

Asan Issue Brief Release: “Comparing Allied Public Confidence in U.S. Extended Nuclear Deterrence”

SEOUL, March 27, 2024 – Dr. Peter K. LEE and Mr. KANG Chungku of the Asan Institute’s Center for Regional Studies (<http://en.asaninst.org/>) have published a new Asan Issue Brief on “Comparing Allied Public Confidence in U.S. Extended Nuclear Deterrence.”

The Issue Brief analyzes why South Korean public confidence in the credibility of U.S. nuclear assurances against North Korean nuclear threats has actually declined since the 2023 Washington Declaration.

- The researchers offer a cross-regional analysis of how public confidence among U.S. allies in Asia and Europe differs depending on the type of extended nuclear deterrence arrangement.
- “Allied publics who state the highest levels of perceived threat but do not host U.S. tactical nuclear weapons are most in favor of enhanced nuclear weapons cooperation with the United States,” the researchers find.

The researchers also critique recent studies of South Korean public opinion that have found support for *both* the re-deployment of U.S. tactical nuclear weapons as well as the acquisition of an independent nuclear weapons capability. This has been widely interpreted to suggest that most South Koreans are committed to seeking nuclear weapons regardless of what the United States might do to strengthen deterrence.

- “South Korean public opinion superficially appears like an outlier but in fact sits within the norm of U.S. allied public sentiment,” the authors contend.
- South Korean support for hosting U.S. nuclear weapons and also developing their own nuclear weapons could be *because they currently lack both options, not because they necessarily want both*.
- “We can only really know the true support for independent nuclear armament if we conduct a survey *after* the United States re-deployed tactical nuclear weapons to South Korea,” the research conclude.

The Issue Brief recommends that ROK-U.S. alliance managers need to pay attention to both extended nuclear deterrence and credible nuclear assurances. From a public opinion standpoint, U.S. credibility ultimately depends on deterrence measures being visible and tangible.

Research Team:

Dr. Peter K. Lee, Research Fellow (peter.lee@asaninst.org)

Mr. KANG Chungku, Principal Associate (ckkang@asaninst.org)

About the Asan Institute for Policy Studies

The Asan Institute for Policy Studies (<http://en.asaninst.org/>) is an independent think tank that provides innovative policy solutions and spearheads public discourse on the core issues in Korea, East Asia and the world. Our goal is to assist policymakers to make better informed and mutually beneficial policy decisions.