

## Asan Institute Releases the Asan Report “South Korean Public Opinion on ROK-U.S. Bilateral Ties”

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SEOUL, May 31, 2022– The Asan Institute for Policy Studies (<http://en.asaninst.org/>) presents the Asan Report “South Korean Public Opinion on ROK-U.S. Bilateral Ties.”

This report aims to identify how South Koreans view the past, present, and future trajectory of the ROK-U.S. bilateral relationship. The analysis includes South Korean public opinion about the U.S., the ROK-U.S. alliance, and outlook of the ROK-U.S. relationship. Some key findings from the report shows that:

- When asked what is the first thing that comes to mind when they see “the United States,” 37.3% of the survey respondents chose “strong military.” In 2015, the percentage of answers mentioning “capitalist economy” and “strong military” were similar at 28.6% and 26.7%, respectively.
- When asked about important events in the history of Korea-U.S. relations, more than half answered security-related issues (Korean War 35.8%, formation of the ROK-U.S. alliance 23.3%).
- South Koreans showed high affinity for the United States and President Biden. The favorability of the U.S. remained above 5 (neutral) and reached a maximum of 6.85 in March 2022. President Biden’s favorability remained at 5.89, which was significantly higher than that of President Xi Jinping (1.99).
- 60.2% of South Koreans supported the idea of developing the ROK-U.S. alliance to include fundamental values, such as democracy and human rights.
- South Korean public’s confidence in the U.S. security guarantee was high. When asked if the U.S. would intervene in the event of a military conflict on the Korean Peninsula, 88.9% answered affirmatively.
- Support for the ROK-U.S. alliance was high. Since 2012, the response that the ROK-U.S. alliance is necessary never fell below 91.9%. South Korean public felt that the alliance was still necessary after unification (minimum 80%, maximum 86.3%).
- Support for USFK was 82.1%. 62.3% of the respondents stated that the USFK was still necessary after unification. The support for USFK seems higher than in the past due to a rise in North Korean provocation.
- 70.2% of South Koreans supported developing indigenous nuclear weapons. This was the highest support for proliferation since 2010. 63.6% favored independent nuclear armament even if South Korea was sanctioned for violating the NPT. And 59% of South Koreans supported the redeployment of U.S. tactical nuclear weapons in South Korea.

38.3% opposed. Support for reintroducing U.S. tactical nuclear weapons can be perceived as an alternative for developing nuclear weapons.

- When asked about the most important issue South Korea and the U.S. should jointly manage, 37.1% named cooperation in dealing with a nuclear North Korea. 16.1% mentioned economic revitalization through trade, 14.3% picked resumption of dialogues with North Korea, 12.6% mentioned China, and about 10% named OPCON transfer, joint exercises, and other alliance related issues.
- The survey explored what South Koreans thought about the joint military exercises. Even since the Moon administration began active engagement with North Korea, ROK-U.S. joint military exercises have been scaled down to win Pyongyang's trust. However, the survey data indicated that nearly half of South Koreans (46.4%) wanted the military exercises to be scaled up to the level before the dialogues. 35.8% wanted to maintain the reduced or suspended status.
- 86.1% supported South Korea's participation in the QUAD. And 83% of the respondents supported South Korea-U.S.-Japan trilateral cooperation.
- 71.7% of South Koreans supported South Korea's participation in the U.S.-led ballistic missile defense (BMD) system (22.8% opposed). Meanwhile, 57.7% of South Koreans supported the deployment of additional THAAD batteries (38.9% opposed).
- Nearly 9 out of 10 (88.3%) people were optimistic about Korea-U.S. relations. South Koreans believed that the relationship between the two countries would improve based on trust in the alliance.

The report suggests that the South Korean public feels strongly about the bond with the U.S. and believes that the alliance is critical to keeping peace and stability in the Korean Peninsula. The authors also point out that with the new administration in Seoul favoring a strengthened alliance, South Korea and the U.S. should seize the moment to accomplish as much as they can.

The sample size of the survey was 1,000 people, over the age of 19. The margin of error is  $\pm 3.1\%$  at the 95% confidence level. The surveys were conducted by *Research & Research* using Random Digit Dialing for mobile and landlines during March 10~12 and 17~18, 2022.

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