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## **The Troubled ROK-U.S. Alliance<sup>1</sup>**

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From the beginning of 2022, North Korea has conducted four missile tests, including two hypersonic missile tests. Since it takes about a minute for them to reach Seoul and it is difficult to intercept them with the existing missile defense systems, hypersonic missiles can pose a formidable threat if equipped with a nuclear warhead. Although North Korea is demonstrating new weapons that threaten South Korea, South Korean military authorities have said it was not a hypersonic missile, and there has been no consultation with the United States. It stands in stark contrast to the response of the first test that the United States and Japan took immediately condemning the test and having a phone consultation between Secretary Blinken and Foreign Minister Hayashi.

Today South Korea finds itself in an unprecedentedly dangerous security environment. While South Korea's ally, the United States, is very far away across the Pacific Ocean, North Korea, China, and Russia, with the system of one-man rule, are spreading a big wave of totalitarianism across the Eurasian continent. It is painful to observe that even as our government speaks of the importance of the ROK-U.S. alliance, the government's policies seem to promote the opposite. Whether it is for individuals or states, in order to achieve objectives, words and deeds better be consistent and the relationship of trust is required between the partners.

North Korea has consolidated hereditary succession of three generations at its November 2021 conference on the 'Three Revolutions' movement of culture, ideology, and technology. It proclaimed the 'Great Kim Jong Un Era' and declared that it

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<sup>1</sup> This is to inform you that this manuscript can be revised in part.

would “transform and change the whole society in line with the revolutionary ideas and will of the Respected Comrade Kim Jong Un.”

At the 2017 National Congress of the Communist Party of China, China enshrined ‘Xi Jinping Thought’ into the Party’s Constitution and in a meeting of the Political Bureau elevated President Xi Jinping to a “Core Leader,” a title previously reserved only for Mao Zedong. In 2018, the Communist Party of China entrenched Xi Jinping’s one-man rule by amending Article 79 of the Constitution, which had stated that the president could not serve more than two consecutive terms. Less than a few months after the National People's Congress (NPC) Standing Committee submitted a proposal for constitutional amendment in January 2018, at the National People's Congress plenary session, 2,958 out of 2,964 participants approved the constitutional amendment with the vote of 99.7% in favor.

In Russia, through the constitutional amendments in 2020, the number of presidential terms was limited to two, yet it allowed President Vladimir Putin to run for president in 2024 by resetting the tally of the tenure to zero, clearing the way for President Putin to extend his rule. Russia's constitutional amendment was completed in six months after President Putin proposed the constitutional amendment in January, and it was passed with the approval of 89.9% (383 out of 426) of the House of Representatives (Duma) and 97.5% (160 out of 164) of the Senate at the same day in March. In the referendum held three months later, 77.9% of the people supported it.

These characteristics of the political systems are well reflected in *the Democracy Index 2020* published by The Economist, a leading British weekly. The Economist surveyed 167 countries and divided them into four categories: “full democracy,” “flawed democracy,” “hybrid regime,” and “authoritarian” North Korea, China, and Russia all belonged to authoritarian regimes. Out of the 167 countries surveyed, Russia ranked 124th, China ranked 151st, and North Korea ranked 167th, the lowest among 167 countries.

South Korea, which has flourished as a liberal democracy and free market economy at the far eastern end of the Eurasian continent, is faced with the waves of totalitarianism sweeping across the continent. South Korea should recognize the implications of the current situation and properly rise to the challenge, but it is

doubtful whether the South Korean government is doing so. To deal with the security threats levelled against South Korea, the ROK-U.S. alliance must be strengthened. At the moment, our concern is that the current South Korean government's efforts to transfer wartime operational control (OPCON) do not help strengthen the alliance.

When the Korean War broke out in 1950, the United Nations forces were formed to save the Republic of Korea, the only legitimate government on the Korean Peninsula recognized by the United Nations. President Rhee Syngman handed over operational control of South Korea's military to General Douglas MacArthur, the commander of the United Nations Command (UNC), to effectively prosecute the war efforts. In 1978, with the establishment of the ROK-U.S. Combined Forces Command (CFC), OPCON was transferred from the UNC commander to the CFC commander. In 1994, South Korea took back peacetime OPCON leaving only wartime OPCON to be exercised by the CFC commander. When the Defense Readiness Condition (DEFCON) is upgraded from the current Level 4, where there is no possibility of military intervention, to Level 3, where there is a possibility of military intervention, the CFC commander will begin to exercise OPCON over the South Korean military. Since the DEFCON upgrade is decided through consultation and agreement between the presidents of the two countries with the recommendation of the CFC commander, the United States cannot arbitrarily decide this and the CFC commander must follow the decisions of the leaders of the two countries.

When the Roh Moo-hyun administration raised the issue of OPCON transfer, the U.S. was rather skeptical. But, at the Roh-Bush summit in September 2006, the two countries agreed to move forward with OPCON transfer. Although North Korea conducted its first nuclear test in October 2006, the two countries agreed to transfer OPCON by April 17, 2012 during the Defense Ministers' meeting in February 2007. After the inauguration of President Lee Myung-bak, the security environment deteriorated with North Korea's second nuclear test in 2009 and the sinking of the South Korean Navy corvette *Cheonan* in 2010. Against this backdrop, the two countries agreed to postpone the OPCON transfer date to late December 2015. As North Korea continued to develop nuclear weapons and missiles, the Park Geun-hye administration changed the arrangement for the OPCON transition. At the 46th ROK-U.S. Security Consultative Meeting (SCM) in 2014, the two sides agreed to shift from a specific dated transition towards a "conditions-based" OPCON transition. These

conditions were: (1) the ROK's acquisition of key military capabilities to lead the allies' combined forces; (2) the ROK's acquisition of military capabilities necessary for initial responses to North Korea's nuclear and missile threats; and (3) a conducive security environment on the Korean Peninsula and in the region for OPCON transition. Since then, the principle of a "conditions-based OPCON transition plan" has been continuously confirmed.

In the joint statement at the Moon-Biden summit in May 2021, the two leaders once again "reiterate[d] [their] firm commitment to a conditions-based transition of wartime operational control." But South Korean Defense Minister Seo Wook said that the conditions for "early" transition of OPCON have been set during the Moon administration right after the 53rd Security Consultative Meeting. This shows that despite the commitment made at the summit, the Moon administration appears to put more emphasis on "early transition" than "meeting conditions." If wartime OPCON is recklessly transferred even though the conditions have not been met, we cannot be sure whether the U.S. military's key strategic assets, such as carrier strike group, strategic bombers and nuclear submarines deployed in Japan or Guam, can be provided in a timely manner. This would eventually lead to isolating South Korea in the face of North Korea's nuclear weapons.

The issue of OPCON transition was first raised by the Roh Moo-hyun administration. In August 2003, President Roh raised the issue of OPCON transition, saying that "Since the Korean War, our military has steadily grown and has substantial power to defend the country. Nevertheless, the military is still not completely equipped with its own independent capability and authority to implement combat operations." Three years later, he said that "the return of wartime OPCON is tantamount to establishing the nation's sovereignty rightfully and remedying an abnormal state that differs from the constitutional spirit concerning the authority to command troops."

In the case of Europe, countries such as Germany, France, the United Kingdom, Spain, and Italy have placed their troops under the wartime OPCON of NATO's Supreme Allied Commander, who is a U.S. general. This is not because they lack self-respect or pride. The thirty NATO member states, just like South Korea, directly control their own military during peacetime. In wartime, however, the American general who serves as NATO commander exercises OPCON over the armed forces of the member

states. The fact that a U.S. general has OPCON over NATO forces is a mechanism to assure the fulfillment of U.S. security commitments to European countries, and therefore none of the NATO member states questions this arrangement. If South Korea regards OPCON as an issue of national sovereignty, it means that South Korea is not properly aware of serious security situation around the Korean Peninsula, and that it fails to see the reality in the era of collective security.

After the 2018 U.S.-DPRK summit in Singapore between President Trump and Chairman Kim Jong Un, proper ROK-U.S. combined military exercises have not been conducted, and those that were conducted degenerated into computer-simulated games. The U.S. has repeatedly wanted to normalize combined forces exercises, but the South Korean government has been lukewarm in its response. As the United States Forces Korea (USFK) was unable to conduct training above the regiment-level in Korea, it has conducted training back on U.S. territory, including Alaska and Hawaii. This raises serious questions about whether a military with no proper training would be able to effectively carry out its missions. In this regard, former CFC Commander Burwell B. Bell warned that, “Military readiness of the Alliance to effectively deter and if necessary defeat North Korea ... is not something that should be treated as a political tool to attempt to achieve potential short-term enhancements of relations with North Korea.”

The term “Extended Deterrence” first appeared in the joint statement of the 38th ROK-U.S. Security Consultative Meeting held right after North Korea’s nuclear test in 2006. At the ROK-U.S. summit in June 2009, the U.S. commitment to extended deterrence was reaffirmed. To make extended deterrence more effective, its contents need to be more concrete. For extended deterrence to work properly, the three C’s should be in place, (1) ‘communication’ that conveys the will to retaliate against the enemy’s attack, (2) ‘capability’ to retaliate against the enemy, and (3) ‘credibility’ in the ability to retaliate against the enemy’s attack and the willingness to use it. Although the ROK and the U.S. have discussed the issue of extended deterrence at their Extended Deterrence Policy Committee, it lacks concrete measures. The concern is whether the U.S. would provide extended nuclear deterrence to South Korea at the risk of its own national security when North Korea can strike the U.S. homeland with nuclear-armed ballistic missiles.

From this perspective, we are concerned with another issue: that is, U.S. position on the “No First Use (NFU)” policy which is being discussed recently. Until now, the U.S. has maintained the position that it does not rule out the possibility of a preemptive use of nuclear weapons to counter an adversary's imminent nuclear attack and to enhance deterrence by making the adversary unaware of when the U.S. will use nuclear weapons. However, the Biden administration sees nuclear weapons as a means to deter the use of nuclear weapons, not a weapon to be used, and is reportedly re-considering the NFU. If the NFU becomes an official position of the U.S., North Korea may misjudge that the U.S. extended deterrence commitment is faltering, and South Korea will be in a situation where it may depend on North Korea's favor for its survival.

Recently, an article published in *The National Interest*, an American foreign policy magazine, has drawn attention. In this article, Dr. Doug Bandow calls for the breakup of the ROK-U.S. alliance and suggests that the ROK could acquire its own indigenous nuclear weapons. He claims that “the alliance is a means, not an end” and it should not be strengthened if it increases the likelihood of a nuclear attack on the United States.” Therefore, he recommends that the United States would be better off closing its nuclear umbrella over South Korea. Even though such opinion remains a minority, the fact that similar articles have been published in *Foreign Policy*, *The US Army War College Quarterly*, and *Orbis* is a concern for South Korea. According to the book *I Alone Can Fix It*, written by Carol Leonnig and Philip Rucker of *The Washington Post*, President Trump had privately indicated that he would seek to blow up the U.S. alliance with South Korea, should he win reelection. Some advisers warned President Trump that shredding the alliances before the election would be politically dangerous. “Yeah, the second term,” Trump had said. “We’ll do it in the second term.” Trump's remarks raise concerns since he is a former president and a leading Republican candidate in the next US presidential election.

Under these circumstances, the South Korean government should ask the U.S. to take concrete measures of extended deterrence. However, it is hard to find traces of such efforts. Rather the government is even going against U.S. measures to enhance extended deterrence. South Korea’s so-called “three no’s agreement” with China over the 2016 deployment of Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) system may exemplify this. To counter ever-growing North Korean nuclear and missile threats,

the U.S. had proposed to build a missile defense network as one of the measures of extended deterrence. In 2017, however, South Korea and China agreed on “three no’s”: (1) no additional deployments of THAAD, (2) no participation in U.S.-led missile defense, and (3) no trilateral alliance with the U.S. and Japan.

Since South Korea lacks the experience and technology to build an effective missile defense network, it must work with the United States to build a missile defense network. The second ‘no’ of the three-no’s agreement, no participation in U.S.-led missile defense, can be misunderstood as a sign of giving up on the ROK-US alliance. Hearing such agreement between Seoul and Beijing, U.S. National Security Adviser H. R. McMaster expressed despair, saying that he did not “think that South Korea would give up its sovereignty in those three areas.” Due to the delay of an environmental impact assessment, the construction of the THAAD system in Seongju and performance improvement have not been carried out. During a visit to South Korea in March 2021, U.S. Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin strongly expressed his grievances by saying that “present poor facilities at the Seongju base are unacceptable.”

THAAD is a weapons system for defending the USFK and South Korea from North Korean missile attacks, not for offensive operations. Nonetheless, Sun Jianguo, Chinese Deputy Chief of Staff for the People’s Liberation Army, said in June 2016 that “deploying THAAD on the Korean Peninsula is an excessive measure that by far exceeds current U.S. defense capabilities.” His assertion, however, is incorrect. Since the THAAD interceptor has a maximum range of 200 km and is not equipped with an explosive warhead, it does not pose a threat to China. Beijing says that the THAAD radar is a threat because it can see inside their country. However, the radar deployed in Seongju is in terminal-mode, has a maximum detection range of 600 km, and is always facing North Korea, making it difficult to see even the Shandong Peninsula nearest to South Korea. China's claims about the THAAD radar are not true, and the “three no’s” policy should be abolished.

In 1991, U.S. President George H.W. Bush and Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev announced the withdrawal of tactical nuclear weapons deployed abroad in separate televised speeches. On the eve of the disintegration of the Soviet Union, the largest territorial unit in the world, President Gorbachev announced the withdrawal of approximately 10,000 tactical nuclear weapons from its border regions such as

Ukraine, Belarus, and Kazakhstan in order to prevent nuclear catastrophe that might result from these weapons falling into the hands of terrorists. At the same time, President Bush also announced that the U.S. would withdraw about 7,000 tactical nuclear weapons deployed around the world, including those from the Korean Peninsula. At one time, hundreds of U.S. tactical nuclear weapons were deployed in South Korea, but now there is not even a single one. The redeployment of some tactical nuclear weapons withdrawn in 1991 should be pursued to counter a growing threat from North Korea as it was recommended by the House Armed Service Committee in an amendment to the fiscal 2013 National Defense Authorization bill.

For South Korea's national security, cooperation with Japan is also necessary, and the trilateral security cooperation among South Korea, the U.S. and Japan must be strengthened. Security cooperation with Japan is important because there are seven UNC rear bases in Japan that serve to support UN forces and provide supplies to the Korean Peninsula in time of war, and there are 50,000 U.S. forces in Japan. In November 2021, a trilateral foreign ministers' meeting was held in Washington D.C. to discuss major security issues, including the North Korean nuclear problem, and a joint press conference was scheduled following the meeting. At that time, the head of South Korea's national police visited Dokdo (an island in East Sea under South Korea's sovereignty), and Japan took this as a problem and gave notice that it would not attend the joint press conference. Although South Korea's police chief can visit South Korea's territory at any time, it is difficult to understand why he visited Dokdo at that time, derailing trilateral cooperation.

The current South Korean government's pursuit of an end-of-war declaration is also undermining the ROK-U.S. alliance. In an interview with Fox News in September 2018, President Moon said that an end-of-war declaration, being a political declaration, could be revoked at any time, and that toughening sanctions would always be an option if the North does not keep its words. But, is that true?

The South Korean government can make various attempts to resolve the stalemate in inter-Korean relations. However, it is hard to understand why the South Korean government is trying to make another political declaration when the two leaders already announced in the September 2018 Pyongyang Joint Declaration that "the two sides agreed to expand the cessation of military hostilities in regions of confrontation



such as the De-Militarized Zone (DMZ) to the substantial removal of the danger of war across the entire Korean Peninsula and a fundamental resolution of the hostile relations.” If something has to be done, demanding that North Korea comply with the Armistice Agreement and North Korea return to the Military Armistice Commission must precede declaring an end-of-war.

To end the Korean War, it is first necessary to check whether there is any hostile intent or not, and the criterion is whether North Korea is complying with the Armistice Agreement. However, in 1994, North Korea sought to nullify the Armistice by withdrawing its delegate from the Military Armistice Commission. Immediately after the third nuclear test in 2013, when the United Nations pushed for sanctions against North Korea, North Korea declared “complete abolition of the Armistice Agreement.” It shows that North Korea knows that its nuclear and missile developments are not in line with the purpose of the Armistice Agreement. Moreover, in September 2021, North Korean Ambassador to the UN Kim Song claimed that “the UNC was established illegally by the U.S. and has nothing to do with the UN in all aspects, including its administration and budget.” Three years ago, he also argued that “the UNC is a monster-like organization that goes against the UN Charter and therefore should be dissolved as soon as possible.”

But the fact is that the UNC was established in July 1950 in accordance with UN Security Council Resolution 84. The UNC was tasked with repelling a North Korean invasion. With the establishment of the CFC in 1978, the UNC handed over its war-fighting mission to the CFC and has focused on maintaining the Armistice and providing rear-area support in the defense of the ROK. North Korea’s denial of the UNC implies that it has no intention to abide by the Armistice Agreement. Against this backdrop, if South Korea declares the end of the war with North Korea, North Korea will demand the dissolution of the UNC more strongly.

In general, an end-of-war declaration is referred to in a peace agreement. If peace can be guaranteed by declaration, there is no reason to oppose it. However, peace is not guaranteed by words or documents. Peace can only be guaranteed when threats are removed. The current situation in which North Korea is increasing its nuclear threat against South Korea with eight missile tests in 2021 exemplifies that the conditions for an end-of-war declaration do not exist. The Paris Peace Accords between the U.S.,

North Vietnam, and South Vietnam, which resulted in the formation of a unified communist Vietnam, fully illustrate how dangerous it is to declare an end to the war and promise peace without meeting the necessary conditions. The Paris Peace Accords formally ended the Vietnam War and declared peace in Vietnam, but before the ink on the agreement could dry, North Vietnam invaded South Vietnam, which became communized within two years. Although the U.S. had promised that “we will respond with full force should the settlement be violated by North Vietnam,” it did not keep its promise. The failure of the U.S. to keep its promise may be attributed not only to the heightened anti-war sentiment within the U.S. at that time, but also by the fact that the U.S. was skeptical of the corrupt South Vietnamese government which was deceived by North Vietnam’s unification tactics and seduced by calls for ‘independence’ and ‘liberation.’ Ten days after the fall of South Vietnam, George S. Springsteen, the then-Executive Secretary at the State Department, wrote in a report titled “*Lessons of Vietnam*” that “If they cannot do the job, we will be unable to do it for them.” This is a point that makes South Koreans worry that Washington might treat South Korea, which is pushing for the end-of-war declaration, as a second Vietnam.

The U.S. intervened in the Vietnam War for 10 years from 1964, and around 60,000 American soldiers were killed and 300,000 were wounded. Professor Rudolph J. Rummel of the University of Hawaii, in his book *Statistics of Democide*, estimated that more than one million Vietnamese had been executed since North Vietnam took over South Vietnam, and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), in its report titled *The State of the World's Refugees 2000*, stated that 800,000 boat people had fled the country.

A hasty end-of-war declaration could lead to irreversible consequences of weakening and disintegrating the ROK-U.S. alliance. North Korea's ultimate goal is to achieve the withdrawal of U.S. forces which were sent to Korea under the UNC to save South Korea after the Korean War broke out. This is why Kim Il Sung tried to achieve that goal by directly negotiating with the U.S. Until recently, a U.S. president had not met with North Korea directly, and it was the Moon administration that changed this. Since June 2018, President Trump and Chairman Kim Jong Un met three times, but the result was the cessation of combined ROK-U.S. military exercises, not the denuclearization of North Korea. South Korea should not push ahead with important

national security issues without sufficient discussions and deliberations, such as public hearings at the National Assembly.

A big wave of totalitarianism is sweeping across the Eurasian continent. South Korea, as a breakwater for liberal democracy, must strengthen the alliance with the U.S. now more than ever. It must secure the U.S. security commitment, including extended deterrence, through concrete measures. South Korea can demand this from the U.S. only when South Korea's words and deeds are consistent. South Korea must discard the wrong ideas of the end-of-war declaration and the OPCON transition that shake the ROK-U.S. alliance. It is necessary to reconsider the "three no's" over THAAD, build a reliable missile defense network, and normalize combined military exercises in order to maintain a proper military readiness posture. Considering that the key to extended deterrence is to have the capability and systems to counter North Korean nuclear and missile threats, South Korea should call for Washington to redeploy its tactical nuclear weapons. It should also establish a Nuclear Planning Group (NPG) with the U.S. as a consultative body that decides the deployment and operation of nuclear weapons similar to that between the U.S. and European allies. Although the U.S. may be reluctant, it is necessary to secure the cooperation of the U.S. by emphasizing the need for measures corresponding to the changed security environment.

When the Cold War ended after 45 years, American and Soviet citizens were asked how they had seen each other throughout the Cold War. Americans responded that they saw the Soviet Union with fear and contempt while the Soviets said that they saw the United States with fear and respect. In the Cold War era, the strategy was "Mutually Assured Destruction (MAD)": if the enemy attacked us with nuclear weapons, we would also use nuclear weapons to destroy the enemy. Under the MAD strategy, what the peoples of both countries had in common was fear of the other, which played an important role in maintaining peace. This experience during the Cold War between the East and West shows that peace can be maintained only if the other side has at least fear of itself. Faced with the North Korean nuclear threat, we should ask whether North Korea has at least some fear of us. Mr. Bob Woodward, Associate Editor at *The Washington Post*, acquired 27 letters that Kim Jong Un sent to President Trump. According to Bob Woodward's 2020 book, *Rage*, Kim Jong Un wrote in a letter to President Trump that "Now and in the future, the South Korean military

cannot be my enemy ... the South Korean military is no match against my military.” It shows how North Korea thinks of South Korea.

Recently, 35 Republican lawmakers in the U.S. wrote a letter to White House National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan outlining their concerns about the end-of-war declaration. In response to this letter, a South Korean foreign ministry official gave an informal briefing to the press, saying that “the declaration does not mean a legal, structural change in the Armistice regime and that the status of USFK and UNC is unrelated.” However, in his speech at the Supreme People's Assembly on September 30, 2021, Chairman Kim Jong Un urged South Korea to first abandon “hostile viewpoint and policies” before declaring the end of war. It was a direct demand for the withdrawal of US forces from Korea, which was an obstacle to the unification of the Korean peninsula under a communist flag.

The South Korean government’s claim that the end-of-war declaration will serve as a catalyst for denuclearization is based on a wrong assumption. In her book *Becoming Kim Jung Un*, Dr. Jung H. Pak, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Department, points out the problems of that assumption. She writes that some people argue “North Korea has always wanted a security guarantee from the United States, and its development of nuclear weapons is a logical reaction to the perceived threat that Washington poses.” Dr. Pak argues that is not the case. Dr. Pak claims the regime requires a “hostile” outside world to justify one-man rule system and its policies, and the Kim family sees a multitude of threats to its survival from the United States, South Korea, China, Russia, and ultimately, its own people. She posits especially that for Kim, a prosperous South Korea poses an existential threat to the Kim regime. Dr. Pak concludes that Kim’s interests lie in conflict not peace, in autarky rather than integration, and in the possession of nuclear weapons.

Most security experts believe that the declaration will weaken the ROK-U.S. alliance rather than promoting the denuclearization of North Korea. The former U.S. Ambassador to the ROK Harry Harris said that “we should ask ourselves what will change the day after that declaration is signed?” Former CFC Commander General Robert Abrams expressed concern over the end-of-war declaration, saying that he is not convinced even though some people say it is “symbolic” and has no specific legal meaning or tangible outcome. Bruce Klingner, Senior Research Fellow at the Heritage

Foundation, argued that the declaration “should not be made as an upfront inducement simply to get Pyongyang back to the table. Any such declaration must come as part of a comprehensive denuclearization agreement.” He also said that “Without tangible progress toward denuclearization, a peace declaration ... could endanger multilateral efforts to pressure Pyongyang to divest itself of its nuclear weapons.” Evans Revere, former principal deputy assistant secretary of state for East Asian and Pacific Affairs, said that “if the goal is the denuclearization of North Korea, the unilateral issuance of a peace declaration or an end of war declaration with a country that has become a de facto nuclear weapon state and is determined to remain a de facto nuclear weapon state, would be a tremendous mistake.” Sue Mi Terry, Director for Korean Affairs at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, expressed concerns that “the declaration could lead to the legalization and normalization of relations with nuclear North Korea.” Victor Cha, Korea Chair at the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), warned of the negative consequence of the declaration on the ROK-U.S. alliance, saying that “they will take that piece of paper and hold it up and say ‘why are you exercising?’, ‘why do you still have troops?’, ... they can also raise questions here in the United States about ‘if there is peace why don’t we just bring the troops home?’” In a recent column, Dr. Cha pointed out that U.S. presidents and senior officials have offered assurances against the threat and use of force, including nuclear weapons on at least 40 separate occasions since 1989.

In order to cope with the unstable security environment, we need the courage to face reality. We must begin with the recognition that fifty million South Koreans have become hostages of North Korea’s nuclear blackmail and that we are entrapped in a Korean version of the Stockholm syndrome. The term Stockholm syndrome was coined in 1973 when an armed robber took four bank employees as hostages for six days in Stockholm, Sweden. With kind-looking gestures by their captor, such as putting a jacket on the shoulders of a shivering captive, the captives became delusional. The captives actually ended up defending their captor. One female captive said, “I felt more safe and peaceful with the captor than with the police or the state.” When the South Korean special envoys visited Pyongyang in March 2018, they reportedly received a commitment from Kim Jong Un that he would not use nuclear or conventional weapons against the South. If we were relieved to hear this, then we have fallen into the Stockholm syndrome.

The wishful thinking that appeasement may one day lead to peace is a Korean version of the Stockholm syndrome. Rather than trying to break free of captivity, South Korea is relying on the favor of North Korean captor. The problem is that the longer South Korea remains hostage, the more it loses its spirit. Consequently, there is no South Korea. The fact that South Korea feels closer to North Korea and China than its American ally and maintains the “three no’s” position over THAAD illustrates that South Korea is entrapped in the Korean Stockholm syndrome. At the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission Hearing by the U.S. Congress in April 2021, participants pointed out several problems: freedom of expression is being restricted, the South Korean government is maintaining equidistance between the United States and China, and South Korea is inclined to North Korea and China. And a concern was raised about the government’s efforts to remove the term “liberal” from the phrase of “liberal democratic order” specified in the Constitution of the Republic of Korea. These phenomena indicate that there is a growing concern within the U.S. about South Korea's identity and policy objectives, and that U.S. trust in South Korea is seriously damaged. South Korea should come out of the Stockholm syndrome and make efforts to revive the spirit of liberal democracy.