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# WHEN CAN A NUCLEAR SECURITY GUARANTEE PREVENT ALLIED PROLIFERATION? LESSONS FROM SOUTH KOREA 1969-1981

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## Introduction

Since late 2016, increasing concern over North Korea's nuclear capabilities has generated discussion in South Korea and elsewhere about whether Seoul might pursue an indigenous nuclear capability to deter threats from the North. South Korean sources suggest that it would only take six to nine months for the ROK to devise a testable nuclear device.<sup>1</sup> During the presidential campaign and into his presidency, Donald Trump has continued to call on U.S. allies to take more responsibility for their own defense, and has even gone as far as verbally endorsing a Japanese or South Korean nuclear weapons program.<sup>2</sup> Additionally, former U.S. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson raised the possibility of a nuclear weapons option for Japan in response to advancement in North Korea's nuclear capabilities.<sup>3</sup> Conversely, Secretary of Defense James Mattis has traveled to East Asia to reaffirm traditional security arrangements and plans for South Korean missile defense.<sup>4</sup> These mixed signals that the Trump administration is sending to American allies in East Asia mirror the contradictory rhetoric the U.S. used in the late 1960's and 1970's that instigated South Korea's clandestine nuclear weapons project. It is vital to reflect on this dangerous time to understand how different American policy strategies either strengthened or undermined the U.S. nuclear security guarantee to South Korea and to use lessons learned to help policymakers prevent destabilizing nuclear acquisition by U.S. allies.

## Theoretical Framework

Continued concerns over North Korean and Iranian proliferation and Chinese and Russian military modernization have drawn the attention of policymakers to the role of

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- 1 Robert Einhorn and DuYeon Kim, "Will South Korea Go Nuclear?" *The Bulletin of Atomic Scientists*; Lee Byong-chul, "Preventing a Nuclear South Korea," 38 North; For the timeline of 6-9 months see Lee young-Wan, "6 Months to Produce Fissile Materials, 6-9 Months to Develop a Detonation Device ... South Korea Could Arm Itself With a Nuclear Weapon in 1.5 Years," *The Chosun Ilbo* (19 February 2016) [Korean]; For a more conservative estimate of 18 months see Matthew McKinzie, "East Asian Nuclearization: Is Trump Wrong?" Nonproliferation Policy Education Center (4 May 2016)
  - 2 Doug Bandow, "Trump and U.S. Allies: From Burden-Sharing to Burden-Shedding," *Foreign Affairs*, 25 January 2017
  - 3 Jesse Johnson, "Amid North Korea threat, Tillerson hints that 'circumstances could evolve' for a Japanese nuclear arsenal," *The Japan Times*, 19 March 2017
  - 4 Helene Cooper, "Mattis Leaves the Door Open to Military Options in North Korea," *The New York Times*, September 18, 2017

extended deterrence in the assurance of U.S. allies. To be able to extend deterrence, a state must be able to deter its allies' adversaries and ensure that its allies believe that it can and will do so. The credibility of *deterrence* and *extended deterrence* is a function of the perceptual lens of the potential aggressor against the U.S. or its allies while the credibility of assurance is a function of the lens through which the umbrella state<sup>5</sup> perceives and interprets U.S. capabilities and actions vis-à-vis the umbrella state's adversary.<sup>6</sup> The factor under consideration for this paper is the role of U.S. *assurance* of allies in the allies' nuclear proliferation behavior.

Murdock argues that the main factors that influence *deterrence* and *extended deterrence* are the adversary's perception of U.S. capabilities and intentions.<sup>7</sup> He further suggests that *assurance* is more complicated because the allies' perceptions incorporate both U.S. actions toward the ally and toward the ally's adversary.<sup>8</sup> I argue, however, that regardless of how the U.S. acts toward the ally's adversary, the same factors – capability and intentions – play a strong role in U.S. allies' perceptions of the credibility of U.S. security assurances. I have developed a typology incorporating allied perceptions of U.S. capability, interests, and resolve to determine the ally's perceptions of the credibility of U.S. security assurances. When facing significant security threats, allies evaluate the credibility of U.S. security guarantees when making their proliferation decisions because U.S. extended deterrence acts as a substitute for the ally developing their own nuclear weapons. If U.S. extended deterrence is not reliable, the ally will have no choice but to find another way to ensure its security by either finding a different nuclear ally or developing nuclear weapons itself.<sup>9</sup>

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5 The recipient of extended deterrence

6 Clark A. Murdock, Jessica M. Yeats, et al. "Exploring the Nuclear Posture Implications of Extended Deterrence and Assurance," Center for Strategic & International Studies (November 2009)

7 Ibid.

8 Ibid.

9 During the timeframe under consideration, the U.S. and Soviet Union are the only two states with nuclear weapons advanced enough to extend nuclear security guarantees to other states. Thus, if a U.S. ally found the U.S. guarantee to lack credibility, their only other option for a nuclear ally would be the Soviet Union. If that were not strategically possible, the only other option is to pursue their own nuclear weapons.

## Assurance Typology

### High Capability

	High Resolve	Low Resolve
High Compatibility of Interests	Ally is highly assured	Ally is moderately assured
Low Compatibility of Interests	Ally is moderately assured	Ally is not assured

### Low Capability

	High Resolve	Low Resolve
High Compatibility of Interests	Ally is slightly assured	Ally is slightly assured
Low Compatibility of Interests	Ally is slightly assured	Ally is not assured

During the timeframe under consideration, the U.S. has maintained capability of defending its allies, thus the two factors that I focus on are U.S. resolve and compatibility of U.S. strategic interests with the interests of the ally in question. As a proxy for U.S. resolve I consider a combination of U.S. troop deployments in the ally’s country and public statements indicating U.S. willingness to come to its ally’s defense. For compatibility of interests, I examine the main components of U.S. president’s grand strategy. I suggest that if both factors are low, the ally is not assured of U.S. commitment, thus the ally will be likely to proliferate. At times where only one of these factors is high, but the other is low, the ally will slow or pause its proliferation activities. When both factors are high, the ally will be strongly assured, obviating its need to acquire its own nuclear weapons, thus there will be no proliferation activity.

## The Origins of US-Korean Relations

Before the Korean War, Korea was of little geostrategic importance to the United States as the U.S. was more preoccupied with concluding a peace treaty with the Japanese following World War II. After the success of U.S. forces in stabilizing the 38<sup>th</sup> Parallel, a major objective of the Truman Administration was preventing the spread of Communism to Japan, which consequently elevated the geostrategic importance of South Korea. This resulted in the placement of U.S. military bases throughout the Pacific.<sup>10</sup> In October of 1953, the Truman Administration made the decision to extend a formal security guarantee to the Republic of Korea (ROK/ South Korea) in the form of the Mutual Defense Treaty that included a memorandum of understanding that the U.S. would automatically respond in South Korea's defense if they were attacked by North Korea.<sup>11</sup> The treaty laid the framework for both economic and security cooperation between the U.S. and ROK.<sup>12</sup>

As the ROK advanced under U.S. military protection, they demonstrated commitment to U.S. nonproliferation goals. Having received significant civilian nuclear technology assistance from the U.S., South Korea willingly ratified the Partial Test Ban Treaty (1964) and signed all International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) safeguards agreements (1968).<sup>13</sup> Despite their cooperative relationship, U.S. lack of response to a number of incidents in the late 1960s<sup>14</sup> led South Korea to question the credibility of the US security guarantee as their only defense against North Korea, thus the ROK's interest in the nuclear option began to build.

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10 U-Gene Lee, "American Policy Towards Korea, 1942-1947: Formulation and Execution," (April 1974)

11 William E. Berry, Jr., "Republic of Korea," in Douglas J. Murray and Paul R. Viotti, eds., *The Defense Policies of Nations: A Comparative Study* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988) pp. 407

12 *Under the treaty, the U.S. Military Assistance Program provided approximately \$5.8 billion in aid between 1950 and 1980. Foreign Military Sales financed another \$1.2 billion in loans on favorable terms. Details from: Fredericka Bunge, ed., South Korea: A Country Study* (Washington D.C.: Foreign Area Studies, The American University, July 1981) pp. 239

13 Mitchell Reiss, *Without the Bomb: The Politics of Nuclear Nonproliferation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988) pp. 86

14 For example: North Korean seizure of the USS Pueblo; increasingly aggressive North Korean raids of South Korean Territory.

## The Nixon Administration

President Nixon's announcement of the "Guam Doctrine" on July 25, 1969 reflected a major shift in U.S. foreign policy toward Asia and the Korean Peninsula.<sup>15</sup> This speech defined "burden-sharing" as the new lexicon of U.S. defense planning in the late 1960s through the 1970s.<sup>16</sup> This meant that although the U.S. and its allies would share some defense costs, the allies would be responsible for supplying manpower and taking a more active defense posture toward their adversaries. It additionally added a sort of conditionality to U.S. security guarantees that U.S. allies had previously understood as unconditional protection.

This announcement, in addition to perceptually calling on allies to take more responsibility for their own defense, spurred concrete actions that impacted the credibility of U.S. security assurances. In 1971, Nixon began large-scale troop withdrawals that troubled South Korean President Park Chung Hee.<sup>17</sup> A recent publication also identifies the troop withdrawal as "a major catalyst of Park's decision" to launch Project 890, South Korea's clandestine military nuclear weapons program, in the early 1970's.<sup>18</sup> These actions intensified Park's fears that the U.S. would abandon South Korea in a crisis for the sake of Washington's broader strategic interests.

In February of 1972, Nixon made his historic trip to China to meet with Mao Zedong, an important step in normalizing relations. Then, in May of 1972, Nixon visited Leonid Brezhnev in Moscow where the two leaders signed seven agreements on issues such as arms control, space exploration, and expanded commerce, marking a turning point in U.S.-Soviet relations. The

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15 *Foreign Relations of the US (FRUS)*, 1969-1976, Volume I, Foundations of Foreign Policy, 1969-1972, Document 29. Full text of Nixon's remarks available in *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: Richard Nixon*, 1969, Pages 544-556.

16 Michael J. Siler, "U.S. Nuclear Nonproliferation Policy in the Northeast Asian Region During the Cold War: The South Korean Case," *East Asia: An International Quarterly*, (Autumn 1998) pp. 59

17 Leon Whyte, "Evolution of the US-ROK Alliance: Abandonment Fears," *The Diplomat*, June 22, 2015.

18 Se Young Jang "The Evolution of US Extended Deterrence and South Korea's Nuclear Ambitions," *Journal of Strategic Studies*, Vol 39, (2016) pp. 502-520; Lyong Choi, "The First Nuclear Crisis in the Korean Peninsula, 1975-76," *Cold War History*, Vol 14 (2014) pp. 71-90 links Park's decision to launch Project 890 to his uncertainty about the credibility of US security guarantees after the collapse of Vietnam in April 1975.

decrease in hostility between the U.S. and two of its main foes indicated to South Korean leadership that their importance to the U.S. was waning.

In response to indications that the U.S. security guarantee may not come through in the event of a North Korean invasion, especially if the North were backed by the Soviet Union or China, Park Chung Hee began exploring options for South Korea to provide for their own defense. South Korea had been both economically and militarily dependent on the U.S. since the end of the Korean War, and was unprepared to provide its own defense within a short timeframe.<sup>19</sup> In 1969, Park began investigating the possibility of acquiring nuclear weapons through an accelerated military arms development program and accessing the international nuclear weapons market.<sup>20</sup> With the credibility of the U.S. security guarantee severely damaged by the Guam Doctrine, Park was convinced that the ROK needed to make some contingency defense plans without the knowledge or approval of the U.S.<sup>21</sup>

The change in South Korea's domestic position on weapons development happened quickly, and without apparent detection by US intelligence or policy makers in its early stages.<sup>22</sup> On June 26, 1975, President Park told journalists from the Washington Post that the ROK would actively pursue nuclear weapons if the U.S. lifted the nuclear umbrella.<sup>23</sup>

In terms of my typology, the shift in the Nixon Administration to the Guam Doctrine and the significant decrease in U.S. troop deployments in South Korea signaled decrease in both U.S. resolve to defend South Korea's and diminished compatibility of interests with the ROK, making ROK leadership question whether the U.S. would truly protect them from in a crisis with the North. Additionally, Nixon's visits to both China and the Soviet Union in 1972 signaled

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19 Ronald McLaurin and Chung-in Moon, *The United States and the Defense of the Pacific*. (Westview Press: Boulder, CO, 1989) pp. 139

20 Siler, "U.S. Nuclear Nonproliferation Policy," pp.60

21 There is evidence that South Korea officially began Project 890 in 1972 and its existence was not discovered by Washington until late 1974. Se Young Jang, "Excavating South Korea's Nuclear History," Wilson Center Nuclear History Project: Sources and Methods, 10 April 2017. <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/blog-post/excavating-south-koreas-nuclear-history>

22 Siler, "U.S. Nuclear Nonproliferation Policy," pp. 60

23 Young-sun Ha, "Nuclearization of Small States and World Order: The Case of South Korea," *Asian Survey*, Vol. 18, No. 11 (November 1978) pp. 1142

improvement of relations with these countries to the ROK, undercutting the importance of South Korea's role in the broader U.S. strategy.

## The Ford Administration

When President Ford assumed office in 1974, South Korean officials were hopeful that the new administration would be more amenable to South Korean security concerns. As a congressman, Ford had supported Truman's policy in Korea, openly regarding the North as the evil regime.<sup>24</sup> Early in his term, Ford made a special trip to Seoul in which he reassured President Park that the U.S. would "continue its best efforts to ensure the peace and security of the region."<sup>25</sup> He also emphatically assured Park that the U.S. would not reduce troops and promised to assist the ROK in military modernization and development of its defense industry. The application of the Guam Doctrine was also temporarily suspended in South Korea, which pleased Park.<sup>26</sup>

The reassurance did not last long. U.S. refusal to recommit troops to Vietnam in early 1975 reintroduced South Korean fears of abandonment. The Ford Administration attempted to quell these fears through public statements guaranteeing South Korea's security. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger publicly reaffirmed there was "no ambiguity" in the U.S. commitment to the ROK<sup>27</sup> and warned North Korea not to make the mistake of underestimating U.S. security commitments to South Korea.<sup>28</sup> Additionally, Secretary of Defense James Schlesinger threatened that any North Korean aggression would be met with massive retaliation, adding that the U.S. would not hesitate to use its tactical nuclear weapons stationed in the South.<sup>29</sup> Although the Ford Administration was taking steps to reassure South Korea, the announcement of Ford's "Pacific Doctrine," which like Nixon's Guam Doctrine emphasized the need for U.S. allies to take more responsibility for their own defense, restored much of South Korea's fears of abandonment.

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24 Chae-Jin Lee, *A Troubled Peace: U.S. Policy and the Two Koreas*. Johns Hopkins University Press: Baltimore (2006). Pp. 76

25 For the Ford-Park joint communique, see Department of State Bulletin, December 23, 1974, 877-878.

26 Lee, *A Troubled Peace*, pp. 76

27 Department of State Bulletin, May 26, 1975, pp. 669

28 Ibid.

29 *The New York Times*, June 21, 1975.

Throughout 1975, Ford Administration took a series of steps to help strengthen the ROK's self-defense capabilities.<sup>30</sup> February 28<sup>th</sup> 1975, the U.S. received a telegram from U.S. Ambassador Richard Sneider reporting that the ROK had initiated a nuclear weapons program.<sup>31</sup> The response from Kissinger was that a nuclear South Korea would have a major destabilizing effect and should be prevented through: inhibiting South Korean access to sensitive nuclear technology and equipment, pressuring South Korea to ratify the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT), and improving American surveillance of ROK nuclear facilities.<sup>32</sup> Under intense pressure from the U.S., Park was compelled to temporarily cease proliferation activities to preserve South Korea's alliance with the U.S.<sup>33</sup> The Park government did, however, continue attempts to acquire nuclear weapons-related components on the international market.<sup>34</sup> Pressure from the U.S. also led South Korea to ratify the NPT in 1976 – with a caveat that it was the ROK's sovereign right to pursue nuclear weapons in the event of failure of the U.S. security guarantee.

The Ford administration's actions were a mix of reassurance and emphasis on self-reliance that sent mixed signals to the ROK. Some actions that improved resolve relative to the Nixon Administration were the temporary suspension of the Guam Doctrine, cancellation of plans for further troop withdrawals from South Korea, Ford's trip to Seoul to reassure the Park government, Kissinger's public statements on the U.S.-ROK alliance and North Korea, and Ford's measures to improve South Korea's own defense capabilities. On the other hand, U.S refusal to recommit troops to Vietnam in 1975 signaled to the ROK that the U.S. may not be fully

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30 Lee, *A Troubled Peace*, pp. 77. The U.S. issued National Security Decision Memorandum 282 on "Korean Force Modernization Plan" (January 9, 1975), National Security Study Memorandum 226 on "Review of U.S. Policy Toward the Korean Peninsula" (May 27, 1975), and National Security Decision Memorandum 309 on "Decisions on ROK Air Defense Requirements" (October 9, 1975). The U.S. also agreed to sell the ROK various advanced military technologies at reduced prices.

31 Gerald R. Ford Presidential Library, National Security Adviser Presidential Country Files for East Asia and the Pacific, Box 9, Korea (4); Also available from South Korean Nuclear History Collection, Nuclear Proliferation International History Project

32 U.S. Department of State, "Development of U.S. Policy toward South Korean Development of Nuclear Weapons" (telegram from the Department of State), February 28, 1975. This document was partially declassified in 1996. For additional information, see also "ROK Plans to Develop Nuclear Weapons and Missiles" (telegram from the Department of State), March 4, 1975.

33 Lee, *A Troubled Peace*, pp. 78

34 Even though these attempts were thwarted by the U.S., the ROK made multiple attempts to buy reactors and other technology from both France (1976) and Canada (1977). Kyongsoo Llo, "The Military Balance in the Korean Peninsula," *Asian Affairs*, Vol. 19, Part I (February 1988): pp. 37.

committed to the defense of its allies, even if they initially back them in a conflict. Moreover, although Ford claimed to deviate from Nixon's strategy, his proposed Pacific Doctrine also emphasized burden-sharing and his continuation of Nixon's approach to China and the Soviet Union still left the ROK with some uncertainty. However, even though Ford did not completely restore South Korean confidence in the U.S. nuclear security guarantee, I would argue that the increase in resolve quelled the ROK's fears of abandonment enough for them to temporarily suspend their proliferation activities, but not enough to take irreversible measures.

## The Carter Administration

When Jimmy Carter became president in 1977, his administration came with a new strategic policy toward South Korea that deeply undermined the credibility of the U.S. security guarantee. He campaigned on the protection of human rights globally, and singled out the Park government for the imprisonment of political dissenters.<sup>35</sup> Carter also negated the Ford Administration's policy on troop withdrawals with Presidential Review Memorandum 13 in which he called for significant reduction in U.S. troop deployments to South Korea.<sup>36</sup> The combination of this doctrinal shift and planning further troop reductions caused significant concern in the ROK.<sup>37</sup> South Korean officials perceived these actions as signals of diminishing strategic value of South Korea's defense in overall U.S. foreign policy.

Bilateral relations worsened throughout the Carter Administration as Carter continued to push for improvement of the human rights situation in the ROK, pointing to the Park regime

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35 Memoranda of Conversation, President Jimmy Carter, South Korean President Park Chung Hee, et al, June 30, 1979, Secret. Source: Digital National Security Archive, Korea; Memorandum of Conversation with President Carter by General John W. Vessey, February 18, 1977, RG 218, CJCJ Brown Records, Box 3, Folder: 001 President/ Vice President 1 August 1976 – December 1977.

36 Don Oberdorfer, *The Two Koreas: A Contemporary History*, New York: Basic Books (2001) pp. 87; For more information on troop withdrawals see William H. Gleysteen Jr, "The Republic of Korea and the United States in East Asia," *Asia-Pacific Defense Forum*, Vol. 3, No. 4 (Spring 1979); Larry A. Niksch, "U.S. Troop Withdrawal from South Korea: Past Shortcomings and Future Prospects," *Asian Survey*, Vol. 21, No. 3 (March 1981); For a historical review of U.S. nuclear weapons deployments in South Korea, see Committee on Atomic Energy, *Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1974), pp. 17; Memorandum of Conversation with President Carter by General John W. Vessey, February 18, 1977.

37 Reiss, *Without the Bomb*, pp. 92-93

itself as the primary culprit.<sup>38</sup> As a consequence for Park's repressive government, the U.S. refused to sell advanced conventional weapons to South Korea, instituted tight restrictions on third party sales of the same items to the ROK, and continued to emphasize burden-sharing in the U.S.-ROK defense relationship.<sup>39</sup> South Korea perceived these actions as even further weakening of the U.S. security guarantee.

In mid-1979, the ROK government held top secret meetings in the Blue House with the Weapons Exploitation Committee and Agency for Defense Development (the two departments created to carry out the South Korea's nuclear weapons program) to determine how to respond to deteriorating relations with the U.S.<sup>40</sup> South Korean appeals to President Carter had not worked, so they turned to the U.S. Congress for support.<sup>41</sup> Consequently, Congress forced President Carter to reassure South Korea in exchange for renouncing their nuclear weapons program, but there was no mention of the human rights issue.<sup>42</sup> This temporarily met South Korea's minimum security requirements, but they still feared the long term risk of shifts in U.S. policy.<sup>43</sup> South Korea had hoped to solidify the relationship in bilateral negotiations, but the negotiations ended in 1980, resulting in acceleration of the ROK's nuclear pursuit.<sup>44</sup>

For this timeframe, the Carter Administration was the lowest point of relations between the U.S. and South Korea. Because one of Carter's main interests was global human rights protections, and he deemed South Korea in violation of these standards, it was difficult for South Korea to see any place for themselves in broader U.S. security strategy. President Park even pleaded with Carter that national security interests supersede human rights, but Carter refused to support for the ROK if these abuses continued.<sup>45</sup> As a consequence, Carter refused to sell and prevented third parties from selling advanced conventional weapons systems to South Korea while continuing to emphasize South Korea's responsibility for its own defense.

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38 Ibid, pp. 87

39 McLaurin and Moon, *The United States and the Defense of the Pacific*, pp. 139-140

40 Reiss, *Without the Bomb* pp. 92-93

41 Siler, "U.S. Nuclear Nonproliferation Policy," (pg. 74)

42 Robert Gillette, "U.S. Squelched Apparent South Korea A-Bomb Drive," *Los Angeles Times*, 4 November 1978, pp. 4

43 Sungjoo Han, "South Korea 1978: The Growing Security Dilemma," *Asian Survey*, Vol. 19, No. 1 (January 1979), pp. 42-43.

44 Bunge, South Korea, pp. 217

45 Memoranda of Conversation, President Jimmy Carter, South Korean President Park Chung Hee, et al, June 30, 1979

Perceptions of low resolve of the U.S. nuclear security guarantee and drastic incompatibility of strategic interests left the ROK government feeling their only choice was to continue their nuclear pursuit.

## The Reagan Administration

The Reagan Administration was finally able to convince South Korea to abandon its nuclear program in 1981. Reagan used a strategy that combined “carrots and sticks” to reassure South Korea that they would not be abandoned if they ceased nuclear pursuit, but also assured them that the consequences would be grave if their nuclear ambitions continued. The strategy was crafted such that the political, economic, and military costs of jeopardizing relations with the U.S. by continuing its nuclear weapons program were too much for Seoul to bear.

This carrot-and-stick approach was likely successful because it gave South Korea little choice, but in return for complying with Reagan’s demands, Seoul also got what they ultimately wanted, restoration of a credible U.S. nuclear security guarantee. Unlike President Carter, Reagan was extremely popular domestically and was given a strong populist mandate to restore U.S. global supremacy.<sup>46</sup> This gave Reagan the ability to meet South Korea’s national security needs and restore other benefits while offering the ROK a NATO-like status in terms of U.S. global interests. Benefits provided to the ROK included:

1. Elevation of the U.S.-ROK mutual security cooperation to that of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) pattern.
2. Combined training, cross-servicing, and mutual support activities similar to those contained in the NATO Mutual Support Act of 1979.
3. Complete termination of all U.S. ground, air, and naval withdrawals from South Korea.
4. Stepped-up security assistance to strengthen South Korea’s defense industry and armed forces.

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46 Siler, “U.S. Nuclear Nonproliferation Policy,” pp. 76

5. Increased military sales credits at higher levels and assistance to the ROK economy to help it absorb the costs of defense purchases.<sup>47</sup>

While the Reagan Administration bestowed these benefits, they also informed South Korea that it would remove them and intensify political and economic pressure if South Korea's nuclear pursuit re-emerged. Because Reagan was able to meet South Korea's security needs in deterring the heavily conventionally armed North Korea through strong reassurances of the credibility of the U.S. nuclear security guarantee, he was able to use that security guarantee as a substitute for indigenous South Korean nuclear acquisition.

The Reagan Administration ultimately met South Korea's security needs in terms of both resolve and compatibility of interests. By elevating the U.S.-ROK alliance to one comparable to NATO, Reagan was able to signal that the U.S. security guarantee was credible. He also took concrete steps like reinstating military sales and integrating troops to further solidify the U.S.-South Korean relationship. Additionally, Reagan reversed the Guam Doctrine and Pacific Doctrine's emphasis on allied burden-sharing in defense, replacing it with a focus on 'bringing allies back in.' This paired with the increase in tension between the U.S. and the Soviet Union during the Reagan Administration reassured South Korea of their place in U.S. security interests and ultimately resulted in the permanent reversal of South Korea's nuclear activities.

## Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to draw some preliminary conclusions about the factors that influence the credibility of U.S. nuclear security guarantees and consequently their effectiveness as a nonproliferation tool. It is not just a matter of whether nuclear security guarantees prevent U.S. allies from proliferating. Rather, I investigated the policy choices surrounding these guarantees that affect U.S. allies' perceptions of the credibility of the guarantee. This is imperative because only a *credible* nuclear security guarantee can serve as a

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47 Siler, "U.S. Nuclear Nonproliferation Policy," pp. 77

viable substitute for a country's own nuclear arsenal, especially when they face a grave security threat.

I argue that the U.S. must consider how its broader foreign policy choices impact how U.S. allies perceive the credibility of security commitments. I identify three aspects of nuclear security guarantees that I hypothesize must all be present for the guarantee to be credible: capability, resolve, and compatibility of interests. I argue that through the timeframe in question, the U.S. was highly capable of defending its allies, thus the factors that vary are resolve and interests, both indications of U.S. *willingness* to come to its allies' defense. Actions taken can undercut allies' perceptions of U.S. resolve, even if they are not purposely directed at the ally. Additionally, actions that indicate shifts in the U.S.'s broader strategic interests, such as doctrinal changes and changes in relations with other nations can send signals to allies of their own strategic value to the U.S. If they perceive that their value is waning, they will question the reliability of U.S. commitments made when the ally was of higher value. I have provided a starting point for a theoretical framework for understanding how allies perceive various U.S. foreign policy choices, and the implications of those perceptions for allies' nuclear proliferation behavior.



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