon the reprocessing facility because it had joined the NPT, as the U.S. had demanded. If South Korea canceled the reprocessing facility, it would end its plan to build nuclear weapons.

In late August, the U.S. government formally began negotiations with South Korea to stop the introduction of reprocessing facilities from France. When Sneider, the U.S. ambassador in Seoul explained the U.S. objection to the South Korean plan to the Minister of Science and Technology Choe Hyung Sup on August 23, 1975, Choe was surprised by U.S. concerns.[12] Choe repeated South Korea's position that the French plant was being acquired only as a learning tool. In another discussion on August 26 with Sneider, KAERI officials expressed "some resentment" to the U.S. concern and defended South Korea's purchase of the French nuclear reprocessing facility.[13] They explained to Sneider that while small amounts of plutonium would be extracted from spent fuel, the laboratory was "the training facility, not a production or pilot plant" (Ibid.). KAERI officials reiterated that the plan's cancelation would cause serious loss of face for South Koreans.

A higher-level discussion followed the technical discussion. On August 27, 1975, U.S. Secretary of Defense James R. Schlesinger visited South Korea to meet President Park Chung-hee.[14] Schlesinger stated that "the only

[11] Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs Philip Habib, Assistant Secretary of State for Politico-Military Affairs George Vest, and Policy Planning Staff Director Winston Lord through the Deputy Secretary of State (Ingersoll) to the Secretary of State, "Approach to South Korean on Reprocessing," circa 4 August 1975; RG 59, Records of Policy Planning Staff, Directors Files 1969-1977 (Winston Lord), box 368, WL Sensitive Non-China '75.

[12] U.S. Embassy Seoul telegram 6495 to Department of State, "ROK Nuclear Fuel Reprocessing Plans," 23 August 1975; Digital National Security Archive.

[13] U.S. Embassy Seoul telegram 6608 to Department of State, "ROK Nuclear Fuel Reprocessing Plans," 26 August 1975; Digital National Security Archive.

[14] Memorandum of Conversations between James R. Schlesinger and Park Chung Hee and Suh Jyongchul, August 26, 1975, History

thing that could undermine the political relationship" between the U.S. and South Korea would be "the Korean effort to acquire its own nuclear weapons" (Ibid). President Park replied that South Korea had "every intention of living up to the NPT." He also emphasized that South Korea had no intention of developing nuclear weapons. Although Schlesinger confirmed that South Korea should comply with NPT obligations, Schlesinger did not directly request President Park to cancel the purchase of the French nuclear reprocessing facility.

South Korea opposed the U.S. demand to stop importing reprocessing technology from France. South Korean Acting Foreign Minister Lho Shing-yong maintained that the best possible solution would be for the U.S. government to accept the Korea-French deal and to inspect the reprocessing facility.[15] However, the U.S. government rejected this proposal. Even if South Korea announced its intention not to build nuclear weapons, the U.S. believed that South Korea's possession of the technology to produce plutonium itself would jeopardize the security environment in East Asia and U.S.-ROK relations.[16] In other words, whether the reprocessing facility was inspected or not, the U.S. considered it problematic.[17] Thus, the U.S. rejected South Korea's proposal and the negotiations were deadlocked.

Until the end of October 1975, South Korea repeated its demand to install a reprocessing facility. On October 23, Lho informed Ambassador Sneider that the ROK government had decided against canceling the French contract. Lho made it clear again that the reprocessing facility was only for nuclear power research and that South Korea was willing to accept the U.S. inspection. Sneider refuted the South Korean claim outright. He argued that the U.S. opposed South Korea's program on economic and technological grounds. He added that the benefits to South Korea were expected to be much less than the cost to the U.S.-South Korea relationship, not just in the nuclear field.

6.3. The Combination of the Export Control policy and the Legal/Normative policy

The U.S.-South Korean negotiations stalled until October 1975. The U.S. saw that there was no guarantee that South Korea would not develop nuclear weapons and having the nuclear capability would alarm its neighbors. In other words, a verbal promise not to develop nuclear weapons was not binding. As a result, the U.S. chose the export control policy.

In response to the South Korean argument to continue building the nuclear reprocessing facility, the U.S. government reframed its strategy. The State Department chose to strengthen U.S. opposition to the French plant. This decision rested on the U.S. intelligence assessment that there was no indication that the ROK government had modified its secret program to seek a nuclear weapons capability at President Park's directive. In this context, the U.S. officials assessed that South Korean's reason for acquiring a pilot reprocessing facility was to develop nuclear weapons.[18]

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and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, Gerald R. Ford Presidential Library, National Security Adviser Presidential Country FIles for East Asia and the Pacific, Box 9, Korea (11). Obtained by Charles Kraus.

[15] State Department telegram 213134 to U.S. Embassy London, 8 September 1975, Secret, forwarding U.S. Embassy Seoul telegram 6989 to Department of State, "Nuclear Reprocessing Plant," 8 September 1975; Excised copy, RG 59, AAD, MDR release by NARA.

[16] U.S. Embassy Seoul telegram 74642 to Department of State, "ROK Nuclear Fuel Reprocessing Plant," 30 September 1975; RG 59, AAD.

[17] State Department telegram 238186 to U.S. Embassy Seoul, "Washington Visit of MOST Atomic Energy Bureau," 6 October 1975; RG 59, AAD

[18] Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs Philip Habib and Policy Planning Staff director Winston Lord through the Deputy Secretary of State (Ingersoll) to the Secretary of State, "Korean Reprocessing – the Next Step," with attached study, "Korean Reprocessing: Issues and Options," 18 November 1975 ; RG 59, Records of Policy Planning Staff, Directors Files 1969-1977 (Winston Lord), box 369, Nov 16-30, 1975.

The U.S. turned to Canada and France, which were seeking nuclear energy cooperation with South Korea. Canada planned to export nuclear reactors to South Korea and France hoped to supply reprocessing facilities. Washington informed Ottawa and Paris of Seoul's nuclear weapons program and its concerns about nuclear proliferation. Shortly thereafter, Canada informed the U.S. that it had postponed the signing of the contract with South Korea.[19]

On December 7, Kissinger met with the Canadian Minister of External Affairs MacEachen. MacEachen said that American intelligence had convinced the Canadian government to postpone signing the contract with South Korea. MacEachen also stated that "we understand that you will cease your nuclear cooperation with Korea if they go on with the French." Thus, the U.S. and Canadian top officials concurred on the South Korean issue.[20]

Although the U.S. government also informed the French government of South Korea's nuclear weapons development plans, it did not ask France to break its contract with South Korea. It suggested that the sale would increase the risk of nuclear proliferation and made it clear that the U.S. intended to prevent South Korea from having a nuclear capability. France continued its contract negotiations with South Korea, but expressed its understanding of the U.S. nuclear nonproliferation policy and stated that it would not interfere with the U.S. policy toward South Korea.[21] The U.S. created a situation in which South Korea would have no choice but to give up the acquisition of plutonium by approaching Canada and France. After laying the groundwork for diplomatic negotiations, the U.S. began to take the export control and legal/normative policy to force South Korea to relinquish its nuclear weapons program.

Consequently, a high-level meeting between the U.S. and ROK was held on December 9, 1975. Ambassador Sneider met Prime Minister Kim Jong-pil, the second-highest government official. At the meeting, Snyder informed Kim of the U.S. opposition to the introduction of reprocessing facilities. Sneider made three points: (1) the U.S. could withdraw the Export-Import loan for the KORI-2 reactor; (2) the U.S. would not allow ROK to reprocess the U.S.-derived nuclear fuel; and (3) the purchase of the reprocessing facility from France would affect the U.S. nuclear cooperation with South Korea.[22] Kim argued that South Korea had neither the money nor the intention to develop nuclear weapons and did not promise to abandon the reprocessing facility.

However, in subsequent meetings among the engineers, the South Koreans expressed interest in technical cooperation from the U.S. The State Department and the U.S. ambassador to South Korea assessed that South Korea indicated that it would reconsider its plans to introduce reprocessing facilities.[23] Therefore, Sneider asked the State Department to give him with instructions to make more positive proposals to South Korea without alienating Park.[24]

After Sneider met with Presidential Secretary at Park's request on December 26, Park indicated that South Korea would shelve its plan to introduce a reprocessing plant until the U.S. and South Korea reached an agreement. Furthermore, Park postponed the signing of the contract with France for six months to give the U.S. and South

[19] U.S. Embassy Seoul telegram 9487 to Department of State, "ROK Nuclear Reprocessing," 10 December 1975; RG 59, Nodis Telegrams, box 6.
[20] Memorandum of conversation, 17 December 1975, 10:45 a.m., Hotel Raphael, Paris; RG 59, Records of the Counselor, 1955-1977, box 3, HS-Official Oct.-Dec. 1975, also available on Digital National Security Archive.
[21] State Department telegram 288551 to U.S. Delegation, "ROK Nuclear Reprocessing Plant Negotiation," 6 December 1975; State Department MDR release from P-reels.
[22] State Department telegram 289656 to U.S. Embassy Tokyo et al., forwarding U.S. Embassy Seoul telegram 9440, "ROK Nuclear Reprocessing," 9 December 1975; RG 59, AAD, MDR release by NARA.
[23] State Department telegram 299089 to U.S. Embassy Paris, "ROK Nuclear Reprocessing Plans," 19 December 1975; RG 59, AAD.
[24] U.S. Embassy Seoul telegram 9813 to Department of State, "ROK Nuclear Reprocessing," 22 December 1975; RG 59, AAD.

Korea time to resume discussions on nuclear cooperation.[25] This was when South Korea broached the topic of reintroducing reprocessing facilities, indicating that it would prioritize its relationship with the U.S. over the acquisition of plutonium.

The State Department considered the South Korean position encouraging and even recognized that the ROK government had probably decided it would be difficult to proceed with the reprocessing facility. Therefore, the State Department instructed the embassy in Seoul to notify the South Korean government that the U.S. would welcome South Korea's reconsideration of its deal with France; that it appreciated South Korea's understanding of the gravity of America's concerns and their impact on the U.S.-ROK relationship; and be prepared to discuss cooperation in the nuclear field if South Korea were to abandon the introduction of reprocessing facilities.[26]

As a result, discussions on U.S.-ROK cooperation in the field of non-sensitive nuclear energy began immediately. On January 22 and 23, a bilateral group of experts in the nuclear energy field discussed the possibility of technical cooperation. The U.S. team stressed that bilateral cooperation would have to follow the ROK decision to cancel the French reprocessing contract. At the same time, it outlined possible areas of U.S. cooperation in the nuclear energy field. Furthermore, it reiterated the advantages of bilateral cooperation by stating that the cancellation of the contract with the French would open the way for more cooperative relationships.[27] Therefore, the U.S. and South Korea confirmed the cooperative relationship in the nuclear energy field from 1956 and agreed that the relationship had contributed to the development of nuclear power and the peaceful use of nuclear energy. The South Korean delegation then promised to reconsider whether to proceed with the plan to introduce reprocessing facilities from France, and the final decision would be based on negotiations between the U.S. and South Korea. The U.S. representative welcomed South Korea's statement and conveyed that cooperation between the U.S. and South Korea in nuclear power would be strengthened if it were canceled.

Then, the U.S. side suggested some areas of possible cooperation while reminding South Korea that cancellation was a condition. The areas of the potential cooperation were: (1) improved communication and coordination of the U.S.-ROK peaceful nuclear cooperation; (2) cooperation in nuclear reactor design, construction, operation, and maintenance; (3) the sister laboratory relationship; (4) the fabrication of nuclear fuel; (5) reprocessing services; (6) the reactor safety and regulatory cooperation; (7) the general agreement for science and technology cooperation; and (8) a timetable for future meetings. Thus, the bilateral negotiations resulted in the confirmation of areas of cooperation in the nuclear energy field and the guarantee by South Korea to reconsider its contract with France based on the outcome of these negotiations.[28] Article IV-2 of the NPT calls for the states to cooperate in the promotion of the peaceful use of nuclear energy. Therefore, the U.S. commitment to South Korea to expand cooperation in the field of nuclear energy was in line with the NPT objective of peaceful use.

According to the Canadian government, the South Korean government decided to shelve the planned reprocessing facility until the U.S.-South Korea negotiations were concluded. Therefore, on January 26, 1976, the governments of Canada and South Korea signed an agreement on the peaceful use of nuclear technology, including the sale of nuclear reactors. The contract stipulated that Canada would not provide nuclear materials that could be used for

[25] State Department telegram 302043 to U.S. Embassy Seoul, "ROK Nuclear Reprocessing," 24 December 1975; Digital National Security Archive.; U.S. Embassy Seoul telegram 9928 to Department of State, "ROK Nuclear Reprocessing," 26 December 1975; RG 59, AAD.
[26] U.S. Embassy Seoul telegram 9961 to Department of State, "ROK Nuclear Reprocessing," 29 December 1975; RG 59, AAD.
[27] U.S. Embassy Seoul telegram 0516 to Department of State, "ROK Nuclear Reprocessing," 22 January 1976; RG 59, AAD.
[28] U.S. Embassy Seoul telegram 0545 to Department of State, "ROK Nuclear Reprocessing," 23 January 1976; Digital National Security Archive.

military purposes.[29]

On 29 January, the ROK government finally canceled its purchase of the nuclear reprocessing plant from France. Park halted its nuclear weapons development program around the end of that year.[30] On January 29, 1977, President Park announced at an annual inspection of the Defense Ministry that South Korea would not go nuclear.[31] As a result, the U.S. forced South Korea to abandon the acquisition of plutonium using the French reprocessing facility. In this way, South Korea's nuclear weapons development program came to an end.

This section has explained how Washington compelled Seoul to give up its nuclear weapons. U.S. documents reveal that U.S. security cooperation was not discussed as an exchange for South Korea abandoning its nuclear weapons program, as Choi (2014), Lanoszka (2018), and Bleek and Lorber (2014) have argued. Rather, the U.S. pressured Canada and France to prevent South Korea from introducing nuclear reprocessing facilities. In the final phase of negotiations, the U.S. urged South Korea to abandon its nuclear weapons development by promising technical cooperation in the nuclear field. Thus, U.S. multilateral cooperative policy and its promise of technical cooperation in the nuclear field led to South Korea's abandonment of nuclear weapons development.

7. Conclusion

The U.S. government, while coordinating its policies with Canada and France, prevented South Korea's nuclear weapons development program through the export control policy with promises of technical cooperation in the nuclear field. It stopped South Korea from developing nuclear weapons by limiting its capability to develop nuclear weapons. The U.S. formulated a policy that focused on South Korea's nuclear capability and prevented obtaining plutonium rather than influencing South Korea's desire to develop nuclear weapons. If South Korea did not have nuclear technology, building nuclear weapons would be impossible.

This study has provided an essential perspective on effective and efficient policies for nuclear nonproliferation. There are limits to assurance strategies that attempt to deter countries from developing nuclear weapons. Indeed, it is possible to reduce the threat perception and create a security environment that does not require the development of nuclear weapons by enhancing military deployment in allied countries and training local forces. However, just as conservative politicians in South Korea have recently mentioned the need to develop nuclear weapons, there will remain a fear that U.S. might not protect them from an attack by North Korea. The desire to shore up national security through the development of nuclear weapons and to strengthen military independence may remain with the allies forever, even if it is a minority opinion. It is difficult for the U.S. to reassure its nervous allies. In South Korea, the U.S. did indeed pursue a coercive policy through export controls, but it also followed international norms of cooperation in the nuclear field. Therefore, the combination of these two policies prevented South Korea from developing nuclear weapons.

When Jimmy Carter became president after Gerald Ford, the proposal to withdraw U.S. forces from South Korea was brought up by Carter. Until more documents are declassified, it will be impossible to clarify the details of

[29] U.S. Embassy Seoul telegram 0552 to Department of State, "ROK Nuclear Reprocessing; Canadian Reactor Sale," 25 January 1976; RG 59, AAD 1976.
[30] U.S. Embassy Paris telegram 20831 to Department of State, "Korean Reprocessing," 16 July 1976; FOIA release by Department of State.
[31] "South Korea Nuclear Chronology," Nuclear Threat Initiative, last updated September 2004, https://www.nti.org/media/pdfs/south_korea_nuclear.pdf?_=1316466791 (accessed 25 November, 2022)

whether South Korea has again launched a nuclear weapons development program out of fear of being abandoned by the U.S. It is worth noting, though, that the Foreign Minister of South Korea made the following statement in June 1977. "We have signed the Non-Proliferation Treaty and thus our basic position is that we do not intend to develop nuclear weapons by ourselves. But if it is necessary for national security interests and people's safety, it is possible for Korea as a sovereign state to make its own judgment on the matter" (Ha 1978: 1142). This statement may sound like a renewed suggestion that South Korea may be developing nuclear weapons. However, as Hong argued, the conditions of South Korea's nuclear energy development had changed since 1972, when Park first made his nuclear development plans. By 1977, South Korea was a signatory to the NPT and subject to IAEA inspections. In addition, the U.S. was strengthening its surveillance of South Korea, "thorough the U.S. provision of nuclear training, technology, and facilities for the peaceful use of atomic energy" (Hong 2011: 508). Thus, the combination of coercive and legal/normative policies by the U.S. not only stopped South Korea from developing nuclear weapons, but also made it more difficult for South Korea to build them in the future.

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