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Calls for Change in the U.S. Nuclear Posture and Implications for South Korea

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Nuclear weapons remain at the center of the balance of power in the international order as "absolute weapons" that can threaten the survival of humanity. The international nuclear regime, which has curbed the proliferation of nuclear weapons, is rapidly weakening as democracies and authoritarian regimes clash in the ongoing US-China strategic competition and war in Ukraine. Russia has threatened to use nuclear weapons against Ukraine, China is expected to grow its nuclear arsenal to more than 1,000 nuclear weapons, and North Korea may soon possess more than 300 nuclear warheads.

After 14 years, U.S. Congress reauthorized the Strategic Posture Commission (SPC) to conduct a bipartisan study reexamining U.S. nuclear posture in the context of a new nuclear arms race. The SPC's report lays out the U.S. response in the event of nuclear war with China and Russia, both of which have recently increased their nuclear threats. The SPC's report called for a broad buildup of nuclear forces, including a shift away from a strategic nuclear deterrent centered on ICBMs and SLBMs, and a more aggressive deployment of tactical nuclear weapons. While the report is at odds with the Biden administration's previous nuclear policy emphasis on nuclear disarmament, it reflects the United States' urgent need to prepare for a nuclear competition with Russia and China.

As North Korea's nuclear threat accelerates in 2024, the SPC report's proposed changes to U.S. policy include steps to strengthen the U.S.-ROK alliance's extended deterrence. First, the U.S. needs to respond to the possibility that China and Russia induce a shift in the force structure that could create a gap in U.S. extended deterrence. If a role for U.S. tactical nuclear weapons increases as the SPC report recommends, our government should not only discuss tactical nuclear operations through the ongoing Nuclear Consultative Group (NCG), but also encourage the U.S. to actively consider redeploying tactical nuclear weapons.

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As an expert in military strategy and weapons systems, **Dr. Yang Uk** has been active in the defense industry and private military enterprises for over 20 years, and founded and operated IntelEdge Inc., one of the first private military companies in Korea. Since leaving the company, he has commented on various military issues and international conflicts through broadcasting and new media, and has written various writings on weapon systems and military history. He obtained a doctorate in military strategy from Korea National Defense University (KNDU), and has analyzed North Korea's military strategy and WMD weapon system as a senior research fellow and the director of the WMD Center at the Korea Defense Security Forum (KODEF). He has been an active member of the policy advisory committee of Army, Air Force, Navy, Ministry of Interior & Safety. Currently, he continues his advisory activities to each military and government agency, teaching military revolution and modern conflicts at Korea Military Academy and Graduate School of National Defense Strategy of Hannam University.