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Global NK International Conference

## Nuclear Competition and Escalation Pathways in East Asia: ROK, US, and PRC Perspectives on Cooperation for the Future of the Korean Peninsula

Session 2. Building a Future Order of the Korean Peninsula: Strategic Communication,  
Extended Deterrence, and Cooperation for Nuclear Non-proliferation

East Asia Institute (EAI)

Grandview Institution (国观智库)

Harvard Kennedy School Belfer Center

Peking University (北京大学)

## Session 2.

### Building a Future Order of the Korean Peninsula: Strategic Communication, Extended Deterrence, and Cooperation for Nuclear Non-proliferation

- Time: May 10, 2023 (Wednesday), 11:10–12:20
- Location: Orchid Room, The Westin Josun Seoul
- Panelists (in alphabetical order): CHUN, Chaesung (Chair, EAI National Security Research Center; Professor, Seoul National University); GIOVANNINI, Francesca (Executive Director, Managing the Atom Project, Belfer Center); JIA, Qingguo (Professor, Peking University); KIM, Tae-Hyung (Professor, Soongsil University); OUYANG, Wei (Vice-Chairman, Grandview Institution); SOHN, Yul (President, EAI; Professor, Yonsei University); TOBEY, William (Director, Office of National Security and International Studies, Los Alamos National Laboratory)

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■ **Presenter: TOBEY, William (Director, Los Alamos National Laboratory)**

#### “A Path Forward on Nuclear Nonproliferation”

- Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT) has been a stable regime and a solid asset for international peace and security. While the death of NPT has been predicted many times, these predictions have been proven wrong. Yet this time may be different.
- Attack on the NPT regime will have a far-reaching impact on the Korean Peninsula. Since the 2000s, diplomacy to reverse the DPRK nuclear threat has stalled.
- The world changed in February 2022 when Russia violated and vandalized the international order. Russia and China, both members of the NPT and permanent members of the UN Security Council, are evidently rethinking or already directly attacking the NPT.
- In response, however, further proliferation cannot be the answer. Like-minded countries supporting the NPT and shared values must act together. They must prepare an active defense of norms, values, and laws, and achieve more tangible defense.
- Extended deterrence has been the most successful nonproliferation policy in the course of history. The best evidence is shown by the difference between Poland and Ukraine. Fortunately, ROK is part of the U.S. treaty alliance and a beneficiary of U.S. extended

deterrence. More work is needed bilaterally and multilaterally to fight against the threat to nonproliferation.

■ Presenter: OUYANG, Wei (Vice-Chairman, Grandview Institution)

“Seeking Cooperation Amid Strategic Dilemma”

- China-U.S. competition is intensifying while DPRK continues its weapon development, and ROK’s DPRK policy is becoming more hardline under the Yoon administration. However, basis and principles for cooperation among the relevant countries in the Korean Peninsula still exist.
- Regional order on the Korean Peninsula is less likely to turn into a “new Cold War,” since relevant countries still share the common interest of nuclear safety, security, and stability.
- Countries, therefore, still have a space to seek cooperation. Great power competition does not mean confrontation in all fields. Nuclear safety, security, avoiding nuclear war, regional stability, and nuclear-related environmental issues are some shared interests and potential areas of China-U.S.-ROK cooperation.
- Multilateral approaches like the Six-Party Talks have often been suspended, but the basic rules and principles are not outdated. Any possible bilateral or multilateral dialogues to promote denuclearization, security, and stability can be meaningful.

■ Presenter: CHUN, Chaesung (Chair, EAI National Security Research Center; Professor, Seoul National University)

“Navigating Future Security Challenges in the Korean Peninsula: Nuclear Deterrence and Strategic Engagement”

- U.S.-China relations may be adversarial on the surface, but this is based on strategic mistrust and misperception that can be resolved. U.S. thinks that China’s drive for economic development is revisionist in nature, and China believes that the U.S. is containing China unjustly by challenging its territorial sovereignty and integrity over Taiwan.

- After the Bali Summit in November 2022, there have been some signs of positive changes. Cautious optimism was observed from the Chinese side, and the U.S. tried to present a vision for ultimate goal of its China strategy.
- Yet to improve its position and enhance the credibility of such commitment, the U.S. should present a more explicit strategic framework implying that it wishes to manage the competition in a reasonable manner. In order to achieve mature relations, it is important to engage in continuous dialogue, diplomacy, and rules-based competition.
- For Korea, the U.S.-China arms race is increasingly more threatening. ROK should try to find a “strategic space” to enhance cooperation with the two countries.
- Washington Declaration was more focused on confirming reassurance for ROK. But this has provoked DPRK in some sense. We need communication with the adversary counterpart and send a signal to the DPRK that extended deterrence is inherently defensive, not offensive.

#### ■ Discussion 1: JIA, Qingguo

- As Professor William Tobey mentioned, the fact that the NPT is under threat is a matter of great concern. The NPT faces numerous challenges. The U.S. itself challenges the regime by deploying nuclear submarines to Australia, and Washington actively discusses deploying tactical nuclear weapons to South Korea and Japan.
- Nuclear safety is a shared interest in the region, and pragmatic steps are required to ensure this. In this front, both the U.S. and China want stability and have in fact voiced strong commitment. However, the reality is much more complicated. Nevertheless, U.S. and China should have benign competition and compete to be better.

#### ■ Discussion 2: GIOVANNINI, Francesca

- It is true that future East Asian order will be predominantly shaped by competition and cooperation between U.S. and China. This order will further shape the general international order as well.

- U.S. and China relations can be defined as “complex interdependence.” The competition cannot be understood in a merely “security dynamic” perspective. While the two states are engaged in competition, there exists a need for cooperation.
- DPRK can offer a valuable opportunity for U.S. and China to show the world that great power cooperation can work. China is a major player, a responsible actor in dealing with the Korean Peninsula. In this context, China should recognize and come to the table as it did during the Six-Party Talks.
- China and ROK-U.S. have different perspectives toward the DPRK, but this is due to a “sequencing dilemma.” China argues that economic cooperation must be realized first in order to reduce the DPRK insecurity, while ROK-U.S. believes that security guarantee must be achieved before any economic cooperation is realized. So in the long term, all parties must commit to dialogue to close this gap.

### ■ Discussion 3: KIM, Tae-Hyung

- Future of NPT is grim. U.S. already faces critical challenges, such as providing reassurance and efficient arms control to its allies. In current international politics, NPT is being increasingly threatened and the U.S., Russia, and China are all modernizing their nuclear forces.
- If ominous forecasts realize, great powers (especially the U.S.) will face immense pressure in terms of preserving the NPT and providing effective extended deterrence to allies. Therefore, it is urgent and imperative for concerned parties to proceed with nuclear arms control talks, which have been proven useful for quite some time.
- Today, significant level of technological advancement is helping some countries build better counterforce capability to nuclear powers. Consequently, some nuclear powers will have less confidence in their survival, which could lead to an arms race to develop more weapons. This trend is happening globally and has a negative impact on arms control as well as the NPT.
- Extended deterrence is important because it alleviates ROK’s threat perception toward DPRK. However, too much emphasis is given to nuclear weapons. This could give a wrong impression

that maintenance of the ROK-U.S. alliance and deterrence against the DPRK nuclear threat is only achieved with nuclear weapons.

- It is true that common interests exist among relevant stakeholders in the Peninsula, but each country prefers to prioritize its own national interest. Every country is blaming each other for the DPRK stalemate.

#### ■ Discussion 4: TOBEY, William

- Two clarifications must be highlighted: Australia firmly agreed to the legal and physical steps ensuring that fuels for the nuclear submarines will not be used for weapons, and no U.S. executive officials are considering the deployment of tactical nuclear weapons in Japan and ROK.
- Reemergence of great power competition is a great challenge, and this issue is larger than nonproliferation. EU, Japan, ROK, U.S., and other like-minded countries should bond not just for nuclear weapons, but for global security. These countries, when working together, will be extremely powerful.

#### ■ Discussion 5: OUYANG, Wei

- It is important to note that “nuclear safety” and “nuclear security” are two different concepts. The former also applies to non-traditional security issues.
- Since China and ROK are neighbors, they already have channels for dialogue. The U.S. does as well, since there are hotlines. So opportunities for restarting bilateral dialogues exist, perhaps through means like a 1.5 track.

#### ■ Discussion 6: CHUN, Chaesung

- To address Chinese concern toward ROK’s potential change in its Taiwan policy, ROK’s official policy on Taiwan remains the same—it supports peace, prosperity, and stability in the Taiwan Strait. While ROK respects the One China Policy, Taiwan Strait is considered important since it is directly related to ROK’s trade and military stability.

- However, Chinese question about ROK's potential change in policy is understandable, because ROK President and Foreign Minister recently have been echoing U.S. rhetoric of opposing a unilateral change to the status quo. Seoul needs to do more work to clarify what opposing change to the status quo means for ROK.
- ROK is critically affected by and vulnerable to the growing U.S.-China competition. In this context, ROK hopes it can participate in a multilateral conversation to figure out where and how ROK can raise its voice.

Panelists (in alphabetical order)

- **CHUN, Chaesung** is the Chair of National Security Center of the EAI and a Professor at the Department of Political Science and International Relations at Seoul Nation University.
- **GIOVANNINI, Francesca** is the Executive Director of the Project on Managing the Atom at the Harvard Kennedy School's Belfer Center.
- **JIA, Qingguo** is a professor at Peking University.
- **KIM, Tae-Hyung** is a Professor at Department of Political Science and International Relations at Soongsil University.
- **OUYANG, Wei** is the Vice Chairman of Academic Committee of Grandview Institution.
- **SOHN, Yul** is the President of the EAI and Professor of the Graduate School of International Studies and Underwood International College at Yonsei University.
- **TOBEY, William** is the Director of the Office of National Security and International Studies at the Los Alamos National Laboratory and a Senior Fellow with the Avoiding Great Power Wars at the Belfer Center.

■ Typeset by Jisoo Park\_EAI Research Associate

For inquiries: 02-2277-1683 (ext. 208) [jspark@eai.or.kr](mailto:jspark@eai.or.kr)

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The East Asia Institute  
1, Sajik-ro 7-gil, Jongno-gu, Seoul 03028, Republic of Korea  
Phone 82 2 2277 1683 Fax 82 2 2277 1684  
Email [eai@eai.or.kr](mailto:eai@eai.or.kr) Website [www.eai.or.kr](http://www.eai.or.kr)