



■■■ HEINRICH BÖLL STIFTUNG
SEOUL
East Asia | Global Dialogue

Regional Views of South Korean Nuclear Debates

Perspectives from Indonesia, Japan, the Philippines,
and Mongolia

DECEMBER 2024



This volume was supported through a grant from the Heinrich Böll Stiftung East Asia Office in Seoul.

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Front page: A picture of downtown Seoul (iStock)

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Acknowledgements

The essays in this volume examine potential regional responses to South Korea's nuclear armament, focusing on partners and friends, rather than allies and adversaries. Each essay addresses the question of how South Korean nuclear armament would be perceived, and how each country might respond.

The essays were drafted and discussed at a seminar held in October 2024, organised by the Asia-Pacific Leadership Network (APLN) and hosted and supported by the East Asia Office of the Heinrich Böll Stiftung (HBS). APLN wishes to express its gratitude to all experts who took part in that seminar, to HBS for its support, and to the authors for taking on this hypothetical yet important emerging security issue in the Asia-Pacific.

APLN also wishes to express particular gratitude to Alexander Hynd, who shared an early draft of his paper for the *Journal of Asian Security and International Affairs*.¹ That paper is the first study to address South Korean proliferation from a broader regional perspective, and provided the inspiration for this project.

Joel Petersson Ivre, Editor

¹ Alexander M. Hynd, 'Dirty, Dangerous... and Difficult? Regional Perspectives on a Nuclear South Korea', *Journal of Asian Security and International Affairs*, (6 December 2024): 1-27, <https://doi.org/10.1177/23477970241298756>.

**REGIONAL VIEWS OF SOUTH KOREAN NUCLEAR DEBATES
PERSPECTIVES FROM INDONESIA, JAPAN, THE PHILIPPINES
AND, MONGOLIA**

December 2024

Asia-Pacific Leadership Network

Chapter 1

DRIVERS AND CONSTRAINTS OF NUCLEAR PROLIFERATION REGIONAL RESPONSES TO SOUTH KOREAN NUCLEAR ARMAMENT

Jun Bong-geun & Joel Petersson-Ivre

A state's acquisition of nuclear weapons is generally assumed to be driven most saliently by security considerations.¹ South Korea, a latent nuclear power, appears to be the most obvious example. North Korea's rapidly expanding nuclear and missile capabilities, combined with its extremely aggressive nuclear strike doctrines, are seen by South Koreans as an existential security threat.² Public opinion surveys conducted over the past few years consistently record around 70% support for nuclear armament.³

Undeniably, North Korea's nuclear program is a strong driver of this increasingly vocal support for nuclear weapons. Proponents of nuclear armament in South Korea argue that nuclear weapons are essential to counter North Korea's nuclear threat, which poses an existential security risk, and that the US nuclear umbrella cannot be trusted for protection indefinitely. Conversely, South Korean opponents of nuclear weapons contend that the US nuclear umbrella has effectively protected its allies since the Cold War, and there is no reason to doubt the reliability of both its security assurance and nuclear umbrella now. The US-South Korea alliance, along with close scientific, technological, and trade cooperation, are tangible evidence of the US commitment to South Korea's security. Furthermore, the United States has strategic reasons to maintain its alliance with South Korea and protect it, due to South Korea's strategic position in containing China.

Security concerns like the need to deter North Korea act as a *driver* of proliferation, while the protection offered by the US nuclear umbrella serves as a *constraint* on proliferation. However, there are other drivers and constraints influencing the South Korean population's desire for nuclear weapons. One important constraint is the negative economic impact of proliferation, and one potential driver is the association between nuclear weapons and international prestige.

These two factors are evident in survey results. When asked if they would support nuclear armament despite economic sanctions from the international community, 63.6% still

¹ Scott Sagan, "Why Do States Build Nuclear Weapons? Three Models in Search of a Bomb," *International Security* Vol. 21, No. 3 (Winter, 1996-1997): 54-86, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/i323316>.

² KNCA, "Law on DPRK's Policy on Nuclear Forces Promulgated", November 11, 2022, <https://kcnawatch.xyz/newstream/1662687258-950776986/law-on-dprks-policy-on-nuclear-forces-promulgated/>; (Republic of Korea Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "Understanding the North Korean Nuclear Issue," https://www.mofa.go.kr/eng/wpge/m_5474/contents.do).

³ A survey by the Asan Institute for Policy Studies in May 2022, which tracked public opinion over an extended period, showed that 70.2% of respondents supported nuclear armament. A 2024 poll from the Korea Institute of National Unification found that support had decreased somewhat from its peak in 2021, but remained high, at 66%.

expressed support, indicating strong public backing for such a move, yet such results appear somewhat sensitive to survey design. Public opinion analysis by Sangshin Lee from the Korea Institute for National Unification (2023) found that when respondents were informed about the potential negative side effects of nuclear armament (e.g., economic sanctions, damage to the South Korea-US alliance), support fell to 35%.

International prestige also appears to play a role. A poll by the Chicago Council in 2022 found that support for nuclear weapons was strong, regardless of whether respondents believed South Korea was stronger militarily than North Korea or not.⁴ The poll also found relatively high confidence in the American security commitment to South Korea.⁵ South Koreans seem to place equal importance on “recovering nuclear sovereignty” and enhancing their international standing, underscoring prestige-related motivations. In the Asan poll, 33.7% of respondents stated that their support for South Korean nuclear armament was “to acquire nuclear sovereignty as a sovereign state,” and 33.4% chose “to enhance South Korea’s influence in the region as a nuclear-armed Great Power.” The Chicago Council poll from 2022, found that “[a]mong the 67 percent who favour a South Korean domestic nuclear weapons program over US deployment or no weapons, prestige was the second most important rationale (26%).”

These results suggest several assumptions on what South Korea would gain, or lose in terms of economic impact and international prestige.

Assumptions of economic impact

Opponents argue that developing nuclear weapons would not only strain South Korea’s relationship with the United States, undermining the United States nuclear umbrella and threatening the alliance, but the United States, Japan, the European Union, and China would also use every available means – legal and economic – to prevent South Korea from going nuclear. This backlash would have serious repercussions for South Korea’s economy, badly damaging its high-tech industries and global competitiveness. Opponents of nuclear armament also point out that nuclear armament is costly and dangerous. Developing and maintaining nuclear weapons would require significant financial resources, leading to opportunity costs for other sectors of the economy.

If South Korea decides to withdraw from the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and launch a nuclear weapons program, it would face international political and economic sanctions immediately and be expelled from export control regimes. This period, sometimes termed the “valley of nuclear development stage,” would present significant challenges for South

⁴ Toby Dalton, Karl Friedhoff, and Lami Kim, ‘Thinking Nuclear: South Korean Attitudes on Nuclear Weapons’ (Chicago Council on Global Affairs, February 2022), 11.

⁵ A too credible commitment of US extended deterrence could also be a driver of support for independent nuclear armament, see Lauren Sukin, ‘Credible Nuclear Security Commitments Can Backfire: Explaining Domestic Support for Nuclear Weapons Acquisition in South Korea’, *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 64, no. 6 (1 July 2020): 1011–42, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022002719888689>.

Korea as a trading and allied nation. South Korea is highly dependent on external trade for its economic survival, and relies heavily on the ROK-US alliance for its security.

South Korea's expulsion from the international nuclear market would be almost guaranteed. Leaving the NPT would isolate South Korea from the global nuclear market, making it impossible to export nuclear technology, engage in international nuclear energy cooperation, or import nuclear fuel. Since nuclear power generation provides about 30% of South Korea's electricity, disruptions in nuclear fuel supply would severely threaten the country's energy security. This, in turn, would jeopardise its energy-intensive export of semiconductors, steel, cars, and ships. Expulsion from the nuclear market, particularly at a time when carbon neutrality and energy security are crucial global priorities, would have significant negative impacts on South Korea's economic and energy sectors.

Assumptions about prestige

Whether prestige is a driver or a constraint is a matter of debate. According to proponents, acquiring nuclear weapons would transform South Korea's international standing, enhance its ability to negotiate with North Korea on equal terms, and provide leverage against the United States and China to take stronger action against North Korea.

Opponents argue that nuclear armament would instead lead to strong international backlash, tarnishing South Korea's reputation as a responsible and model member of the international community. South Korea would risk being compared to rogue or problematic states such as North Korea, Iran, or apartheid-era South Africa, especially as South Korea's pursuit of nuclear weapons would violate its non-proliferation commitments and norms. Although Article 10 of the NPT allows for withdrawal under certain circumstances, this clause has become largely obsolete since the NPT's indefinite extension in 1995 and near-universal adoption. Any attempt to invoke it could label South Korea as a rogue state.

South Korea cares deeply about its international image and prestige, and South Koreans take great pride in their nation's status as a "middle power." President Yoon Seok-yeol has sought to promote South Korea as a "global pivotal state." In an essay for *Foreign Affairs*, he argued: "South Korea should no longer be confined to the Korean Peninsula but rise to the challenge of being what I have described as a 'global pivotal state,' one that advances freedom, peace, and prosperity through liberal democratic values and substantial cooperation."⁶ The roots of this concept trace back several decades and are closely tied to South Korea's journey from one of the world's poorest countries to one of the richest. This journey is a source of immense national pride in South Korea, where

⁶ Seok-yeol Yoon, 'South Korea Needs to Step Up', *Foreign Affairs*, 6 April 2022, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/south-korea/2022-02-08/south-korea-needs-step>; the view that South Korea should take a central role in regional affairs is bipartisan, see: Joon Hyung Kim, 'South Korea's Strategic Autonomy: Maintaining Regional Stability Amid US-China Competition' (Asia-Pacific Leadership Network, May 2024), https://cms.apln.network/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/Joon-Hyung-Kim_27-May.pdf.

politicians use it to promote economic and cultural exports. Nuclear armament, opponents argue, would tarnish not only the South Korean economy, but the positive image that South Korea has built up, possibly setting it back by decades.

These arguments – common enough in the South Korean nuclear debate – make assumptions about the international community’s views and responses to South Korean nuclear armament. However, such responses remain understudied. For that reason, this volume investigates how South Korean nuclear armament might be viewed in the region, thereby allowing these assumptions to be scrutinised more closely.

A study on regional responses to South Korean nuclear armament

Understandably, much academic and policy work has focused on the security drivers behind South Korean support for nuclear weapons. This study explores prestige and economy-related impacts of South Korea’s nuclearisation. A study of this kind is necessary because Korean public opinion in favour of nuclear weapons seems to be partly driven by prestige-related factors and constrained by potential economic costs. Yet, despite these two factors being well-established in opinion polls and policy writings over the last decade, few studies have sought to explore either question in more detail. More specifically, how would other states view South Korea going nuclear, and how would they react? Is there any way for other states to influence South Korea to prevent it from going nuclear?

The essays in this study provide tentative answers from four regional states – the Philippines, Indonesia, Mongolia, and Japan – highlighting the ways that South Korea’s nuclear proliferation could impact its international prestige and economy.⁷

The study purposefully focuses on four countries with which South Korea has good or relatively friendly ties, but no alliance relationships. It excludes the United States, whose policy on “allied proliferation” has become a hotly debated topic in Washington, where Jennifer Lind and Daryl Press, among others, have argued that the US decades-long policy of extending nuclear deterrence to prevent its allies from acquiring their own nuclear weapons may have outlived its usefulness.

It also excludes China, whose response to South Korean nuclear proliferation also remains understudied, but is likely influenced by China’s strategic competition with the United States. In one of the few existing studies, Tong Zhao and Jungmin Kang have argued that China’s response would depend on whether or not South Korea went nuclear with US approval. If Washington responded with harsh punishments, Zhao and Kang argue that “Beijing might have an incentive to apply less severe pressure than Washington on Seoul in order to move South Korea closer to Beijing.” However, if Washington sought

⁷ The essays were discussed at a workshop held in Seoul in October 2024.

to accommodate Seoul, “China would probably impose comprehensive economic sanctions on South Korea.”⁸

In our view, with the possible exception of Japan, the “friendly” states – important partners of South Korea in many international and commercial endeavors – present a vastly different dynamic that deserves the attention of policymakers. Southeast Asian countries for example, have received little attention, despite their growing importance and geopolitical adjacency to Northeast Asia, and their normative and legal commitments to nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament. To our knowledge, the essay by Karla Mae Pabeliña in this study is the first analysis that assesses the potential response of the Philippines to South Korean proliferation, while Elaine Natalie and Andhika Prawira’s essay adds to a small body of work addressing Indonesia’s response.⁹ Likewise, the essay by Jargalsaikhan Enkhsaikhan is the first to situate the South Korean nuclear debate in the context of Mongolia’s small but normatively influential position in the region, as the only one-country nuclear weapons-free zone. Finally, Akira Kawasaki and Keiko Nakamura’s study on Japan challenges the assumption that Japan is a “nuclear domino,” and focuses instead on Japan and South Korea’s shared legacy of nuclear victimhood and how to build a cross-national movement of nuclear disarmament education.

The responses of South Korea’s regional partners offer a more rigorous test in the context of international normative, legal, and commercial frameworks. When push comes to shove, how far will these states go to contain South Korean proliferation? How do they reconcile their normative and legal positions, such as membership in the Treaty on the Prohibition on Nuclear Weapons, with their economic development imperatives?

Overview of findings

The findings of this study are not straightforward. Overall, the essays find that South Korea’s nuclear proliferation would be negatively received by policy elites and governments in the Asia-Pacific region. However, these governments are likely to be either unwilling or incapable of subjecting South Korea to bilateral economic sanctions, outside of any sanctions regime imposed by the UN Security Council, which they would implement. With the caveat that China’s response has not been assessed here, this finding challenges the common assumption that South Korea will have to ride out sanctions in the short term, but will be able to adapt in the long term. The findings in this volume suggest the opposite: in the short term, South Korea’s economic integration into the regional economy might even bolster its ability to avoid sanctions; the goodwill that South

⁸ Tong Zhao and Jungmin Kang, ‘China’s Role in Shaping South Korea’s Nuclear Choice’, *Global Asia* 18, no. 1 (March 2023), https://www.globalasia.org/v18no1/cover/chinas-role-in-shaping-south-koreas-nuclear-choice_tong-zhaojungmin-kang.

⁹ Lauren Sukin and Woohyeok Seo, ‘East Asia’s Alliance Dilemma: Public Perceptions of the Competing Risks of Extended Nuclear Deterrence’, *Journal for Peace and Nuclear Disarmament* 7, no. 1 (2 January 2024): 91–114, <https://doi.org/10.1080/25751654.2024.2358596>; Alexander M. Hynd, ‘Dirty, Dangerous... and Difficult? Regional Perspectives on a Nuclear South Korea’, *Journal of Asian Security and International Affairs*, (6 December 2024): 1-27, <https://doi.org/10.1177/23477970241298756>.

Korea has accumulated through its soft power might also lessen the blow of any reputational damage in the region. Even more concerning is the possibility that a state like South Korea acquiring nuclear weapons could legitimise their acquisition in the eyes of Southeast Asian publics, to a degree that a bona fide pariah state like North Korea does not. This tentative finding indicates that the risk of a nuclear domino effect reaching further south than Taiwan should not be excluded.

However, the South Korean economy faces immense headwinds in the coming decades, as its population decreases at the fastest pace in the world. Meanwhile, Indonesia is projected to rise to become the world's fourth largest economy, and the Philippines is projected to be one of the world's fastest growing markets through 2050.¹⁰ Both countries will grow at a higher pace than South Korea for the foreseeable future. Any leverage that South Korea may gain from its integration into the world economy is likely to decrease over time, and that is before taking into account the potential response of China.

One sector of the South Korean economy that would be impacted in both the short and the long term by nuclear proliferation is the nuclear power and export industry – a key part of the Yoon administration's global pivotal state strategy. Even if sanctions were limited in scope and duration, South Korean proliferation would likely lead to uncertainty among international customers who require long-term stability for the kind of capital-intensive projects that nuclear reactor exports entail, and even less demanding projects like feasibility studies would likely suffer too. This would be the case for energy cooperation with both Indonesia and the Philippines. The negative impact of the former Moon administration's decision to phase out nuclear power on South Korean reactor exports is indicative in this regard.¹¹ The impact on the nuclear energy industry in South Korea would be similarly negative. The ability of nuclear power to support South Korean heavy industries would also decrease over time. South Korea's ability to switch over to fossil fuels, mostly imported from Russia and the Middle East, would be heavily curtailed. Russia would be sure to sanction South Korea to support its new North Korean ally. Oil shipments would likely be shipped through Southeast Asia, where they would fall under Southeast Asian nations' UNSC sanctions enforcement, which this study does find support for.

Japan has a potentially unique role to play in preventing South Korean nuclear armament. The two countries have a shared history of nuclear victimhood: 30,000 Koreans were killed in the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. However, the two countries' understanding of this shared history differ. For many decades, Japanese civil society has

¹⁰ 'Indonesia Will Become the 4th Largest Economy in the World by 2030', Wellington Capital Advisory, 26 January 2021, <https://www.wca.co.id/post/indonesia-will-become-the-4th-largest-economy-in-the-world-by-2030>; Marcus Lu, 'Visualizing the Future Global Economy by GDP in 2050', Visual Capitalist, 22 August 2023, <https://www.visualcapitalist.com/visualizing-the-future-global-economy-by-gdp-in-2050/>.

¹¹ Viet Phuong Nguyen, 'Lights Out for South Korea's Nuclear Export Ambitions', *The Diplomat*, 17 August 2017, <https://thediplomat.com/2017/08/lights-out-for-south-koreas-nuclear-export-ambitions/>.

cultivated a vibrant community of anti-nuclear activists; in South Korea, the stories of Korean atomic bomb survivors are not well-known, and the atomic bombings are at times even seen as tools of liberation from Japanese colonial rule. As Akira Kawasaki and Keiko Nakamura argue, the nuclear victimhood framing in Japan has not been conducive to self-reflection on the Japanese colonial and war-time legacy. Earnest reconciliation over historical issues between South Korea and Japan could open up space and opportunity to build a shared understanding of the humanitarian consequences of nuclear use, and help strengthen the nuclear taboo both in South Korea and Japan.

Finally, the findings of this study clearly reject the assumption that South Korea's international prestige would be enhanced by nuclear acquisition. Both Mongolia and Indonesia would view South Korean nuclear weapons in the same light as North Korean weapons and might even regard Seoul as a rogue state. Moreover, Kawasaki and Nakamura argue that the Japanese people will be "dismayed" by South Korea's decision to acquire nuclear weapons, rather than emboldened to pursue weapons of their own. Even the Philippines – the most ambivalent country assessed in this study – would view the action as "heralding the breakdown of the NPT," rather than a complement to South Korea's international status. While the prestige argument is generally used to argue that nuclear weapons would put South Korea on equal footing with North Korea, it is clear that any perceived status enhancement would come at a huge reputational cost. Nuclear weapons will thus have a net negative effect on South Korea's international prestige.

Recommendations

To prevent South Korea from going nuclear, regional states must work to strengthen the non-proliferation regime, increase their awareness of the drivers and constraints of nuclear proliferation, and support inter-Korean reconciliation and dialogue to address Seoul's security concerns.

Ensure a successful NPT RevCon in 2026: The most urgent priority is for all states to work toward a successful conclusion of the NPT Review Conference in 2026. Without an effective NPT regime, there will be no international legal basis on which to impose sanctions on South Korea through the UN Security Council, which will be the key international mechanism through which South Korea can be swayed from the path of nuclear proliferation. Moreover, the risk of a "nuclear domino" effect throughout both Northeast and Southeast Asia will increase significantly in the absence of the non-proliferation regime.

Increase awareness in the region: At the same time, a nuclear domino effect should not be considered a foregone conclusion; regional leaders should seek to strengthen nuclear disarmament education among regional populations to strengthen public resistance against calls for nuclear armament. Experts and civil society activists must also work to increase awareness in regional capitals about how the unresolved situation on the Korean Peninsula is creating the risk of a new and dangerous nuclear arms race. Decisionmakers

need to understand how a Korean nuclear standoff would affect their own national interests and identify tools to convince South Korea that nuclear armament is not in its best interests either. Quiet diplomacy and leader-level statements on the importance of upholding the international non-proliferation regime would show regional leadership. The new Prabowo government in Indonesia, the latest country to join the TPNW, has a particularly important role to play in regional non-proliferation leadership.

Regional dialogue and partnerships with South Korea: Other US allies in the region should seek to enhance their strategic partnerships with South Korea. Ongoing efforts, especially in Japan, to shoulder a larger defence burden could also be helpful in ensuring that increasingly scarce US strategic resources can be focused on maintaining requisite security assurances to South Korea, reducing proliferation pressures in Seoul. In the long term, bringing the Korean Peninsula back on the agenda of regional dialogue mechanisms, such as the ASEAN Regional Forum or the Ulaanbaatar Process, could help facilitate inclusive dialogue, including inter-Korean dialogue, and help reverse the increasing salience of nuclear weapons in Northeast Asian national security policies.

Moving the debate forward

The essays in this brief volume represent an initial exploration of the potential economic and reputational consequences of South Korea's potential nuclear choice. More detailed studies that model economic impact and systematically investigate public opinion in regional states could provide more perspectives to validate these findings, and more data for implementing the recommendations. The responses of China and European countries should also be considered. As the South Korean nuclear debate rages on, it behoves all sides to inform themselves of the complex dynamics that nuclear proliferation introduces in the Asia-Pacific and beyond.

Chapter 2

CRITICISE, COMPARTMENTALISE: THE PHILIPPINES' RESPONSE TO A NUCLEAR SOUTH KOREA

Karla Mae G. Pabeliña

If South Korea decides to acquire nuclear weapons, the response of the Philippines may depend on the circumstances and context of the situation. It will depend on the credibility of allegations of non-compliance and the gravity of South Korea's actions, including whether deception was used to conceal or fabricate information. Key questions that would need to be answered include: did South Korea formally announce its intention to withdraw from the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT)? Did the South Korean National Safety and Security Commission (NSSC) refuse to allow access to International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) inspectors at any of its nuclear facilities or other suspected locations? Were there any indications that South Korea is violating its Safeguards Agreement and Additional Protocol? Is the IAEA unable to determine whether South Korea's nuclear materials remain under peaceful uses, or did diversion already occur? Were pathways towards weaponisation actively explored in its nuclear institutes and defence establishments for years? Is there any evidence that South Korea actually did detonate nuclear test devices?

Breaches of non-proliferation-related obligations are not rare. Many of these transgressions include minor or technical violations, due to the difficulties in the implementation of the treaty's provisions or failure in reporting.¹ In 2004, as part of its initial declarations under the Additional Protocols, South Korea reported that scientists at the Korea Atomic Energy Research Institute (KAERI) conducted experiments on the enrichment of nuclear material in the course of atomic vapour laser isotope separation (AVLIS). These experiments, conducted in 2000, involved milligram quantities of enriched uranium and were carried out without the government's knowledge.² In 2004, the IAEA Director General reported to the IAEA Board of Governors that based on its verification activities, the experiments had already been discontinued.³ The IAEA Board of Governors, in its Chairman's Statement, decided to absolve South Korea of any

¹ Treasa Dunworth, "Compliance and Enforcement in WMD-Related Treaties," *WMD Compliance and Enforcement Series No. 1 (2019)*, Geneva, Switzerland: UNIDIR.

² "International Inspection Team Conducting Investigation in South Korea," *IAEA Press Release*, 2 September 2024, <https://www.iaea.org/newscenter/pressreleases/iaea-inspection-team-conducting-investigation-south-korea>.

³ "IAEA Board Concludes Consideration of Safeguards in South Korea," *IAEA Press Release*, 26 November 2004, <https://www.iaea.org/newscenter/news/iaea-board-concludes-consideration-safeguards-south-korea>.

wrongdoing, and resolved not to refer the case to the United Nations (UN) Security Council.⁴

It should also be noted that non-compliance with non-proliferation obligations does not automatically lead to international condemnation or to the imposition of sanctions. In most cases, “soft” compliance measures are first utilised to encourage a particular state’s cooperation.⁵ Close consultation and dialogue usually lead to corrective actions and remedies. The wider political context will also determine how a breach of non-proliferation obligations will be responded to. After the 2004 episode, South Korea implemented corrective actions and cooperated with the IAEA in the conduct of its investigations following the disclosure of the KAERI experiments. Moreover, South Korea’s technical violation through the KAERI experiments paled in comparison to the allegations of breaches of non-proliferation obligations committed by Iran, which were also under discussion within the IAEA in 2004.

Overt violations

Sanctions may be imposed by the UN Security Council in overt acts of non-compliance with safeguards agreements and violations of non-proliferation obligations. However, such sanctions rely on consensus among its permanent members (P5).⁶ In the event that an IAEA investigation reveals that South Korea has overtly violated its non-proliferation obligations, the matter will be brought to the IAEA Board of Governors, then referred to the UN Security Council. The latter has the authority to act on such non-compliance, particularly if it considers it a threat to international peace and security.

The Philippines, as a responsible member of the international community, would implement sanctions measures agreed upon by the UN Security Council, as it has done for sanctions regimes imposed on North Korea. It is unlikely, however, that the Philippines will go out of its way to implement unilateral sanction measures against South Korea, in line with its foreign policy of being “friends to all, enemy to none,” as well as its own strategic interests.⁷

South Korea going nuclear will likely be seen in the Philippines as a manifestation of the further deterioration of inter-Korean relations, as well as an indication of the general failure of regional states and institutions to facilitate lasting peace on the Korean Peninsula. While disappointment over South Korea leaving or violating the NPT will be

⁴ Olli Heinonen, “The IAEA Mechanisms to Ensure Compliance with Nuclear Non-Proliferation,” *WMD Compliance and Enforcement Series No. 2 (2020)*, Geneva, Switzerland: UNIDIR.

⁵ James Revill, John Borrie, Pavel Podvig, and Jennifer Hart, “Compliance and Enforcement: Lessons from across WMD-Related Regimes,” *WMD Compliance and Enforcement Series No. 6 (2019)*, Geneva, Switzerland: UNIDIR.

⁶ The P5 is composed of China, France, Russia, the United States, and the United Kingdom.

⁷ Statement of Secretary Enrique A. Manalo during the 78th session of the United Nations General Assembly High-Level Week, 23 September 2023, https://gadebate.un.org/sites/default/files/gastatements/78/ph_en.pdf.

expressed, it would be difficult for the Philippines to press hard against South Korea without looking like it has sided with North Korea, which has developed nuclear weapons and shows no sign of giving them up despite extensive sanctions regimes. Depending on the response of the nuclear weapon states (NWS), South Korea going nuclear will aggravate the divide between the haves and have-nots, reopen debates on the salience of nuclear weapons as a security guarantee against external threats, and may herald the breakdown of the NPT.

Costs to bilateral relations

The Philippines and South Korea share a deep bond characterised by mutual trust and support. The Philippines was among the first countries to send an expeditionary force to South Korea following the outbreak of the Korean War in 1950. Over the span of five years, the Philippines sent five Battalion Combat Teams with a total number of 7,420 personnel to help repel North Korean and Chinese aggression. Around 116 Filipino soldiers were killed in action, 299 wounded, 57 missing, and of those, 41 were repatriated during Prisoner of War exchanges.⁸ The longstanding ties between South Korea and the Philippines, underpinned by their “shared sacrifice for democracy, sovereignty and freedom,” have evolved into a strategic partnership.⁹

South Korea is considered a reliable partner of the Philippines. It is the third top trading partner of the Philippines with total trade amounting to USD 1,258.01 million in August 2024.¹⁰ South Korea provides financial assistance in the development of infrastructure projects all over the Philippines, including building bridges, and integrated disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation initiatives.¹¹ Following the state visit to Manila of President Yoon Suk Yeol on 6-7 October 2024, both countries agreed to expand cooperation in areas such as space cooperation, emerging technologies, blue economy, and public health systems. Notably, the agreement also included cooperation on nuclear power (see below).

South Koreans are the top source of foreign tourists for the Philippines, comprising 26.87% of all inbound foreign travellers to the country from January to September 2024.¹² South Korean culture, entertainment, and food are well-loved and sought after in the

⁸ “The Philippine Expeditionary Force to Korea (PEFTOK)”, *Official Website Embassy of the Republic of the Philippines in Seoul*, 2024. <http://www.philembassy-seoul.com/dafa.asp>.

⁹ “Joint Declaration on the Strategic Partnership between the Republic of the Philippines and the Republic of Korea,” *Presidential Communications Office*, 7 October 2024, https://pco.gov.ph/news_releases/joint-declaration-on-the-strategic-partnership-between-the-republic-of-the-philippines-and-the-republic-of-korea/.

¹⁰ “Highlights of the Philippine Export and Import,” *Philippine Statistics Authority*, 10 October 2024, <https://psa.gov.ph/statistics/export-import/monthly>.

¹¹ Kim Hyun-bin, “Interview: Philippines seeks to forge strategic partnership with Korea this year,” *The Korea Times*, 13 January 2024, https://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/nation/2024/01/113_366823.html.

¹² “Visitor Arrivals: Ranking by Country of Residence, January- September 2024,” *Department of Tourism*, http://tourism.gov.ph/files/2024/tourism_demand/10/10-03/JAN-SEPT.pdf.

Philippines.¹³ There are also over 62,000 Filipinos living in South Korea either as workers, students, or family members.¹⁴

In terms of defence and security relations, South Korea has supported the Philippines in its ongoing military modernisation program. The South Korea-based Korean Aerospace Industries (KAI) supplied 12 FA-50PH light jet fighters to the Philippine Air Force and is looking to sell more FA-50s as well as their upcoming KF-21 Boramae fighter aircraft.¹⁵ South Korean firms such as Hyundai Heavy Industries (HHI) are also heavily involved in the Philippine Navy's (PN) modernisation effort, delivering or building two missile frigates, two corvettes and six offshore patrol vessels, as well as vying for the PN's first submarines.¹⁶

If sanctions are imposed against South Korea, the Philippines will be hard-pressed to implement them given both countries' close relations. The stakes are just too high for the Philippines to sever ties or break off diplomatic engagements altogether. As it had tried to do with China, the Philippines is more likely to compartmentalise the issue of South Korea's nuclear breakout or non-compliance from the broader aspects of its diplomatic engagements. It may attempt to apply pressure, but through items that the Philippines might deem expendable or in an early enough stage to minimise damages, such as delaying or cancelling the implementation of a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with South Korea to conduct feasibility studies on rehabilitating or replacing the Bataan Nuclear Power Plant, as it will involve nuclear technologies and nuclear energy development.¹⁷ The possible cancellation of this MOU by the Philippines may give the policymakers in Seoul pause from violating international nuclear non-proliferation norms, as the credibility of South Korea as a reliable nuclear supplier will be questioned. However, as the MOU is merely for feasibility studies, it remains to be seen if the potential financial losses from its termination may be sufficient for South Korea to give up its nuclear ambitions.

¹³ Interaksyon, "Reasons why Filipinos love Korean culture and products," *Interaksyon*, 3 December 2019, <https://interaksyon.philstar.com/trends-spotlights/2019/12/03/158231/philippines-filipinos-korean-hallyu-no-brand/>.

¹⁴ Jon Dunbar, "Filipino students in Korea discuss service, community," *The Korea Times*, 21 June 2022, https://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/nation/2022/06/177_331371.html.

¹⁵ Felix Kim, "Philippines, South Korea enhancing defense cooperation," *Indo-Pacific Defense Forum*, 15 November 2023, <https://ipdefenseforum.com/2023/11/philippines-south-korea-enhancing-defense-cooperation/>.

¹⁶ Reuters, "Philippines, South Korea boost defence cooperation, upgrades ties to strategic partnership," *Reuters*, 7 October 2024, <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/philippines-south-korea-upgrade-ties-strategic-partnership-2024-10-07/>.

¹⁷ Jean Mangaluz, "Meralco, Samsung sign MOU for nuclear energy adoption," *Philstar*, 14 October 2024, <https://qa.philstar.com/business/2024/10/14/2392466/meralco-samsung-sign-mou-nuclear-energy-adoption>.

Further possible actions of the Philippines

As a state-party to the NPT and the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW), the Philippines will not support South Korea going nuclear as a matter of principle, and is likely to issue limited statements to that effect. The Philippines wants to see lasting peace on the Korean Peninsula and has consistently condemned the provocative actions of North Korea, which undermine economic progress, peace, and stability in the Korean Peninsula and the Indo-Pacific region. The Philippines has also condemned the unprecedented surge of North Korea's ballistic missile launches and its rhetoric on the possible use of nuclear weapons. The Philippines might be understanding of South Korea's security concerns but will continue to support the denuclearisation of the entire Korean Peninsula, North Korea included.

Should South Korea end up nuclearising, the Philippines will continue to promote peaceful dialogue among all concerned parties. The Philippines will also constructively contribute to discussions on the humanitarian and environmental consequences of nuclear weapon use. The Philippines will emphasise the need to support the NPT as a significant component of the rules-based international order that sustains the security of all nations. The Philippines could also play a more active role in bridging the discourse of nuclear weapons and disarmament in this era of heightened insecurity and mistrust. Within ASEAN, the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) remains the only political security forum that engages the wider Asia-Pacific states including North Korea. The ARF Intersessional Meetings (ISM) on the Non-Proliferation and Disarmament serve as a multilateral platform that provides the opportunity for ASEAN member states to engage with nuclear-armed states, including those who are not parties to the NPT, on non-proliferation and disarmament issues. Given recent pronouncements of South Korean leaders to consider building their own nuclear arsenal combined with the North Korea's continued possession of nuclear weapons and its bellicosity, there is an urgency for Manila to pay attention to developments on the Korean Peninsula on both sides of the 38th Parallel.

Chapter 3

A ROGUE SEOUL? SOUTH KOREA'S NUCLEAR AMBITIONS AND INDONESIA-SOUTH KOREA RELATIONS

Elaine Natalie & Andhika Prawira

South Korea's potential pursuit of nuclear armament marks a critical juncture in its relations within the Asia-Pacific, potentially straining ties with regional countries like Indonesia. As a strong advocate for non-proliferation and regional stability, Indonesia would likely view a nuclear-armed South Korea with concern. According to an April 2024 poll by Victor Cha at the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), 66% of South Korean elites opposed nuclear proliferation, primarily due to fears of reputational damage and international sanctions.¹ However, public support for South Korea acquiring nuclear weapons has increased, rising from 60.2% in 2023 to 66% in 2024, according to a survey by the Korea Institute for National Unification (KINU).² South Korea's nuclearisation could undermine its bilateral relationship with Indonesia, intensifying regional tensions, and erode trust between the two nations.

While previous studies have comparatively examined public³ and elite⁴ perceptions across countries such as Indonesia, Australia, and Taiwan, this paper focuses solely on Indonesia's perspective on a potential nuclear-armed South Korea. It explores Indonesia's potential response, including diplomatic and multilateral actions, and the broader implications for Indonesia-South Korea bilateral relations and regional stability.

Indonesia's non-proliferation record and views of a nuclear South Korea

Indonesia has long been a strong and consistent supporter of nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament. It signed and ratified the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) in the 1970s, the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT) in 2011, and most recently ratified the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW) in September 2024. Beyond its participation in international non-proliferation

¹ Victor Cha, "Breaking Bad: South Korea's Nuclear Option," Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), April 2024, vi. <https://www.csis.org/analysis/breaking-bad-south-koreas-nuclear-option>.

² KINU, "Result of the 2024 KINU Unification Survey," *Korea Institute for National Unification*, June 27, 2024, https://www.kinu.or.kr/eng/board/view.do?nav_code=eng1678858138&code=78h7R6ucKsuM&idx=24481.

³ Lauren Sukin and Woohyeok Seo, "East Asia's Alliance Dilemma: Public Perceptions of the Competing Risks of Extended Nuclear Deterrence," June 2024, <https://www.apln.network/projects/nuclear-weapon-use-risk-reduction/east-asias-alliance-dilemma-public-perceptions-of-the-competing-risks-of-extended-nuclear-deterrence>.

⁴ Alexander M. Hynd, "Dirty, Dangerous... and Difficult? Regional Perspectives on a Nuclear South Korea," *Journal of Asian Security and International Affairs* (Forthcoming).

and disarmament treaties, Indonesia has consistently demonstrated strong opposition to actions by other states that could threaten or undermine the global non-proliferation and disarmament regime. This opposition includes its support for United Nations Security Council (UNSC) sanctions on Iran in 2007 (Resolution 1747), when Indonesia was a non-permanent member of the UNSC. Although Indonesia's position later shifted due to domestic public and political pressures, leading to its abstention on further sanctions in Resolution 1803, it did not vote against them.

Indonesia is currently campaigning for a non-permanent seat on the UNSC for 2029-2030. If South Korea were to pursue a nuclear weapons program, Indonesia would likely support UNSC sanctions. While there might be some disagreement within bureaucratic elites – such as opposition from the Ministry of Trade and the Ministry of Industry, given South Korea's status as an important trading partner – domestic resistance to sanctioning South Korea would likely be weaker than in the case of Iran, where religious and ideological factors, and political plays at the time, played a larger role. As a result, Indonesia's support for sanctions on South Korea would likely be stronger and less likely to be reneged. Even if Indonesia does not serve on the UNSC at the time of Seoul's proliferation, it would follow and adhere to any sanctions imposed on South Korea. Therefore, it is crucial that the UNSC remain functional and unified despite any geopolitical developments that may arise.

Indonesia has also demonstrated strong opposition to North Korea's nuclear weapons program. Whenever North Korea conducted a nuclear test, Indonesia consistently issued statements condemning Pyongyang's actions, emphasising the risks of proliferation and instability in the region. Although Indonesia established diplomatic relations with North Korea long before it did with South Korea, North Korea's nuclear weapons policy has tarnished its reputation and strained its relations with Indonesia. Beyond its inward-looking nature and lack of economic development, North Korea's ongoing nuclear tests and ballistic missile launches, which Indonesia has regarded as threats to regional security, have led to its perception in Indonesia as not being a respectable member of the international community. If South Korea were to pursue nuclear proliferation, Dewi Fortuna Anwar, Research Professor at the Research Centre for Politics at the National Research and Innovation Agency (PRP-BRIN), warns that "Indonesia will view Seoul in the same way it views Pyongyang – as a rogue state."⁵

Indonesia has also consistently been wary of developments that may undermine the global nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament regime or contribute to regional instability, even when those developments are not directly in pursuit of proliferation. A clear example is its response to AUKUS, where, in September 2021, Indonesia issued a five-point statement that stated how it “takes note cautiously of the Australian Government's decision to acquire nuclear-powered submarines” and “stresses the importance of

⁵ Dewi Fortuna Anwar, interview with the authors, September 30, 2024.

Australia's commitment to continue meeting all of its nuclear non-proliferation obligations.”⁶ Some scholars in the IR community have argued that Indonesia’s stance has softened since then, citing then-President Jokowi’s May 2023 statement that AUKUS (and the Quad) should be seen “as partners, and not competitors.”⁷ The Indonesian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, however, has maintained a more cautious and consistent position. In March 2023, it reiterated that “Indonesia expects Australia to remain consistent in fulfilling its obligations under the NPT and IAEA Safeguards, as well as to develop with the IAEA a verification mechanism that is effective, transparent and non – discriminatory.”⁸

If South Korea were to acquire nuclear-powered submarines, Indonesia would likely respond with concern and caution. Given South Korea’s advanced nuclear technology and capability to potentially develop such submarines indigenously, Jakarta might worry that this development could shift the regional balance of power and prompt an arms race. Considering the cooperative defence agreements between South Korea and Indonesia, including past submarine contracts, Indonesia might also assess how this new capability could impact future defence collaborations. Additionally, Indonesia may raise the issue within ASEAN, advocating for dialogue on security implications to reinforce the Southeast Asia Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone and maintain regional stability.

Given Indonesia’s high level of caution toward Australia’s nuclear-powered submarines and their potential impact on the already fragile non-proliferation regime, it is likely that if South Korea were to pursue nuclear latency – or anything short of full proliferation – Indonesia would still express deep concern. Indonesia would likely oppose any nuclear pathway for South Korea, including indigenous development of nuclear weapons or nuclear-powered submarines. Such actions by South Korea would likely strain its relations with Indonesia.

Challenges ahead for Indonesia and a nuclear-armed South Korea

The Indonesia-South Korea relationship is currently stronger than ever. Having celebrated the 50th anniversary of formal diplomatic relations in 2023, President Yoon Suk Yeol is eager to use the landmark anniversary to enhance cooperation between Seoul and Jakarta.⁹ Indonesia and South Korea have built a partnership based on shared economics and strategic interests, as well as overlapping identities and values. Expanded

⁶ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia, "Statement on Australia's Nuclear-powered Submarines Program, *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia*, September 17, 2021, https://kemlu.go.id/portal/en/list/siaran_pers/105/statement-on-australias-nuclear-powered-submarines-program.

⁷ Joko Widodo, interviewed by Fiza Sabjahan, "Special Interview with Indonesia President Joko Widodo ahead of the 42nd Asean Summit," *New Straits Times*, May 8, 2023.

⁸ MoFA Indonesia, https://x.com/Kemlu_RI/status/1635487836576292864, March 14, 2023.

⁹ BPMI of Presidential Secretariat/UN, “Indonesia, ROK to Enhance Strategic Partnership”, Cabinet Secretariat of the Republic of Indonesia, July 28, 2022, <https://setkab.go.id/en/indonesia-rok-to-enhance-strategic-partnership/>.

bilateral relations have been established through a “special strategic partnership” framework since 2017. South Korea's decision to pursue nuclear weapons would pose a significant threat and present unprecedented challenges to Indonesia-South Korea relations.

Both strategic and economic cooperation has grown significantly between Indonesia and South Korea, with economic cooperation taking precedence in the relationship. In terms of strategic cooperation, Seoul and Jakarta have forged strong ties through joint projects such as the KF-21 Boramae Fighter jet, submarine deals, and increasing military cooperation through joint training and educational exchanges.¹⁰ However, challenges like delayed payments and stalled contracts continue to persist.¹¹

On the economic front, although the Indonesia-Korea trade partnership has not yet reached the same USD value of goods and services exchanged as that with other regional great powers, progress has been encouraging. The Indonesia-Korea Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (IK-CEPA), which came into force on 1 January 2023, has been a key instrument in eliminating tariffs and boosting trade and investment.¹² South Korea has emerged as a key investor in Indonesia, particularly in green energy, infrastructure development, and electric vehicle production, with significant milestone projects currently underway. At COP29 Azerbaijan, the new Prabowo administration introduced a renewable energy development program, aiming to add 75 GW of capacity through solar, wind, hydropower, geothermal, and nuclear power plants.¹³ In line with this ambition, Indonesia and South Korea agreed to expand energy cooperation in November 2024, reaffirming an MOU signed in 2022 that included cooperation on small modular reactors (SMR).¹⁴

In a hypothetical situation where South Korea officially takes steps to develop nuclear weapons, it could expect to be sanctioned by the UNSC for its violation of the NPT. An official from Indonesia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, interviewed by the authors, emphasised that Indonesia's stance has always been consistent with the NPT and that it opposes nuclear proliferation and armament. The official noted that if South Korea were to develop nuclear weapons, Indonesia would face significant issues in its broader relationship with South Korea, and would urge it to return to a non-nuclear weapon policy

¹⁰ Indo-Pacific Defense Forum, “Indonesia, South Korea mark milestone with deeper defense collaboration,” Indo-Pacific Defense Forum, August 2023, <https://ipdefenseforum.com/2023/08/indonesia-south-korea-mark-milestone-with-deeper-defense-collaboration/>.

¹¹ Nam Hyun-woo, “Indonesia seeks cost cut, tech reduction in Korean fighter jet deal,” The Korea Times, May 2024, https://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/nation/2024/10/113_374089.html.

¹² Mi-ha Jeong, Seo-young Kim, and Mi-geon Kim, “Interview: ‘Indonesia is Land of Opportunity for S. Korea with Duty-Free Access.’” Chosun Daily, September 2, 2024,

<https://www.chosun.com/english/industry-en/2024/09/02/3KIDIMRVENAYXBVZDK5FRQJMUM/>.

¹³ “Indonesia Affirms Commitment to Paris Agreement at COP29,” *Antara News*, November 13, 2024, <https://en.antaranews.com/news/333837/indonesia-affirms-commitment-to-paris-agreement-at-cop29>.

¹⁴ “South Korea and Indonesia Deepen Energy Partnership to Bolster Resource Security,” *Korea PRO*, November 13, 2024, <https://koreapro.org/2024/11/south-korea-and-indonesia-deepen-energy-partnership-to-bolster-resource-security/>.

and uphold the principles of the NPT.¹⁵ An attempt to pursue nuclear weapons could cost Seoul its leverage and lead to isolation from the international community, including potential sanctions from other major powers.

Indonesia may want to prioritise its bilateral relationship with South Korea, considering its strategic and economic importance. However, if UN sanctions are imposed, maintaining those relationships could prove challenging. A precedent can be seen in 2019, when several countries imposed broad sanctions on Iran over its nuclear program and alleged human rights violations, causing trade between Indonesia and Iran to drop by 80.2%.¹⁶

In the highly unlikely case that South Korea can proliferate without facing UN sanctions, Indonesia would likely be willing to maintain its bilateral relations with South Korea. Indonesia's approach could reflect the country's pragmatic realities of trade, business, and economic needs. South Korea remains a key investor in Indonesia, with foreign direct investment reaching approximately USD 2.5 billion in 2023 and bilateral trade reaching USD 20.8 billion in 2023.¹⁷ This hypothetical situation would likely create a potential divide within Indonesia's bureaucratic elites. While the Ministry of Foreign Affairs may advocate for upholding moral principles and international norms in line with its diplomatic agenda, other ministries, such as the Ministry of Industry and the Ministry of Trade, are likely to prioritise pragmatic economic considerations, pushing to maintain strong ties with South Korea to safeguard investments, especially in critical sectors such as infrastructure, energy, and technology to generate jobs and boost economic growth. However, the entanglement of nuclear proliferation issues with energy cooperation could mean that the MOU on SMR cooperation would be suspended, and Indonesia's plans to build nuclear power would be in jeopardy.

Another potential implication of South Korea's nuclear proliferation on the Indonesia-South Korea bilateral relationship is the concern that it could set a dangerous precedent in the region. While Indonesia has long advocated for nuclear non-proliferation, disarmament, and a nuclear weapons-free zone in Southeast Asia (SEANWFZ), there would be no guarantee that Indonesia would not feel compelled to explore nuclear capabilities in response to shifting power dynamics.

According to Dewi Fortuna Anwar, South Korea's proliferation would not only cause a nuclear domino effect in Northeast Asia, with Japan feeling threatened, but it could also have a cascading effect on Southeast Asia, which would undermine the SEANWFZ and prompt countries in the region to consider developing their own nuclear technology. Such

¹⁵ Indonesian official at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, interviewed by the authors, October 4, 2024.

¹⁶ Reuters, "Indonesia, Iran sign preferential trade agreement", Reuters, May 23, 2023, <https://www.reuters.com/world/indonesia-iran-sign-preferential-trade-agreement-2023-05-23/>.

¹⁷ Sudibyo Wiradji, "Stimulating Indonesia's economic growth through South Korean investment." The Jakarta Post, May 21, 2024, <https://www.thejakartapost.com/business/2024/05/21/stimulating-indonesias-economic-growth-through-south-korean-investment.html>.

developments would significantly undermine the non-proliferation regime – if not destroy it altogether – complicate regional security, and heighten tension across the region. “The nuclear taboo will also be crossed. It’s not just Koreans who will cross the nuclear taboo; other countries will cross it as well. A taboo is only a taboo when you don’t do it. But once you start doing it, it becomes commonplace; it’s no longer a taboo.”¹⁸ For Indonesia, a nuclear-armed South Korea could present a direct challenge to its foreign policy objective of upholding the nuclear non-proliferation regime.

Countering South Korea’s proliferation

Indonesia and ASEAN are likely to take a strong stance against South Korea's pursuit of nuclear weapons. As Indonesia has ratified not only the NPT but also the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW), it remains firmly committed to preventing the spread of nuclear weapons. South Korea's potential pursuit of nuclear weapons would threaten the integrity of the NPT and global disarmament efforts. Therefore, Indonesia and ASEAN would strongly oppose any initiatives that undermine these international agreements. The official from Indonesia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs noted that Indonesia would definitely utilise ASEAN and all of the ASEAN mechanisms which South Korea is a part of, such as the East Asia Summit, ASEAN Plus Three, and perhaps ASEAN Plus One to encourage South Korea to return to a non-nuclear armed status and adhere to the principles of the NPT. It will also engage with multilateral forums, such as the UN and others, to do the same.¹⁹ Additionally, Dewi Fortuna Anwar expressed a desire to see the strengthening of trilateral cooperation not only between South Korea, Japan, and the US but also between South Korea, Japan, and China, in the hopes of improving South Korea-Japan relations and urging China to play a more active role in dialogue with Pyongyang.²⁰ She elaborated:

“We need to continue toward political settlements. As long as North Korea feels insecure, it will continue to behave in ways it believes are necessary to protect itself. It’s not going to disarm its nuclear weapons because that’s the only leverage it has over the international community.

We in Southeast Asia don’t feel the need to possess such weapons because we’re not afraid of our neighbors, and we don’t perceive an existential threat to our national security. So, that’s what we need to push for: more dialogue, more cooperation, and more mutual trust.”²¹

¹⁸ Dewi Fortuna Anwar, interviewed by the authors, September 30, 2024.

¹⁹ Indonesian official at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, interviewed by the authors, October 4, 2024.

²⁰ See: Dewi Fortuna Anwar, “ASEAN ‘Centrality’ and China-Japan-South Korea Trilateral Co-Operation,” *Global Asia* 19, no. 3 (September 2024), https://globalasia.org/v19no3/cover/asean-centrality-and-china-japan-south-korea-trilateral-co-operation_dewi-fortuna-anwar.

²¹ Dewi Fortuna Anwar, interviewed by the authors, September 30, 2024.

South Korea's potential acquisition of nuclear weapons capabilities (or nuclear-powered submarines) would heighten regional tensions, destabilise the region, and challenge Southeast Asia's nuclear-weapon-free zone. Considering these implications, the new Prabowo administration should demonstrate international leadership and engage proactively on nuclear non-proliferation issues. For Prabowo, regional stability is crucial if he is to meet his target of accelerating Indonesia's economic growth to 8%. Drawing strength from Indonesia's role within ASEAN and its long-standing commitment to non-proliferation, Prabowo should take a proactive stance by encouraging regional dialogue on the importance of strengthening the NPT. Prabowo, along with other ASEAN leaders, could also encourage South Korea (as well as Japan) to attend the TPNW Meeting of State Parties (MSP) in an observer capacity.

South Korea's potential pursuit of nuclear armament would present significant challenges for its relations with Indonesia, a strong and consistent advocate of nuclear non-proliferation and regional stability, whose track record already suggests that it would strongly oppose any move by South Korea to develop its own nuclear weapons. While Indonesia may face internal debates about balancing diplomatic and economic ties with Seoul and adhering to non-proliferation principles, its overall stance would likely align with international efforts to prevent further nuclear proliferation. South Korea's nuclearisation would also have broader implications for regional security, potentially undermining Indonesia's vision of a nuclear-free Southeast Asia and prompting further instability in the Asia-Pacific. For Indonesia, maintaining regional stability and the integrity of the global non-proliferation regime will remain a priority, even as it seeks to manage its bilateral relationship with South Korea. For South Korean policymakers, the question is whether they are ready to jeopardise their future relationship with an emerging major power in the region.

Chapter 4

NO LONGER IN GOOD STANDING: HOW MONGOLIA WOULD VIEW SOUTH KOREA GOING NUCLEAR

Jargalsaikhan Enkhsaikhan

Mongolia's general position on the issue of non-proliferation of nuclear weapons is well known: it opposes attempts by any state to proliferate nuclear weapons, and despite the good ties between the two countries, South Korea would not be an exception. Mongolia opposes the ongoing nuclear arms race, and the weakening of the NPT regime, and promotes the denuclearisation of the Korean Peninsula. Mongolia is the only single-state Nuclear Weapons Free Zone in the world, and advocates for the establishment of a Northeast Asian Nuclear Weapons-Free Zone (NEA-NWFZ).¹

Mongolia's bilateral relations with South Korea are based on the established comprehensive partnership relations and consultations on issues of mutual interest and concern. Around 50,000 Mongolians live and work in South Korea. At the same time Mongolia maintains traditional good-neighborly relations with North Korea and tries to play a role in promoting understanding and developing relations between the two Koreas.²

As a part of Northeast Asia, Mongolia tries to promote confidence-building by not only developing good-neighborly bilateral relations with all the states of the region but also promoting a regional Track 1.5 dialogue on non-traditional security issues known as the Ulaanbaatar Dialogue. The Ulaanbaatar Dialogue is complemented by the Ulaanbaatar Process, a Track 2 regional civil society dialogue that provides a venue and platform for civil society organisations of the region to cooperate for common good. Both are inclusive processes that involve representatives of both Koreas and the United States.

Mongolia does not believe that South Korea developing its own nuclear weapons would be welcomed in the region and globally. Though South Korea borders on a de facto nuclear North Korea, Mongolia would have a difficulty in supporting South Korea become a de facto nuclear-weapon state by developing its own nuclear weapons since it is a state in good standing within the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT). Going nuclear would only further complicate the already tense situation on the Peninsula and the region, and hurt South Korea's good standing with the NPT and the international community. Doing so would also diminish the prospect of establishing a

¹ "Mongolia's Nuclear-Weapon-Free Status | United Nations Platform for Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zones," <https://www.un.org/nwzf/content/mongolias-nuclear-weapon-free-status>.

² Sainbuyan Munkhbat, Mendee Jargalsaikhan, and Yo Batbold, "Mongolia's Balancing Act Between the Two Koreas" (Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung Mongolia & Mongolian Institute for Innovative Policies, 2020).

NEA-NWFZ – a long-held Mongolian foreign policy goal.³ South Korean nuclear weapons would also make the situation critically dangerous since the two Koreas share a common border and therefore there would be almost no time for them to take serious decisions on the possible use of force or taking preventive actions thereof. The risk of the use of nuclear weapons would increase, even if not deliberately or accidentally but by miscalculation forcing both Koreas to either use or lose their weapons – a very unstable situation.

Nuclear threats and blackmails would become part of their policy toward each other, especially during South Korean election periods. The issue of Korean unification, reconciliation, or a peace agreement, would be replaced by mutual animosity, causing further political alienation between the two Koreas. It goes without saying that South Korea's nuclear armament will deal a serious, if not a fatal, blow to the NPT regime.

As for South Korea itself, going nuclear will surely entail enormous political and economic costs, including for its military and civilian nuclear industries and for broader cooperation with other industrialised states and the Global South. Nuclear weapon states and nuclear capable states, such as members of the Nuclear Suppliers Group, would impose sanctions on South Korea, limiting its ability to cooperate with those countries.

Although both Koreas would be de facto nuclear weapon states, international opinion might even be *less* sympathetic to South Korean case because of its nuclear umbrella state status prior to developing its own nuclear weapons. If South Korea developed nuclear weapons while under the effective protection of the US nuclear umbrella, it might create the perception that South Korea's proliferation was not motivated by security concerns at all.

How Mongolia can respond to South Korean nuclear armament

Mongolia has limited capability, and little legal and geopolitical space to respond forcefully to South Korea's nuclear armament. Much would depend on United Nations Security Council (UNSC) reaction. If UNSC sanctions South Korea Mongolia would follow the sanctions, bearing duly in mind the purpose of sanctions and bilateral relations with South Korea. Mongolia would be unlikely to impose bilateral sanctions on South Korea outside of the UNSC sanctions regime, because it has not done so with regards to North Korea.

The policy of the international community, including Mongolia, would depend to some extent on the main reasons that South Korea would provide to explain its decision of going from a nuclear umbrella state to a de facto nuclear weapon state. The reasons provided must be clear and logical; states would want to understand what South Korea's

³ Mongolia's 1998 Defence White Paper stated: "With an eye toward expanding the [nuclear weapons-free] zone, the public of Mongolia calls on their neighboring countries to declare their territories as nuclear-free and their border areas as demilitarized zones." See: "Mongolian Defense White Paper 1997/1998" (Ministry of Defense of Mongolia, 1998), 21.

had done to dissuade North Korea from pursuing its nuclear weapons program, and what had been done to end the armistice or conclude a peace treaty with North Korea. It would be very important for South Korea to point out that it had not received a credible or, to use the US term, *ironclad* commitment from the United States that it would use its nuclear weapons in response to North Korean aggression or use of its nuclear weapons against South Korea.

For Mongolia to play a constructive role in the South Korean nuclear issue, it should consult proactively with South Korea on the issue and offer its role as a mediator. It could try to bring the two Koreas to discuss the situation on Korean Peninsula on a bilateral basis. South Korea's positive response to such a suggestion would show to the world that at least it was willing to reason with North Korea.

If South Korea officially indicated that it was considering leaving the NPT, Mongolia should push for the issue to be discussed at NPT Review Conference or the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) as a separate urgent item. However, to be practically successful that effort would need the understanding and at least indirect support of the nuclear weapon states.

In case UNSC adopts sanctions against South Korea, Mongolia would implement them as it has been implementing sanctions on North Korea. However, the implementations might be more difficult in the South Korean case due to the comparatively large number of Mongolian citizens living in South Korea and the effect on bilateral trade and other economic activities.

In sum, Mongolia remains firmly opposed to all nuclear proliferation and will undoubtedly view South Korean proliferation as a negative development not only for South Korea but for international peace and stability. However, its ability to respond constructively is dependent on a cohesive response from the international community, and particularly a unified opposition expressed by the UNSC. Mongolia's predicament thus underlines the vital importance of strengthening and sustaining the NPT at the next Review Conference in 2026.

Chapter 5

NO DOMINO: HOW JAPAN'S EXPERIENCE CAN DISSUADE SOUTH KOREA FROM GOING NUCLEAR

Akira Kawasaki & Keiko Nakamura

It is often said that if South Korea were to go nuclear, it would trigger a domino effect, with Japan and Taiwan following suit.¹ But assuming that such a domino effect would easily take place is overly simplistic. Japanese public opinion against nuclear weapons – rooted in the history of Hiroshima and Nagasaki – remains strong enough to constrain policymakers. Education, of both the public and policymakers, plays a major role in shaping these attitudes, and could do so in South Korea as well. This paper first examines Japan's potential response to a nuclear South Korea. It then discusses the role of education, with a critical analysis of Japan's practices, and concludes with recommendations for advancing disarmament education that would be effective in South Korea and globally.

Japan's double standard

To understand Japan's potential response to a nuclear South Korea, it is helpful to first examine Japan's double standard regarding nuclear weapons. On one hand, Japan advocates for a world without nuclear weapons, based on the recognition of the catastrophic humanitarian consequences of the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945. After World War II, Japan declared itself a “nation of peace” under its war-renouncing constitution, and continues to assert this identity. Since 1967, it has maintained the Three Non-Nuclear Principles: not possessing, not producing, and not permitting the introduction of nuclear weapons. Most people are aware of the devastation caused by the atomic bombings in Hiroshima and Nagasaki; nuclear weapons are thus generally regarded as “evil.”

On the other hand, Japan benefits from the United States' extended deterrence, a fundamental component of the Japan-US Security Treaty of 1960. In response to North Korea's nuclear and missile developments, as well as China's military rise and expansionism, Japan started the Extended Deterrence Dialogue with the United States in 2010. Strengthening the credibility of US nuclear deterrence has been a key objective in Japan's National Security Strategy since 2013.

¹ See: Chung-in Moon, ‘Is Nuclear Domino in Northeast Asia Real and Inevitable?’ (Asia-Pacific Leadership Network, 1 October 2021), 29, <https://www.apln.network/projects/wmd-project/is-nuclear-domino-in-northeast-asia-real-and-inevitable>.

Several opinion polls show that 60-70 percent of the public believe that Japan should join the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW), which entered into force in 2021. However, the government maintains its policy of neither signing nor ratifying the treaty, with less than 40 percent of National Diet members expressing their support for Japan joining it. A public opinion poll also shows that over 60 percent of respondents believe the US nuclear umbrella is “necessary” for Japan, at least “for the time being.”

The awarding of the 2024 Nobel Peace Prize to Nihon Hidankyo, the Japan Confederation of A- and H-Bomb Sufferers Organizations, has been warmly welcomed in Japan, further strengthening the nuclear taboo. This historic award has increased public pressure on the government to do more for nuclear disarmament, including attending future Meetings of States Parties to the TPNW as an observer. Notably, civil society groups in Japan have coordinated efforts across diverse sectors – labor unions, cooperative societies, lawyers, medical professionals, faith-based organisations, academics, students, and NGOs – overcoming past political and generational divisions. The Japan Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons officially launched in April 2024 and is built on a broad coalition of over 35 civil society groups. It is now developing a nationwide, supra-partisan campaign to pressure the government to join the TPNW.²

What if South Korea goes nuclear?

Japan's dual stance must be fully examined in order to assess how Japan might respond to South Korea's potential nuclear armament. The Japanese public, which generally opposes nuclear weapons, would be dismayed at the emergence of a new nuclear-armed state just next door. Moreover, South Korea cannot go nuclear without withdrawing from or breaching the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), one of the most universally accepted legal bases of today's international order. Such a move would be viewed as a serious challenge to United Nations-centered multilateralism, which Japan continues to regard as essential for maintaining international peace and security.

At the same time, it is important to acknowledge that an increasing number of Japanese politicians, including leading lawmakers, have recently discussed the idea of Japan's “nuclear sharing” with the United States, or even Japan's potential independent nuclear armament. In the aftermath of the 2011 Fukushima nuclear disaster, some politicians argued that Japan should not abandon nuclear power in order to maintain a “potential nuclear deterrent.”³ Ishiba Shigeru, who became Japan's Prime Minister on 1 October 2024, was one of those politicians, although he made it clear that he did not support Japan becoming a nuclear-armed state.

² Japan NGO Network for Nuclear Weapons Abolition, <https://nuclearabolitionjpn.com/english>.

³ Chester Dawson, “In Japan, Provocative Case for Staying Nuclear”, *The Wall Street Journal*, 28 October 2011, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424052970203658804576638392537430156>.

Nuclear sharing?

In 2022, soon after Russia’s military invasion of Ukraine, the late former Prime Minister Abe Shinzo called for a “discussion” on the possibility of Japan engaging in nuclear sharing. Some political factions responded positively to this idea, but then-Prime Minister Kishida Fumio firmly rejected it, stating that Japan’s Three Non-Nuclear Principles will be “firmly” upheld.⁴

Nuclear sharing became a topic of debate during the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP)’s presidential election in September 2024. The LDP, Japan’s dominant political party, which has governed the country almost continuously since the 1950s, saw several of the nine candidates explicitly refer to the possibility of nuclear sharing with the United States and the potential revision of the Three Non-Nuclear Principles. These candidates included Ishiba Shigeru, who won the election, and Takaichi Sanae, who finished a very close second. During the party’s election campaign, Ishiba argued that nuclear sharing with the United States by “taking part in the decision-making process of the use of nuclear weapons” would not be incompatible with the Three Non-Nuclear Principles, which prohibit a physical “introduction” of nuclear weapons. Meanwhile, his competitor Takaichi went so far as to suggest an explicit revision of the Three Principles.

However, these debates do not mean that Japan is likely to pursue a nuclear sharing arrangement with the United States, even if regional tensions further worsen. In fact, since becoming Prime Minister in October 2024, Ishiba has not spoken about nuclear sharing or the “Asian version of NATO” that he had previously advocated for.⁵ In any case, it is the United States that holds the decisive power in determining any nuclear sharing arrangements. Japan could not share or introduce US nuclear weapons unless the United States deemed it in its own interest and actively pursued such a policy. Moreover, even if the United States were to do so, it is highly questionable that the Japanese public would readily accept it, as public opinion polls consistently show that 70-80 percent of Japanese believe that the Three Non-Nuclear Principles “should be maintained.”

Conflicting historical recognitions in Japan and Korea

As mentioned above, the nuclear taboo remains deeply embedded in the collective consciousness of the Japanese public. This sentiment stems from repeated exposure to the horrors of the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, whether through school

⁴ “Kishida says Japan won't seek nuclear sharing with U.S.”, *Nikkei Asia*, 28 February 2022, <https://asia.nikkei.com/Politics/International-relations/Kishida-says-Japan-won-t-look-for-nuclear-sharing-with-U.S>; Address by Prime Minister Kishida Fumio at the Nagasaki Peace Memorial Ceremony,” Prime Minister’s Office of Japan, 9 August 2022 https://japan.kantei.go.jp/101_kishida/statement/202208/_00004.html.

⁵ Ishiba Shigeru, “The Future of Japan’s Foreign Policy”, Hudson Institute, 25 September 2024 <https://www.hudson.org/politics-government/shigeru-ishiba-japans-new-security-era-future-japans-foreign-policy>.

education, books, comics, television programs, or other mediums, cultivating a strong self-identity among Japanese citizens as members of an "atomic-bombed nation."

In contrast, despite tens of thousands of Koreans also being victims of the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, South Korean society has not developed a similar nuclear taboo rooted in historical experience. Instead, there is an underlying perspective in South Korea that permits some acceptance of the utility of nuclear weapons. Many South Koreans perceive that Japan's surrender, prompted by the atomic bombings, directly led to Korea's liberation and independence. This view, which regards the atomic bombs as instruments of Korea's liberation from Japanese occupation, carries a dangerous implication: it risks encouraging a broader acceptance of nuclear weapons as useful tools in today's world.

To counter the rise of pro-nuclear sentiments in South Korea, establishing a nuclear taboo similar to that in Japan is necessary. However, as noted, emphasising the tragedies of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in South Korea – where perspectives on the bombings differ – may instead provoke resentment or opposition toward Japan. The strong dissatisfaction among South Koreans regarding the Japanese government's reluctance to fully acknowledge its role as an aggressor must be understood by Japan.

To move forward, Japan—both its government and society—must confront its history as an aggressor with sincerity to bring about lasting historical reconciliation. Moreover, there is an urgent need for both Japan and South Korea to cultivate a deeper, more universal understanding of the inhumanity of nuclear weapons that transcends regional views and extends to a global context. This effort includes reexamining the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki as shared human experiences that highlight the inherent inhumanity of nuclear weapons.

Role of disarmament education

One effective way to foster a shared understanding between Japan and South Korea of the inhumanity of nuclear weapons is through disarmament education. Beyond merely disseminating knowledge on nuclear issues, disarmament education is an empowering process that equips individuals with critical and logical thinking skills while instilling a shared commitment to universal values that respect the life, safety, and dignity of every person.

While education is often associated with schools, disarmament education is not limited to formal school settings; it is designed to reach people of all ages and backgrounds. Therefore, alongside structured programs for children and youth whether through school curricula or non-formal initiatives – there is a need to expand informal educational opportunities. These efforts should aim to engage parliamentarians, local government officials, educators, media, NGOs, and other individuals directly involved in security and disarmament dialogues.

The importance of disarmament education has been emphasised repeatedly in various international documents, where it is recognised as a shared priority. Both the Japanese and South Korean governments have consistently supported these initiatives through United Nations resolutions, NPT Review Conference agreements, and other international commitments.

However, the implementation of disarmament education in both Japan and South Korea remains insufficient, with each country facing distinct challenges in this area. In post-World War II Japan, “peace education” – focusing on the tragedies of war and the atomic bombings – has been widely promoted, largely due to the efforts of teachers' unions. These unions became passionate anti-war and anti-nuclear advocates, motivated by remorse for sending their students to war. Such education has instilled a strong peace consciousness among younger generations by sharing the stories of those who suffered from the war, including the *hibakusha*, or atomic bomb survivors. While effective in fostering a deep aversion to nuclear weapons and war, questions persist about whether this approach has adequately equipped individuals with the necessary knowledge and skills for preventing war and building sustainable peace. Educational institutions, by focusing on Japan’s experiences as a victim, have largely neglected opportunities for students to critically engage with the broader context of wartime history – including Japan’s responsibilities as an aggressor in its colonial and wartime actions – and to reflect on how to prevent future tragedies. Additionally, students are rarely provided systematic opportunities to learn about current global nuclear issues or concrete pathways toward disarmament. There are also ongoing challenges in fostering critical thinking and proactive attitudes toward addressing these issues.

In South Korea, peace education has not been as widely promoted. This can be attributed in part to the relatively underdeveloped nature of anti-nuclear movements in South Korea, which has not served as a driving force for peace education in the way they have in Japan. Furthermore, peace education in South Korea has a very different emphasis: while Japan’s peace education focuses on the horrors of war and the atomic bombings, South Korea’s peace education is primarily framed within the context of promoting reunification on the divided Korean Peninsula. And, of course, the differing historical perspectives mentioned earlier cast a dark shadow over these efforts. Although both nations share a common awareness of the universal values underpinning disarmament, South Korean skepticism remains regarding Japan’s peace education, given Japan’s reluctance to fully address its wartime aggression.

Recommendations

While it is important to promote disarmament education that reflects each country’s unique circumstances, there are also significant areas where the two nations can and should collaborate. Through dialogue at all levels – among governments, civil society, experts and practitioners (especially educators), NGOs, and individuals – both countries can move toward greater mutual understanding and empathy for each other’s historical

contexts. More effective approaches to disarmament education can be pursued by emphasising the following areas:

Nuclear Risk Assessment in Northeast Asia: In South Korea, awareness of the catastrophic impact of nuclear weapons use is relatively limited. While Japan has some degree of awareness rooted in the atomic bombing experiences, it is fair to say that the Japanese public also does not fully comprehend today's nuclear threats. Disarmament education should therefore emphasise the realistic nuclear risks facing both countries, the potential humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons use, and the importance of Japan-South Korea cooperation to mitigate these risks. Outcomes of the "Reducing the Risk of Nuclear Weapons Use in Northeast Asia" project – conducted collaboratively by the Asia-Pacific Leadership Network, Nautilus Institute, and Research Center for Nuclear Weapons Abolition, Nagasaki University (RECNA) – offer valuable case studies and quantitative assessments that can enhance these educational efforts.⁶

Universalising the Inhumanity of Nuclear Weapons Use and Testing: To cultivate a shared understanding between Japan and South Korea on the inhumanity of nuclear weapons, it is important to underscore the indiscriminate suffering they cause, irrespective of nationality or ethnicity. During the atomic bombings, a large number of Koreans, including those who had been forcibly brought to Japan, were present in both Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Although the precise number of Koreans affected remains unknown, estimates range from 25,000 to 50,000 in Hiroshima and 11,500 to 20,000 in Nagasaki.⁷ What is clear, however, is that a significant number of Koreans lost their lives in these tragedies.

Additionally, over 2,000 nuclear tests conducted by nuclear-armed states have inflicted widespread harm globally, underscoring the need for continued investigation and support for those affected. In this regard, South Korean civil society has a vital role to play in examining the impacts of North Korean nuclear tests.

By expanding the focus beyond the specific Japanese narratives of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, nuclear weapons can be framed as a universal issue. Nuclear testing, in particular, should be viewed as fundamentally incompatible with human rights, social justice, and environmental and ecological protection. Enhanced efforts by both the Japanese and South Korean governments to investigate and support victims of nuclear testing could also foster closer ties with countries that are parties to the TPNW.

⁶ Research Center for Nuclear Weapons Abolition, Nagasaki University (RECNA), The Project on "Reducing the Risk of Nuclear Weapons Use in Northeast Asia", https://www.recna.nagasaki-u.ac.jp/recna/nu-nea_project2021-2023-eng.

⁷ The lower estimate is drawn from *The Atomic Bomb Disasters of Hiroshima and Nagasaki*, a work jointly edited by Hiroshima City and Nagasaki City and published by Iwanami Shoten in 1979. The upper estimate, meanwhile, is based on figures provided by the Korea Atomic Bomb Victim Association in 1972.

Fostering a Mid- and Long-Term Vision for Change: In both South Korea and Japan, the belief in nuclear deterrence remains deeply rooted as a perceived pillar of national security. Disarmament education can play a key role in cultivating the ability to critically assess this reliance on nuclear-based security frameworks and exploring alternatives that do not depend on nuclear weapons. Rather than dismissing such alternatives as unrealistic or unattainable in today's security environment, policymakers and citizens in both countries could benefit from sustained forums for discussion and vision-building toward a nuclear-free security approach. A promising example was the dialogue held at the Korean National Assembly in September 2024, organised by the National Assembly Futures Institute.⁸ This event brought together bipartisan representatives from both South Korean and Japanese parliaments, as well as civil society leaders, to discuss mid- to long-term visions for improved regional security, including the potential establishment of a Northeast Asia Nuclear Weapon-Free Zone.

Paving the Way for a Nuclear-Free Future in Northeast Asia

In an increasingly uncertain global security environment, where powerful states wield nuclear threats, calls for greater nuclear reliance in the name of national security are growing worldwide, especially in Northeast Asia. In this climate, advocating for the importance of education might seem like a distant goal. Yet, by harnessing the transformative potential of disarmament education, there lies a genuine opportunity to shift the awareness and actions of policymakers, opinion leaders, civil society, and individuals in both South Korea and Japan. A heightened awareness of the inhumanity of nuclear weapons will play a crucial role in curbing the rise of pro-nuclear arguments in South Korea. Furthermore, the broader impact of disarmament education can support both countries in moving beyond historical tensions, fostering mutual trust and building a foundation for dialogue on shared security challenges. This approach not only strengthens the security of both Japan and South Korea but also holds the potential to enhance regional – and ultimately global – security.

⁸ National Assembly Future Institute, 3 September 2024, <https://nafi.re.kr/new/notice.do?mode=view&articleNo=8995>.

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ABOUT APLN

The Asia-Pacific Leadership Network (APLN) is an independent, not-for-profit organisation and network of over 160 former, serving and emerging political, military, diplomatic and academic leaders from 22 countries across the Asia-Pacific, registered and headquartered in Seoul, South Korea. APLN's work addresses regional defence and security challenges with a particular focus on reducing nuclear weapons risks.



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