

## **Asan Institute Releases the Asan Report “Transitioning Attitudes on North Korea: Perceived Threat and Preferred Response”**

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SEOUL, April 21, 2023 – The Asan Institute for Policy Studies (<http://en.asaninst.org/>) has released a new report titled "Transitioning Attitudes on North Korea: Perceived Threat and Preferred Response," aimed at exploring South Korean attitudes towards North Korea, its nuclear program, and potential responses. The report provides key insights into South Korean public opinion and identifies several trends that are crucial to understanding the current security environment on the Korean Peninsula.

According to the report's findings, a majority of South Koreans associate North Korea with negative images, such as the dictatorship under Kim Jong-un (34.2%) and nuclear weapons (32.3%). While some respondents associated North Korea with Korean Unification (12.5%), it was a much smaller percentage. The report also shows that 43% of respondents rated North Korea's nuclear threat as the most important concern for South Korea's security, followed by the "New Cold War Paradigm" (16.9%) and "China's Rise" (12.4%). Meanwhile, the South Korean public expressed less concern about non-traditional emerging threats, such as climate change, supply chain insecurity, infectious disease, and terrorism.

Furthermore, the report found that South Korean perception of the North Korean threat is influenced by the security environment. Pessimism about the national security condition has increased to around 60% after North Korean military provocations. In November 2022, those who expressed a negative sentiment on national security exceeded 70%, reaching its peak (70.7%). This result was higher among those aged 40 and above (40s: 80.7%, 50s and 60+: 79.3%). However, the younger age group was relatively more optimistic, although they still expressed pessimism about national security (20s: 64.5%).

The report also indicates that the South Korean public's confidence in the U.S. security guarantee remains high, with roughly half of the respondents (52.9%) answering affirmatively when asked if the U.S. would use nuclear weapons to defend South Korea in the event of a hypothetical nuclear attack by North Korea. However, there was a 9.8%p reduction in confidence regarding the U.S. security guarantee when respondents were asked whether the U.S. would use nuclear weapons to defend South Korea even if it meant risking its security (43.1%).

Regarding the issue of nuclear armament, 64.3% of South Koreans supported developing indigenous nuclear weapons, while 33.3% opposed. However, support for independent nuclear armament drops to 54.7% when the possibility of sanctions is mentioned (Oppose: 42.3%). The

report suggests that this drop appears to be statistically significant. The survey also found that 61.1% of South Koreans supported the redeployment of U.S. tactical nuclear weapons in South Korea as an alternative to countering North Korean nuclear weapons (Oppose: 36.2%). When the possibility of sanctions was mentioned, South Koreans expressed a stronger preference for deploying U.S. tactical nuclear weapons than developing indigenous nuclear weapons.

The report concludes by emphasizing the importance of understanding South Korean perception about the robustness of U.S. extended deterrence in shaping their view of countermeasures against the North Korean threat.

The survey had a sample size of 1,000 people over the age of 19, with a margin of error of  $\pm 3.1\%$  at the 95% confidence level. The surveys were conducted by Research & Research using Random Digit Dialing for mobile and landlines on November 10-12, 2022.

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