

Abstract

South Korea's Strategic Response to North Korea's Advanced Nuclear Capabilities and Nuclear Threat

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The primary objective of this study is to analyze and assess the patterns of the nuclear threat posed by North Korea with its advanced nuclear capabilities and propose response strategies for the South Korean government. Thus, the study will deduce the determinants for Pyongyang's nuclear use, identify possible manifestations of its nuclear threat, and suggest two strategic responses for Seoul focusing on diplomatic security and national defense.

North Korea seems to be nearing the completion phase of its nuclear development program as it strives to advance its nuclear arsenals. Furthermore, Pyongyang's recent legislation of its new nuclear doctrine displays its intention to exercise its nuclear capabilities. This study identifies three factors that may push North Korea to cross the nuclear threshold: possible alliance intervention, goal attainability, and risk-taking. Pyongyang's perception of the three factors will impact the country's decision to use nuclear forces, which will likely take the following forms: preemptive use, limited use, or use to induce alliance intervention.

In response to North Korea's advanced nuclear capabilities, South Korea needs to converge and utilize the four elements of national power, DIME (Diplomatic, Information, Military, Economy). Regarding its diplomatic security strategy, South Korea must maintain economic sanctions until North Korea makes more tangible steps toward denuclearization. It is also necessary to continue South Korea's "audacious initiative" and bring North

Korea back to the negotiating table. In terms of South Korea's defense strategy, the military must accelerate the development of the three-axis defense system along with efforts for effective extended deterrence. Simultaneously, South Korea and the U.S. should continue nuclear policy dialogues and planning consultations.

South Korea needs a strategic plan to guarantee its mid to long-term security amid the complex and uncertain security environment of the Korean Peninsula. To this end, the South Korean government should devise a comprehensive strategy encompassing issues such as the North Korean nuclear threat, U.S.-China strategic competition, the global security situation, etc.

Keywords

North Korean nuclear threat, determinants for nuclear use, diplomatic security strategy, national defense & military strategy