Since his inauguration, President Obama has placed substantial emphasis on pushing forward non-proliferation and counter-terrorism. His overall nuclear policy consists of three components: non-proliferation, disarmament and the peaceful use of nuclear energy. This policy was first laid out in President Obama’s Prague speech on April 5, 2009, and further developed in the April 2010 Nuclear Posture Review (NPR). These policy adjustments have direct implications for South Korea as a country that is facing an expanded nuclear threat as a result of North Korea’s nuclear development.

The 2010 NPR pointed out nuclear terrorism and nuclear proliferation as today’s most immediate and extreme threats, and stressed the need to maintain stable strategic relationships with existing nuclear states such as China and Russia. The NPR emphasizes the concept of negative security assurance: the U.S. declared that it will not use or threaten to use nuclear weapons against non-nuclear weapons states that are party to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and in compliance with their nuclear non-proliferation obligations. This implies that any state that uses chemical and biological weapons (CBW) rather than nuclear weapons against the U.S. or its allies and partners would face the prospect of a devastating conventional military response rather than being punished with nuclear weapons. However, the U.S. has also declared that it reserves the right to employ nuclear weapons to deter a conventional or CBW attack against the U.S. or its allies and partners by states that possess nuclear weapons or those not in compliance with their nuclear non-proliferation obligations.

The NPR has two implications on the Korean peninsula. First, outlier countries such as North Korea and Iran that have violated their NPT obligations and continued to pursue nuclear weapons have been excluded from the negative security assurance. Therefore, there is high possibility that North Korea might refer to such provisions found in the NPR to justify its position of possessing nuclear weapons, while continuing to argue that the U.S. must abandon its hostile policy toward Pyongyang. In response to the NPR, North Korea’s Foreign Ministry announced its plan to further increase and modernize its nuclear deterrent as long as the U.S. continues to pose a security threat to the North. Thus, the 2010 NPR could have the effect of further holding back North Korea from returning to the six-party process and also raises the possibility of reopening discussions, before North Korea’s return to Six-Party Talks, on U.S.-DPRK normalization or on a peace regime.

The NPR states that U.S. nuclear weapons may still play a role in deterring a conventional or CBW attack against the U.S. or its allies, which implies the possibility of a U.S. preemptive strike against North Korea. This clearly illustrates the Obama government’s rejection of the No First Use policy, which is an irritant to the North. In order to persuade Pyongyang to return to the six-party process, the U.S. should pose its policies more flexibly, even though its strategies should consistently emphasize dialogue and sanctions. Also, the NPR states that the United States will use nuclear weapons only to protect the vital interests of the U.S. or its allies, but it is not clear what those vital interests are. It is essential for Washington to
clearly specify those interests to maintain a favorable position in negotiating with North Korea.

Second, the 2010 NPR indicates that although a U.S. “nuclear umbrella” is provided by a combination of the strategic forces of the U.S. Triad, non-strategic nuclear weapons deployed forward in key regions, and U.S.-based nuclear weapons, many of these weapons were removed at the end of the Cold War. Instead, the U.S. has developed missile defense (MD), counter-weapons of mass destruction (WMD) capabilities, conventional power-projection capabilities, and integrated command and control as its main tools for enhancing regional security. While continuing to maintain nuclear deterrence, the United States seeks to strengthen its regional deterrence capability through MD or conventional long-range missiles. Such a possibility raises the concern that U.S. deterrence capability achieved with nuclear weapons could be weakened, including U.S. extended deterrence capabilities provided to South Korea.

South Korean concerns over U.S. extended deterrence pertain to the planned transfer of wartime operational control (OPCON) scheduled for 2012. The possible weakening of U.S. nuclear extended deterrence as suggested in the NPR could mean a decline in U.S. defense support to South Korea, and in turn a weaker defense capability of the ROK vis-à-vis North Korea. Furthermore, the uncertain number of U.S. forces on the Korean peninsula associated with strategic flexibility of U.S. Forces Korea (USFK) would signal a weakening of defense capability to the Korean people.

Concerning MD, South Korea is currently developing Korea Air and Missile Defense (KAMD) and is not participating in the U.S.-centered MD system. South Korea considers that joining the U.S. MD system might provoke North Korea and worsen South Korea’s relationship with China. Japan, on the other hand, is partially included in the U.S. MD system. Such a situation leaves open the logical possibility that U.S. troops stationed in Japan might be more effective in deterring North Korea than the U.S.-ROK alliance.

It is important for both the U.S. and South Korea to develop a concrete plan for extended deterrence. The U.S. clearly stated in the 2010 NPR its commitment to provide “a credible extended deterrence posture and capabilities” not only through nuclear weapons but also through conventional military forces and MD. A tailored deterrence capability should be established between the U.S. and Korea, a process through which both sides could ascertain that the new extended deterrence does not imply a weakening U.S. nuclear umbrella but a new strategy for more efficient deterrence. One important part of this strategy would be to establish an integrated operation system by strengthening interoperability between KAMD and the U.S. MD system. Tailored extended deterrence should be established separately for Korea and Japan, covering not only nuclear elements but also diverse military, economic, political and legal elements that would produce more comprehensive extended deterrence measures.

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NEWS & EVENTS

MAY 6, 2010 – CENTER FOR STRATEGIC AND INTERNATIONAL STUDIES, WASHINGTON DC
PREPARING FOR INSTABILITY IN NORTH KOREA: U.S.-CHINA-SOUTH KOREA COORDINATION
3-5pm, CSIS, 1800 K Street NW, Room B1-A/B
Scott Snyder, Center for U.S.-Korea Policy Director, and Bonnie Glaser, Senior Fellow, CSIS Freeman Chair in China Studies, presented findings of their new report, “Responding to Change on the Korean Peninsula: Impediments to U.S.-South Korea-China Coordination.” Hon. Richard Lawless, former Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Asia-Pacific Affairs, served as discussant. The event was moderated by Larry Niksch, Senior Associate, Center for Strategic and International Studies.

MAY 10-11, 2010 – KOREAN GLOBAL FOUNDATION, BRUSSELS, BELGIUM
11th WORLD KOREAN FORUM: THE NEW ERA OF KOREA AND EU
European Parliament and Hotel Metropole Brussels
In cooperation with the European Institute for Asian Studies (EIAS), the Korean Global Foundation will host the 11th World Korean Forum. Held in Brussels, this year’s forum will examine the European Union experience and the era of a unified Korea. Scott Snyder, Center for U.S.-Korea Policy Director, will present a paper on the integration and development of the European Union and implications for the Korean peninsula.

MAY 26-27, 2010 – PACIFIC FORUM CSIS, SHANGHAI, CHINA
U.S.-CHINA DIALOGUE
Fudan University
Pacific Forum CSIS will convene U.S. and Chinese scholars and experts for its U.S.-China Dialogue at Fudan University in Shanghai. Scott Snyder, Center for U.S.-Korea Policy Director, will serve as a panel presenter on Korean Peninsula issues.
JUNE 24-25, 2010 – COUNCIL ON U.S.-KOREAN SECURITY STUDIES, UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA, AND INTERNATIONAL COUNCIL ON KOREAN STUDIES, LOS ANGELES, CA  
CUSKOS-USC-ICKS JOINT CONFERENCE 2010  
University of Southern California  
The Council on U.S.-Korean Security Studies (CUSKOS), University of Southern California (USC), and International Council on Korean Studies (ICKS) will co-host a conference on North Korea. Scott Snyder, Center for U.S.-Korea Policy Director, will serve as a panelist.

PUBLICATIONS


Scott Snyder (April 21, 2010), “Northeast Asian Public Views: Isolated North Korea; Good Vibes Between Japan and South Korea,” Asia Unbound, Council on Foreign Relations.


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VIEWS ON THE U.S.-ROK ALLIANCE

“President Lee has agreed to host the next Nuclear Security Summit in the Republic of Korea in two years. This reflects South Korea’s leadership, regionally and globally, and I thank President Lee and the South Korean people for their willingness to accept this responsibility.”

--President Barack Obama, Opening Remarks at Nuclear Security Summit, April 13, 2010, Washington DC.

“President Obama must really be commended for his efforts to reengage with the world. And when it comes to Asia, the American government and President Obama have shown their commitment and resolve to reengage with the Asian partners.”

--President Lee Myung-bak, Interview with Fred Hiatt, Washington Post, April 21, 2010, Seoul.

“OPCON transition does not mean—does not mean—that the Republic of Korea has to have independent and self reliant forces. We, the U.S., are committed to provide the capabilities—very similar to what we’re doing right now—that we need to be able to fight and win, if North Korea were ever to attack.”


“The essence of a successful North Korea policy is close cooperation of the parties involved in the ROK-U.S. Alliance. North Korea policy must be led and other nations must be persuaded based on this.”


“Kim Jong-il has had some difficulties with some of the economic policies that he’s put forward that has engendered real popular protest on the part of North Koreans. So it’s been difficult to get this regime to move back into the Six-Party Talks, but our alliance with China, Russia, and South Korea and Japan is very strong, and I believe we will eventually get there.”

--Hillary Clinton, U.S. Secretary of State, Remarks on Nuclear Nonproliferation at the University of Louisville, April 6, 2010, Louisville, KY.
The Center for U.S.-Korea Policy aims to deepen and broaden the foundations for institutionalized cooperation between the United States and South Korea by promoting a comprehensive U.S.-ROK alliance partnership on emerging global, regional, and non-traditional security challenges. A project of The Asia Foundation, the Center is based in the Foundation’s Washington DC office.

The Asia Foundation is a private, non-profit, non-governmental organization committed to the development of a peaceful, prosperous, just, and open Asia-Pacific region. Drawing on 50 years of experience in Asia, the Foundation collaborates with private and public partners to support leadership and institutional development, exchanges, and policy research.

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The Center for U.S.-Korea Policy is based in the Washington DC office of The Asia Foundation with seed funding from the Smith Richardson Foundation. The Center accepts donations from the public and private sector for its programs and operations. Inquiries should be directed to Scott Snyder at ssnyder@centerforuskoreapolicy.org.

This newsletter is produced by the Center for U.S.-Korea Policy to provide updates and analysis on current policy issues related to the U.S.-ROK alliance partnership. All views expressed in this publication are those of the author(s).

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