

National Institute for Deterrence Studies & Peter Huessy Seminar

The Implications of a Nuclear-Armed South Korea

June 13, 2025 10:00-11:00 AM (Eastern)

Webinar Transcript

How to cite:

Chun, I.-B. (2025, June 13). *The implications of a nuclear-armed South Korea* [Virtual seminar]. National Institute for Deterrence Studies & Huessy Seminars.

Abstract

As regional tensions rise and nuclear threats evolve, the question of whether South Korea should pursue its own nuclear deterrent has become increasingly urgent. In this timely Huessy Seminar, Lieutenant General In-Bum Chun (ROK, Ret.)—a distinguished military leader and strategic thinker—offers a candid and deeply informed perspective on the motivations, risks, and strategic consequences of a nuclear-armed Republic of Korea.

Drawing on decades of military experience and firsthand insight into the Korean Peninsula's security dynamics, General Chun explores the complex domestic and geopolitical factors driving South Korean public opinion, the implications for the U.S.-ROK alliance, and the potential ripple effects across Northeast Asia. From the enduring threat of North Korea to the strategic calculus involving China, Japan, and the United States, this seminar provides a nuanced analysis of deterrence, sovereignty, and regional stability.

Participants will gain a deeper understanding of:

Why a majority of South Koreans support indigenous nuclear capability

The divergent views among conservatives, moderates, and progressives

The strategic logic behind nuclear latency versus full armament

The potential for regional proliferation and alliance recalibration

The enduring importance of U.S. extended deterrence

This seminar is essential viewing for policymakers, defense professionals, and scholars seeking to understand the future of deterrence in East Asia and the evolving role of allied nuclear capabilities in a multipolar world.

Executive Summary

The Implications of a Nuclear-Armed South Korea

Hosted by the National Institute for Deterrence Studies and Huessy Seminars

Featuring Lieutenant General In-Bum Chun (ROK, Ret.)

This virtual seminar brought together global security professionals, scholars, and defense leaders to examine the strategic, political, and regional implications of a nuclear-armed Republic of Korea (ROK). Lieutenant General In-Bum Chun (ROK, Ret.) delivered a comprehensive and candid analysis of South Korea's evolving security calculus in the face of persistent threats from North Korea and growing concerns about China's regional ambitions.

Key takeaways included:

- **Public Sentiment & Political Divides:** Approximately 70% of South Koreans support indigenous nuclear capability, with support strongest among conservatives who prioritize strength-based deterrence. Progressives remain opposed, citing risks to nonproliferation norms and alliance stability.
- **Strategic Motivations:** While North Korea's nuclear arsenal is a major concern, General Chun emphasized that fear of Chinese coercion is the primary driver behind South Korea's nuclear interest. Uncertainty about long-term U.S. commitment also fuels calls for nuclear latency.
- **Alliance Dynamics:** General Chun argued that any South Korean nuclear capability would be an extension—not a replacement—of U.S. deterrence. He stressed the enduring importance of the U.S.-ROK alliance, even in a nuclear-capable South Korea.
- **Regional Proliferation Risks:** A South Korean nuclear program could trigger similar ambitions in Japan and Taiwan, potentially destabilizing the Indo-Pacific. However, Chun noted that such developments might also pressure adversaries like China and North Korea.
- **Policy Recommendations:** Chun advocated for transparent dialogue with the U.S., a reformed 123 Agreement to address spent fuel issues, and stronger public communication around the Nuclear Consultative Group's (NCG) achievements to bolster confidence in extended deterrence.
- **Geopolitical Context:** The seminar also explored North Korea's motivations for nuclear development, its growing ties with Russia, and China's strategic miscalculations in enabling Pyongyang's arsenal.

This seminar underscored the urgency of rethinking deterrence frameworks in a multipolar nuclear environment and highlighted the need for sustained U.S. leadership, alliance cohesion, and strategic clarity in Northeast Asia

Unabridged Transcript

(Note: there will invariably be some word errors in the following transcript.)

00:02:26:06 - 00:03:05:06

Kimberly Cherington

Hi. Good morning, everyone. I'm Kimberly Cherington, and I'd like to welcome you on behalf of the National Institute for Deterrence Studies. Otherwise known as NIDS, for tuning in to today's Huessy Seminar, where the most important interaction is with you. In case you're new to us, NIDS is a 501 C3 nonprofit organization that provides deterrence education by hosting live and virtual events, podcast publications on global security, as well as workshops and courses through our new academy, all in the interest of advancing peace and promoting stability through a strong national security and nuclear deterrent.

00:03:05:07 - 00:03:32:01

Kimberly Cherington

You can see more of what we have to offer and get involved in. Think deterrence.com. Please help us grow our membership and audiences by following us on LinkedIn, X Rumble, and YouTube, as well as wherever you listen to your favorite podcasts. Don't miss our next live event on Cat at the Capitol Hill Club in Washington, DC. It's more important today than ever.

00:03:32:04 - 00:04:01:08

Kimberly Cherington

Dr. Uzi Rubin on June 27th, addressing the growing concerns of missile threats in the Middle East. Dr. Rubin is the founder and first director of the Israel Missile Defense Organization in the Israel Ministry of Defense, in which he initiated and managed Israel's nationwide effort to develop, produce and deploy its first national missile defense shield, the arrow Missile Defense System.

00:04:01:09 - 00:04:29:07

Kimberly Cherington

Please join us if you're in D.C. for that event. Our next virtual Huessy Seminar will be held on July 11th with Rose Gottemoeller, former NATO deputy secretary general, who speaks on arms control and navigating nuclear diplomacy. On July 18th, we have Matt Kroenig, senior director of Scowcroft Center for Strategy and Security, that an invitation will be coming out soon.

00:04:29:08 - 00:05:20:03

Kimberly Cherington

July 25th, we have Gregg Weaver Strategic Imperatives on augmenting theater and Nuclear Forces for the 21st century. On August 1st, we have the honorable Frank Miller, who will join us again for a discussion on why simply renewing the U.S. Russian arms control framework is no longer sufficient in today's multipolar nuclear environment. As the world marks the 80th anniversary of atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, national security experts, military leaders and scholars will gather at the Harry S

Truman Library on August 6th for a one-day conference addressing the evolving role of nuclear weapons in global security.

00:05:20:05 - 00:05:48:13

Kimberly Cherington

This timely event, hosted by the Harry Truman Library and NIDS, will explore conversations about nuclear deterrence and its role in preventing great power conflict. We hope that you can join us for this event called Peace Through Strength. 80 years later. You can look for this event and all of our events at our website at Thinkdeterrence.com. You can register there as well.

00:05:48:14 - 00:06:17:11

Kimberly Cherington

And feel free to email me if you would like to get any of your colleagues on the guest list for any future events. During today's presentation, we encourage you to write your questions in the chat box at any time. We will begin the Q&A session after our speaker and during this, if you see a question that you think is very important that you want to address, please give it a thumbs up so we can give it priority.

00:06:17:12 - 00:06:34:04

Kimberly Cherington

I want to introduce our host for today's seminar, Mr. Peter Hussey himself, President and Senior Director of Strategic Deterrence Studies at Geo Strategic Analysis and senior fellow here at NIDS. Welcome, Peter.

00:06:34:05 - 00:07:27:06

Peter Huessy

Thank you, Kimberly. We are honored today to have General Chung, who is served in the South Korean military from 1981 to 2016, I believe, Korea has a very special place in my heart. I spent two years there at Yonsei University in Seoul as a undergraduate student, and it's interesting. One of the things that General Chun is famous for is that he rescued one of his commanding officers, who was a victim of a bombing in Rangoon, Burma, by the North Koreans, in which my Korean host, teacher, mentor, dear friend and young son, ambassador to the United States, ambassador to the United Nations, National Security advisor to the president of the country of Korea

00:07:27:08 - 00:07:58:12

Peter Huessy

was also killed. And so I have a very strong attachment to the Republic of Korea, and I'm honored to have General Fund come in to talk to us. Let me preface my remarks by pointing out that the issue of whether or not South Korea should at some point secure nuclear weapons, and apart from every nuclear weapons on the peninsula that are owned by the United States is in 1982, according to Tom Reed, who was President Reagan's deputy national security advisor.

00:07:58:13 - 00:08:30:12

Peter Huessy

In 1982, Dong, shopping, in a secret meeting of the Chinese Politburo, decided to export nuclear weapons technology to Pakistan and also to North Korea, Iran, Libya. And I think also it led over into Iraq. But this was a deliberate attempt to proliferate nuclear weapons technology as a means of putting pressure on the United States. We're living isn't it interesting if you look at all those areas of Libya?

00:08:30:13 - 00:08:55:08

Peter Huessy

So, the North Korea, Pakistan and Iran, we're dealing with the end result now, after 40-some-odd years of China's deliberate attempt to spread nuclear weapons to the bad guys. General Cherny is going to talk to us today about what's going on the Korean peninsula, what the options they have with respect to dealing with the North Korean threat.

00:08:55:09 - 00:09:09:06

Peter Huessy

General, on behalf of NIDS and my president, who's joining us here today on Jim Petrosky, and I want to thank Kimberly for all her great organizational work. General, it's an honor to have you here. And it's over to you, sir.

00:09:09:07 - 00:10:09:01

Lt. Gen. In-Bum Chun

Thank you very much. Thank you, NIDS, for this opportunity to, introduce the Korean perspective of how we see South Korean nuclear weapons. First, I think it's important to understand why South Koreans want nuclear weapons. Now, depending on how you word a survey, it comes out very differently. But, I think it's probably safe to say that most polls conducted towards South Koreans about an indigenous nuclear, capability comes out to about seven out of ten people in South Korea want their own nuclear weapon.

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Lt. Gen. In-Bum Chun

This is quiet, comparative to about 15 to 20% in Japan. So, the Koreans have this desire for nuclear weapons. So, the first thing that I would like to mention is, why is that? Why do Koreans want their nuclear weapons? Maybe it's an obvious question that, but I still think it's something that we should look into.

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Lt. Gen. In-Bum Chun

For me, I try to understand my own people first. And the more I do, I find it that it's not easy. So, when I try to answer this very simple question. Why do South Koreans want nuclear weapons? Well, it depends on which South Korean you're talking to. So, let's just assume that 30% of the South Korean population is conservative, 30% is progressive, and 40% are moderates who are caught in the middle.

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Lt. Gen. In-Bum Chun

Of course, the conservatives want their own nuclear capability because they base, security on strength. And since North Korea has a nuclear capability, it is to the conservatives, just natural and their psychology and thinking that they would want a comparable capability. For now, all the Koreans know that we have the United States that provide us, that deterrence.

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Lt. Gen. In-Bum Chun

But still, because of the uncertainties of the world, it's there's that margin of doubt. Requires some sort of effort on our part to try to fill that gap.

00:12:19:05 - 00:13:01:04

Lt. Gen. In-Bum Chun

Progressives are the ones that are probably most against having nuclear weapons on the Korean Peninsula. One of the themes that they say is we're trying to denuclearize North Korea. If we go nuclear, we just have lost our justification and trying to denuclearize North Korea. Well, that's, statement or line of thinking. I'm a person who thinks North Korea will ever forget for, ever give up their nuclear weapons.

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Lt. Gen. In-Bum Chun

I, for one, don't think North Korea will ever give up their nuclear weapons. So that logic, although it sounds very good, doesn't really seem to be practical in my mind. The progressives also cite many of the reasons, South Korea having nuclear weapons would bring repercussions. And, strange to the rock U.S. Alliance, as well as, the IAEA, the NPT and so forth.

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Lt. Gen. In-Bum Chun

So, the progressive side, those things, the economic, fallback that we would have and, When we say 30% of the Korean population would not support a indigenous program, that's probably the, the progressive saying that the progressives are generally not very pro U.S. and they are in general, I think, nationalistic. They are they pride themselves in being Korean.

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Lt. Gen. In-Bum Chun

But at the same time, they have these wishful, thinking towards the North Koreans. Peter mentioned that the North Koreans attempted to kill, my delegation in 1983. In 1983, I was only 24 years old. There was a lot of, you know, education about how bad the North Koreans were. But South Korea has always thought that it was an exaggeration.

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Lt. Gen. In-Bum Chun

But after what I saw on that day, I thought to myself, okay, we need to find a way to live peacefully with North Korea. But I have to keep my gun powder dry. Unfortunately, when long years of peace continue, having that consistent, mindset of preparedness is not easy. So the progressives and the conservatives and the moderates, I think, as a whole, are scared.

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Lt. Gen. In-Bum Chun

Scared of uncertainty, scared of, abandonment. But our fear is not only towards North Korea, it's just that North Korean nuclear weapons has sparked, generational, fears, which is China. So, if you ask Koreans why they want nuclear weapons, it's not that we don't trust the United States. It's not even North Korean nuclear weapons. It usually comes out as we're concerned about China, and with nuclear weapons, we will never have to be afraid of the Chinese.

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Lt. Gen. In-Bum Chun

That's what comes out as number one reason, North Korean nuclear weapons comes out as maybe number 2 or 3. And number 2 or 3 is, you know, uncertainties in international relations. During the Biden administration, the Nuclear consultative group, the NCG, provided some, a new type of security assurances for the Republic of Korea, which is envied by many nations.

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Lt. Gen. In-Bum Chun

So far, it's pretty good, but we have not seen what the Trump administration is going to do next. So again, it's parts fears and uncertainty. This leads to another issue that we face compared to our adversaries, our adversaries especially like North Korea and China and Russia. Their leadership can sustain themselves for many decades. Well, our political systems are there, in Korea's case, five years and the United States 4 to 8 years.

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Lt. Gen. In-Bum Chun

Basically, the enemy can wait us out. And they know that the enemy also looks at us and so and, and, and their eyes, we lack the resolve. Compared to their society, they don't have to worry about opinion. And so, they can just wait us out. So, this is a systematic advantage that they have and a systematic challenge that we have.

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Lt. Gen. In-Bum Chun

Today, I was asked, what kind of implications would South Korean nuclear weapons have? Obviously, it would be a nuclear proliferation, a nuclear arms race. In my experience, in many, seminars and conferences and, and tabletops. If South Korea were to have nuclear weapons, the Japanese would want their own nuclear weapons, which actually, if you think about it, doesn't make sense.

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Lt. Gen. In-Bum Chun

Only 15 to 20% of their population want nuclear weapons. And if South Korea were to have nuclear weapons, the Chinese and the North Koreans would have a hard time with that situation alone. Why would the Japanese want nuclear weapons? And it's surely not for practical reasons. It's more or less, emotional if the Koreans have it. The Japanese must happen.

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Lt. Gen. In-Bum Chun

I think Taiwan would also be very, very interested in having their own nuclear system.

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Lt. Gen. In-Bum Chun

If the South Koreans were to go nuclear. We would not be going nuclear, as did the North Koreans, by lying and cheating. We would only pursue an indigenous nuclear, capability through the mechanism that already exists. We would go to the NPT and present our case. We would confer with the United States and, try to persuade the United States to see where we are.

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Lt. Gen. In-Bum Chun

In any case, if South Korea had nuclear weapons. Who would be the most which nation amongst all the northeast Asian or Indo Pacific nations? That would be, on the losing end? To me, it's obvious it's the Chinese. And if the Chinese and the North Koreans don't like it, if our adversaries, if our enemies don't like it. The logic is that it's good for us.

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Lt. Gen. In-Bum Chun

So, I think, South Korea having its own nuclear weapons has advantages, but we need to think of it in a

different light. For instance, South Korean nuclear weapons, to me, would be an extension of US nuclear capability. My understanding is that the United States lacks nuclear capability already. It should welcome allies that are true to the concept of, you know, freedom and democracy, shared values to have as a deterrent.

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Lt. Gen. In-Bum Chun

That would really put pressure on its main adversary, which in this case would be the Chinese. For us, I think even if South Korea were to have its own indigenous nuclear capability, the United States would still be important because nuclear weapons is not a weapon to be used lightly. It's, it's just a deterrent.

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Lt. Gen. In-Bum Chun

All the other things, which is 99% of the other security tasks that must be conducted, has to be done with allies. And for the Republic of Korea, the United States is ever important. Even if we had a thousand nuclear warheads, we would still need the United States. So, the second point to me is not only is would South Korean nuclear weapons be an extension of US capability, but it would actually, the United States would still be the most important country for South Korea.

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Lt. Gen. In-Bum Chun

Finally, the North Koreans are every day improving their conventional and nuclear capability. There needs to be some stage where we need to find a balance to, negotiate with North Korea. North Korea will not negotiate when South Korea does not have nuclear weapons. So, some people find it absurd, but to, de-escalate sometimes escalation is a requirement.

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Lt. Gen. In-Bum Chun

Another point is, and I've said this before. U.S. adversaries, they've always miscalculated American resolve. They've always seen the United States as weak. The Americans, are selfish. They enjoy life too much. And the moral pedestal that the United States has placed itself, at the price of its own soldiers to our enemy. And so, weakness. That's why they hide their critical assets and hospitals and schools.

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Lt. Gen. In-Bum Chun

Because they know that we will not we'll do everything that we can to, limit collateral damage to them. It's just a weakness that we have. But I think our adversaries let's say that Koreans, South Koreans, although we've gone soft. We're not we're not like Americans. They would not be as certain about the level of cruelty that the South Koreans might, go through.

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Lt. Gen. In-Bum Chun

But there's a Vietnam are gone, but still, memories through last. So I think that's another element to think about before I finish. Even as a South Korean. Sharing my thoughts with you about South Korean, indigenous weapons. I really don't have a warm and fuzzy about South Koreans have weapons. Actually, it scares me, because I know a lot of these generals.

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Lt. Gen. In-Bum Chun

And to think that they would have, you know, their fingers on a red button. Doesn't make me feel good. I would rather have American assistance. Which means if the United States, helps us and, becoming a nuclear capable nation, it's actually control and safety. You can ensure that our weapons are safer and that cooperation is built into the use of such and such capability, which would make me feel a lot better.

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Lt. Gen. In-Bum Chun

Sometimes when I think of this, I wonder what the North Koreans are doing. And it really scares me that the North Koreans might actually have an accident. Who is making sure that, you know, their nuclear arsenal is protected from an accident or a missile launch. So let me just stop there and see what questions might arise.

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Lt. Gen. In-Bum Chun

Thank you.

00:26:35:09 - 00:26:56:09

Peter Huessy

Thank you, General, very much for that. I'm going to pass on the question that my president asked here. I'll read it to you. If the Republic of Korea gets a nuclear deterrent, do you think that they may follow the US with treaties and extended deterrence? And if so, who would be wrong? The partners with the Republic of Korea in that case.

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Lt. Gen. In-Bum Chun

Obviously, it would be the United States. So, the United States is the glue, that would that would integrate any kind of apparatus in Northeast Asia. In my view, because quite frankly, the United States is the only nation that, everybody trusts for whatever reason. And I think that if South Korea were to go nuclear and right now the South Koreans are not advocating for nuclear weapons, yet what they're advocating for is nuclear capability, nuclear latency, so that if an unforeseen situation, what we dread most is a U.S. withdrawal, a nullification of the Rocks alliance.

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Lt. Gen. In-Bum Chun

I know it sounds absurd, but sometimes the messaging coming from Washington, DC really is scary. It's scarier than what comes out of Beijing. So, and that kind of situation, we want to make sure by the time, Americans pack up and leave, we will at least have a nuclear capability. And I have found that many Americans, say that.

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Lt. Gen. In-Bum Chun

Oh, if, United States were to abandon Korea, then the previous calculations or, stance that they would be adamantly against, South Korea having to blow up is not because of just South Korea, but because of the arms race that it would cause a significantly goes down. So again, to your question, the United States would be our, loop.

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Lt. Gen. In-Bum Chun

And, I think that the US, provides us the kind of trust.

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Peter Huessy

Okay. The second question, if the South Koreans have a latent nuclear capability or even acquire nuclear weapons, what happens with respect to Japan?

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Lt. Gen. In-Bum Chun

As I said, Japan would probably want to have their own nuclear weapons. I don't... I think the progressives are. Generally, very anti-Japanese. They, they, they have long memory. But that is not to say that the conservatives are anti-Japanese, but I think the majority of the Korean people, don't like what happened to us in the past, but they would rather look to the future.

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Lt. Gen. In-Bum Chun

And so, you know, there are good Japanese that are bad Japanese like everybody else, but, I personally don't care if, if Japan has nuclear weapons because what is Japan going to do? Launch a missile to Seoul, maybe Pyongyang, but only after opening. Launched a missile too. Right. Yeah. And with this, again, if South Korea and Japan had nuclear weapons, who could we really trust?

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Lt. Gen. In-Bum Chun

To keep us sane? It's probably the Americans. So no matter what kind of, nuclear capabilities that South Korea or Japan or any other northeast, Asian country has, I think the rule of the United States will change, but not the importance of the United States.

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Peter Huessy

Interesting. Another question came up, general, is if the United States deployed the sea launch cruise missile in a nuclear variant in the Western Pacific, or, for example, put a capability on, F-35, had a, Gravity bomb or cruise missile or some kind of extended range missile on the on our airplanes in that area. Would that probably delay any South Korean move towards nuclear capability, or would it basically be enough to assuage the concerns of the Korean people that America is going to stick around?

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Lt. Gen. In-Bum Chun

So, there's a, good number. I can't give you a percentage who want real American nuclear weapons back on the Korean Peninsula. Mostly these, the conservatives. But I, for one, am not one of them. Because why would I want nuclear weapons on Korean soil? Making it an obvious target? When? As you just said, a, U.S. submarine could be somewhere, you know, with, with a heavy punch and F-35s.

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Lt. Gen. In-Bum Chun

Why would I want a nuclear capable F-35? Korea. So. And it's an, It's fine. So, I don't see the value in that. Now, I would see value if you had a Pershing type missile with hypersonic capability. Then again, it's like having two cocked pistols. You know, aimed at the other person's head, and having the same kind of capability because Korea is a small peninsula.

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Lt. Gen. In-Bum Chun

So, if the North Koreans ever launched when the alarm bell goes off, the guy who's on duty is going to have to push the button. He won't even have time to make a call. So having this type of situation is exactly why, the INF treaty, came about. Well, 40 years ago. So, I don't see that as a solution either.

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Lt. Gen. In-Bum Chun

Right now, the NCG has done a pretty good job. The only thing that the NCG has been not good at is educating the Korean population. For whatever reason, all the things that the NCG has achieved has not been shared appropriately with the public, in my view. And so, despite a lot of progress by the US government, I don't think the general public feels comfortable about this.

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Lt. Gen. In-Bum Chun

So, I think, having nuclear weapons back on Korean soil, although it is attractive to some Koreans once they know the dangers and, you know, the benefits and the costs, they will probably say, yeah, you know, it's better to have it on a U.S. submarine off the coast of the sea or, in Hawaii or Guam.

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Lt. Gen. In-Bum Chun

It's just a matter of a couple of hours. Having said that,

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Lt. Gen. In-Bum Chun

What would assure Korea more, in my view, is short. Strong statements such as the Biden administration and of the regime. That kind of language is what North Korea understands. That kind of language is what, you know, folks understand. And I think, the, the, the next U.S., nuclear capable missile, maybe the B 84 should name should be the end of the regime.

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Lt. Gen. In-Bum Chun

And, you need to have more, stronger resolve, because I think that's where, our adversaries think that we are not capable and that.

00:35:33:03 - 00:35:57:02

Peter Huessy

Okay, my next question is, it may seem obvious, but I don't think people have thought through what is it that North Korea seeks to gain by having this nuclear capability? Because, as you know, prior to what, 2004 or 5, they were enriching uranium, but they weren't they didn't have a bomb, which they exploded. I think, in 2006, I believe.

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Peter Huessy

But what do they seek to gain from having this nuclear capability?

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Lt. Gen. In-Bum Chun

I think that.

00:36:05:11 - 00:36:13:07

Lt. Gen. In-Bum Chun

I don't mean rhetorically what they say, but what is, in your view, the real reason behind what they're doing?

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Lt. Gen. In-Bum Chun

I think the North Koreans are genuinely afraid, a regime change, attempt by the United States and South Korea. Some American, senior, policymakers have stated that regime change should be a stated policy, for the United States. I'm sure that was not lost by the North Koreans. Secondly, North Korean leadership, they know their deficiencies better than anyone else.

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Lt. Gen. In-Bum Chun

Can you imagine what Kim Jong un, must feel? How is there any person around him that he can trust? He probably can't even trust his own wife. So, he's got a group of people who share the same interests, but. And then he uses terror to maintain himself. But because of the deficiencies of his system, he's not only scared of us, but he's scared of his own people.

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Lt. Gen. In-Bum Chun

So, he needed a, devise, a mechanism to protect his power. And I think that's the second reason why he would want a nuclear weapon. Now, once they have this nuclear capability, they've not only improved the bomb itself and the missile delivery system, but the policies of this. Actually, they said it was going to be no first use.

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Lt. Gen. In-Bum Chun

But they seem to have put it in their Constitution that they are a nuclear state, which implies that they will never give it up. They will also have policy statements saying that, although it will not be a first strike capability. It can be used at any time. They have, delegated some of the, launch authority because they're concerned that, for a strike, preemptive attack by the South or the United States could, pick up, leadership in that case, local commanders have the authority to launch, nuclear weapons.

00:38:34:15 - 00:39:06:00

Lt. Gen. In-Bum Chun

And so far, so, they're modifying their operational, code, day by day. So, in my view, the North Koreans genuinely feel threatened from abroad and within. Number one. Number two, with this, nuclear capability. They want to make sure that their regime survival is not, threatened.

00:39:06:01 - 00:39:25:11

Peter Huessy

My next question is, given the origin of North Korea's nuclear program in having to do with China, what does China seek to gain by acquiescing in and supporting a North Korean nuclear program, or are they having second thoughts?

00:39:25:12 - 00:40:13:04

Lt. Gen. In-Bum Chun

So, it seems China, thought that it's better to have a nuclear armed North Korea than to have a to have it

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better than to have North Korea collapse and, a free and Democratic, Republic of Korea coming to its borders with a strong American ally. So, I think the many years that we wasted thinking during the six party talks that the Chinese were really going to pressure North Korea, and to not have, going nuclear was, one was nonsense.

00:40:13:05 - 00:40:44:03

Lt. Gen. In-Bum Chun

You know, they could have starved the North Koreans, but they did not do that. And now we're stuck with this situation. So again, when I think of these things, I say to myself, you know, the Chinese brought it upon themselves that South Korea would want nuclear weapons and, you know, something like Chinese, specialists, experts tell me that if South Korea were to go nuclear, the Chinese would be unhappy.

00:40:44:03 - 00:41:41:13

Lt. Gen. In-Bum Chun

But they would accept it. So, I think, the Chinese felt that they are that much, concerned about having the United States at their borders, that it would be better to have North Korea, a nuclear armed North Korea, next to them. And I think that was a big mistake. When you when I think of this also brings me into mind at some stage when we can negotiate and have some sort of, arrangement with North Korea and when North Korean nuclear missiles are not heading for Washington or Seoul, those missiles might actually be pointing towards Beijing.

00:41:41:15 - 00:42:17:09

Lt. Gen. In-Bum Chun

And that kind of situation would be pretty good for us. So, I think all of that is something to think about. South Koreans like myself would only agree to a, agreement with North Korea if we had, nuclear weapons or some, firm commitment by the United States. That it would provide a deterrent that we would not need to question.

00:42:17:10 - 00:42:36:07

Peter Huessy

Another question here from, John Slagle. Let me read it to you, sir. Is there a reason to believe the current 123 agreement between the United States and the Republic of Korea underpinning crucial nuclear cooperation survives a Republic of Korea nuclear armament?

00:42:36:09 - 00:43:04:02

Lt. Gen. In-Bum Chun

Yeah, that's a great question. You know, so, if you put it that way, I don't think it would survive. But again, I said we would not be pursuing nuclear weapons like the North Koreans that, actually, what's in the short term, what's more, pressing for us is the one, two, three agreement, right now are spent fuel.

00:43:04:03 - 00:43:51:08

Lt. Gen. In-Bum Chun

We just can't store it anymore because we don't have the space. So, we need to reprocess some of this fuel just because of economic reasons. Now, when we do this, all of us know that this reprocessing might entail weapons development. And so, we need a new one, two, three, agreement, that, allows South Korea to have an economic, survivable, you know, solution to our nuclear energy, problem that we have spent fuel, storage being the top, issue.

00:43:51:08 - 00:44:25:06

Lt. Gen. In-Bum Chun

So, this is this is a separate and, more critical short term issue that we need to talk about. And it's really being hampered because, I think the United States suspect and rightfully so. Okay. South Korea wants to do this, to increase its capability to have nuclear weapons. I would just say to you guys, accept it.

00:44:25:08 - 00:45:00:08

Lt. Gen. In-Bum Chun

We're at a stage where new kind of thinking is required. So, I, I would just say, you know, look at the advantages and not just the, just the cost. And, again, South Korea would be South Korea's nuclear weapons would be an extension of U.S., capabilities. And, by helping us, we would actually ensure safety and a measure of control.

00:45:00:09 - 00:45:06:01

Lt. Gen. In-Bum Chun

And I would personally feel a lot better if you guys were involved.

00:45:06:02 - 00:45:27:12

Peter Huessy

And I what I hear you also saying is that if the United States took a nuclear capability at the theater level and had it in the region, it would not only protect South Korea, but also Japan, the Philippines and Taiwan, so that it would be not considered just a South Korean benefit, it would be regional and overall deterrence.

00:45:27:13 - 00:45:29:10

Peter Huessy

Is that correct?

00:45:29:11 - 00:46:06:03

Lt. Gen. In-Bum Chun

Yeah. Of course. You know, definitely. That would be it. But the thing is, I, I think the Chinese and the North Koreans, maybe not the North Koreans, but the Chinese think that the United States is. So, against using nuclear weapons. Even if you had nuclear weapons in the region that the Americans would actually not use it.

00:46:06:04 - 00:46:33:07

Lt. Gen. In-Bum Chun

And if memory serves me right, when the Ukrainian war broke out, you know, you stated instead of saying in the three G, you actually said, we're not going to use nuclear weapons. And it turned out that prudent use, the use the, against us. So I think that's a lesson that we need to learn. Thugs only, respect, strength.

00:46:33:08 - 00:47:09:02

Peter Huessy

No, I, I've written recently a couple essays on. If you take your nuclear to turn off the table, it's awfully difficult to put it back. And we did that in 2014 by saying Ukraine has no interest, and then in 2022 or actually December 21st, we locally talked about fearing escalation. And that gave, in my view, a signal to Putin that his nuclear threats were capable of keeping us somewhat restrained in what we helped Ukraine with.

00:47:09:03 - 00:47:23:07

Peter Huessy

Which this puts us in the current dilemma we're in. Another question came out here, and I wonder if it's related. What is North Korea getting in return for sending troops to Ukraine? And also, missiles?

00:47:23:08 - 00:48:02:07

Lt. Gen. In-Bum Chun

Everything food, fuel, money, technology. What's most frightening for me is experience right now. Two years ago, I was in DC with, Roomful of Experts. A lot of them Russian experts. They said, you know, they the learned opinion was that this was going to be short lived. But once the war is over, the North Koreans will be thrown out like a concubine or something.

00:48:02:08 - 00:48:25:07

Lt. Gen. In-Bum Chun

And I said, I'm not too sure. They asked me, why don't you think that? And I told them, did you see Putin opened the door for Kim Jong un when he was trying to get in the car. Did you see Putin wait for Kim Jong Un at a meeting? It's usually the other way around, you know. So makes other people wait an hour or so.

00:48:25:07 - 00:48:52:11

Lt. Gen. In-Bum Chun

But it wasn't like that. What do we see now? We know that the North Koreans have provided nearly more than half of all the ammunition that the Russians are using, made in North Korea. They're refurbishing a new bridge with, between North Korea and the Russians. Why would they do that? Unless they're planning on doing a lot of business.

00:48:52:12 - 00:49:23:09

Lt. Gen. In-Bum Chun

Even if the war is over, there's going to be a lot of student visas for North Koreans. And the students will not be studying in Moscow University. There are actually going to be workers fixing and rebuilding, newly occupied, Ukrainian, former Ukrainian and now Russian territory. So, this relationship is going to last a long, long time.

00:49:23:11 - 00:49:52:10

Lt. Gen. In-Bum Chun

And so now the all the sanctions that we had is kaput. And, I'm sure China is a bit, you know, uncomfortable with all of this. This whole war in Europe has benefited the Chinese the most. And I think the North Koreans, especially Kim Jong un, he's the either the second runner up, gained from this.

00:49:52:11 - 00:50:00:07

Lt. Gen. In-Bum Chun

And it's very, very disturbing for me as a security, analyst sitting here.

00:50:00:07 - 00:50:26:09

Peter Huessy

And so would you expand on your, what the Chinese reaction has been to this cooperative effort between North Korea and Russia because you alluded to it in your answer. But I'd like you to expand what the concerns, both pro and con, are, because it's a very intriguing line of thinking about. You would think

15

China would be in support of it because they're both allies.

00:50:26:10 - 00:50:34:10

Peter Huessy

But you also seem to hint that there's some they could be some problems here. So, could you expand on that, please?

00:50:34:11 - 00:51:14:14

Lt. Gen. In-Bum Chun

Sure. Number one, North Korea has always been, very good at, milking the Chinese and Russian tint. Okay. But once the Soviet Union collapsed when one to trade up, they were only, afforded one source. And then that one source started becoming picky and controlling. And I think, Kim Jong UN didn't like that. So he endured a lot of suffering until he got his nuclear device to work.

00:51:15:00 - 00:51:44:09

Lt. Gen. In-Bum Chun

Right now, the Chinese are saying, we don't care. They didn't care. Why are they saying that so many times? You know, although they benefited from the Ukrainian Russian War I. This is the biggest winner. They got cheap, you know, Russian fuel. They're sending a lot of stuff to Russia, to maintain Russian war machine. So, the Chinese have benefited from this.

00:51:44:11 - 00:52:27:00

Lt. Gen. In-Bum Chun

But at the same time, the relationship with the Russians and the North Koreans, I think they've lost, measure of influence for many years. We Koreans and the United States thought that the North Koreans and the Chinese relationship was something like the Korean, you, South Korean and U.S. relationship, an ally. Far from the truth, it seems North Korean attitude is during the Great War of revolution, which is, Mount Saint tomb fighting Chiang-Kai-shek and all that, North Korean communists fought on the side of Mao.

00:52:27:01 - 00:53:07:08

Lt. Gen. In-Bum Chun

And so, the war in Korea, where China sent hundreds of thousands of their troops, was just the payback. So, it's a more of a trans factional relationship. And in the 90s, when we think a million North Koreans starved to death, a lot of the North Koreans suffered. They were not blaming Kim IL sung or Kim Jong IL, but they were actually blaming the Chinese that the Chinese did not help enough, that they were betrayed.

00:53:07:09 - 00:53:42:04

Lt. Gen. In-Bum Chun

So, it's not just the South Koreans who don't like the Chinese. It's actually the North Koreans don't like the Chinese. It's another, aspect to think about because it provides us with, opportunity, an opportunity to put a wedge between, North Korean and Chinese, relations. I just want to say that for thousands of years, the Chinese know that it is bad luck to fight with the Koreans, especially the North Koreans.

00:53:42:05 - 00:54:23:06

Lt. Gen. In-Bum Chun

So, this is something that, I feel that there's a dynamic with which there are many opportunities in northeast Asia, especially when the United States, is concentrating, and, China, we can we can see the

initial firefight that China and the U.S. might fight. But how do we finish it? Maybe, you know, this area is an answer.

00:54:23:07 - 00:54:51:11

Peter Huessy

Let me ask you another question. That is, always intrigued me. And that is, there are those on the left and the right who are calling for the US to withdraw our forces from South Korea. The most prominent are Ted Galen Carpenter and Doug Van Dam, who were with the, affiliated with the Quincy Institute. Would you run through us for us?

00:54:51:12 - 00:54:59:07

Peter Huessy

What would be the consequences of U.S. military forces leaving the Republic of Korea?

00:54:59:09 - 00:55:39:01

Lt. Gen. In-Bum Chun

You know, I'm not a fortune teller, so I will just rely on history. And 1949, for whatever reason, the United States decided to withdraw from the Korean Peninsula. The Koreans begged the United States not to leave. Schoolgirls went on the streets to plead. The U.S. soldiers stay a little bit longer. The United States said, don't worry.

00:55:39:01 - 00:56:07:08

Lt. Gen. In-Bum Chun

Nothing will happen. The Koreans then said, well, if you do have to leave, can you leave us some weapons? And the United States, what kind of weapons do you want? The Koreans said, how about some tanks? And they said, Kim, look at your terrain. Rice paddies and mountains. This is not tank country. The South Koreans did not have a single tank at all.

00:56:07:08 - 00:56:45:03

Lt. Gen. In-Bum Chun

The North Koreans had 242 T-34 80 fives. Every South Korean officer remembers this because we had to stop those tanks by, sending in Suicide Squad. That's how we stopped them. So, if history has taught us anything, that mistake not only cost 10% of the Korean people, but by 37,000 Americans lost their lives. You know, if the United States were to withdraw.

00:56:45:04 - 00:57:18:11

Lt. Gen. In-Bum Chun

I believe that the North Koreans, because they've been taught for the past eight decades that the South needs to be liberated from those foxy Americans. That's what they call you guys foxy Americans. And that foxy is not what we think is not the fox that you think. It looks more like a wolf. But every 3- to 5-year-old kid in North Korea knows this foxy, some young gotten beaten down.

00:57:18:13 - 00:57:55:04

Lt. Gen. In-Bum Chun

That's what they call it. It's like a wolf. That's what they refer to Americans as. They would have too. The temptation would be too great. And what scares me most is think about Kim Jong un. He is now 40 years old. You know, all his life, when he was sitting on grandpa's lap, he heard that North Korea is the greatest Paradise in the world, that all the things that, they've achieved is because of the Kim family.

00:57:55:06 - 00:58:26:09

Lt. Gen. In-Bum Chun

The only thing that hampers their happiness is these foxy Americans. Maybe Kim Jong UN really believes it in his heart that it is his mission to liberate a South Koreans. If there's another war on the Korean Peninsula, and if the United States does nothing, then it will truly be, Japan. And if you lose Japan, then the United States loses to the whole of the Pacific.

00:58:26:12 - 00:58:50:02

Lt. Gen. In-Bum Chun

You know, that is not the kind of United States that if I were an American, that I would want to pass down to my grandchildren because our grandfather was, did not sacrifice for us to, pick up the baton.

00:58:50:04 - 00:59:01:00

Peter Huessy

Understood. I'm going to turn it over to our president, Jim. Petrosky. James, thank you for joining us. And the last words are yours, sir.

00:59:01:01 - 00:59:24:01

James Petrosky

Thank you very much, general. And Peter and all our guests that are here, listening. And I can't say enough for the attention it needs to be paid to this important issue and the role of nuclear weapons in preserving peace and how we have to look at all these very complex issues. And so, I think this is a great topic.

00:59:24:02 - 00:59:55:13

James Petrosky

I think it's one that needs to continue to be looked at. You look at today in the news, the, the emphasis on, of course, what's going on in the Middle East and the influence of nuclear weapons. There and how that affects our policy, our peace, and, of course, our prosperity as a country. I think that we can see, the questions especially, show that there's a great interest in this issue, and I'm glad it's coming to the forefront, because I think we've put it in the back for too long.

00:59:55:14 - 01:00:20:07

James Petrosky

So, your comments, General Chun, have been extremely valuable in evaluating this issue. I do want to highlight that Kimberly mentioned earlier that we were going to have a recognition of the 80th year since the bombings that occurred and a decision that was made to drop those bombs at the Truman Center in Kansas.

01:00:20:08 - 01:00:46:12

James Petrosky

And we've extended and received a warm agreement with General Chung to speak at that event. And so we are, we are delighted to have him come there. If you can make it there, I think it's going to be a great event where you can see him live in person. So, I understand I haven't seen you in person, but I understand you have to look better in person than you do on the video here, so I'll just pass that along.

01:00:46:13 - 01:01:07:00

James Petrosky

That's, So, we look forward to that. And we look forward to all the answering any of these additional

questions that are here that we didn't get to, and so I'm going to turn it over to our director of operations, Kimberly Cherrington, to close out this session. But once again, thank you so much for your wise words.

01:01:07:01 - 01:01:18:08

James Petrosky

And we will be contemplating on this. And, for all of our guests and all of the supporters of Nez, I thank you for all that you do for us. So back to you, Kimberly. Thank you.

01:01:21:09 - 01:01:51:15

Kimberly Cherrington

Thanks, Jim. And thanks, on behalf of the National Institute for Deterrence Studies, for being here today. And thank you to General Chun for sharing your time and expertise with our audience. And of course, thank you to Peter for bringing this important content to our attention every single week, every single day, for all you do, to fulfill our mission here at NIDS, which is to advance peace, promote stability, and shape policy through applied research, education, and consulting.

01:01:52:00 - 01:02:22:07

Kimberly Cherrington

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01:02:22:08 - 01:02:24:01

Peter Huessy

Thank you. General Chun.

01:02:24:02 - 01:02:27:02

Lt. Gen. In-Bum Chun

Honored.

01:02:27:03 - 01:02:48:05

Peter Huessy

And thank you, Kimberly, and thank you to all our sponsors and supporters and attendees. And we will see you again, at our next meeting. Thanks very much.