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Ganeeva Aliya

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**Academic supervisor:**

**Pavlov A.Y.**

Doctor of History,  
Associate Professor

**Reviewer:**

**Potiomkina E.**

Associate professor,  
Saint-Petersburg State University of Economics

Saint Petersburg

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## INTRODUCTION

The development of South Korea's nuclear program began in the 1950s. However, despite the antagonism with North Korea and the constant sense of a military threat from the North, Seoul has not developed a nuclear weapon. Although, starting from the 1970s, South Korea was economically and technologically more ready for this and had a set of motives, at first glance, similar to North Korean ones.

Decision-making in this area was influenced by the difficult military and political conditions of the Korean Peninsula, the peculiarities of the functioning of the alliance between Seoul and Washington in the entire spectrum of US relations with Asian countries, the feeling of dependence on an ally in South Korea, as well as energy security factors. At the same time, thanks to the rapid successful development of the nuclear industry, as well as the economy and science in general, South Korea has become a state capable of obtaining a nuclear charge relatively quickly.

In this work, I consider the possibility of creating nuclear weapons in South Korea, the influence of public opinion on this issue. Different points of view on the need to create nuclear weapons from different political blocs and the international aspect of the problem will also be considered.

**Research question** is to identify the role of public opinion on nuclear issue.

**The mission** is to conduct an in-depth analysis of the likelihood of developing nuclear weapons in the context of the current situation with public opinion. This is relevant, because the prerequisites really exist. And the creation of its own nuclear weapons will change the foreign policy of South Korea. The issue of solving the nuclear problem on the Korean Peninsula remains open, maintaining its tension over the past few years. The mechanism of the "six", in which Russia, China, the USA, Japan, the DPRK and the Republic of Korea take part, remains inactive, while each of its participants is developing its own strategy to counter the new nuclear doctrine of North Korea. This approach stimulates further escalation of the conflict in the region, since not only is there no mutual understanding on the issue of the nuclear status of the DPRK, but there are also a number of tense moments between the

participants in the six-party talks, each of which seeks to solve the North Korean problem in accordance with its own interests.

There are also regular statements in Seoul about the need to denuclearize the Korean Peninsula, including for reasons of solidarity with the American ally. In practice, however, the issues of North Korean nuclear disarmament occupy a modest place in the hierarchy of goals of South Korean diplomacy. For Seoul, it is much more important to keep calm at the border and minimize the likelihood of military clashes. And in political circles, and in the expert community, and among the general public, there are different opinions on how to ensure external calm, a response in the event of regular border clashes, pinning hopes on a policy of concessions.

One of them could be a deep crisis in the nuclear non-proliferation regime. The first signs of this crisis have already appeared: in South Korea, they began to seriously talk about the fact that it would be nice for Seoul to acquire its own nuclear arsenal.

**The object** of this analysis is public opinion in South Korea

**The subject** is a factor of nuclear weapons in public opinion

An analysis was made of the US-Korean interaction in the nuclear field, because a change in the position regarding security will be associated with relations with America. Not all cases of circuits appear with such close cooperation and tend to be independent. And the US is pursuing its own interests.

The main source base of the work was the documents and materials of the governing structures of the countries, to some extent connected with the Korean problem, including its nuclear aspect. Most of the research is the analysis of public opinion; for this, the media, Internet resources and social networks were used. Such as the:

- Ministry of National Defense, Republic of Korea
- Official website of the Government of the Republic of Korea
- Office for Government Policy Coordination, Prime Minister's Secretariat, Republic of Korea
- Office of the President, Republic of Korea

- U.S. The Department of Defense

Korean sites for collecting public opinion, analyzing the evolution of the country's national strategy. To study the development of nuclear energy, the works of Dyachkov<sup>1</sup>, Sunhyuk Kim<sup>2</sup>, William A. Gamson<sup>3</sup>, Lankov<sup>4</sup>, Dalton<sup>5</sup> were studied.

The methodological basis of the chapter is analysis (current and past events), analytical studies (to find out the reasons and influence of public opinion for decisions and events), statistics (public opinion polls), comparative analysis (compare of events, the evolution of opinions).

To achieve the goal of the study, the following tasks were set.

1. Consider the growth of South Korean nuclear power and provide a historical retrospective of the development of the nuclear industry to understand the country's potential
2. Aware the technical possibilities of creating nuclear weapons.
3. Analyze the evolution of public opinion.
4. Consider the influence of various social and political circles on decision-making in South Korea
5. Identifying and explaining fundamental trends in the attitude of the South Korean public towards foreign policy and national security
6. Consider the impact of security issues and the international dimension of the problem on public opinion and decision-making

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<sup>1</sup> Дьячков И.В. Ядерная программа Южной Кореи: генезис, развитие, влияние на регион / И.В. Дьячков // Вестник Тамбовского университета. - 2014. - № 9. - С. 144-152.// D'yachkov I.V. Yadernaya programma Yuzhnoy Korei: genезis, razvitiye, vliyanie na region / I.V. D'yachkov // Vestnik Tambovskogo universiteta. - 2014. - № 9. - С. 144-152.// URL: <https://cyberleninka.ru/article/n/yadernaya-programma-yuzhnoy-korei-genezis-razvitiye-vliyanie-na-region/viewer>

<sup>2</sup> Sunhyuk Kim. State and Civil Society in South Korea's Democratic Consolidation: Is the Battle Really over? Asian Survey, Vol. 37, No. 12 (Dec., 1997), pp. 1135-1144, University of California Press//URL: <https://online.ucpress.edu/as/article-abstract/37/12/1135/92579/State-and-Civil-Society-in-South-Korea-s?redirectedFrom=fulltext>

<sup>3</sup> William A. Gamson and Andre Modigliani. Media Discourse and Public Opinion on Nuclear Power: A Constructionist Approach, American Journal of Sociology, Vol. 95, No. 1 (Jul., 1989), pp. 1-37//Published By: The University of Chicago Press//URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2780405>

<sup>4</sup> Андрей Ланьков. Война за кимчхи. Как история и национализм сталкивают Китай и Южную Корею// 04.06.2021// Andrey Lan'kov. Voyna za kimchhi. Kak istoriya i natsionalizm stalkivayut Kitay i Yuzhnyuyu Koreyu// URL: <https://carnegiemoscow.org/commentary/84599> 4.06.2021

<sup>5</sup> Toby Dalton, Karl Friedhoff, and Lami Kim, "Think- ing Nuclear: South Korean Attitudes on Nuclear Weapons," Research//The Chicago Council on Global Affairs//February 21, 2022//URL: <https://www.thechicago-council.org/research/public-opinion-survey/think- ing-nuclear-south-korean-attitudes-nuclear-weapons>.

This master thesis consists of the introduction, three chapters, conclusion, bibliography and appendixes. In the first chapter, the author considers various characteristics, such as the characteristics of public opinion and political parties in South Korea, the main security issues and technical capabilities. In the second chapter, the author analyzes public opinion and the opinion of the political establishment. In the third chapter, the author considers the influence of the international aspect of the problem on public opinion.

## **CHAPTER I. THE NUCLEAR FACTOR IN THE FOREIGN AND DOMESTIC POLICY OF SOUTH KOREA.**

This chapter contains information that is necessary for further analysis. It is necessary to consider various characteristics, such as the characteristics of public opinion and political parties in South Korea, the main security issues in order to understand the problem of attitudes towards its own nuclear weapons, and technical capabilities. This will allow us to consider the evolution of public opinion on the issue of nuclear weapons in more depth in the next chapter and provide a foundation for considering the international aspect.

### *1.1. The rise of South Korean nuclear power*

The South Korean nuclear program began in the 1950s, when Seoul managed to convince the United States of the need for cooperation on this issue. South Korea managed to successfully use the Atoms for Peace program announced by President D. Eisenhower in 1953<sup>6</sup>.

On February 3, 1956, the parties signed an agreement on the peaceful use of nuclear energy. In the document, the parties pledged to exchange information on research reactors and their operation, as well as on the use of radioactive isotopes in

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<sup>6</sup> Sheen S. Nuclear Sovereignty versus Nuclear Security: Renewing the ROK-U.S. Atomic Energy Agreement // The Korean Journal of Defense Analysis. 2011. Vol. 23. № 2. P. 274

medicine, biology, industry and agriculture. The United States also leased 6 kilograms of 20% enriched uranium to the Republic of Korea and agreed to sell fissile materials and research reactor equipment on separately negotiated terms. Since January 1958, US nuclear weapons have been deployed in South Korea under the control of the American military. In 1967, about 950 nuclear warheads were simultaneously deployed at US bases in South Korea.

After the 1950 war, the government vigorously promoted a policy of providing nuclear power technology for Korea's future prosperity, even as all the resources it had to achieve the absolute value of rebuilding the ruins and national renaissance had been spent. One of the main factors that determined South Korea's need for the development of its nuclear program was the economy's need for electricity against the background of the rapid development of energy-intensive industries<sup>7</sup>.

This happened in several stages:

- Creation of a government organization. Within the government, a related organization was created to develop and implement nuclear energy policy (in 1956 - Department of Atomic Energy of the Ministry of Education), the Law on Atomic Energy (1958) came into force, the Research Institute (1959).
- Education of nuclear personnel. In the early stages of training, there were no professional staff, funds or facilities to be responsible for training, so the IAEA invited mobile laboratories and experts for training. In addition, the government has selected 237 government-funded foreign students for 10 years since 1954 and sent them to the IAEA and nuclear research centers in the United States, Great Britain and Canada to develop human resources through the acquisition of nuclear technology. Government dollars and US dollars were used

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<sup>7</sup> Дьячков И.В. Ядерная программа Южной Кореи: генезис, развитие, влияние на регион / И.В. Дьячков // Вестник Тамбовского университета. - 2014. - № 9. - С. 144-152.// D'yachkov I.V. Yadernaya programma Yuzhnoy Korei: genesis, razvitiye, vliyaniye na region / I.V. D'yachkov // Vestnik Tambovskogo universiteta. - 2014. - № 9. - С. 144-152.// URL: <https://cyberleninka.ru/article/n/yadernaya-programma-yuzhnoy-korei-genezis-razvitie-vliyanie-na-region/viewer> (Access data 20.05.22)

to cover expenses. Government-funded foreign students have returned to Korea and have contributed to the development and implementation of nuclear policy in government, research institutes and universities, research into the use of nuclear energy, and in the dissemination of knowledge and training of technical personnel for the future development of nuclear technology.

- Creation of the Faculty of Nuclear Engineering at the University. In order to develop the basic human resources that will lead nuclear research and nuclear energy production, it was decided to establish a nuclear engineering department at the university. Such faculties were established at Hanyang University in 1958 and at Seoul National University in 1959 for the training specialization.

- Implementation of a research reactor. In 1959, it was decided to introduce the first research reactor as a policy of understanding basic nuclear technology and developing human resources. In 1962, Korea's first research reactor TRIGA Mark-II (100kW) was launched. Some of the government-funded international students returned in time to take part in the construction, and they helped immensely to understand nuclear power through testing the static and dynamic characteristics of nuclear reactors, and to verify the safety of operation and use<sup>8</sup>.

- Construction of a nuclear power plant. Following the decision to introduce nuclear power, the first Corey unit (587,000 kW) and the first nuclear power plant were completed and commercialized in 1978. Despite the fact that in 1970, GDP per capita was only about \$ 290. The Kori-1 construction was the country's largest power unit project with an investment of 156 billion won, making Korea the 21st nuclear power plant owner in the world<sup>9</sup>. It was a turnkey procurement business at the time, a 100% one-time payment method that had no

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<sup>8</sup> 우리나라가 핵무기를 개발하지 않는 이유가 무엇인가요?// SNEPC//

URL:[https://atomic.snu.ac.kr/index.php/우리나라가\\_핵무기를\\_개발하지\\_않는\\_이유가\\_무엇인가요%3F](https://atomic.snu.ac.kr/index.php/우리나라가_핵무기를_개발하지_않는_이유가_무엇인가요%3F)  
(Access data: 20.02.2022)

<sup>9</sup> Ibid



choice but to participate in a limited area as a simple subcontract because Korean industrial infrastructure did not exist at the time. The plant operator was referred to a technology provider and trained accordingly. Following the Kori block 1, construction began on the Wolsong-1 block (679,000 kW) and the Kori-2 block (650,000 kW). The construction of two nuclear power plants was completed in 1983, and the era of nuclear power in South Korea began in earnest.

Further, from the mid-1970s to the mid-1980s, there was a period of growth in nuclear power. This was largely due to the growing tension between the DPRK and the ROK<sup>10</sup>. It was a period when the government pursued strong nuclear energy policies in a situation where the conditions for nuclear energy production, such as labor, finance and technology, were not yet well established. But it is possible to divide the directions of activity of that period.

- Construction of a nuclear power plant. To increase the speed of localization of nuclear power plant equipment and technologies and to facilitate technology accumulation, the keyless method, which is a method of contracting individual divisions, was borrowed from Corey blocks 3 and 4, and domestic construction and engineering companies were involved. Hanbit Units 1 & 2 and Hanul Units 1 & 2 were ordered one after the other and were all completed by the end of the 1980s thanks to domestic industry input and an increase in localization speed.

- Nuclear power technology. Recognizing the importance of engineering technology in the construction of nuclear power plants and the need for localization, KABAR was founded (1975), and KNE (1976) and KOPEC (1982) became KEPCO-E & C. In the 1970s, KEPCO-E&C sent technicians to Bechtel in the United States to acquire engineering technology, while simultaneously

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<sup>10</sup> Ланцова Ирина Сергеевна, Ланко Дмитрий Александрович. Внутренние и международные факторы отношений между двумя корейскими государствами в 50-80 -е годы XX века// 2017// Lantsova Irina Sergeyevna, Lanko Dmitriy Aleksandrovich. Vnutrenniye i chastotnyye faktory otnosheniy mezhdvu dvumya koreyskimi gosudarstvami v 50-80-ye gody XX veka// URL: <https://cyberleninka.ru/article/n/vnutrennie-i-mezhdunarodnye-factory-otnosheniy-mezhdvu-dvumya-koreyskimi-gosudarstvami-v-50-80-e-gody-xx-veka/viewer> (Access data: 13.01.2022)

engaging in engineering services and procurement for Corey Units 3 and 4 and Hanbit Units 1 and 2, thereby expanding their technological capabilities. In addition, in 1979, KEPCO-E&C acquired basic nuclear power technology for nuclear power generation in cooperation with Belgoatom in Belgium. Since nuclear fuel was supplied by nuclear power plant suppliers, it was not possible to stimulate technology localization. However, in 1982, KEPCO-NF (then Nuclear Fuel Co., Ltd.) was founded to help localize technology for the development of the nuclear industry. In the field of equipment, they had basic capabilities in line with the 1960s heavy industry development policy, but they did not have specialized technology, so they were only responsible for the supply of some equipment. However, in accordance with the government's policy of unification of electricity supply in 1981, Doosan Heavy Industries & Construction (then Korea Heavy Industries) became the main power plant supplier, manufacturing and supplying equipment for Hanbit No. The localization project progressed, the technological base of materials for nuclear power was being firmly established<sup>11</sup>.

- Nuclear research and development. In 1972, Unit 2 TRIGA Mark-III (2 MW) was put into operation, and with the help of technology the capacity of Unit 1 was increased to 250 kW. Domestic production was maximally involved in the construction of power unit No. 2, which contributed to the accumulation of industrial technologies. R&D was carried out at the Atomic Energy Research Institute with an emphasis on basic research such as isotope research and production, radio-chemistry, furnace physics, nuclear reactor engineering, biological physics and health physics, radiation medicine, and agricultural research. After the privatization of the Scientific Research Institute of Atomic Energy in 1973, research and development began in the field of nuclear energy technologies, such as the development of nuclear reactor technology, nuclear safety, and the design of nuclear power plants, but the depth of research was low due to a lack of professional staff and research budget. In particular, the Nuclear

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<sup>11</sup> 김상기. "남북관계에 대한 파급영향." 정성윤 외. 『북한 핵 개발 고도화의 파급영향과 대응방향』. 서울: 통일연구원, 2016.

Fuel Development Corporation was created and separated from the Atomic Energy Research Institute (1976). However, it was mistakenly perceived as a research institute for the development of nuclear weapons, and in 1981 it was merged again with the Atomic Energy Research Institute for international political and diplomatic reasons<sup>12</sup>.

In the mid-1980s, there were five operating nuclear power plants, and since it was planned to commission about 30 nuclear power plants in the future in accordance with the nuclear power production plan, it was important to localize and modernize the technologies associated with nuclear power plants. In this regard, technology alliances and cooperation with foreign suppliers with advanced technologies lead to technological independence through the introduction and absorption of appropriate technologies.

South Korea's military nuclear program began in 1970 as a reaction to the Nixon Doctrine of July 1969, which guided the US's Asian allies to resolve military security problems on their own (with the exception of conflicts involving nuclear powers). In addition, the United States began a course of rapprochement with the PRC. In 1971, the South Korean government formed the Arms Research Committee. In 1973, the Committee developed a long-term plan for the creation of nuclear weapons (NW); the cost of its implementation over 6–10 years was estimated at USD 1.5–2 billion<sup>13</sup>. At the initial stage, the creation of a plutonium nuclear charge was considered as a priority. In 1970-1975. Negotiations were held with France on the construction of a plant for the radio-chemical reprocessing of irradiated nuclear fuel (SNF) and the separation of plutonium<sup>14</sup>. However, under pressure from the United States, the "intensified" nuclear test of India in 1974, France rejected the

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<sup>12</sup> KEPCO NF. Official site//URL: <https://www.knfc.co.kr/mps> (Access data: 23.03.2022)

<sup>13</sup> 함택영, "남북한의 군사력: 사실과 평가방법," 『국제정치논총』, 제37집 1호 (1997), pp. 27~60;

함택영, "북한 군사력 및 군 사위협 평가 재론," 『현대북한연구』, 제7권 3호 (2005), pp. 53~96;

이정우, "북한의 재래식 군사력 평가와 대남 군사위협 의 변화," 『현대북한연구』, 제17권 2호 (2014), pp. 296~331.

<sup>14</sup> 정성윤, "북한의 핵전력과 핵전략." 정성윤 외. 『북한 핵 개발 고도화의 파급영향과 대응방향』. 서울: 통일연구원, 2016.

South Korean proposal. On April 23, 1975, South Korea ratified the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), linking, however, the fulfillment of its obligations under the Treaty with the provision of the US with a "nuclear umbrella"<sup>15</sup>. On November 14 of the same year, the IAEA Comprehensive Safeguards Agreement entered into force for South Korea<sup>16</sup>.

The intentions of US President J. Carter, elected in 1976, to completely withdraw American troops from South Korea (which were never implemented), forced the country's leadership to decide to resume the military nuclear program. Despite the signing of the NPT, South Korea secretly began to independently develop technologies for the radiochemical reprocessing of spent nuclear fuel and enrichment of uranium<sup>17</sup>.

From 1981 to 1987, South Korea produced uranium targets from depleted uranium, which were then irradiated outside the IAEA safeguards in the Triga-III research reactor to produce small amounts of plutonium<sup>18</sup>.

At three facilities in South Korea, the conversion of natural uranium into metallic form was secretly carried out, which was later used in experiments to enrich uranium by the laser method. Experiments on laser enrichment of uranium were carried out by South Korean scientists up to 2000<sup>19</sup>.

Information about South Korea's work on uranium enrichment and plutonium separation in violation of its obligations under the IAEA Comprehensive Safeguards Agreement became international only in 2004, when South Korean representatives

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<sup>15</sup> 전성훈, 『미국의 對韓 핵우산정책에 관한 연구』 (서울: 통일연구원, 2012), p. 3.

<sup>16</sup> Mack, Andrew Potential, not proliferation: Northeast Asia has several nuclear-capable countries, but only China has built weapons. Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists//1 July 1997// URL: <http://www.highbeam.com/doc/1G1-19580892.html> (Access data: 2.01.2022)

<sup>17</sup> 전성훈. 『미국의 對韓 핵우산정책에 관한 연구』 . 서울: 통일연구원, 2012.

<sup>18</sup> 함택영, "남북한의 군사력: 사실과 평가방법," 『국제정치논총』, 제37집 1호 (1997), pp. 27~60;

함택영, "북한 군사력 및 군 사위협 평가 재론," 『현대북한연구』, 제7권 3호 (2005), pp. 53~96;

이정우, "북한의 재래식 군사력 평가와 대남 군사위협의 변화," 『현대북한연구』, 제17권 2호 (2014), pp. 296~331.

<sup>19</sup> Barbara Demick. South Korea experimented with highly enriched uranium / Incident could complicate arms talks with North//Los Angeles Times//Sep. 3, 2004//URL: <https://www.sfgate.com/politics/article/South-Korea-experimented-with-highly-enriched-2728185.php> (Access data: 23.03.2022)

provided the Agency with "complete data" about the nuclear program over the past years<sup>20</sup>. The IAEA's special investigation into undeclared nuclear activities in South Korea was published in the Agency's Director General's report of November 11, 2004. The IAEA decided not to submit the South Korean dossier to the UN Security Council, "taking into account all circumstances, including the country's reputation and demonstrated constructive cooperation in clarification of all aspects, as well as the minimum amount of received nuclear materials. " On February 19, 2004, the Additional Protocol entered into force for South Korea<sup>21</sup>.

In 2006, South Korea re-energized nuclear energy development. They began to erect four more blocks and named them "Shin Kori". The first power unit with an American water-cooled reactor of the OPR-1000 type was commissioned in 2010. NPP "Shin Kori - 2" with a reactor of the same type was connected to the grid two years later. The capacity of both is up to 999 MW<sup>22</sup>. In January 2016, the power start-up phase began at Unit 3 of Shin Kori NPP after the unit was first connected to the grid. It is planned to launch another fourth power unit, and recently the supervisory authority approved the construction of the Shin Kori-5 NPP and the Shin-Kori-6 NPP<sup>23</sup>.

Another notable South Korean nuclear power plant is the Wilson NPP. It is located in the north of Gyeongsang Province. It is one of the largest in Korea: the station accounts for about 5% of all electricity consumed in the country.

One of the most famous South Korean nuclear power plants is the Hanul nuclear power plant. Until 2013, the plant was called the Uljin NPP, after the city of the same name. The plant consists of six power units: two power units with pressurized water reactors SR-1 designed by Framatome with a capacity of 985 MW

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<sup>20</sup> IAEA Board Concludes Consideration of Safeguards in South Korea// 26.11.2004//URL: <https://www.iaea.org/newscenter/news/iaea-board-concludes-consideration-safeguards-south-korea> (Access data: 23.03.2022)

<sup>21</sup> Ibid

<sup>22</sup> 전성훈. 『미국의 對韓 핵우산정책에 관한 연구』. 서울: 통일연구원, 2012.

<sup>23</sup> 정성윤. "북한의 핵전력과 핵전략." 정성윤 외. 『북한 핵 개발 고도화의 파급영향과 대응방향』. 서울: 통일연구원, 2016.

and four power units with pressurized water reactors OPR-1000 with a capacity of 1048 MW. The first power unit of the Hanul NPP was commissioned in 1988, the last in 2005. In addition, it is planned to build two more Shin-Hanul power units. It is the most powerful in South Korea and the fourth in the world. Its total capacity is 5900 MW. True, the country has another station of the same strength - the Hanbit nuclear power plant. However, the authorities are planning to increase the capacity of the Hanul NPP to 8,700 MW. For comparison: the most powerful nuclear power plant in the world - the Japanese nuclear power plant "Kashiwazaki-Kariva" has a capacity of 8212 MW.

The last South Korean nuclear power plant is the Hanbit NPP (formerly Yongwan), located on the coast of the Yellow Sea in Yongwan County, Jeollanam-do Province. Its capacity is 5875 MW. There are six power units with pressurized water reactors. The first two power units developed by the American company Westinghouse with a capacity of 980 MW were connected to the grid in 1986. Four more power units are equipped with OPR-1000 reactors with a capacity of 1039 MW to 1050 MW. They were launched between 1994 and 2002. By 2030 South Korea, they intend to export up to 80 nuclear reactors.

## *1.2. Specifics of public opinion and political parties in South Korea*

Political parties in South Korea are a unique phenomenon, characteristic and possible, perhaps, only for Korean society. By the names of the parties it is very difficult to understand what they are. Therefore, it seems natural to want to get acquainted with the history of the parties<sup>24</sup>, but it is not easy to do this, since the Korean parties do not have any "history". A feature of political parties in the

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<sup>24</sup> Clarke H.D., Stewart M.C. The decline of parties in the minds of citizens // Annual review of political science. – Palo Alto, 1998. – N 1. – P. 360

Republic of Korea is their formation around the figure of a political leader, and not on the basis of political programs and ideology<sup>25</sup>.

Regarding one of the main ruling Democratic Party Toburo, we can say the following. It, like all parties in the country, was periodically reformed. Historically, the first "Democratic Party" (Kor. 민주당 Minjudang) was formed in 1955 by Shin Ikhee, Jang Myung, Yun Bosung, and Cho Byungok. However, in 1964, the party ceased to exist, merging with the "Civil Party". After that, until 2014, many successor parties of a democratic orientation were created and liquidated.

On March 16, 2014, the Democratic Party merged with the New Politics Coalition to form the New Political Alliance for Democracy<sup>26</sup>. On December 28, 2015, the New Political Alliance for Democracy decided to adopt a new name and henceforth be known as the "Joint Democratic Party" and then simply "Democratic Party"<sup>27</sup>.

In the 2016 parliamentary elections, the "Democratic Party" won<sup>28</sup>. In the presidential election of 2017, Moon Jae-in from this party won and became the president of the country.

The Power of the People (Korean: 국민의힘 Kunming Him) is a right-wing conservative political party in the Republic of Korea, the country's opposition party. The name until August 31, 2020 is the United Party of the Future.

The party was formed on February 17, 2020 as a result of a merger between the Free Korea Party, the New Conservative Party and the Forward to the Future 4.0

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<sup>25</sup> Jhee B.-K. Ideology and voter choice in Korea // Korean political science review. – Seoul, 2006. – N 40. – P. 70.

<sup>26</sup> 새정치민주연합, KBS World// 23 March 2014//URL:

[http://rki.kbs.co.kr/russian/news/news\\_hotissue\\_detail.htm?lang=r&id=news\\_hotissue&No=1000091&current\\_page=o](http://rki.kbs.co.kr/russian/news/news_hotissue_detail.htm?lang=r&id=news_hotissue&No=1000091&current_page=o) (Access data: 02.03.2022)

<sup>27</sup> 박해식기자. [속보]새정치민주연합, 새 당명 '더불어민주당'으로 확정//URL:

<https://www.donga.com/news/article/all/20151228/75602475/1> (Access data: 02.03.2022)

<sup>28</sup> В Южной Корее правящая партия не набрала большинства мест в парламенте// Информационное агентство «ОБЗОР.PRESS»// V Yuzhnoy Koreye pravayshchaya partiya ne nabrala bol'shinstva mest v parlamente// Informationsnoye agentstvo «OBZOR.PRESS»//14.04.2016//URL: <https://obzor.press/world/2016041419911> (Access data: 02.03.2022)

Party. On August 31, 2020, the party decided to adopt a new name and continue to be called "The Power of the People"<sup>2930</sup>.

Almost all parties in South Korea are formed shortly before the elections. This can create pictures of extreme political instability. However, this impression is absolutely erroneous.

In fact, modern South Korea is a society in which, just, there are several very stable political forces, each of which has its own, quite clearly expressed, ideology and program. It is significant that such a phenomenon as the mass migration of deputies to the ruling party in Korea is quite rare (although it does occur). At the same time, for some reason, there was no tradition of stable parties in Korea<sup>31</sup>. Korean political parties are temporary, almost decorative structures that are usually created for the next election. However, all Koreans understand exactly what kind of ideological platform this or that party represents. In fact, it is customary in Korean politics to regularly carry out what is called rebranding in business. Once every few years, the external form of presenting the ideology changes, and the corresponding party is, as it were, created anew. But at the same time, not only the ideological and political platform of the party, but also the composition of its leadership remains the same. It can be said that in South Korean politics, a party is just another representative of a certain ideology.

The theory of party identity and political behavior was largely influenced by the research of the Michigan School and the classic work *The American Voter*. Campbell and his colleagues define party identity as the psychological attachment of an individual to a particular party, which develops in the process of political socialization from early childhood<sup>32</sup>. Party identity makes it easier for the voter to

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<sup>29</sup> Главная оппозиционная партия решила изменить название//Glavnaya oppozitsionnaya partiya reshila izmenit' nazvaniye// KBS World Radio Russian Service//2020-08-31//URL: [http://world.kbs.co.kr/service/news\\_view.htm?lang=r&id=Po&Seq\\_Code=62970](http://world.kbs.co.kr/service/news_view.htm?lang=r&id=Po&Seq_Code=62970) (Access data: 13.03.2022)

<sup>30</sup> 새누리당, 오늘 자유한국당으로 개명...상징은 '햇불'. 출처 : SBS 뉴스 원본 링크//URL : [https://news.sbs.co.kr/news/endPage.do?news\\_id=N1004039343&plink=COPYPASTE&cooper=SBSNEWSSEND](https://news.sbs.co.kr/news/endPage.do?news_id=N1004039343&plink=COPYPASTE&cooper=SBSNEWSSEND) (Access data: 17.01.2022)

<sup>31</sup> Kim H., Choi J.Y., Cho J. Changing cleavage structure in new democracies: An empirical analysis of political cleavages in Korea // *Electoral studies*. – Oxford, 2008. – N 27. – P. 143.

<sup>32</sup> Hess R., Torney J. *The development of political attitudes in children*. – Chicago: Aldine, 1967. – 456 p.



choose candidates and parties, helps to recognize programs and ideologies, and facilitates a retrospective assessment of election campaigns<sup>33343536</sup>. As a result, party identity significantly influences electoral behavior<sup>37 38</sup> and acts as an effective voter mobilization mechanism<sup>39</sup>.

The main factor of the Korean voter's party identification is regional affiliation<sup>40</sup>. Many researchers note that regionalism is a key aspect of electoral behavior and party identification in South Korea. For example, according to H. Lee, the party identification of Korean voters should be understood in the logic of regional demarcation; later this idea was supported by A. Khvan<sup>41</sup>. Recent studies have also confirmed that the region of birth has a stronger influence on the party identification of voters than all other factors<sup>424344</sup>.

According to the **Appendix 1** shows that the level of party identification among Korean voters is growing, although not as much as in other new democracies. A survey conducted during the 2012 presidential election shows that more than 50% of voters identified themselves with one party or another. This fact testifies to the

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<sup>33</sup> Bartels L.M. Beyond the running tally: Partisan bias in political perceptions // *Political behavior*. – Oxford, 2002. – N 24. – P. 130.

<sup>34</sup> Gerber A.S., Huber G.A. Partisanship, political control, and economic assessments // *American journal of political science*. – Hoboken, NJ, 2010. – N 54. – P. 158.

<sup>35</sup> Goren P. Character weakness, partisan bias, and presidential evaluation // *American journal of political science*. – Hoboken, NJ, 2002. – N 46. – P. 630.

<sup>36</sup> Lodge M., Hamill R. A partisan schema for political information processing // *The American Political Science Review*. – Cambridge, 1986. – N 80. – P. 515.

<sup>37</sup> Bafumi J., Shapiro R.Y. A new partisan voter // *The journal of politics*. – Cambridge, 2009. – Vol. 71, N 4. – P. 17.

<sup>38</sup> Bartels L.M. Partisanship and voting behavior, 1952–1996 // *American journal of political science*. – Hoboken, NJ, 2000. – N 44. – P. 37.

<sup>39</sup> Rosenstone S.J., Hansen J.M. Mobilization, participation, and democracy in America. – N.Y.: Longman, 1993. – 368 p.

<sup>40</sup> Lee H.C. The voting behavior of independent voters: the case of the 16 th Congressional election // *Korean political science review*. – Seoul, 2011. – N 34. – P. 137–160.

<sup>41</sup> Hwang A.R. A multiple indicators approach of partisan attitudes: an analysis of the effect of partisanship on voters' choice in the 17 th presidential election in Korea // *Contemporary politics*. – L.: 2008. – N 1. – P. 85–110.

<sup>42</sup> Park W.H. Reconstruction of party identification // *Analyzing the 2012 presidential election in South Korea / Chan Wook Park, Won-Taek Kang (eds.)*. – Seoul: Nanam, 2013. – 234 p.

<sup>43</sup> Jang S.J. The Korean voters' attitude toward political parties: ideological and psychological foundation of party support and party voting // *Analyzing the 2012 National Assembly election in South Korea / C.W. Park, W.T. Kang (eds.)*. – Seoul: Nanam, 2012. – 236 p.

<sup>44</sup> Han J.H. Party identification of the Korean electorates: party platforms, party leaders and party activists // *Analyzing the 2012 National Assembly election in South Korea / C.W. Park, W.T. Kang. (eds.)* – Seoul: Nanam, 2012. – 268 p.

consolidation of the party system in Korea, although its pace, of course, remains low.

In the last 20 years in South Korea, there are three such political and ideological platforms. First, it is the moderate right, somewhat similar to the British conservatives. The current avatar of the right is the Power of the People. Secondly, it is the moderate left, reminiscent of the European right-wing social democrats<sup>45</sup>, but with an unusually strong nationalism for the current European left. They are represented by the United Democratic Party. Thirdly, these are the radical leftists, whose positions are generally close to the Eurocommunists, but at the same time they are nationalist. Now they are not so popular, as the rhetoric of the population regarding unification with North Korea has changed. And the parties in South Korea tend to adjust to the current agenda<sup>46</sup>. Korean voters understand all this very well and do not get lost in such party life. For the voter, it is quite obvious that, for example, "Free Korea" is nothing more than a hypostasis (or another avatar) of the Great Country Party, which participated in the 2007 elections. And on February 17, 2020, Free Korea merged with the Forward to the Future 4.0 parties and the New Conservative Party, creating the United Future Party before the parliamentary elections<sup>47</sup>. The voter also knows that the United Democratic Party is the same moderate-left party that was called the United New Democratic Party in the 2007 election and before that was known as Our Open Party.

In the next presidential election, Korean voters will most likely have to vote for some completely new parties, under new and rather interesting names. However, one can be sure that these parties will represent all the same three main ideological platforms, and that they will be led by the same people who are leading the parties of the respective trends now.

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<sup>45</sup> Dalton R.J. Democratic challenges, democratic choices: The erosion of political support in advanced industrial democracies. – Oxford: Oxford univ. press, 2004. – 230 p.

<sup>46</sup> Han J.H. Party identification of the Korean electorates: party platforms, party leaders and party activists // Analyzing the 2012 National Assembly election in South Korea / C.W. Park, W.T. Kang. (eds.) – Seoul: Nanam, 2012. – 130 - 135 p.

<sup>47</sup> [News analysis] New conservative party or throwback to the Saenuri Party?// Feb.18,2020//URL: [http://english.hani.co.kr/arti/english\\_edition/e\\_national/928719.html](http://english.hani.co.kr/arti/english_edition/e_national/928719.html) (Access data: 03.04.2022)

Nevertheless, talk about the imperfection of political parties, the effectiveness of which and the level of public confidence in them are extremely low.

According to many analysts<sup>48 49 50 51</sup>, after the presidential elections of 1987, regionalism became the defining watershed of the political sphere of South Korea: the four main candidates (Ro Dae-woo, Kim Yong-sam, Kim Dae-jung, Kim Jong-Pil) were from different regions, and actively enjoyed their support in the pre-election fight. Since then, the South Korean party system has been strongly influenced by regionalism, and belonging to a particular territory has been a determining factor in electoral politics.

A key feature of South Korea's party system is that political parties are regionally oriented. Political discrimination for the regions was initially a serious obstacle to the full consolidation of democracy in the state. Thus, the Youngnam region has always been represented in the National Assembly to a greater extent than others, since most of the members of the Saenuri party came from this region, in contrast to the Democratic United Party, which enjoys significant support in Honam province<sup>5253</sup>.

Gradually, however, the factor of regional affiliation in South Korean politics weakened. Since the 2000s, another electoral cleavage has been actualized - an ideological one: the conservative electorate votes mainly for Free Korea, the liberal one for Democratic Party of Korea<sup>54</sup>. However, given that the process of ideological

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<sup>48</sup> Choi H.S. What determined the 6.27 local election?: Partisanship and Regionalism // Korean political science review. – Seoul, 1995. – N 29. – P. 141–161.

<sup>49</sup> Lee K.Y. The Korean elections and regionalism. – Seoul: Orum, 1999. – 214 p.

<sup>50</sup> Park C.W. Party vote in the 14 th National Assembly elections // The Korean election I / Nam Young Lee (ed.). – Seoul: Nanam, 1993. – 342 p.

<sup>51</sup> Yang J.I. Elections and voting behavior in Korea: a case study of the National Assembly elections and localism // Korea and world politics. – Seoul, 2001. – N 17. – P. 1–33.

<sup>52</sup> «Азиатская модель» демократии. Особенность партийного плюрализма в Южной Корее// "Asian model" of democracy. Feature of party pluralism in South Korea//URL: [https://russiancouncil.ru/blogs/anastasiya-zhuravleva/1103/17\\_апреля\\_2014](https://russiancouncil.ru/blogs/anastasiya-zhuravleva/1103/17_апреля_2014) (Access data: 10.02.2022)

<sup>53</sup> Han J.T. Sub-regionalism of Honam district after democratization // The Korean journal of humanities and the social sciences. – Seoul, 2013. – N 37. – P. 62.

<sup>54</sup> Mah I.S., Jaung H., Kim C.H. The social and economic origins of a newly emerging social cleavage in Korean society // Korea and world politics. – Seoul, 1997. – N 13. – P. 35-40.

identification of both parties has not yet been completed, ideology has not yet become a key factor in electoral competition.

Thus, since 1987, the South Korean party system has been affected by two main divisions - regional and ideological. Considering that the regional component in inter-party competition is gradually decreasing, while the ideological component, on the contrary, is increasing, it can be assumed that at present the Korean party system is gradually transforming from a multi-party to a two-party one<sup>55</sup>. (**appendix 2**)

The stability of the presidential republic, whose system is based on the principle of checks and balances, is ensured by a compromise between competing parties. The confrontation between the ruling party and the opposition can lead the process of political decision-making to a dead end and, thus, complicate public administration. Thus, for the successful functioning of the presidential republic, it is necessary that the ruling and opposition parties be ready to compromise when discussing the political agenda. However, in South Korea, the level of confrontation between the competing parties is extremely high and excludes the possibility of any compromise. With the beginning of democratization, inter-party conflicts have caused the disruption of more than 40% of the sessions of the National Assembly. There are two reasons for this state of affairs.

The first reason is that despite more than 20 years of democratization experience, the behavioral models of the ruling and opposition parties were formed in the authoritarian era. In the dictatorship, the ruling party acted as a vanguard of the authoritarian leader, and its main function was to carry out the will of the authoritarian leader. In addition, due to the specificity of the electoral system and direct manipulation of election results, the ruling party always occupies a majority in the National Assembly. The ruling party's parliamentary dominance did not

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<sup>55</sup> Randall V., Svasand L. Party institutionalization in new democracy. Party Politics. London. 2002 – Vol. 8. № 1. – p. 5 – 29//URL: <http://www.yorku.ca/sbohn/pols6425/Notes/Week5/Party%20Politics%20vol%208%20Randall%20and%20Svasand.pdf>. (Access data 12.12.2021)

contribute to the establishment of negotiation processes, consultations and discussions between the ruling and opposition parties. Regardless of the opinion of the opposition, the ruling party could always get what they wanted.

Opposition parties were unable to achieve their goals through regulation, so they were forced to resort to illegal and sometimes violent measures. For example, they tried to boycott debates on bills they oppose by occupying the congressional conference room. Sometimes they went out into the streets to gain public support. In extreme cases, opposition leaders risked their lives to fight a hunger strike. Despite the illegality of this act, many Koreans supported the opposition, saying that no other way was possible to fight the dictatorship.

The behavioral models of the ruling and opposition parties also survived the democratization period. Even if a party wins a majority in democratic elections, it tries to make the most of its potential for a dominant position. The ruling party prefers to monopolize the legislative process rather than compromise with the opposition. If a party fails to secure a parliamentary majority, it will try to regain its dominant position by merging with smaller parties or attracting independent members of parliament without cooperating with political opponents.

When the ruling party tried to monopolize the legislative process, the opposition party had no choice but to rely on the means developed during the military regime in order not to lose its political influence. Ironically, when the opposition party becomes a majority, it adopts a majority-party decision-making model and refuses to negotiate with the opposition.

Even in a crisis like 1997<sup>56</sup>, the conflict model of inter-party competition was deeply ingrained in Korean politics, so an agreement could not be reached and an agreed two-party system could not be formed.

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<sup>56</sup> Kim Kihwan. The 1997-98 Korean Financial Crisis: Causes, Policy Response, and Lessons. at The High-Level Seminar on Crisis Prevention in Emerging Markets// Organized by The International Monetary Fund And The Government of Singapore//July 10-11, 2006//URL: <https://www.imf.org/external/np/seminars/eng/2006/cpem/pdf/kihwan.pdf> (Access data:6.03.2022)

The second reason for the conflictogenicity of the political sphere of South Korea is the growing ideological polarization of political elites<sup>57</sup>. As the results of studies show, the number of parliamentarians with a moderate ideological orientation has significantly decreased - if in the 16th convocation of the National Assembly (2002-2007) 62% of deputies belonged to the moderate ideological wing, then in the 17th (2007-2012) there were only 35 such .4%, and in the 18th (2012 - present) - only 22.8%.

If ideology determines the way a politician thinks and behaves, then it is unlikely that he will make political decisions that run counter to his convictions. In addition, the Conservatives have rallied into one party (Free Korea) and the Liberals into another (Democratic Party of Korea, DPK), making it even more difficult for them to compromise. The ideological polarization of the National Assembly is one of the main reasons why Korean politicians are unable to find pragmatic solutions leading to a better standard of living for the people.

In this situation, public confidence in the National Assembly and political parties is at a very low level. **Appendix 3** shows data on the level of trust in the National Assembly and political parties since 1996.

The low level of trust in the most important democratic institutions is fraught with adverse consequences for the development of democracy<sup>58</sup>. Figure 2 shows that at present, the vast majority of Koreans do not trust either the National Assembly or political parties. This unfortunate fact means that citizens do not take into account the normal functioning of parliaments and political parties. As mentioned earlier, the fact that Korean voters' party identity is gradually increasing can be seen as evidence that the Korean party system has been consolidated. But the level of trust in political parties and parliaments is declining. Ironically, the consolidation of the political

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<sup>57</sup> Jang S.J. The Korean voters' attitude toward political parties: ideological and psychological foundation of party support and party voting // Analyzing the 2012 National Assembly election in South Korea / C.W. Park, W.T. Kang (eds.). – Seoul: Nanam, 2012. – 236 p.

<sup>58</sup> Yoo S.J. National Assembly as a representative institution and public trust: gap between expectation and reality // Korean journal of legislative studies. – Seoul, 2009. – N 27. – P. 129-132.

party system in Korea is progressing at the same time as the public's level of trust is lowering.

Talks that South Korea needs to acquire its own nuclear weapons has been going on for a long time. Even the nuclear arms race itself on the Korean Peninsula was at one time initiated not by Pyongyang, but by Seoul. In the early 1970s, under the influence of the Vietnam Syndrome, the United States proclaimed the so-called Guam Doctrine, which called for the gradual withdrawal of American forces from Asia. In this situation, the likelihood arose that American troops would be withdrawn from South Korea - moreover, Washington then began to really consider such a scenario.

This turn of events did not at all please the South Korean leadership, whose entire strategy was based on the presence of American troops in the country. Therefore, the government of General Park Chung Hee, on the one hand, began to take all imaginable diplomatic measures in order to prevent the withdrawal of American troops, and on the other, secretly work to create its own nuclear weapons. South Korea's attempts to acquire its own nuclear potential soon ceased to be a secret and caused a lot of concern in the United States. The result was a compromise reached in the late 1970s: Washington pledged to maintain its military presence in South Korea, and South Korea, for its part, pledged not to develop its own nuclear weapons. This compromise lasted for about half a century, although over the past 10-15 years, many in South Korea have expressed dissatisfaction with the commitments that Seoul then assumed.

South Korea is an ideologically divided society, and the views of South Korean left-wing nationalists are quite different from those of their opponents from the right-wing conservative camp. Nevertheless, the attitude towards nuclear weapons on both flanks of the South Korean political elite was negative.

The right-wingers in South Korea are taking consistent - sometimes even one would like to say "radical" - pro-American positions. Because of this, they, firstly,

until recently did not doubt the reliability of the American "nuclear umbrella", and secondly, they were not ready to take steps that would inevitably irritate Washington.

The left, on the other hand, is traditionally pacifist and tends to believe that South Korea can deal with external threats without the use of military force and, consequently, without means of deterrence - diplomacy alone. In addition, unlike its right-wing opponents, the South Korean left is not so serious about the threat from the North, and the majority believe that North Korea will never use nuclear weapons against its fellow tribesmen.

This belief is very common among Koreans, especially among those who adhere to left-wing nationalist views popular among the intelligentsia.

All this is superimposed on the fact that, on the whole, the inhabitants of the South have little interest in the affairs of the North. For example, in 2011, on the eve of the presidential elections, sociologists asked the surveyed South Koreans to say what problems should be addressed first of all by the future presidential administration. The problems of relations with the North were in last place. They were considered the most important only by 8.8% of respondents<sup>59</sup>.

However, in the past few years, there have been a number of events that - at least at first glance - could lead to a change in attitudes towards nuclear weapons in the South Korean establishment.

### *1.3. Security challenges and technical capabilities*

In 1969, US President R. Nixon proclaimed the "Nixon Doctrine", which assumed that the American allies themselves would guarantee their own security, and not rely primarily on US assistance. In addition, the United States began a course towards rapprochement with the PRC.<sup>60</sup> A specific consequence of the implementation of the "Nixon Doctrine" for South Korea was the reduction of the

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<sup>59</sup> South Korean Public Opinion on North Korea & the Nations of the Six-Party Talks. October 2011. Seoul, Asan Institute, 2011. P. 3.

<sup>60</sup> Тихонов М., Кан Мангиль. История Кореи// Tikhonov M., Kan Mangil'. Istoriya Korei.. XX в.: в 2 т. М., 2011. Т. 2. С 225



American contingent from 70 to 44 thousand troops. As a "compensation", the United States allocated \$ 1.5 billion to Seoul for the modernization of the army<sup>61</sup>. Nonetheless, doubts persisted in both American and South Korean political circles for some time about whether American troops would remain in the country at all. By the way, the US forces in South Korea in the 1950-1990s. possessed tactical nuclear weapons, and Seoul and Washington were bound by the 1953 alliance.<sup>62</sup>

Seoul, fearing a weakening of support for its main ally in the face of confrontation with the North, heightened the sense of threat.

In 1975, in conversations with US Secretary of Defense J. Schlesinger, Park Chung Hee emphasized that the military potential of the South must be demonstratively built up, since Kim Il Sung might miscalculate and start a war if it seems to him that the South is weak. In addition, the Minister of Defense of the Republic of Korea Seo Chong Chol noted that the United States could delay the procedure for providing military assistance, fearing being drawn into a conflict similar to Vietnam, and the DPRK's allies border on it and in an emergency could quickly come to the rescue. The American minister generally supported the initiative for military reinforcement, but stressed that Seoul needs to be prepared to repel the North Korean threat, and the threat from the USSR or the PRC is the concern of the United States. It is possible that these words were a hint not to focus on the model of the nuclear powers in the modernization of the armed forces.

Under the influence of the deteriorating international situation for Seoul in 1970, the Defense Development Agency and the Weapons Development Committee were created in South Korea. AOR exists today and is the official organization engaged in R&D in the military sphere. This agency is mentioned in the 1970s American documents cited below. as an organization carrying out practical work on the development of the military nuclear program of the South. KRO was a special

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<sup>61</sup> Engelhardt M.J. Rewarding Nonproliferation: The South and North Korean Cases // The Nonproliferation Review. 1996. Spring-Summer. C 32

<sup>62</sup> Mutual Defense Treaty Between the United States and the Republic of Korea; October 1, 1953 // American Foreign Policy 1950-1955 Basic Documents Volumes I and II. Department of State Publication 6446. General Foreign Policy Series 117. Washington, DC : U.S. Government Printing Office, 1957

secret body, which included a number of high-ranking officials. It was at its meeting in early 1970 that a political decision was made to launch a military nuclear program<sup>63</sup>. Through KRO, contacts were established with countries where Seoul hoped to acquire "sensitive" technologies<sup>64</sup>. However, subsequently, the United States managed to convince South Korea to abandon the idea of creating its own nuclear weapons for a long time.

However, there are now early signs that many in the South Korean establishment have begun to question whether the idea of a nuclear South Korea is an absolute taboo. For example, mention may be made of the statement made by Won Yoo Chul, MP and prominent figure in the ruling party, who said that South Korea should acquire "peaceful" nuclear weapons to defend against North Korea's "destructive" nuclear weapons. It does a good job of reflecting some of the peculiarities of the South Korean elite's thinking lately.

The reasons why people in Seoul have begun to ponder what recently seemed unthinkable are obvious. First, confidence in American security guarantees is declining - not only due to the strengthening of neo-isolationist sentiments in the United States, but also due to changes in the regional and global balance of power. The second reason is the successes of North Korean nuclear scientists and rocket scientists. In the new situation, when the DPRK has practically developed a full-fledged nuclear missile potential, many in Seoul have doubts that, as one South Korean diplomat put it privately, "the United States will be ready to sacrifice San Francisco to protect Seoul."

Until recently, the Seoul talk about its own nuclear potential seemed (and in many ways was) only diplomatic demonstrations aimed at influencing Washington's position and forcing the United States to more decisively oppose North Korea's nuclear ambitions. However, the decision to equip new boats with launchers costs a

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<sup>63</sup> Oberdofer D. *The Two Koreas: a Contemporary History*. Basic Books, 2001. 177 p

<sup>64</sup> 이윤섭. *박정희 정권의 시작과 종말*, 서울 : 북큐브, 2012. P 270-271

lot of money - a lot more than is usually spent on diplomatic maneuvers, so this time Seoul's intentions are more serious than before.

The Northeast Asia region is critical to the world. Along with Western Europe and North America, Northeast Asia is one of the top three economic activity zones in the world, but also a powder keg of potential fires.

Within its framework, North Korea, which possesses nuclear weapons, is opposed to South Korea, Japan and the United States. China is opposed to Taiwan, which it considers an apostate province, and is involved in maritime territorial disputes with Japan over the Senkaku / Diaoyu Islands. Japan and South Korea are not militarily opposed to each other, but they are constantly in diplomatic conflicts<sup>65</sup>.

The United States, with its main forces stationed in South Korea and Japan, juggles alliances with Seoul and Tokyo, while controlling the low-profile Proliferation Security Initiative, which controls North Korean shipping and leads the Quad group from Australia, India, Japan and other countries. myself.

However, Seoul's nuclear inclinations, albeit quite understandable in the context of the current situation on the Korean Peninsula, are fraught with serious problems for the region. East Asia is now very similar to Europe in the early 20th century. Here, most countries do not trust their neighbors, and classical nationalism is still the most important component of the dominant ideologies. In addition, the Chinese factor cannot be disregarded - China, to put it mildly, is very unpopular among its neighbors, many of whom are not opposed to acquiring nuclear weapons primarily in order to defend themselves against Beijing (with conventional weapons it is difficult for its neighbors to contain China simply by virtue of huge difference in size)<sup>66</sup>.

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<sup>65</sup> Jahyun Chun. Who decides foreign policy? The role of national trauma in shaping the influence of public opinion in South Korea//Published online: 07 Mar 2021// URL: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/01442872.2021.1895980?journalCode=cpos20> (Access date: 2.02.2022)

<sup>66</sup> Андрей Ланьков. Война за кимчхи. Как история и национализм сталкивают Китай и Южную Корею// 04.06.2021// Andrey Lan'kov. Voyna za kimchki. Kak istoriya i natsionalizm stalkivayut Kitay i Yuzhnyuyu Koreyu// URL: <https://carnegiemoscow.org/commentary/84599> 4.06.2021 (Access date: 21.02.2022)

Nuclear programs of North and South Korea, in case of an unfavorable turn of events, may be a good excuse for other countries in the region, which also want to acquire the notorious absolute deterrent. It's about Japan and Taiwan, but in the long term such countries of Southeast Asia may also join the nuclear race, which no one thinks about in this context now.

The motivations of all the major players are quite understandable and logical, but the results to which their policies lead can be very sad. This has happened more than once in history, although this can hardly serve as a consolation.

However, not everything is as straightforward as it might seem. Yes, inter-Korean interaction is considered to be one of the main factors provoking talks about its own nuclear weapons in South Korea. But the factor of a strong China also plays an important role, if it does not claim to be the main one. Public opinion polls from different years have shown how the confidence of the South Korean population has changed that in the event of a conflict, China will side with North Korea (**appendix 4**)<sup>67</sup>.

A disproportionate number of South Koreans generally believe that China would side with North Korea if a new Korean war broke out. In 2012, as you can see in Figure 1, the percentage increased. This was a reflection of China's stance on the sinking of the warship Cheonan and the shelling of Yongpyeong Island, two of North Korea's most significant and direct military attacks. In 2013, the heads of state of both countries changed. The atmosphere between the leaders was quite peaceful, which led to a reduction in those who believed that China would side with North Korea. 2015 was the calmest year, but in 2016 the situation changed. Most observers believe that the turning point here came in 2017, when China reacted sharply to South Korea's deployment of American THAAD anti-missile systems. Seoul agreed to the deployment after the North Korean army added medium-range missiles, which pose a direct threat to virtually all targets in South Korea.

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<sup>67</sup> Kim Jiyeon. South Korean Public Opinion, The Asan Institute for Policy Studies//date of application: 13.11.2021// URL<https://theasanforum.org/south-korean-public-opinion/> (Access data: 21.01.2022)

The negative reaction in Beijing can be explained by the fact that he felt that this directly affected his interests. First of all, China was concerned that this was creating a very unpleasant precedent for the deployment of an American missile defense system along the Chinese borders. Over time, this would increase the chances that other neighbors would acquire missile defense systems that could be directed against China.

The second problem was the fact that the American battery includes a powerful radar, which theoretically makes it possible to monitor the airspace of Northeast China. Therefore, Beijing decided to put pressure on South Korea through South Korean firms operating in China. Sanctions followed without formal sanctions, with constant audits of firms. The tourism sector also suffered, since there was an outflow of Chinese tourists from South Korea. Pressure on military policy through economic influence.

The dynamics of the deterioration of public opinion and opinion in political circles regarding relations with China is obvious. Despite clear ideological and nationalist divisions, China's rise is still the main problem. He is increasingly beginning to claim the role of hegemon in East Asia. Despite the fact that until recently the South Korean public for the most part perceived this rise with surprising calmness, the rise of China is causing more and more tension in Seoul, and not only among the elites, but also among ordinary citizens. But it must be borne in mind that continued exchanges and cooperation contribute to the easing of tension and the strengthening of peace even in nuclear-asymmetric relations.<sup>68</sup>

In 2020, South Korea announced that its new Hyunmoo-4 short-range ballistic missile (SRBM) could carry a 2 ton warhead, and in March North Korea tested an SRBM that it said could deliver a 2.5 ton payload. Hyunmu-4 is the largest rocket in South Korea.

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<sup>68</sup> Jin Myung Lee, "Is Liberal Peace Likely in Nuclear Asymmetry?" *Korean Journal of International Studies*, vol 13, no. 1 (2015), pp. 29~61.

September 2021 was the month of big rocket events for the Korean Peninsula. However, the launches that took place on the Korean Peninsula (and not only in its northern half) in September 2021 are very different in many respects from those launches to which we are all already accustomed. The nuclear missile arms race on the peninsula is entering a new phase, this time with the active participation of the South (although it must be admitted that its actions are largely a reaction to the actions of the North).

On September 15, 2021, a successful test launch of a submarine ballistic missile was carried out in South Korea<sup>69</sup>. This makes us think about the direction in which Seoul is going to develop its armed forces. Few remember that the nuclear arms race on the Korean Peninsula was once started not by North, but by South Korea. This also worried neighboring China. Wang Yi also criticized the US proposal for South Korea to join the "outdated" Five Eyes alliance. Wang Yi told his South Korean counterpart, Foreign Minister Jung Ui Young, that Seoul and Beijing are "partners who cannot part."<sup>70</sup> South Korea is becoming increasingly important in the US-China rivalry for influence.

The SLBM, launched from the An Changho submarine, is a variant of the Hyunmoo-2B ballistic missile and has a maximum range of 500 kilometers. Thus, South Korea becomes the seventh country in the world, which is armed with an SLBM fleet. North Korea has recently become such a country. SLBMs are expected to enter service by the end of 2022. "We will develop more powerful, longer-range and more accurate missiles to provide deterrence and security and peace on the Korean Peninsula," the South Korean government said in a statement<sup>71</sup>. At the same time, a new anti-ship cruise missile was tested in South Korea, which, according to

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<sup>69</sup> A Quiet Arms Race Is Rapidly Heating Up Between the Two Koreas//date of application: 2.11.2021//URL: <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/04/19/world/asia/korea-missiles-arms-race.html> (Access data:15.03.2022)

<sup>70</sup> China's Wang Yi slams US move for South Korea to join 'outdated' Five Eyes alliance//date of application: 7.12.2021) //URL: [https://www.scmp.com/week-asia/politics/article/3148806/chinas-top-diplomat-wang-yi-slams-us-move-south-korea-join?utm\\_source=rss\\_feed](https://www.scmp.com/week-asia/politics/article/3148806/chinas-top-diplomat-wang-yi-slams-us-move-south-korea-join?utm_source=rss_feed) (Access data: 01.05.2022)

<sup>71</sup> North Korea Reports Long-Range Cruise Missile Test as Arms Race Intensifies//date of application: 23.11.2021//URL: <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/09/13/world/asia/north-korea-cruise-missile-arms-race.html> (Access data:17.03.2022)

experts, is at the level of the best world samples. In addition, bench tests of an engine for a long-range ballistic missile took place in South Korea.

According to experts, ballistic missiles SLBMs are not very effective weapons when used with conventional (non-nuclear) warheads. Most experts now see only one possible application for South Korean SLBMs - strike at Pyongyang and, possibly, at the centers of command and communications of the North Korean army in case of war. Indeed, there is currently an imbalance on the Korean Peninsula: almost the entire territory of the Seoul agglomeration, which is home to 25 million people, or about half of the total population of South Korea, is in the zone of heavy North Korean artillery fire. At the same time, the South Korean armed forces - apart from aviation - are not capable of delivering a tangible blow to Pyongyang. It is the need to give an answer to the threat that Seoul faces, in a semi-official manner, and explain the South Korean military their decision to develop an SLBM.

However, a significant number of experts are skeptical about these explanations (for example, Jeffrey Lewis of the Middlebury Institute, one of the leading American experts on nuclear weapons and their means of delivery<sup>72</sup>). These experts draw attention to the fact that SLBMs are expensive weapons and, in terms of value for money, not the most effective. He has alternatives. The development and adoption by South Korea of its own SLBMs makes experts remember that there has long been talk of a possible transformation of South Korea into a nuclear power - or, more precisely, a restart of the South Korean military nuclear program.

It is no coincidence that among all seven powers, whose naval sailors have acquired such complex and expensive devices as SLBMs to manufacture and operate, only South Korea does not possess nuclear weapons. This, as already mentioned, is not surprising: SLBMs are inherently well combined with nuclear warheads. It is officially believed that South Korea has not had a military nuclear

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<sup>72</sup> North Korea Expert Jeffrey Lewis Imagines Nuclear War in New Novel//August 16, 2018//URL: <https://www.middlebury.edu/institute/news/north-korea-expert-jeffrey-lewis-imagines-nuclear-war-new-novel> (Access data 02.05.2022)

program since the late 1970s. However, there is reason to suspect that the country still has some kind of embryonic nuclear program - or, rather, a proto-program.

The point is that in South Korea, possibly, under conditions of maximum secrecy, research is being carried out, which, if necessary, will allow, within a very short time, to deploy its own production of nuclear charges. Some observers believe that the now half-forgotten incident of 2004, when it was discovered that South Korean scientists have been engaged in uranium enrichment experiments for a long time (on a very modest scale), can serve as indirect evidence<sup>73</sup>.

After testing SLBMs, South Korea turned into an unusual country: Seoul has the entire "nuclear triad", that is, all three main types of nuclear warheads, although there are no nuclear weapons yet. However, given the financial and technical capabilities of South Korea, the creation of such weapons, even if no nuclear proto-program in South Korea actually exists, is only a matter of several years for months).

Overall, South Korea's defense plan calls for spending 315.2 trillion won (US \$ 273 billion) over the next five years, an average 5.8 percent increase over the same period last year as the country continues to strengthen its defenses amid threats from Pyongyang.

### **Conclusions on the first chapter**

Republic of Korea in the XX century. made an impressive economic, scientific and technological leap that made the emergence of a nuclear program possible. Nevertheless, despite the antagonism with North Korea and the constant feeling of a military threat from the North, Seoul did not create nuclear weapons, although, starting from the 1970s, it was economically and technologically more ready for this and had a set of motives, at first glance. similar to North Korean. Decision-making in this area was influenced by the difficult military-political conditions of the Korean Peninsula, the peculiarities of the functioning of the

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<sup>73</sup> Южная Корея надеется на справедливый вердикт МАГАТЭ// Yuzhnaya Koreya nadeyetsya na spravedlivyy verdikt MAGATE//date of application: 1.12.2021//URL: [https://ria.ru/20041103/724471.html?chat\\_room\\_id=724471](https://ria.ru/20041103/724471.html?chat_room_id=724471) (Access data: 01.02.2022)



alliance of Seoul and Washington within the entire range of US ties with Asian countries, the feeling of dependence on an ally in South Korea, as well as energy security factors.

It can be concluded that not in itself an alliance with the United States, but their very persistent intervention, became the main obstacle to the advancement of the military program of the South. At the same time, thanks to the rapid successful development of the peaceful nuclear industry, as well as the economy and science in general, South Korea remains a threshold state capable of relatively quickly acquiring a nuclear charge. In addition, Seoul intends to use political methods to seek the lifting of the restrictions imposed on it during negotiations on the extension of the 1972 agreement. Seoul seeks to expand the scope of the politically permissible so that it corresponds to its scientific and technological potential. In particular, South Korea is interested in obtaining permission to create a full cycle of nuclear fuel, which theoretically simplifies the creation of nuclear weapons. Such aspirations, as well as the international community's ignorance of South Korean violations of the nonproliferation regime, cannot but alert the North.

The USA, Russia, France and China - these four countries are the main players in the world market for peaceful nuclear energy. However, another country, South Korea, a relatively young state that forty years ago was almost completely dependent on imports in all spheres of life, claims to replenish this list, not without reason. But the economic policy of Seoul, focused on the production of goods for export, contributed to the fact that Korea today is 13th in the world in terms of GDP and 7th in terms of the volume of products exported abroad, and in the nuclear field, if not surpassed its Western teachers, then persistently breathes them in the back.

## CHAPTER II. GOVERNMENT ESTABLISHMENT AND PUBLIC OPINION ON THE NUCLEAR ISSUE

The acquisition of nuclear weapons has become a major feature of South Korea's national security discourse. Opinion polling over the past decade shows consistent majority support for nuclear ownership. Leading political figures are publicly discussing the idea of either developing a South Korean national nuclear weapons program or seeking to restore US tactical nuclear weapons on the Korean Peninsula.

### *2.1. Different positions of the political establishment*

Talk about the need to have their own nuclear weapons has been circulating among the political elites for a long time.

In July 29, 2019 Cho Kyung Tae, one of the leaders of the Free Korea Party (now united in the People's Power), wants South Korea to pursue its own nuclear program. The party argues that South Korea should respond to the North's nuclear and missile threats by acquiring a meaningful nuclear deterrent rather than through making futile appeals for peace. But that type of thinking is an irresponsible and dangerous form of “security populism.”<sup>74</sup>

It can be said that he considered the ideal solution for the United States to agree to the return to the Korean Peninsula of American tactical nuclear weapons, which were withdrawn from Korea in the early 1990s. In the event that, however, if such an agreement cannot be obtained, Cho Kyung Tae said, South Korea should formally withdraw from the nuclear non-proliferation treaty and begin to deploy its own nuclear arsenal.

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<sup>74</sup> [사설] 자유한국당, 위험천만한 ‘핵무장론’ 중단해야//10.12.2021//URL: <https://www.hani.co.kr/arti/opinion/editorial/905086.html> (Access data: 12.05.2022)

For his part, another possible candidate for the top post, Yu Seungmin, has pledged that, if elected, he will conclude an agreement with Washington to share this potential with Seoul<sup>75</sup>. Hon Junphyo promises to adhere to the same course, who not only supported the idea of attracting nuclear weapons to the republic, but also pointed out the possible development of its own by South Korea. "Nuclear weapons can be rebuffed exclusively with the help of nuclear weapons," he stressed in an interview with the American news agency Bloomberg<sup>76</sup>.

After Donald Trump became US President in early 2017, in Seoul, including among the right-wing conservative elites, doubts arose about the US's readiness to fulfill its allied obligations under the new conditions<sup>77</sup>. Of course, the statements of Trump himself, who constantly showed dissatisfaction with the entire system of American military-political alliances in general, and the alliance with South Korea in particular, play a significant role in this. He invited his allies like South Korea and Japan to protect themselves by developing their own nuclear weapons. Moreover, he, in fact, tried to extort from US allies - primarily from South Korea - by threatening to withdraw US troops from the country if Seoul did not start paying "much more" for US defense<sup>7879</sup>.

Second, the military-technological breakthrough achieved by North Korean engineers in recent years plays a significant role in changing the mood in Seoul (at

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<sup>75</sup> 이승우. '비박' 유승민 새누리 복당...친박 반발로 또 내홍//Yonhapnews//URL: <https://www.yna.co.kr/view/AKR20160616094252001>. (Access data: 23.05.2022)

<sup>76</sup> South Korean Presidential Candidate Vows to End Deal with North// date of application: 21.11.2021//URL: <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2021-10-26/south-korean-presidential-candidate-vows-to-end-deal-with-north> (Access data: 02.05.2022)

<sup>77</sup> Saheli Roy Choudhury. "Trump signals he wants South Korea to pay more for US military presence there" //CNBC// 21.04.2020//URL: <https://www.cnn.com/2020/04/21/trump-signals-he-wants-south-korea-to-pay-more-for-us-military-presence-there.html> (Access data: 03.05.2022)

<sup>78</sup> Bruce Klingner, Jung H. Pak, and Sue Mi Terry, "Trump shakedowns are threatening two key US alliances in Asia," Brookings Institution, December 18, 2019//date of application: 10.12.2021//URL: <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2019/12/18/trump-shakedowns-are-threatening-two-key-u-s-alliances-in-asia/>. (Access data: 22.04.2022)

<sup>79</sup> "Траммп: Южная Корея согласилась увеличить выплаты США для защиты от КНДР"//ФГБУ «Редакция «Российской газеты»// "Траммп: Yuzhnaya Koreya soglasilas' uvelichit' vyplaty SSHA dlya zashchity ot KNDR"//ФГБУ «Redaktsiya «Rossiyskoy gazety»//08.08.2019//URL: <https://rg.ru/2019/08/08/tramp-iuzhnaia-koreia-soglasilas-uvlichit-vyplaty-ssha-dlia-zashchity-ot-kndr.html> (Access data: 07.05.2022)

least on the right flank of South Korean politics). Throughout 2017<sup>80</sup>, North Korea tested two models of ICBMs capable of hitting targets in the continental United States, and successfully tested a thermonuclear charge. Work on submarine-based ballistic missiles is also advancing in North Korea - already the second missile submarine is ready to go into operation<sup>81</sup>.

This means that the DPRK has either already become, or in the near future will become the third country in the world, after China and Russia, theoretically capable of wiping out New York or Washington. In this situation, the most pro-American representatives of the Seoul elite began to ask themselves the question of whether the United States would risk supporting South Korea if the possible cost of intervention in the inter-Korean conflict would be the death of millions of US civilians. In other words, doubts began to appear in Seoul that the United States would be willing to sacrifice San Francisco to protect Seoul, and Donald Trump's statements and deeds only increased these doubts<sup>82</sup>.

In the new situation, when doubts arose about the reliability of the main - and, in fact, the only - strategic ally, the idea of creating a nuclear deterrent potential of its own began to seem much more attractive than before. Especially in the context of the discussion of US intentions to weaken the nuclear umbrella<sup>83</sup>.

So, the emergence of pro-nuclear sentiments among the Korean right is understandable and, if we take into account the situation in which their country finds itself, it is quite logical.

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<sup>80</sup> Kim Jong Un hints at North Korea test of intercontinental ballistic missile//CBS News.//01.01.2017//URL: <http://www.cbsnews.com/news/kim-jong-un-hints-north-korea-test-intercontinental-ballistic-missile/> (Access data: 08.02.2022)

<sup>81</sup> 북극성 2형 2차 발사 공개 정보 분석, 한국국방안보포럼(KODEF)//SPN 서울평양뉴스//URL: <http://www.spnews.co.kr/news/articleView.html?idxno=733> (Access data:)

<sup>82</sup> Shweta Sharma "Yoon Suk-yeol: Will 'South Korea's Donald Trump' worsen tensions with North Korea?"//11.04.2022//URL: <https://www.independent.co.uk/asia/east-asia/yoon-suk-yeol-south-korea-election-result-b2032649.html> (Access data:02.05.2022)

<sup>83</sup> 미국, "핵사용 조건 더 엄격히 한다" ...동맹국 "핵우산 약화된다" 반대//date of application: 3.12.2021//URL: <https://www.hani.co.kr/arti/international/america/1022822.html> (Access data:07.05.2022)

In recent national elections, the Conservative Party included the return of US nuclear weapons to its political platform. While the nuclear issue did not feature prominently in the campaigns leading up to South Korea's latest presidential election in March 2022, growing threats in the region and doubts about the security alliance with the United States are making the nuclear issue increasingly relevant<sup>84</sup>.

Many fear <sup>85</sup>that new president Yoon Seok Yeol 's lack of experience and the fact that he is a conservative from a non-ruling party will hinder sensible nuclear policy. But recording Yoon Seok Yeol as a typical conservative would be wrong - in fact, he joined the Korean right involuntarily. Yoon Seok Yeol previously worked in anti-corruption investigations and became famous for bringing charges against conservative President Park Geun-hye during her trial. Liberal President Moon Jae-in installed Yoon Seok Yeol as attorney general in the hope that he would be obedient to his party. However, Yoon, as Attorney General, did not make exceptions for the liberals and, as a result, due to the absence of a third force in Korea, joined the conservatives.

If Yoon Seok Yeol is really serious about security and stability on the Korean Peninsula, experts say, he should go nuclear to fix the asymmetric power relationship with North Korea. The transition to nuclear weapons is also supported by 71 percent of South Koreans, who prefer the development of a domestic weapons program to the deployment of American nuclear weapons. Only after Yoon Seok Yeol achieves a balance of nuclear power can he respond to Kim with military options. Until then, Yoon Seok Yeol should exercise restraint and try not to “add fuel to the fire”<sup>86</sup>.

Internal factionalism among the political elite was a chronic factor that hampered Korea's leadership and contributed to its weakness in relations with

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<sup>84</sup> Hyonhee Shin. “South Korea's president-elect wants U.S. nuclear bombers, submarines to return”//06.04.2022//URL: <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/skoreas-president-elect-wants-us-nuclear-bombers-submarines-return-2022-04-06/> (Access data:05.05.2022)

<sup>85</sup> Hyonhee Shin “South Korea's president-elect wants U.S. nuclear bombers, submarines to return”//06.04.2022//URL: <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/skoreas-president-elect-wants-us-nuclear-bombers-submarines-return-2022-04-06/> (Access data:05.05.2022)

<sup>86</sup> “Can Yoon Seok Youl’s Preemptive Strike against North Korea bring Peace and Stability to the Korean Peninsula?”//URL: <https://whanchoi.people.uic.edu/Can-Yoon-Seok-youls-Preemptive-Strike-against-North-Korea.pdf> (Access data:20.05.2022)

external powers. One such example is 2016. It demonstrates how South Korea's internal political turmoil continues to interfere with its foreign policy. The bribery and influence scandal in late 2016 and early 2017<sup>87</sup>, which led to the impeachment of President Park Geun-hye, created a political leadership vacuum at a time of rising tensions over the development of North Korea's nuclear program.

Regarding the role of the National Assembly in making foreign policy decisions. Seoul National University professor Geun Lee explores the relationship between the executive and the legislature and finds that while the National Assembly provides some oversight of foreign policy in hearings with Foreign Ministry officials and sometimes acts as a mouthpiece for discussion of sensitive national issues, its role in shaping foreign policy is secondary. The National Assembly engages in its own diplomatic contacts with legislative counterparts in a manner that promotes communication and information sharing, but—with the exception of occasional behind-the-scenes diplomacy with Japanese parliamentarians—it does not significantly influence the formation or conduct of foreign policy. In fact, a 2012 parliamentary amendment requiring the consent of 60 percent of the representatives of the National Assembly to consider a bill increases incentives for the executive branch to avoid formal involvement of the legislature in controversial foreign policy issues<sup>88</sup>.

Professor Yang Ho Kim of the National Defense University of Korea has explored how institutional bureaucratic interests have shaped foreign policy under five presidential administrations<sup>89</sup>. He concludes that the leadership of the president

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<sup>87</sup> "South Korea's presidential scandal"//BBC News//URL:  
[https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=&ved=2ahUKewid0p2zh474AhWyl4sKHfoKAPAQFnoECAkQAQ&url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.bbc.com%2Fnews%2Fworld-asia-37971085&usg=AOvVaw2lz437dpKgahbq\\_VLsapw5](https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=&ved=2ahUKewid0p2zh474AhWyl4sKHfoKAPAQFnoECAkQAQ&url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.bbc.com%2Fnews%2Fworld-asia-37971085&usg=AOvVaw2lz437dpKgahbq_VLsapw5) (Access data:20.05.2022)

<sup>88</sup> Scott A. Snyder, Geun Lee, Young Ho Kim, and Jiyeon Kim. Domestic Constraints on South Korean Foreign Policy. //January 2018//URL:[https://cdn.cfr.org/sites/default/files/report\\_pdf/Discussion\\_Paper\\_Series\\_Snyder\\_etal\\_South\\_Korean\\_Constraints\\_OR.pdf](https://cdn.cfr.org/sites/default/files/report_pdf/Discussion_Paper_Series_Snyder_etal_South_Korean_Constraints_OR.pdf) (Access data:20.05.2022)

<sup>89</sup> B Young Ho Kim. Bureaucratic Politics in South Korean Foreign Policy—Making.//URL:  
[https://cdn.cfr.org/sites/default/files/report\\_pdf/Discussion\\_Paper\\_Series\\_Snyder\\_etal\\_South\\_Korean\\_Constraints\\_OR.pdf](https://cdn.cfr.org/sites/default/files/report_pdf/Discussion_Paper_Series_Snyder_etal_South_Korean_Constraints_OR.pdf) (Access data:2.05.2022)

is of the utmost importance and that North Korea policy is the issue most prone to bureaucratic politics. He attributes the influence of bureaucratic politics to the opposing interests of the Ministry of Unification (which promotes inter-Korean relations and seeks unification) and the Ministry of National Defense and the National Intelligence Service (which take a defensive and hostile stance towards North Korea)<sup>90</sup>.

South Korea is a deeply polarized society. For more than a decade, the political life of the country has been determined by the confrontation between two political camps: the so-called conservatives and the so-called progressives.

These names, perhaps, are best taken in quotation marks - also because the South Korean "conservatives" are far from European and American conservatives in their political views, and it is generally difficult for South Korean "progressives" to find Western analogues. Simplifying somewhat, we can assume that "conservatives" are supporters of a moderate market economy, who in their foreign policy are unconditionally guided by the United States. Their "progressive" opponents, by European standards, can be described as very moderate social democrats (a bit like British Labor in Tony Blair's time). However, the South Korean "progressives" differ from the European moderate left, in particular, by their pronounced nationalism<sup>91</sup>.

Speaking of political camps in South Korea, it makes little sense to name the parties with which these camps are associated. The fact is that in South Korea there is a rather unusual, but established tradition - both main parties are periodically rebranded. In other words, when the next parliamentary or more often presidential elections are approaching, both "conservatives" and "progressives" usually announce the dissolution of their previous party and the creation of a new party, which, in general, differs from the old one only in emblems and name. At the

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<sup>90</sup> B Young Ho Kim. Bureaucratic Politics in South Korean Foreign Policy-Making.//URL: [https://cdn.cfr.org/sites/default/files/report\\_pdf/Discussion\\_Paper\\_Series\\_Snyder\\_etal\\_South\\_Korean\\_Constraints\\_OR.pdf](https://cdn.cfr.org/sites/default/files/report_pdf/Discussion_Paper_Series_Snyder_etal_South_Korean_Constraints_OR.pdf) (Access data:2.05.2022)

<sup>91</sup> Kang S.T., Park J.H. The change in Korean social movement and the postmaterialism // Oughtopia. – Seoul, 2011. – N 26. – P. 35.

moment, the main party of the "conservative" camp is the People Power Party, and the main party of the "progressive" camp is the United Democratic Party. However, there is no doubt that in a few years both "conservatives" and "progressives" will use some other signs<sup>92</sup>.

The "conservatives" trace their ideological lineage to the military regimes that ruled Korea from 1961-1987, and if you go back to more ancient times, then from Syngman Rhee and even the first Korean nationalist modernizers of the late 19th century.

The "conservatives" now in opposition have a much more negative view of North Korea than their opponents. There were times when the real policy of the "conservatives" in relation to the North was described by the chased Chinese-Korean formula "myolgon thon-il", that is, "Having destroyed the communists, we will unite the country!" Somewhere before the beginning of the sixties, the South Korean leadership, which was then completely dominated by the ideological teachers and mentors of the current "conservatives", was really seriously going to "liberate" North Korea from the "puppet communist regime" ruling there<sup>93</sup>. However, those times are long gone, although even now the rightists say that their goal is to unite the country on the principles of liberal democracy (that is, on South Korean terms).

By and large, the politics of the right until recently were best described by the formula developed by their guru and idol Park Chung-hee: "first economic growth, then unification." In other words, although the rightists formally, at the level of declarations, denied legitimacy for North Korea, in practice they proceeded from the fact that the South would have to coexist with the North Korean state for a very long time.

With the passage of time, changes began to occur in the attitude of the right to the North. A growing number of supporters of the right, especially among the

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<sup>92</sup> Kang W.T. Electoral politics in South Korea: ideology, region, generation and media. – Seoul: Purungil, 2003. – 89 p.

<sup>93</sup> Lee K.Y., Lee H.W. A study of influence of ideological voting: scope, measurement and meaning of ideology // Contemporary politics. – L.: 2008. – N 1. – P. 137–166



youth, began to doubt that unification with North Korea should be considered as a practical policy goal. These people, in general, are not yet ready to completely abandon the slogan of unification on the principles of liberal democracy. However, the further, the more they consider unification as some kind of abstract goal, the achievement of which is possible only in the indefinite future and which should not affect practical politics in any way.

In principle, the orientation towards long-term peaceful coexistence presupposes a readiness for negotiations and compromises, and once the "conservatives" showed such readiness. However, in recent years there has been near consensus on the right that almost any form of interaction with North Korea is either unnecessary or dangerous and should therefore be avoided. The ideal, from their point of view, was the policy pursued by the last two right-wing administrations - Lee Myung-bak (2008-2012) and Park Geun-hye (2013-2017). This policy boiled down to ignoring North Korea and curtailing any cooperation with this country.

The "conservatives" imply that such a tough approach will lead to the fact that North Korea may abandon its nuclear program, the existence of which they perceive as a serious threat.

However, in many cases, statements that nuclear disarmament, they say, can be achieved by pressure on the North, are rather ritualistic.

Rather, interactions with the North should be avoided in the first place because North Korea usually profits economically from such contacts (this is generally true) and uses the funds thus obtained to further advance its nuclear program, undermining the security of the South Korean state.

The "progressives" attitude towards North Korea is more complex. The "progressive" camp historically took shape in the 1990s on the basis of the merging of two components that, although not antagonistic in earlier periods, represented two different political forces.

First, the roots of the "progressives" go back to the anti-systemic opposition of the 1960s and 1970s, that is, to people who, like Kim Dae-jung (president from 1998 to 2002), at one time actively opposed the rule of the military. The then anti-systemic opposition was partly guided by ideological considerations, and partly had a regional character and relied on the southwestern provinces of the country.

Another component of the current South Korean "progressives" came from the radical left-nationalist student movement of the eighties. In those years, the social and political life of South Korean universities was dominated by radicals whose ideology was a bizarre mixture of Marxism-Leninism and Korean nationalism. These people didn't bother with their studies and spent their time fighting the police and reading Marxist and nationalist literature. A significant majority of them at that time, to one degree or another, sympathized with North Korea - in their opinion, a country in which a nationally clean and socially just society was built. The ideal for them was unification on an equal footing, perhaps through the creation of a confederation, but some were then not opposed to the North Korean order being extended to the whole country. Of course, this was not about the real North Korean order, about which they knew little, but about the order of the North Korea that existed in their imagination.

The beginning of the nineties became for these people a time of severe disappointment. The collapse of the socialist bloc dealt a sudden and, in fact, mortal blow to their worldview. Student activists, who firmly believed in the rightness of mass movements and workers' demonstrations, suddenly found that in Eastern Europe both mass movements and workers' demonstrations are clearly directed against the ideology in which they themselves, in part, had just come to believe.

Another blow for them was the partial "opening" of North Korea. In earlier times, the South Korean press contained a lot of negative information about North Korea - and much of the information was generally quite fair. However, the radicals perceived any negativity associated with North Korea as official propaganda and

were extremely distrustful of it, preferring to draw information about the North from Pyongyang's official publications.

However, in the mid-nineties, a massive famine began in North Korea, which, among other things, led to the fact that flows of North Korean economic migrants rushed to China. Many of the former student activists got the opportunity to meet with North Koreans, and these meetings most often took place in China, where there was no talk of manipulation by the South Korean intelligence services. From these contacts, it became clear to revolutionary radicals that North Korea was not a paradise of equality and prosperity, but a poor Third World country whose political system could best be described as a de facto estate monarchy.

However, traces of past dreams have an impact on the views of the "progressives". Former radical students, who joined the "progressive" camp and eventually took up significant positions in it, do not perceive North Korea as an example to follow for a long time, but still they do not treat it as negatively as their opponents from the "conservative" camp. For the South Korean "progressives", North Korea is not a country of totalitarian nightmare, but rather a brotherly country (or rather, an isolated part of its own country), which for some reason lost its way and found itself in a difficult situation.

The ideologists of the "progressive" camp over the past 20-25 years have emphasized that the ideal policy towards North Korea is a policy of cooperation. The long-term goal of this policy, they say, is to unite the country on a confederal basis, that is, in accordance with the "one nation, two systems" model. However, in some respects, the "progressives" are similar to their opponents, the "conservatives", who, as we remember, while in words without completely abandoning the slogan "Destroy the communists and unite the country!", In practice, they now consider the unification of Korea as a task postponed to infinity.

Nevertheless, the South Korean "progressives" are determined that it is necessary to somehow interact with North Korea.

However, in some respects, the “progressives” are similar to their opponents, the “conservatives”, who, as we remember, while not completely abandoning the slogan “Let's destroy the communists and unite the country!” In practice, are now considering unification. But the move will not be viable without massive subsidies from the South Korean government. South Korean "progressives" not only want to conduct economic and trade exchanges with North Korea, but are also ready to generously subsidize this exchange from the budget. True, now the resumption of such contacts is impossible due to the sanctions regime. The current “progressive” administration does not dare to violate this regime, primarily because such violations will lead to a conflict with the United States, which no one in Seoul wants now.

True, even among the "progressives" there is a gradually growing understanding that the average South Korean taxpayer in its mass is increasingly indifferent to North Korea and less and less inclined to perceive the North Koreans as their fellow tribesmen. This means that taxpayers are not very willing to pay money out of their own pockets for the implementation of those ambitious cooperation plans that the "progressives" cherish. Therefore, in their propaganda and journalism, the "progressives" are trying to convince the South Korean public that interaction with the North will, they say, be carried out on a mutually beneficial basis and will benefit both Korean states - and in this propaganda it often comes to direct and very comical manipulations with facts and statistics.

However, there are now early signs that many in the South Korean establishment are beginning to question whether the idea of a nuclear South Korea is an absolute taboo. One can, for example, mention the statement made by Won Yoo-chul, a member of parliament and a prominent figure in the ruling party, who said that South Korea should acquire "peaceful" nuclear weapons in order to protect itself from North Korea's "destructive" nuclear weapons. The statement, no doubt, is comical, but at the same time it reflects well some of the features of the thinking of the South Korean elite in recent times.

The reasons why Seoul began to think about what recently seemed unthinkable are obvious. First, confidence in US security guarantees is declining, not only due to increased neo-isolationist sentiment in the US, but also to changes in the regional and global balance of power. The second reason is the success of the North Korean nuclear and missile scientists. In the new situation, where North Korea has almost developed a full-fledged nuclear missile capability, many in Seoul have doubts that, as one South Korean diplomat privately put it, “the United States will be willing to sacrifice San Francisco to protect Seoul.”

Now the rhetoric of the problem of nuclear weapons is about the same.

In August 2021, the US withdrew from Afghanistan and the question arose of what it would mean for Washington's other global military commitments<sup>94</sup>. In particular, for South Korea, which is still counting on US military support.

As Biden said, Afghanistan and South Korea are completely different cases. Afghanistan is one of the poorest and least developed countries in the world. South Korea, on the contrary, is one of the main allies with a developed economy and military strength<sup>95</sup>.

However, the situation itself has left the political establishment wondering whether South Korea should continue to depend on US military protection. Or it should already take care of its own defense. Especially after the loud statements of Yun Seok Yol, who spoke quite harshly against North Korea<sup>96</sup>. In particular, it could amplify voices among the ruling party and the entire political establishment who want South Korea to pursue its own nuclear deterrence.

## 2.2. *Evolution of public opinion*

Everything that has been said above concerns, first of all, the mood in the ranks of the political and intellectual elite. The public opinion of ordinary Koreans

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<sup>94</sup> William Gallo “How the Afghanistan Withdrawal Looks from South Korea, America's Other 'Forever War' ” //20.08.2021//URL: <https://www.voanews.com/a/usa-how-afghanistan-withdrawal-looks-south-korea-americas-other-forever-war/6209777.html> (Access data: 05.05.2022)

<sup>95</sup> Remarks by President Biden on the Drawdown of U.S. Forces in Afghanistan. The White House//07.08.2021//URL: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/speeches-remarks/2021/07/08/remarks-by-president-biden-on-the-drawdown-of-u-s-forces-in-afghanistan/> (Access data:08.05.2022)

<sup>96</sup> Jessie Yeung, Paula Hancocks and Yoonjung Seo, “ South Korea's new leader says age of appeasing North Korea is over”//CNN//URL: <https://edition.cnn.com/2022/05/23/asia/south-korea-president-exclusive-interview-intl-hnk/index.html> (Access data:17.05.2022)

directly affects the formation of the agenda for parties and the establishment, so it is important to consider the current opinion in the country.

The development of their own nuclear weapons has been discussed among the population for quite a long time. Almost every year, surveys are conducted among the inhabitants of the country in order to identify a change in trends. Since the DPRK carried out its first nuclear tests in 2006, opinion polls have consistently shown that more than half of South Koreans want nuclear weapons at Seoul's disposal<sup>97</sup>. In a poll conducted by the Gallup Institute, this opinion was expressed by 60% of respondents<sup>98</sup>.

There are more and more voices of those who believe that only through the creation of their own nuclear weapons can independence in the field of military security be achieved. For example, in 2016, the book *Let's Have Nuclear Weapons*<sup>99</sup> (published by Giparang) was published by Dr. Song Dae Sun, the former director of the Sejong Institute and a security expert<sup>100</sup>. At a press conference on the occasion of the publication, he stated that "it is the living truth of international politics that whoever does not have nuclear weapons becomes a slave or hostage to whoever possesses them." The author's proposed five-step solution:

1. canceling the joint declaration on the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula;
2. relocation of US tactical nuclear weapons to the Korean Peninsula;
3. international provision of nuclear weapons on credit;
4. international purchase of nuclear weapons;

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<sup>97</sup> Kim, Jiyeon, Karl Friedhoff, and Kang Chungku. "The Fallout: South Korean Opinion Following North Korea's Third Nuclear Test." Asan Issue Brief, no. 46

<sup>98</sup> 갤럽리포트. 데일리 오피니언 제333호(2018년 11월 5주) - 분야별 정책 평가, 경제 정책 중점 (11월 통합)//URL: <https://www.gallup.co.kr/gallupdb/reportContent.asp?seqNo=967> (Access data:21.05.2022)

<sup>99</sup> Jin-yeo Park, "Report on the publication ceremony of Dr. Dae-sung Song's Book, We Should Also Have Nuclear Weapons" (in Korean), Dailian// Aug. 24, 2016//URL: [www.dailian.co.kr/news/view/586835/?sc=naver](http://www.dailian.co.kr/news/view/586835/?sc=naver) (Access data:01.05.2022)

<sup>100</sup> 안보전문가 송대성 박사 "우리도 핵을 갖자" 출판기념회// 13.12.2021//URL: <https://www.dailian.co.kr/news/view/586835/?sc=naver> (Access data:21.05.2022)

## 5. South Korea's own nuclear developments.

Explains that urgent action is a measure of the nation's survival<sup>101</sup>.

A recent study<sup>102</sup> in September 2021 by the Asan Institute for Political Research showed that 69% of South Korean citizens support the idea of Seoul receiving a nuclear weapon. This figure is significantly higher than in 2010, when 55% of its residents were in favor of the republic gaining such potential. Members of the Power of the People conservative party did not fail to take advantage of this opportunity. For example, since May, incoming President Yoon Seok Yeol has called for the US to redeploy nuclear weapons to the peninsula in his 2022 presidential election<sup>103</sup>.

According to polls, nuclear weapons are very popular in South Korea. Public opinion polls show that for many years from 50 to 70 percent of respondents have consistently supported the idea of creating their own nuclear weapons. True, the polls in this case reflect the "opinion of the people", while the political elites, until recently, did not have nuclear ambitions.

A recent poll<sup>104</sup> in South Korea paints an even more interesting picture of the pressure the Moon Administration has faced in its final days. The Korea National Unification Institute's extensive annual poll in July 2021 of South Korean views on unification focused on growing evidence that South Korea's younger generation desires peaceful coexistence with the North, but is not interested in Koreans' long-standing desire for unification as a single nation. The poll results show both growing

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<sup>101</sup> 안보전문가 송대성 박사 "우리도 핵을 갖자" 출판기념회// 13.12.2021//URL: <https://www.dailian.co.kr/news/view/586835/?sc=naver> (Access data:21.05.2022)

<sup>102</sup> J. James Kim, Kang Chungku, Ham Geon Hee "Fundamentals of South Korean Public Opinion on Foreign Policy and National Security"//13.09.2021//URL: <https://en.asaninst.org/contents/fundamentals-of-south-korean-public-opinion-on-foreign-policy-and-national-security/> (Access data: 05.05.2022)

<sup>103</sup> Yoon says he will request redeployment of U.S. tactical nukes in case of emergency//Yonhap News Agency// September 22, 2021//URL: <https://en.yna.co.kr/view/AEN20210922005300320> (Access data: 05.05.2022)

<sup>104</sup> Sang Sin LEE. KINU Unification Survey 2021//URL: <https://www.kinu.or.kr/pyxis-api/1/digital-files/87cb5812-a81a-4fdc-824c-8d359544e8f7> (Access data: 05.05.2022)

disinterest in North Korea and skepticism about the possibility of denuclearization<sup>105</sup>.

The people of South Korea clearly understand that there is no hope for the denuclearization of North Korea. According to a 2021 poll by the Korean Institute for National Unification (KINU), 90 percent of South Koreans said North Korea would not denuclearize. A CNN poll conducted immediately after the Trump-Kim summit in Singapore in 2018 also showed that 70% of Americans believe that North Korea will not denuclearize. This is because nuclear weapons are the key means by which North Korea's hereditary dictatorship can survive and eventually force South Korea into submission to unification under the communist flag<sup>106</sup>.

However, at a high-level meeting of the ruling party, opinions such as the need for independent nuclear weapons and the introduction of tactical nuclear weapons reflected the gravity of the problem.

These views appear not to have been expressed as specific political alternatives, but rather to highlight awareness of the security threat posed by North Korea's nuclear progress and countermeasures. It has also been pointed out that this is a dangerous idea and an unrealistic idea for a military requirement.

Despite the ongoing rhetoric of powers about the idea of unification, public opinion is not homogeneous. Regardless of what politicians and ideologues may say, ordinary South Koreans are less and less inclined to perceive North Korea as an alienated part of their country<sup>107</sup>. For them, North Korea is gradually becoming "overseas", that is, a poor country, which, at the whim of geography, is located close to South Korea and whose population, at the whim of history, speaks a dialect of the Korean language. Skepticism is growing among the masses about the very idea of

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<sup>105</sup> *ibid*

<sup>106</sup> How to Understand North Korea's Demand for the Withdrawal of ROK-U.S. "hostile policy"// 21.01.2022//URL: <https://en.asaninst.org/contents/how-to-understand-north-koreas-demand-for-the-withdrawal-of-rok-u-s-hostile-policy/> (Access data: 05.05.2022)

<sup>107</sup> Chung Min Lee. "A Peninsula of Paradoxes: South Korean Public Opinion on Unification and Outside Powers"// MAY 13, 2020//URL: <https://carnegieendowment.org/2020/05/13/peninsula-of-paradoxes-south-korean-public-opinion-on-unification-and-outside-powers-pub-81737> (Access data: 05.05.2022)



unification, which has long and regularly been confirmed by opinion polls. According to a survey<sup>108</sup> by the Asan Institute for Policy Research of 1,000 men and women aged 19 and older across the country, the North Korean nuclear test was the highest risk factor for causing anxiety in people, at 39.9% of the risk factors in Korean society. Not wanting to directly deny the need for unification as a political goal, young people in the South usually say that the unification of the country is, of course, necessary, but it should not be carried out with undue haste, it must be prepared thoroughly and slowly. Such a turn of logic makes it possible to exclude the issue of unification from the current agenda and postpone it to an indefinite future, without throwing at the same time a direct challenge to the ideology of ethnic nationalism.<sup>109</sup>

However, while most Koreans perceive the North Korean nuclear test as a threat, it is more than an affirmative opinion as to whether the post-nuclear tensions are a crisis that could escalate into a war between North Korea and the United States. Opinion "no" was much higher.

The Chicago Council on International Affairs (CCGA), commissioned by Korea Research, has published the results of a survey conducted among 1,500 Koreans aged 18 and over from December 1 to 4, 2021<sup>110</sup>. According to a poll by a US think tank, seven out of ten Koreans support developing their own nuclear weapons. that the Korean population has a much higher preference for developing their own nuclear weapons than for US nuclear deployment. According to this, 71% of respondents supported the development of South Korea's own nuclear weapons, while 26% opposed.

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<sup>108</sup> "South Korean Attitudes toward North Korea and Reunification"//URL: <http://en.asaninst.org/contents/south-korean-attitudes-toward-north-korea-and-reunification/> (Access data: 15.05.2022)

<sup>109</sup> Андрей Ланьков. Единство и противоположности. Достижимо ли объединение Кореи// Andrey Lan'kov. Yedinstvo i protivopozhnosti. Dostizhimo li ob"yedeneniye Korei//29.04.2018//URL: <https://carnegie.ru/commentary/76206> (Access data: 02.05.2022)

<sup>110</sup> 류지복. "한국인 71%, 자체 핵무기 개발 지지...10년 후 최대위협은 중국"//23.02.2022//URL: <https://www.yna.co.kr/view/AKR20220223000500071> (Access data: 02.05.2022)

56% supported the deployment of US nuclear weapons in South Korea, while 40% opposed.

When asked if they preferred in-house or American nuclear development, 67% answered "in-house development", far more than "American nuclear development" (9%). 24% said South Korea should not have nuclear weapons<sup>111</sup>.  
**(appendix 5)**

When asked if they were confident that the US would protect South Korea in the event of an inter-Korean conflict, 61% responded positively, while 36% responded negatively.

Some politicians argue that a nuclear acquisition would increase the likelihood of North Korea disarming, but 82 percent of South Koreans believe that North Korea is unlikely to give up its nuclear weapons and they are more likely to support a domestic weapons program. When asked if they thought North Korea would give up its nuclear weapons, only 12% said, "I think so," while 82% said, "I don't think so."

North Korea (46%), China (33%), Japan (10%) and the US (9%) were in order of answer as to which country poses the greatest threat to South Korea's security<sup>112</sup>.

But the prestige offered by a nuclear-weapon state is a strong secondary factor. One in four South Koreans (26%) rated South Korea's rising prestige in the international community as the main reason for their support of nuclear weapons, similar to countering the North Korean threat (23%).

Among the majority that support the acquisition of nuclear weapons, potential consequences such as pressure from China, international economic sanctions, or the

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<sup>111</sup> Toby Dalton, Karl Friedhoff, Lami Kim. Thinking Nuclear: South Korean Attitudes on Nuclear Weapons. Chicago Council on Global Affairs//February 21, 2022//URL: <https://www.thechicagocouncil.org/research/public-opinion-survey/thinking-nuclear-south-korean-attitudes-nuclear-weapons> (Access data: 05.05.2022)

<sup>112</sup> 류지복. "한국인 71%, 자체 핵무기 개발 지지...10년 후 최대위협은 중국"//23.02.2022//URL: <https://www.yna.co.kr/view/AKR20220223000500071> (Access data: 05.05.2022)

withdrawal of US troops do not greatly reduce support. Only 11 percent of supporters changed their minds when faced with these hypothetical consequences<sup>113</sup>.

56% of respondents believe that China will be the most dangerous country in 10 years, it is far ahead of the second, North Korea (22%).

Defense against threats other than North Korea (39%) was the most frequently cited reason for South Korea's support of a nuclear weapons program, followed by the rise of South Korea's status in the international community (26%) and the response to threats from North Korea (23 %). This means that the number of respondents in favor of possession of nuclear weapons for reasons other than the North Korean threat was significantly higher.

In fact, the public often fails to understand foreign policy. For instance, when South Koreans were asked about several important agreements between their country and the United States, many responded that they were unaware of them. When asked about the civil-nuclear agreement, which deals with the civilian use of nuclear power and related technological constraints between South Korea and the United States, some 34 percent said they did not know what it was. Only 1.8 percent said that they did know, and 18.5 percent said that they were somewhat aware of the agreement. When asked about the operational control transfer of the South Korean forces by the head of the U.S. Combined Forces Command, which currently holds authority over both U.S. and South Korean forces in times of war, 32.3 percent refused to respond because they did not know the issue well enough. These examples make it clear why many scholars remain wary about government decisions being influenced by public opinion.

Political figures can also sway public opinion on policy issues. In South Korea, as in other countries, the public tends to follow the positions of political elites when the issue is divisive. A citizen who supports the president is more likely to

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<sup>113</sup> Toby Dalton, Karl Friedhoff, Lami Kim. Thinking Nuclear: South Korean Attitudes on Nuclear Weapons.//Chicago Council on Global Affairs.// February 21, 2022//URL: <https://www.thechicagocouncil.org/research/public-opinion-survey/thinking-nuclear-south-korean-attitudes-nuclear-weapons> (Access data: 05.05.2022)

support the president's position on a given issue out of loyalty and trust to the officeholder. Therefore, the success or failure of a controversial foreign policy is closely linked with the public's trust in the politicians who propose the policy, particularly the president. When the government's approval ratings are high, even controversial policies are less likely to undermine its popular support. By contrast, unpopular presidents are likely to face a difficult time convincing the public that a given policy is in the country's best interest. This is one reason it is advisable to pursue controversial policies during a president's period.

Presidents sometimes make decisions against the wishes of their political base. President Roh Moo-hyun, for example, sent troops to Iraq at the request of the US despite strong opposition from his progressive supporters<sup>114</sup>. However, conservatives, given their pro-American sentiment, welcomed the idea. Progressives, who protested vehemently against this decision, were finally forced to accept it. Public opinion is divided on this issue. Those who supported Roh Moo-hyun understood the difficulties that the newly elected president of South Korea faced with US pressure, in light of the importance of the United States as an ally<sup>115</sup>. But Moo Hyun was lucky that the conservatives were on his side. He was able to negotiate with them easily, as he convinced his supporters. Thus, the president's political decision is determined by the president's popularity, the timing of the decision, and the availability of additional assistance.

### **Conclusions on the second chapter**

After analyzing the public opinion of South Korea, we can conclude that the influence is quite significant. The point is not even in the influence itself, but in the fact that, in fact, it forms the current agenda regarding nuclear weapons. According to the reaction of the population, the ruling party maneuvers in such a way as to satisfy the sometimes flashing public opinion. The president, in turn, often proceeds

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<sup>114</sup> "S. Korea To Send Troops To Iraq"/CBS News//17.10.2003//URL: <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/s-korea-to-send-troops-to-iraq/> (Access data:17.05.2022)

<sup>115</sup> "President Bush Meets with President Roh Moo-hyun" Joint Statement Between the United States and the Republic of Korea//20.10.2003//URL: <https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2003/10/20031020-2.html> (Access data:17.05.2022)

from the rhetoric that it would be beneficial for him to demonstrate to other countries. This is evident in the still-voiced idea of reunification with North Korea. Often, this is used as a cover for the impossibility of resolving the issue of own nuclear weapons, since the country's leadership is still not ready to take such a step at the moment. Although it is clear from the examples given in the chapter that there is already a majority of votes for this, both among the population and among the political establishment.

The next chapter will consider the impact on public opinion of the factor of other countries.

### **CHAPTER III. INTERNATIONAL ASPECT OF THE PROBLEM**

This chapter will analyze the influence of external factors on the change in public opinion. And specifically, the influence of the countries of the Asian region on the security of South Korea in the context of the possible development of its own nuclear weapons. Interaction with the United States will also be analyzed separately, since the rhetoric of public opinion is mainly related to the issue of the reliability of the nuclear umbrella and the expediency of creating our own defense in the face of growing danger from powerful China and North Korea continuing to develop its nuclear potential.

#### *3.1. The influence of the Asian region on public opinion in South Korea*

Two groundbreaking U.S. - North Korea summits in June 2018<sup>116</sup> and February 2019<sup>117</sup> and three inter-Korean summits in 2018<sup>118</sup> led more South Koreans to temporarily believe that North Korea was denuclearizing. But by early

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<sup>116</sup> Assessing the Summit. Council on Foreign Relations//13.06.2018//URL: <https://www.cfr.org/event/assessing-summit> (Access data:17.05.2022)

<sup>117</sup> Ма Юньпэн. «Второй саммит КНДР – США: чем меньше игр, тем больше рисков» / / Ма Yun'пен. «Vtoroy sammit KNDR – SSHA: chem men'she igr, tem bol'she riskov»// 01.03.2019//URL: <https://ru.valdaiclub.com/a/highlights/sammit-kndr-ssha-igra/> (Access data:16.05.2022)

<sup>118</sup> Brett Roegiers and Kyle Almond. In pictures: The historic Korean summit//URL: <https://edition.cnn.com/interactive/2018/04/world/korea-summit-cnnphotos/> (Access data:17.05.2022)

2020, the euphoria around South-North relations had dissipated. Indeed, even many self-identified progressives - the most vocal supporters of inter-Korean détente - lacked confidence that North Korea would give up its nuclear weapons. Tensions are now escalating as more opinions emerge about North Korea's intentions to dominate the peninsula<sup>119</sup><sup>120</sup>.

Policy towards North Korea is generally subject to bureaucratic politics, given the mission of the MoU and the political views of MoU officials. The Memorandum of Understanding was created specifically for the development of inter-Korean relations and the pursuit of peaceful unification. Thus, MoU staff and officials by definition prefer dialogue and participation to pressure and confrontation. Meanwhile, the Ministry of National Defense and the National Intelligence Service are taking a tougher stance and are demanding a tougher response from North Korea. Given these stark differences, North Korea policy is often fragmented and poorly coordinated.

Recent polls show that the majority of the population wants to develop their own nuclear weapons, not only to counterbalance North Korea's nuclear threats, but also to counter alleged Chinese encroachment<sup>121</sup>. "Threats other than North Korea" are a major factor in supporting a domestic nuclear arsenal, with a majority (55%) saying China will become South Korea's biggest threat in a decade. South Korea stands out as one of the few strategically important states that has virtually irreversible ties to both the United States and China.

They fear that if such a situation arose around Russia, which is under the cover of its nuclear weapons, then so could China or North Korea. The situation around

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<sup>119</sup> Christian Davies. "Kim Jong Un could use nuclear arsenal to dominate Korean peninsula, warn experts"// 26.04.2022//URL: <https://www.ft.com/content/78e1f0fb-70c2-4b35-82e1-a5f4a6027c13>

<sup>120</sup> North Korea: 'Kim doesn't just want more missiles, he wants better ones'//URL: <https://www.ft.com/content/e50ceab9-6203-4af5-ba1b-18a304603728> (Access data:17.05.2022)

<sup>121</sup> Toby Dalton, Karl Friedhoff, and Lami Kim, "Thinking Nuclear: South Korean Attitudes on Nuclear Weapons," Research//The Chicago Council on Global Affairs//February 21, 2022//URL: <https://www.thechicago-council.org/research/public-opinion-survey/thinking-nuclear-south-korean-attitudes-nuclear-weapons>. (Access data:17.05.2022)

Russia also raises an important question about South Korea's energy security<sup>122</sup>. Rising gas prices and inflation are already threatening to displease voters, whom President-elect Yoon Seok Yeol won by a narrow margin. And the dissatisfaction of voters directly affects the position of the political establishment, in particular the ruling party, which is the opposition for the current president. South Korea imports 98 percent of its energy, and the South Korean port of Yeosu is the fourth largest recipient of Russian fossil fuel shipments since the start of the conflict<sup>123</sup>.

The issue of fuel was raised precisely in 2022 in connection with the events described. Most resident Koreans share a hands-off approach to the situation<sup>124</sup>, believing that one must weigh all the factors and remember that this is "not a Korean war."

Under public pressure, Yoon Seok Yeol said he would protect South Korea from surrounding nuclear powers by asking the United States to once again deploy nuclear weapons on the Korean Peninsula. Otherwise, some more marginal - but increasingly vocal - members of his party called on South Korea to build its own nuclear weapons at any cost. This thinking is not new, and South Korea's desire to expand even within the US alliance commitment has been a problem since the 1970s, when South Korea briefly considered a nuclear weapons program, as mentioned in chapter one.

The president also plans to reverse the outgoing Moon administration's decision<sup>125</sup> to phase out nuclear power. This reversal will not lead to an immediate

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<sup>122</sup> Troy Stangarone, "How South Korea Can Wean Itself off Russian Fossil Fuels," //The Diplomat// March 31, 2022//URL: <https://thediplomat.com/2022/04/how-south-korea-can-wean-itself-off-russian-fossil-fuels/>.(Access data:17.05.2022)

<sup>123</sup> "Financing Putin's War on Europe: Fossil Fuel Imports from Russia in the First Two Months of the Invasion"//Centre for Research on Energy and Clean Air//April 28, 2022//URL: <https://energyandcleanair.org/wp/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/Fossil-fuel-imports-from-Russia-first-two-months-of-invasion.pdf>. (Access data:22.05.2022)

<sup>124</sup> Олег Кирьянов. Это затруднительно: Южная Корея отказалась поставлять оружие Украине// Oleg Kir'yanov. Eto zatrudnitel'no: Yuzhnaya Koreya otkazalas' postavlyat' oruzhiye Ukraine//URL: <https://news.ru/asia/eto-zatrudnitelno-yuzhnaya-koreya-otkazalas-postavlyat-oruzhie-ukraine/> (Access data:22.05.2022)

<sup>125</sup> Jane Chung; Editing by Richard Pullin. "South Korea's President Moon says plans to exit nuclear power"//URL: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-southkorea-nuclear-president-idUSKBN19A04Q> (Access data:22.05.2022)



reduction in gas prices, but will strengthen South Korea's energy security in the long term. But the new focus on civilian nuclear power also has more subtle but important implications for South Korea's ability to get the bomb. In this way, the President can turn his policy towards the creation of his own nuclear weapons. Because the situation around new tests in North Korea is starting to stir up unrest again not only among the population, but also among the political elite.

Now there is a majority support for a domestic nuclear weapons program and less support for the deployment of US nuclear weapons in South Korea<sup>126</sup>. When residents are asked to choose between developing them, the public overwhelmingly prefers a domestic weapons program over the deployment of US nuclear weapons. Public support for both options appears to be insensitive to potential negative repercussions for South Korea's relationship with China, South Korea's economic security, an alliance with the United States, or hopes for North Korea's denuclearization. Now China is the only country in the world that can effectively put pressure on both the US and North Korea. To do this, China has a powerful tool at its disposal - sanctions. Monopoly control over North Korea's foreign trade means that China actually determines how harshly they will be implemented. If the DPRK becomes stubborn, then China can always increase sanctions pressure on Pyongyang. If the United States suddenly becomes intractable and unwilling to compromise, China may ease sanctions, giving Pyongyang, on the contrary, a chance to escape pressure<sup>127</sup>.

At the center of the South Koreans' changed attitude towards China is the controversy over the deployment of THAAD. The opinions of South Koreans about THAAD have been different at different times. In general, they have supported almost every security measure since the escalation of military provocations in North Korea. There was one moment when South Koreans were evenly divided between support and

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<sup>126</sup> 류지복. "한국인 71%, 자체 핵무기 개발 지지...10년 후 최대위협은 중국"//23.02.2022//URL: <https://www.yna.co.kr/view/AKR20220223000500071>(Access data:22.05.2022)

<sup>127</sup> Ланьков Третий участник. Какую роль играет Китай в переговорах Кима и Трампа//13 ИЮНЯ 2018// Lan'kov Tretiy uchastnik. Kakuyu rol' igrayet Kitay v peregovorakh Kima i Trampa//13.06.2018//URL: <https://carnegiemoscow.org/commentary/76582> (Access data:22.05.2022)



opposition in 6 polls regarding THAAD. This was done in a survey conducted in November 2016. **(Appendix 6)**

All the debate surrounding the deployment of THAAD and soured relations between South Korea and China has clearly affected how South Koreans feel about China. In addition, it has also affected how South Koreans view the United States. Both countries are very important partners. China is the largest trading partner, which is why many South Koreans were so worried about China's economic retaliation for THAAD

In accordance with the concept of the "East Asian nuclear domino"<sup>128</sup>, the development of nuclear weapons by North Korea may lead to a geopolitical chain reaction, to the fact that first Japan and South Korea will acquire their own nuclear weapons, then Taiwan, and then, possibly, South Korea, some countries in East Asia, including Vietnam. All these countries already have the economic and technical potential that allows them to create and deploy their own nuclear deterrent forces within a reasonable time frame.

South Korean public opinion has often fueled the country's dismal relations with Japan. Diplomatic relations between the two countries suffer when nationalistic sentiment flares up—particularly around historical issues, such as the controversy surrounding the comfort women statues in front of the Japanese embassy in Seoul and consulate in Busan. Anti-Japanese sentiment among South Koreans, therefore, has been identified by political pundits as a constraint for the nation's government, especially when politicians have made friendly gestures toward Japan. Any reconciliatory moves have been seen as a sign of weakness, thereby limiting Seoul's ability to work with Tokyo. There is an opinion that former President Park Geun-

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<sup>128</sup> 이호령, "NPT체제하에서 '자위적 핵 주권', 가능한가?," 북한 핵 위협, 어떻게 대 처해야 하나?, 한반도선진화재단 국가전략 토론회//2013년 4월 16 일//, p. 32. (date of application: 3.12.2021)

hye vilified an old enemy to gain approval from a public that is still entrenched in the past<sup>129</sup>.

Jiyoon Kim, a specialist at the Asan Institute for Policy Studies, analyzes recent trends in South Korean public opinion towards Japan, perhaps the most sensitive topic of foreign policy among the public, and comes up with some surprising conclusions. Kim argues that the president and the elite have a tremendous ability to shape public opinion on contentious issues, especially among the president's core political constituencies. But the president's ability to use that influence depends in part on his or her approval rating and the timing of the decision in question. This conclusion highlights the role of the presidential leadership as a major factor in both shaping South Korea's foreign policy and mobilizing public support for that policy.<sup>130</sup>.

Political scientists and communication scholars have long debated the role of public opinion in policymaking. Theoretical studies, most notably by Benjamin Page and Robert Shapiro, find that public opinion can be rational and worth taking into consideration. Nonetheless, conventional wisdom warns against the dangers of basing policy on public opinion, especially when foreign policy is concerned.

Many pundits and journalists assume that public opinion has a significant influence on policymaking in South Korea. When U.S. soldiers in South Korea accidentally killed two junior high school girls in a roadside accident in 2002<sup>131</sup>, for example, anti-American sentiment spread throughout the nation and arguably

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<sup>129</sup> Jiyoon Kim. Report Part Title: Public Opinion and Presidential Power in South Korea. Report Title: Domestic Constraints on South Korean Foreign Policy. (18 pages)//Copyright: Jan. 1, 2018// Publisher: Council on Foreign Relations//URL: <http://www.jstor.com/stable/resrep21430.6 pp. 38-55> (Access data:23.05.2022)

<sup>130</sup> Scott A. Snyder, Geun Lee, Young Ho Kim, and Jiyoon Kim. Domestic Constraints on South Korean Foreign Policy. //January 2018//URL: [https://cdn.cfr.org/sites/default/files/report\\_pdf/Discussion\\_Paper\\_Series\\_Snyder\\_etal\\_South\\_Korean\\_Constraints\\_OR.pdf](https://cdn.cfr.org/sites/default/files/report_pdf/Discussion_Paper_Series_Snyder_etal_South_Korean_Constraints_OR.pdf) (Access data:23.05.2022)

<sup>131</sup> Sharon Ayling. "Killings of young girls by U.S. troops ignites rage" Workers World, August 1, 2002.//URL: <https://www.ibiblio.org/ahkitj/wscfap/arms1974/HRS/2002/Stop%20US%20Military%20dossier/4.htm> (Access data:23.05.2022)

decided the outcome of the presidential election that year. In 2008<sup>132</sup>, South Koreans staged massive demonstrations protesting the import of U.S. beef. In 2012, protests forced then President Lee Myungbak to cancel the General Security of Military Information Agreement (GSOMIA) with Japan just thirty minutes before the scheduled signing<sup>133</sup>.

But such events are the exceptions, not the rule. In fact, the influence of public opinion on the president's decision-making in South Korea is overrated. Although South Korean leaders are sometimes forced to explain their decision-making processes to those who disagree with them, political elites hold significant power to generate, form, influence, and change public opinion. Popular presidents can make decisions and count on their supporters to defend them. Unpopular presidents, however, need to be more careful, as they cannot assume that the same voters who once carried them into office will continue to support their policies.

As Moon seeks to affirm his legacy of peace with North Korea, his biggest enticement to the North has consistently been the desire to achieve an end-of-war declaration between the United States and North Korea, designed to open the door to a peace treaty and denuclearization. A recent polling<sup>134</sup> conducted by the Chicago Council on Global Affairs on American public opinion toward North Korea shows that 76% of Americans support a Korean peace agreement, but only in exchange for the suspension of North Korea's nuclear program. Only 24% of surveyed Americans supported a peace agreement with a nuclear North Korea.

As in previous Chicago Council surveys over the past decade, Americans continue to strongly support diplomacy with North Korea and the use of economic sanctions as a tool by which to pressure North Korea toward compromise, while also

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<sup>132</sup> Reuters Staff. "Anti-U.S. beef protest draws 100,000 S.Koreans"//URL: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-korea-protest-idUSSE021734120080531> (Access data:23.05.2022)

<sup>133</sup> Brian Kim "GSOMIA and the Shadow of 'Lee-Myung-Park-Geun-Hye' A tale of political revenge?"// September 10, 2019//URL: <https://thediplomat.com/2019/09/gsomia-and-the-shadow-of-lee-myung-park-geun-hye/> (Access data:20.05.2022)

<sup>134</sup> Karl Friedhoff, Marshall M. Bouton Fellow for Asia Studies. Americans Remain Committed to South Korea, View North Korea as an Adversary//. October 2021//URL: <https://www.thechicagocouncil.org/sites/default/files/2021-10/FINAL%20-%20Korea%20Brief%20.pdf> (Access data:20.05.2022)

opposing offensive military action against North Korea. This result suggests that while there is every reason for the Biden administration to keep the door open to negotiations with North Korea, there is little political incentive to make additional concessions or to sign on to South Korea's end-of-war declaration proposal in the absence of a North Korean commitment to pursue denuclearization.

Recent public polling in South Korea paints an even more interesting picture of the pressures the Moon administration faces in its waning days. An extensive annual survey conducted in July by the Korea Institute of National Unification of South Korean views on unification focused widely on growing evidence that South Korea's younger generation desires peaceful coexistence with the North but are disinterested in the longstanding Korean wish for unification as a single nation. The survey results reveal both deepening disinterest in North Korea and skepticism that denuclearization is possible.

Most relevant for the Moon administration's immediate efforts is the widespread public support in South Korea for an alliance-based approach to North Korea. Whatever tactical efforts North Korea might make to take advantage of the Moon administration's desire to establish inter-Korean peace and cooperation will only be sustainable if Moon is able to win support from the Biden administration.

The South Korean public's preferred posture toward North Korea is to exercise caution against the country and to support strengthening the U.S.-South Korea alliance over an emphasis on improving inter-Korean relations. Almost half of surveyed South Koreans supported the resumption of U.S.-North Korea summitry under the Biden administration if it makes substantial progress on denuclearization, representing a vote of confidence for America's ongoing efforts to pursue denuclearization through negotiations with the North. Among the same respondents, 20% indicated that they supported U.S.-North Korea summitry regardless of whether North Korea makes progress on denuclearization, slightly less than the percentage of Americans supporting détente with North Korea regardless of denuclearization.

Taken together, American and South Korean public opinion on North Korea policy show a strong degree of consensus and complementarity. It is likely that this consensus will endure and provide the foundation for continued U.S.-South Korea policy coordination toward North Korea regardless of who wins the March 2022 South Korean presidential election and is inaugurated as South Korea's new government the following May.<sup>135</sup>

Against a backdrop of growing regional rivalry, March and April 2021 surveys conducted in the United States, Japan, and South Korea show that publics in all three countries share similar views of China's growing influence and intentions. But the data also show that internal divisions within the US-Japan-South Korea relationship will pose challenges to deeper cooperation.<sup>136</sup>

### 3.2. *The influence of the US factor on public opinion in South Korea*

There is no doubt that South Korea has enough financial and technical capabilities to easily take a place in the nuclear weapons club. As mentioned in the first chapter, it was South Korea that pioneered the development of nuclear weapons. They made good progress in the 1970s, during the reign of General Park Chung-hee. Many patriotic Koreans still believe that the assassination of Park Chung-hee in 1979 was organized by the Americans, who thus allegedly sought to prevent South Korea from becoming a great nuclear power.<sup>137</sup>

The problem is that the United States, which was the main guarantor of South Korea's security, found itself in the zone of North Korean nuclear weapons. It was

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<sup>135</sup>Scott A. Snyder. Forbes. October 14, 2021 9:15 am (EST) Can U.S. And South Korean Public Opinion Align On North Korea?//URL: <https://www.cfr.org/blog/can-us-and-south-korean-public-opinion-align-north-korea> (Access data:23.05.2022)

<sup>136</sup> KARL FRIEDHOFF, CRAIG KAFURA, AND DINA SMELTZ Americans, Japanese, and South Koreans Wary of China's Intentions//Chicago Council on Global Affairs.// August 25, 2021//URL: [https://www.thechicagocouncil.org/research/report/americans-japanese-and-south-koreans-wary-chinas-intentions?utm\\_source=media&utm\\_campaign=rpt&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_term=china-intentions&utm\\_content=text](https://www.thechicagocouncil.org/research/report/americans-japanese-and-south-koreans-wary-chinas-intentions?utm_source=media&utm_campaign=rpt&utm_medium=email&utm_term=china-intentions&utm_content=text) (Access data:23.05.2022)

<sup>137</sup> Chong-Sik Lee. South Korea 1979: Confrontation, Assassination, and Transition. Asian Survey Vol. 20, No. 1, A Survey of Asia in 1979: Part I (Jan., 1980), pp. 63-76 (14 pages)// Published By: University of California Press//URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2644008> (Access data:23.05.2022)

impossible to imagine such a situation. This alarmed the South Korean public as it called into question the credibility of US support.

Before that, Seoul knew for sure: if the DPRK tries to unite the peninsula by force, the Americans will come to the aid of South Korea, who will at least correct the situation. This was the case in June 1950 during the Korean War<sup>138</sup>. Then North Korea practically defeated South Korea. She was saved by the entry of American troops. Since that time, confidence in an alliance with the United States has strengthened in the minds of the inhabitants of South Korea. Now the situation has changed.

As already mentioned, Yoon Seok Yeol comes from the main opposition People's Power Party (PPP). After taking office as president of South Korea, he said that he plans to seek consultations with the United States on the process of attracting US strategic nuclear assets<sup>139</sup>. It was about such assets as intercontinental ballistic missiles, in cases where emergencies occur on the Korean Peninsula.

He stressed that despite allied efforts to strengthen extended deterrence, if national security is threatened by Pyongyang's nuclear weapons and missiles, he will ask for the redeployment of US tactical nuclear weapons and a nuclear exchange<sup>140</sup>.

But Yoon said his plan does not mean nuclear arming South Korea, noting that he will prioritize diplomacy in resolving the North's nuclear issue<sup>141</sup>. But even his supporters in the party leaned towards the position of creating their own nuclear weapons.

The US opposed the proposal, saying it would go against the Biden administration's goal of reducing the role of nuclear weapons in US strategy. The United States is not the only country opposed to the redeployment of nuclear

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<sup>138</sup> Александр Алексеев. Корейская война 1950-1953 гг.: региональный конфликт с глобальными последствиями// Aleksandr Alekseyev. Koreyskaya vojna 1950-1953 gg.: regional'nyy konflikt s global'nymi posledstviyami//URL: <https://encyclopedia.mil.ru/encyclopedia/history/more.htm?id=11776564@cmsArticle> (Access data:17.05.2022)

<sup>139</sup> Yoon says he will request redeployment of U.S. tactical nukes in case of emergency//Yonhap News Agency// September 22, 2021//URL: <https://en.yna.co.kr/view/AEN20210922005300320> (Access data:17.05.2022)

<sup>140</sup> Ibid

<sup>141</sup> Ibid

weapons to South Korea. When asked about Yun's nuclear weapons proposal, China's Foreign Ministry said such calls were "irresponsible"<sup>142</sup>.

In South Korea, too, this more comprehensive view of the alliance seems to be accepted. In a survey<sup>143</sup> conducted in March 2021, 54 percent of the South Korean public said the alliance with the United States was based on the security interests of both countries and on shared values such as democracy and human rights. On this, there were virtually no gaps based on generation or on party identification. Among those who support South Korea's Democratic Party, 53 percent said the alliance was based on both security and democracy and human rights, and that number was 58 percent among those who support the People's Power Party<sup>144</sup>.

Publics in both countries also express favorable views of one another. In South Korea, views of the United States remain positive, with the United States receiving a mean favorability score of 6.0 on a 0-10 scale, where 0 represents least favorable. Meanwhile, Japan received a mean score of 3.2, China 3.1, and North Korea 2.8<sup>145</sup>.

In the current situation, US intervention in the conflict between Seoul and Pyongyang could lead to the fact that they themselves will be under attack. And among the political elite of South Korea, doubts have taken root that the United States will do this.

The public is inclined to believe that North Korea, in the event of a conflict, can simply threaten the United States with a nuclear strike if the Americans intervene. And the political establishment of South Korea is sure that in this case the country will be at a disadvantage, because there is a high probability that America will simply step aside. And then Seoul will be practically defenseless against a North Korean nuclear strike.

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<sup>142</sup> William Gallo «US Rules Out Redeploying Tactical Nukes to South Korea»./Voice of America (VOA).//September 24, 2021//URL: <https://www.voanews.com/a/us-rules-out-redeploying-tactical-nukes-to-south-korea/6243767.html> (Access data:17.05.2022)

<sup>143</sup> KARL FRIEDHOFF, CRAIG KAFURA, AND DINA SMELTZ Americans, Japanese, and South Koreans Wary of China's Intentions./Chicago Council on Global Affairs./ August 25, 2021

<sup>144</sup> Ibid

<sup>145</sup> Ibid

The development of our own nuclear weapons in this situation seems to be a logical and reasonable step. Such weapons would allow South Korea to create an independent defense system and not worry about whether it is possible to rely on allies. Indeed, in this case, parity will be achieved and the threat will be leveled.

The problem rests on the fact that the population of South Korea is not ready for sanctions.

That is why the country has not yet decided to develop its own nuclear bomb. After all, political elites do not want people to be dissatisfied with their standard of living. The government does not want to lose the elections, because this will be the inevitable result. This is where the influence of public opinion on the development of nuclear weapons is manifested. It is in South Korea that the problem of public opinion is so acute.

The importance of the relationship between South Korea and the US can be seen in the unified response<sup>146</sup> condemning North Korea's multiple missile tests this year, including its first ICBM test since 2017<sup>147</sup>. The US military presence in South Korea and Japan provides regional stability<sup>148</sup>, and embassy officials in Seoul say the presence deters regional adversaries. If so, the South Korean public, unsure of the deterrent capabilities of its military, may see the US presence as a critical factor in keeping the peace<sup>149</sup>.

To explore the attitudes of the South Korean public towards the US military, Macromill Embrain conducted a nationwide web-based survey of 1,107 respondents

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<sup>146</sup> North Korea says tested new ICBM, prepared for long confrontation with U.S.//Published March 26, 2022//URL: <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/nkorea-fired-unidentified-projectile-off-east-coast-skorea-military-2022-03-24/> (Access data:23.05.2022)

<sup>147</sup> North Korea tests banned intercontinental missile// Published 24 March 2022//URL: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-60858999> (Access data:23.05.2022)

<sup>148</sup> BURDEN SHARING. United States Government Accountability Office. Report to Congressional Committees. Benefits and Costs Associated with the U.S. Military Presence in Japan and South Korea//URL: <https://www.gao.gov/assets/gao-21-270.pdf> (Access data:23.05.2022)

<sup>149</sup> Timothy S. Rich, Maggie Fields, Kierigan McEvoy, and Joe Black "How Much Are South Koreans Willing to Pay Toward the US Alliance?"//April 16, 2022// URL:<https://thediplomat.com/2022/04/how-much-are-south-koreans-willing-to-pay-toward-the-us-alliance/> (Access data:20.05.2022)



in South Korea from March 11 to 16, 2022, and using quota sampling by age, gender, and geographic region<sup>150</sup>.

Question was: “On a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 is strongly opposed and 5 is strongly supportive, how do you feel about the presence of US military bases in South Korea?” They found that a majority of respondents state that they partially or fully support presence (55.83 percent) compared to only 10.84 percent who say they object to some degree or strongly, indicators that suggest that the public at large sees presence as an effective and possibly cost-effective deterrent. to North Korean aggression. A third of the respondents expressed a neutral position. **(appendix 7)**

Second question was: “From 0 percent to 100 percent, what percentage of the costs of the U.S. military presence in South Korea do you believe South Korea should pay?” The average response was 32.08 percent, below estimates of what South Korea currently pays.

Broken down by political party affiliation, they find that supporters of the main conservative party, the People's Power Party (PPP), are overwhelmingly in favor of US presence (74.02 percent) and only 2.85 percent are opposed. In contrast, the majority of supporters of the main liberal party, the Democratic Party (DP), supported the US presence (49.41 percent) with 17.8 percent in opposition<sup>151</sup>.

In moving to cost sharing, PPP supporters on average supported a higher fee (35.62 percent) than DP supporters (31.19 percent). However, even a higher amount is below most estimates of the current level of South Korea's contribution. The results show that President-elect Yoon Seok Yeol's base, while supporting a US presence and likely supporting Yoon's drive to strengthen relations between the two countries, is unlikely to support higher cost shares<sup>152</sup>.

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<sup>150</sup> Ibid

<sup>151</sup> Timothy S. Rich, Maggie Fields, Kierigan McEvoy, and Joe Black “How Much Are South Koreans Willing to Pay Toward the US Alliance?”//April 16, 2022// URL:<https://thediplomat.com/2022/04/how-much-are-south-koreans-willing-to-pay-toward-the-us-alliance/> (Access data:20.05.2022)

<sup>152</sup> Ibid

They believed that supporting the US presence would influence the willingness to take on higher spending. As shown in **appendix 8**, this pattern is very clear, with an average of 9.26% cost sharing among those who strongly oppose presence to 42.40% among those who strongly support. These results suggest that the current high estimate of about 44 percent may be the best the South Korean administration can offer without risking public backlash.

Respondents were also asked, "In general, do you think the US shares the same concerns as South Korea about North Korea?" Here we see that 56.55% of respondents say "yes", and that these respondents, on average, indicate that South Korea should pay more (34.28% versus 30.88% among those who answered "no"). Again, we find that PPP supporters are somewhat more likely to say yes (60.85%) than DP supporters (56.91%)<sup>153</sup> (**appendix 9**)

Numerous polls have shown strong support by South Koreans for the long-term presence of US troops in the country. Moreover, almost seven in ten (68%) believe that the US military presence in the Asia-Pacific region should be maintained, and 15% were in favor of increasing it (compared to 15% preferring its reduction). One reason for this support: Almost three-quarters (74%) say that the US military presence in the Asia-Pacific region increases stability in the region<sup>154</sup>. These views are largely consistent across age cohorts and among supporters, with 68 percent of Democratic Party of Korea supporters and 85 percent of People's Power Party supporters agreeing that presence increases stability<sup>155</sup>.

Appendix 10 shows that the favorability scores of the United States and the President of the United States have changed over time. Interestingly, US favor in South Korea depends little on the US president. A favorable score is measured on a scale of

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<sup>153</sup> Timothy S. Rich, Maggie Fields, Kierigan McEvoy, and Joe Black "How Much Are South Koreans Willing to Pay Toward the US Alliance?"//April 16, 2022// URL:<https://thediplomat.com/2022/04/how-much-are-south-koreans-willing-to-pay-toward-the-us-alliance/> (Access data:20.05.2022)

<sup>154</sup> Karl Friedhoff, Marshall M. Bouton Fellow for Asia Studies. Americans Remain Committed to South Korea, View North Korea as an Adversary.//October 2021//URL: <https://www.thechicagocouncil.org/sites/default/files/2021-10/FINAL%20-%20Korea%20Brief%20.pdf> (Access data:20.05.2022)

<sup>155</sup> Ibid

zero to ten (very dislike - 0, very much - 10), and the US scores in the first half of 2017 were about 5.7.

The difference in positive ratings between Trump and the US has remained fairly stable throughout the year. Trump's score rose slightly in the November poll, but that was mostly due to the prudent and relatively calm stance he displayed during his state visit to South Korea in early November. There is no denying that he is not a typical American president.

Recognition of the need for an ROK-US alliance is divided among various demographic groups. Generally, people in their 40s are considered the most progressive and least attractive in the United States. However, 90 percent of them also supported the alliance. The younger generation, known for its security conservatism, is just as strongly in favor of the alliance as the older generation. Even the supporters of the Justice Party, who are the most progressive in South Korea's guerrilla landscape, are expressing strong support for the alliance. (**Appendix 11**)

### *Conclusions on the third chapter*

North Korea and South Korea are playing a similar political game. For a long time, heads of state tried to convince world public opinion that the situation was under control. They tried to create the appearance that all existing problems would soon be resolved through negotiations. That is why there is supposedly no need to resort to drastic measures. The last president tried to convince everyone that the problem of nuclear proliferation is almost solved. However, polls clearly showed that the public did not really believe in it. And because of the sanctions, any economic interaction was impossible.

Moon Jae-in tried to ease the sanctions, but did not succeed, because the United States was not going to do this without significant concessions on nuclear disarmament from North Korea.

The situation around North Korea is still ambiguous. Public opinion sees the threat more in a strong China than in neighboring North Korea. And the nature of the relationship is largely determined by who is in power in the Republic of Kazakhstan and the United States. Conservatives in South Korea have traditionally taken a harder line on relations with the DPRK than progressives. This can be seen even in the example of the new president, Yoon Seok Yeol.

Thus, it can be seen that national security decisions such as alliances do not depend on public approval, but the widespread public support in South Korea for the US military presence certainly simplifies the decision. It can be concluded that the South Korean public will support the intentions of the new president to strengthen relations between South Korea and the United States in the field of security, especially since North Korea continues to improve its missile and nuclear capabilities.

An alliance with the United States will come at a cost, so it is important for Yoon Seok Yeol to maintain current public support so as not to displease the population and the political elite.

## CONCLUSION

After conducting this study, I came to the conclusion that South Korea is a country where public opinion means a lot to the ruling party. Very often, parties are renamed, united depending on the agenda of the public. As elected parties, it is important for them to be supported by the people. That is why they broadcast from the stands what will resonate with voters. Therefore, the paper reveals the importance of the impact of public opinion on the country's defense policy.

Poll statistics have shown that not all South Korean policy revolves around the danger from North Korea. According to polls among the population, it is no longer in first place. And with the US, everything is rather ambiguous. Yes, the policy of the main ally is still carried out, but the voices about their own military independence are getting louder. Especially in the conditions of neighboring rapidly developing China.

Seoul seeks to expand the scope of what is politically acceptable to match its scientific and technological potential. In particular, South Korea is interested in obtaining permission to create a full cycle of nuclear fuel, which theoretically simplifies the creation of nuclear weapons. Public opinion puts strong pressure on the ruling circles, forcing the nuclear issue to be put on the agenda more and more often. At present, it is no longer possible to speak with certainty about the US nuclear umbrella, as the Korean establishment is increasingly inclined towards issues of an independent nuclear program. This is indicated both by the results of the surveys presented in the paper and by statements in the media. One can trace the evolution of opinions regarding this issue, as it is gaining momentum year after year. And if back in the 2010s one could name only a few high-profile statements, such as the book Song Dae Sun "Let's Have Nuclear Weapons", now the voices are getting louder, and the politics are sharper. Recent studies show that the majority of the population wants them not only to balance North Korea's nuclear threats, but also to counter perceived encroachment from China. Thus, the influence of foreign states

on public opinion regarding the problem was analyzed. Because in South Korea, bursts of public reaction to international agendas are very clearly visible.

At the same time, recent events have highlighted South Korea's energy instability and dependence on foreign fuel. More voices in South Korea's ruling circles, more officials claiming that reprocessing will allow the country to recycle fuel for its own reactors, become an important part of the country's energy security and reduce the radioactivity of spent fuel, which will facilitate storage. As the new administration has vowed to end the former administration's nuclear phase-out policy and as the current nuclear fuel storage facility fills up, these arguments are likely to intensify. While there are still many obstacles and a long time until such a potential is realized, the convergence of technological and domestic trends in South Korea, combined with the perceived threat not only from North Korea, but also from China, presents a new challenge for the non-proliferation regime on the Korean Peninsula and outside of it. South Korea's decision to make a nuclear breakthrough would have disastrous consequences for the country, the region, and the global nonproliferation regime.

Thus, it can be summed up that the nuclear-missile arms race on the peninsula is entering a new phase, this time with the active participation of the South. The pressure of public opinion has already made adjustments to the policy of the last president.

If Yoon Seok Yeol's nuclear policy succeeds within the next five years, the industry's importance in South Korea's national energy policy will increase. But it must be recognized that, depending on the technologies involved, the new policy also risks giving South Korea a latent ability to produce nuclear weapons as public and political pressure to acquire them grows stronger.

This convergence of technological and domestic trends in South Korea, coupled with the perceived threat presents a fundamentally new challenge to the nonproliferation regime on the Korean Peninsula and beyond.

Established wisdom in public opinion studies teaches us that collective political preferences tend to be rational, stable, coherent, and mutually coherent. If there are any noticeable changes in collective policy preferences, they tend to be reasonable and predictable. For example, the public seems to be very positive about the US and sees the US as an important ally in maintaining regional peace and stability. This support seems strong even after four years of complicated bilateral relations under Trump's presidency in Washington. While changing circumstances may require some adjustments to the ROK-US alliance, South Koreans today seem to be in favor of continuing that relationship even after reunification. Approach to China is more cautious, perhaps prudent given the volatile history of bilateral relations.

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SNEPC//

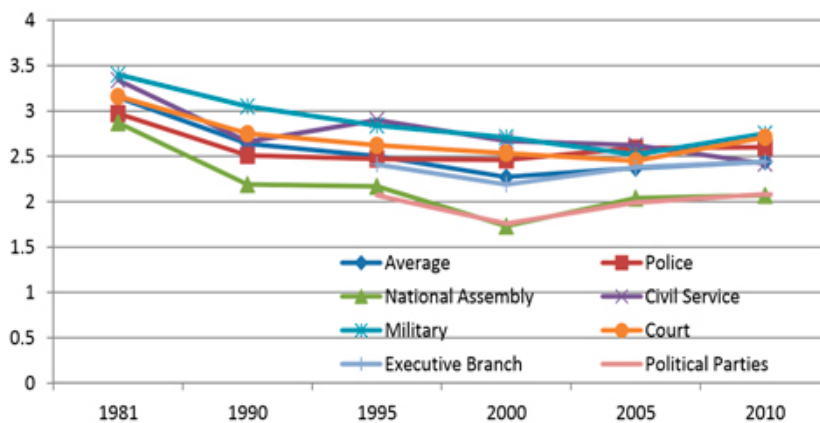
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## Appendixes

### Appendix 1

#### The level of confidence in the political institutions of South Korea (1981 - 2010)



Source: Jung Y., Sung S. «The Public's Declining Trust in Government in Korea»<sup>156</sup>

<sup>156</sup> Jung Yong-duck, Sung Sea Young “The Public's Declining Trust in Government in Korea // Meiji Journal of Political Science and Economics. – Vol. 1, 2012. – P. 13. URL: <http://mjps.meiji.jp/articles/files/01-04/01-04.pdf>

## Appendix 2

### Level of party support in new democracies

Years	Czech Republic	Hungary	Poland	South Korea	Taiwan
1996	48,8	35,0 (1998)	52,3 (1997)	27,3 (2000)	33,6
2004	57,9 (2002)	52,3 (2002)	37,6 (2001)	34,1	46,7
2008	41,6 (2006)	No data	50,0 (2007)	37,8	49,6

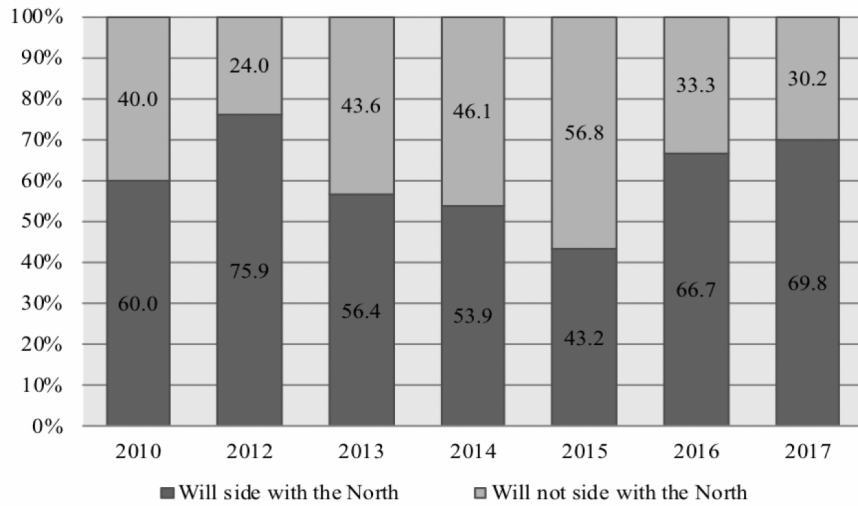
## Appendix 3

### Number of respondents who trust the National Assembly and political parties

Years	National Assembly, %	Political parties, %
1996	31,1	5,3
2003	3,8	5,5
2007	3,2	2,9
2013	N/A	3,5

## Appendix 4

Figure 3. Will China Take Sides with North Korea in Another Korean War?

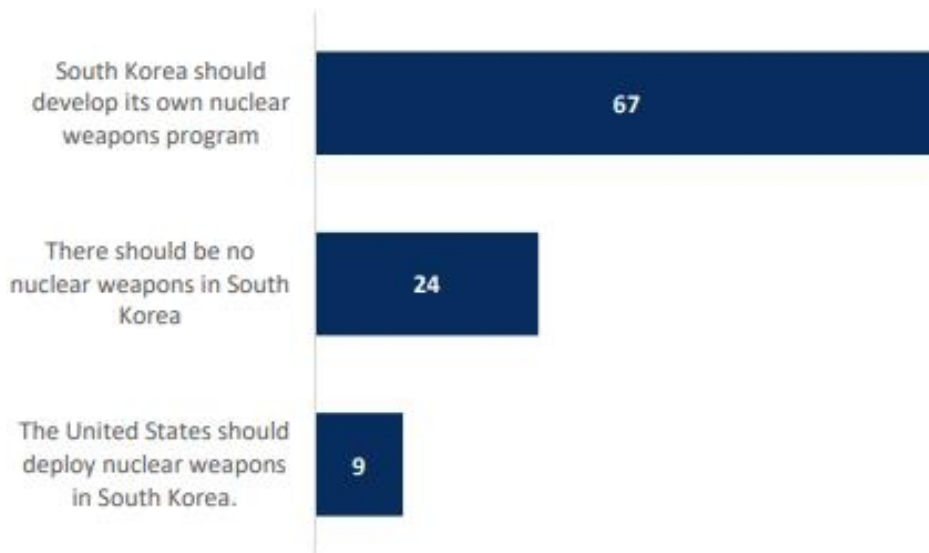


Source: The Annual Surveys of the Asan Institute for Policy Studies

## Appendix 5

### Nuclear Weapon Preferences

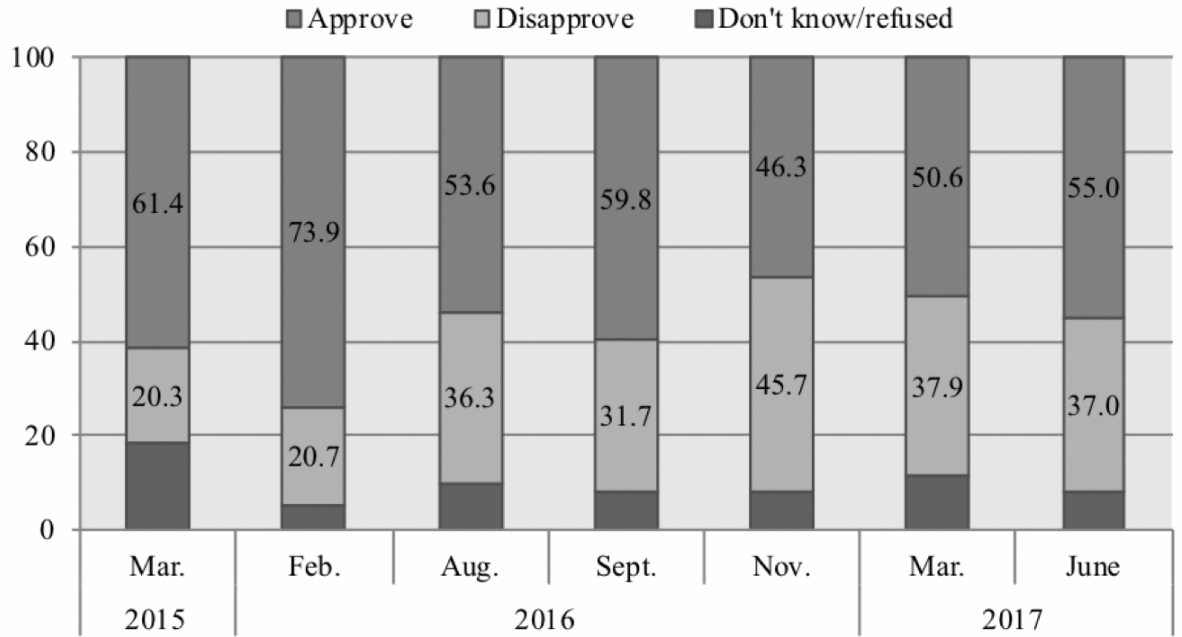
Which of the following best describe your preference regarding nuclear weapons in South Korea? (%)



December 1-4, 2021 | n = 1,500

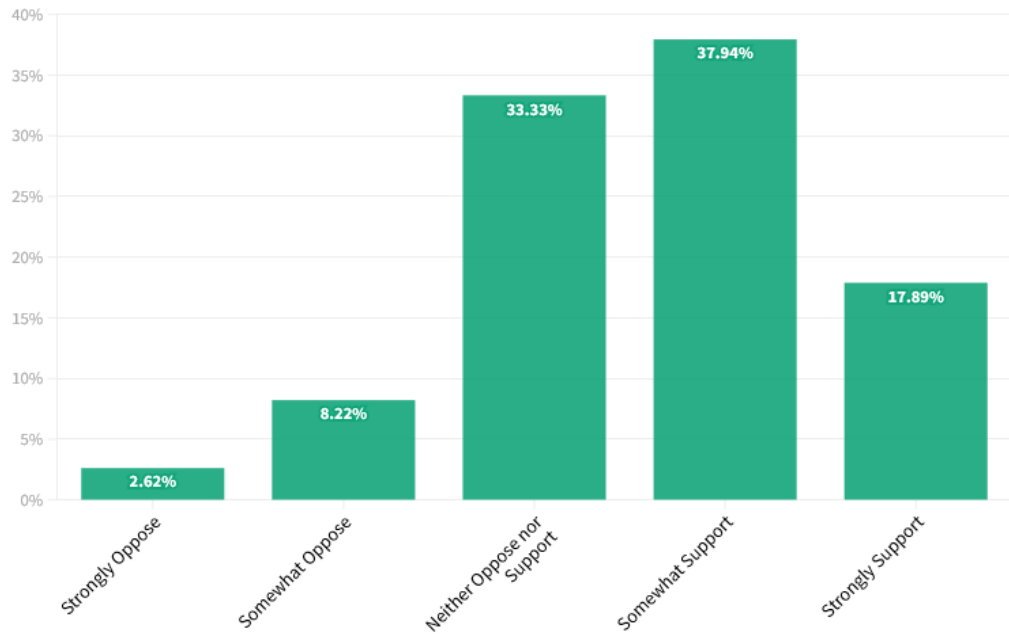
## Appendix 6

Figure 6. Public Opinion on THAAD Deployment



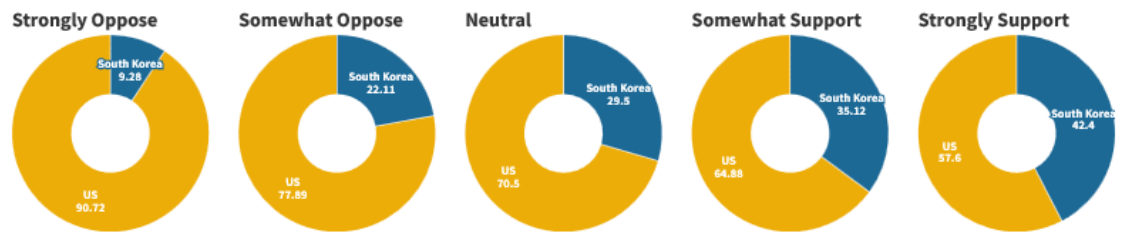
Appendix 7

How do you feel about the presence of American military bases in South Korea?



Appendix 8

## Average accepted cost-sharing, by level of support for U.S. military presence

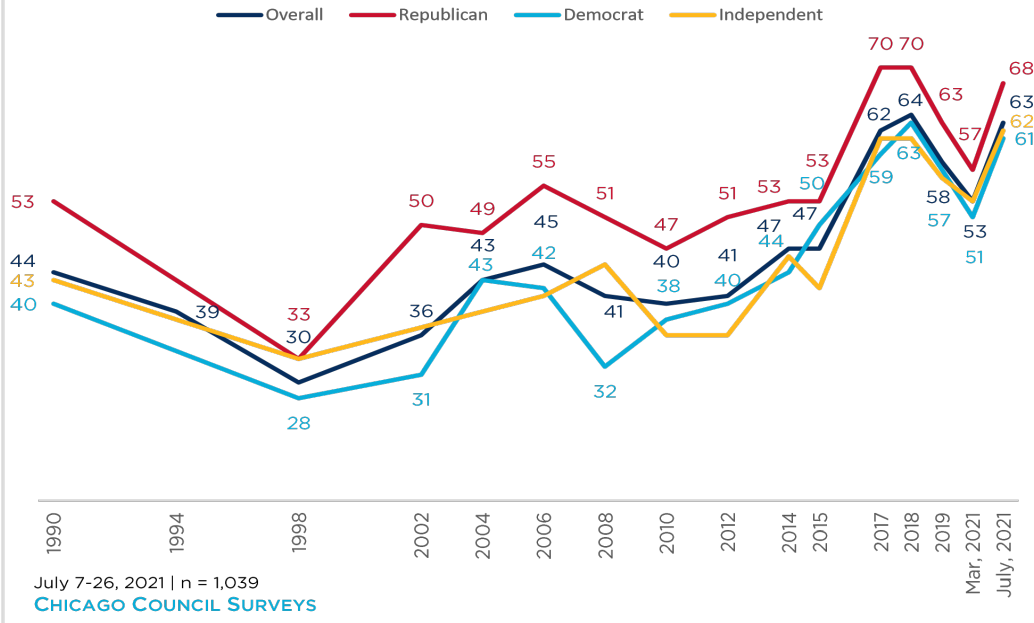


## Appendix 9



## Use of US Troops in Defense of South Korea

There has been some discussion about the circumstances that might justify using US troops in other parts of the world. Please give your opinion about some situations. Would you favor or oppose the use of US troops: *If North Korea invaded South Korea* (% favor)

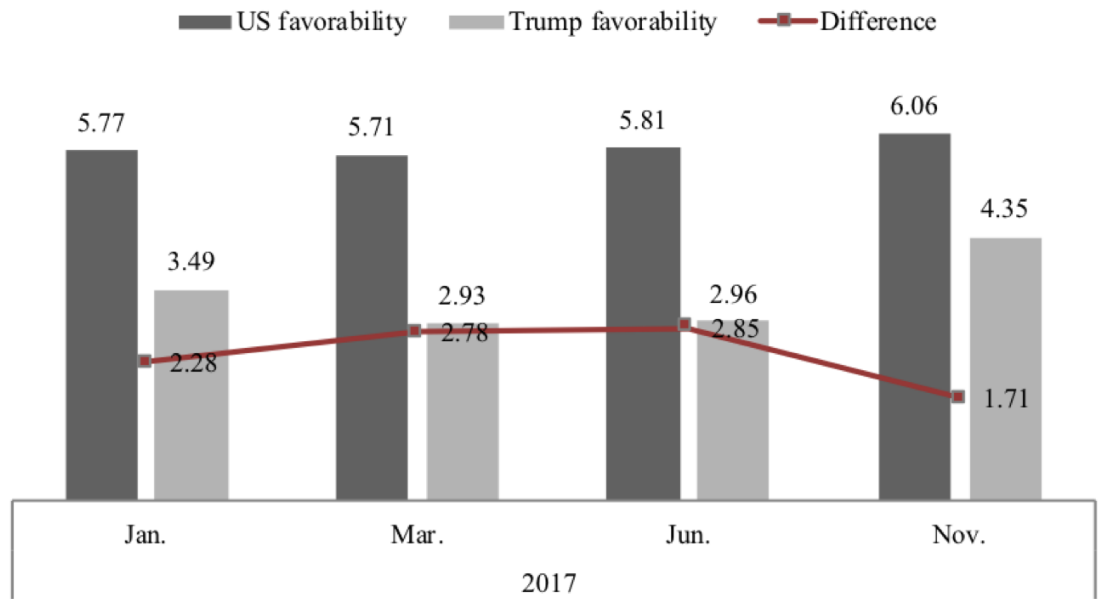


This survey also included an experiment that replaced the word “invaded” in the hypothetical scenario with the word “attacked.” This was to test if framing North Korean aggression as an invasion—which implies North Korean forces entering South Korea—made it more likely that the American public would support defending South Korea. An attack, on the other hand, covers a range of more limited provocations and might reduce support among the American public to defend South Korea. Despite this change in wording to the scenario, American support to defend South Korea did not waiver. When framed as a North Korean attack, 62 support defending South Korea.

The American public also remains supportive of a US troop presence in South Korea. Two-thirds (66%) supported maintaining long-term military bases in South Korea in the March 2021 survey, and Democrats (65%) and Republicans (70%) agree.

South Korean attitudes toward the US military presence in South Korea remain robust. Multiple [surveys](#) have shown strong support among South Koreans for the

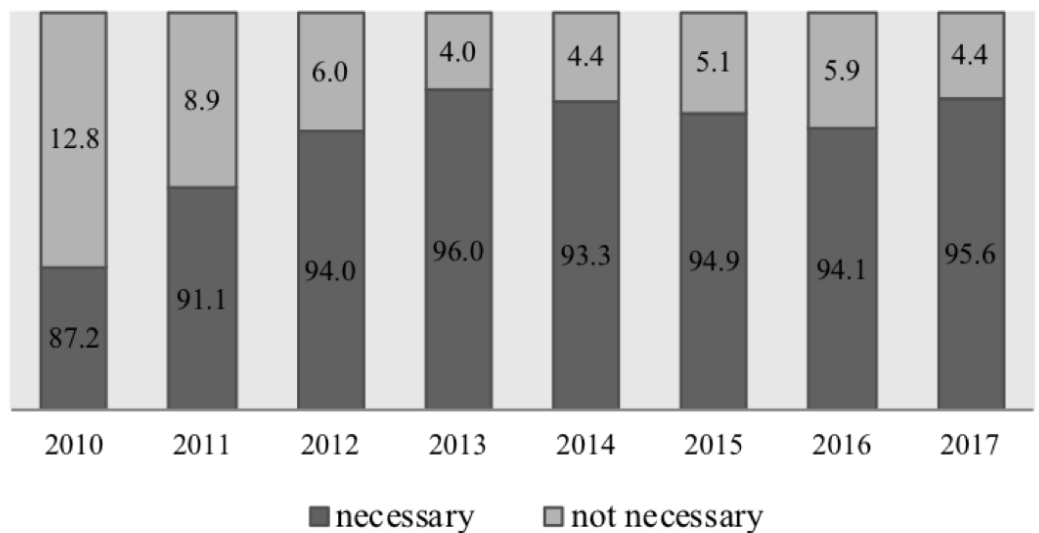
Figure 1. Country and Leadership Favorability Ratings: United States



Source: Public Opinion Polls of the Asan Institute for Policy Studies

Appendix 11

Figure 2. Support for Alliance between South Korea and the United States



Source: Public Opinion Polls of the Asan Institute for Policy Studies