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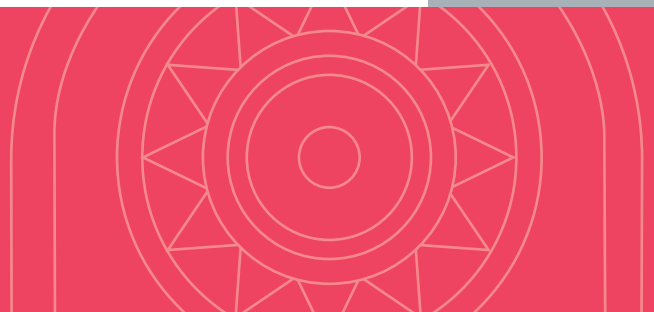
**Woodrow Wilson  
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## **Nuclear Proliferation International History Project**

### **Bringing Seoul into the Nonproliferation Regime**

The Effect of ROK-Canada Reactor Deals on South Korea's  
Ratification of the NPT

By Se Young Jang  
NPIHP Working Paper #10  
September 2017





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# **Bringing Seoul into the Non-Proliferation Regime**

The Effect of ROK-Canada Reactor Deals on Korea's Ratification of the NPT

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## Key Findings

**Pressure by the United States was less decisive in forcing South Korea to ratify the NPT in 1975 than commonly assumed.** Records show that a consensus to ratify the treaty was reached within the ROK government by early March 1975—before the US applied meaningful pressure.

- Although the US Embassy in Seoul forwarded its suspicions of the ROK’s nuclear ambitions during 1974, the inter-agency intelligence assessment concluding that the ROK had launched a nuclear weapons program was completed only in late February 1975. While the White House was still determining its response to the report, the ROK government had already decided to ratify the NPT up to the level of the Prime Minister.
- In January 1975, the State Department confirmed that no specific actions had been taken to make the NPT ratification a condition for any US dealings with South Korea.

**There is little evidence that the 1975 Congressional resolution calling on the EX-IM bank to defer financing for reactor construction in Korea had an impact on ROK decision-making.**

The short time between the introduction of the resolution to the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations on March 7<sup>th</sup> and the notification of ROK President Park’s decision to ratify the NPT by the Korean Ministry of Foreign Affairs on March 8<sup>th</sup> suggests the events were not directly related.

**South Korea joined the NPT to secure the sale of Canadian heavy-water reactors, whose sale had been made contingent on ratification.** The ROK government chose to pursue the plutonium route to a bomb in 1972, making the acquisition of heavy-water reactors critical to the entire project.

- Evidence from Korean and Canadian archives show that the strengthened safeguards Canada placed on its nuclear reactors after the May 1974 Indian nuclear test played a decisive role in South Korea’s decision to ratify the NPT.
- South Korea’s Foreign Minister first mentioned that Korea might consider ratifying the NPT if it were a precondition for the sale of a CANDU reactor during his visit to Ottawa in November 1974.
- On January 20, 1975, Canada announced that they would reconsider the sale of reactors if South Korea refused to ratify the NPT. Three days later, ROK ministers recommended that President Park Chung Hee accept the Canadian ultimatum to secure the sale of two heavy water reactors (CANDU and NRX). Park approved the decision on March 7, 1975.
- In December 1975, Canadian Secretary of External Affairs also asserted that South Korea had ratified the NPT upon Canada’s suggestion.

**The South Korean government did not regard NPT ratification as the end of its military nuclear pursuits.** South Korea's program was not formally suspended until December 1976—over one-and-a-half years after the Korean National Assembly ratified the NPT in March 1975.

- ROK officials still regarded the import of a NRX reactor to be possible at the time they chose to ratify the NPT under Canadian pressure. However, archival records show that Canadian officials saw any future sale of a NRX reactor to be unlikely.
- South Korea's negotiations with France to acquire a nuclear reprocessing facility continued even after the ROK ratified the NPT. US and Canadian concerns over the French reprocessing deal would stall the sale of Canadian reactors until 1976.

# Bringing Seoul into the Non-Proliferation Regime

## The Effect of ROK-Canada Reactor Deals on Korea's Ratification of the NPT

Se Young Jang<sup>1</sup>

### Introduction

South Korea (Republic of Korea: ROK) avoided fully committing itself to the Treaty of Non-proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) in the regime's early years. While the ROK government signed the NPT when it opened for signature on July 1st, 1968, the National Assembly ratified the treaty only on March 19, 1975, after seven years of resistance and hesitation.<sup>2</sup> To justify its tardiness, the ROK government pointed to the potential threat of nuclear attack by its adversarial neighbors—China and North Korea—who remained outside the NPT.<sup>3</sup> ROK representatives also

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<sup>2</sup> Some scholars wrote that South Korea ratified the NPT in April 1975, but they appear to have confused the date of the NPT ratified in the ROK National Assembly (March 19, 1975) with the date when it was deposited to the United States, one of the three depositary states (April 23, 1976). The other two depositary states were the Soviet Union and the United Kingdom. See some examples of this confusion in Joseph A. Yager, "Nuclear Suppliers and the Policies of South Korea and Taiwan toward Nuclear Weapons" in *The Nuclear Suppliers and Nonproliferation*, ed. Rodney W. Jones (Washington, DC: Lexington Books, 1985), 188; Mitchell Reiss, *Without the Bomb: The Politics of Nuclear Nonproliferation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 87; Etel Solingen, *Nuclear Logics: Contrasting Paths in East Asia and the Middle East* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), 85; Eugene B. Kogan, "Coercing Allies: Why Friends Relinquish Nuclear Plans" (Ph.D. diss., Brandeis University, 2013): 108. In addition, a few others confuse the date of ratification with the date of signing the NPT. For instance, see Lyong Choi, "The First Nuclear Crisis in the Korea Peninsula, 1975–76," *Cold War History* 14/1 (2014): 76.

<sup>3</sup> "Briefing for the Interdepartmental Meeting," Bureau of International Economy, ROK Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA), January 23, 1975, File 5, Micro-film Roll J-06-0102, Classification 741.61 CN, *Agreement between Canada and the Republic of Korea for Co-operation in the Development and Application of Atomic Energy for Peaceful Purposes I – III (1973–1976)*, Diplomatic Archives of the Republic of Korea (hereafter, 5/J-06-0102/741.61CN, ROK Diplomatic Archives). All the documents from the ROK Diplomatic Archives cited in this paper were written in Korean. The titles of the documents cited here have been translated from Korean into English by author.

sought to dispel suspicions that South Korea intentionally delayed ratification while covertly developing nuclear weapons. During general debate at the 1975 NPT Review Conference, the ROK delegation justified its previous position by saying that South Korea had delayed ratification not because of their “desire to keep open nuclear options,” but of “desire to see entire [the] Korean Peninsula brought under [the] NPT system.”<sup>4</sup> Yet this retrospective justification falls short, as the ROK National Assembly abruptly ratified the NPT in the absence of significant changes to the regional security environment in Northeast Asia. Why did Seoul abandon its reluctant position on the NPT and choose to ratify it in March 1975, rather than some other time?<sup>5</sup>

President Park Chung Hee pursued a nuclear weapons program in the first half of the 1970s in response to weakening security commitments from the United States, and thus explanations of South Korea’s ratification reluctance must take this into account.<sup>6</sup> Existing literature emphasizes Washington’s role in precipitating Seoul’s ratification as a way to prevent nuclear proliferation on the peninsula.<sup>7</sup> Some authors specifically claim that American pressure

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<sup>4</sup> Telegram 03406 from US Mission Geneva to State Department, May 10, 1975, US National Archives and Record Administration (NARA), College Park, MD [retrieved from the Access to Archival Databases at <http://aad.archives.gov>, April 27, 2016] (hereafter, US NARA AAD).

<sup>5</sup> Some noteworthy occurrences in 1974–75 which could have affected South Korea’s perception on national security were: an underground tunnel that North Korea had secretly dug under the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) was found for the first time in November 1974 with the second one discovered on March 19 in the following year; Kim Il-sung visited Beijing in April 1975; Saigon fell under the control of North Vietnamese forces on April 30, 1975. The latter two events happened after South Korea’s ratification of the NPT, and the discovery of the first tunnel also did not appear to affect the ROK government’s decision. If President Park had felt unsecured by the North Korean provocation, he would not have ordered to ratify the treaty which was subject to restrict the South’s discretionary power to develop weapons.

<sup>6</sup> See more details about President Park’s launch of the nuclear weapons program in Se Young Jang, “The Evolution of US Extended Deterrence and South Korea’s Nuclear Ambitions,” *Journal of Strategic Studies* 39/4 (2016).

<sup>7</sup> See Etel Solingen, “The Political Economy of Nuclear Restraint,” *International Security* 19/2 (Fall, 1994): 143; Reiss, *Without the Bomb*, 92; Rebecca K. C. Hersman and Robert Peters, “Nuclear U-Turns: Learning from South Korean and Taiwanese Rollback,” *The Nonproliferation Review* 13/3 (2006): 541–2; Seung-Young Kim, “Security, Nationalism and the Pursuit of Nuclear Weapons and Missiles: The South Korean Case, 1970–82,” *Diplomacy & Statecraft* 12/4 (2001):59, 65; Sung Gul Hong, “The Search for Deterrence: Park’s Nuclear Option,” in *The Park Chung Hee Era: The Transformation of South Korea*, ed. Byung-kook Kim and Ezra F. Vogel (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2011), 497, 499; Jonathan D. Pollack and Mitchell B. Reiss, “South Korea: The Tyranny

“succeeded in persuading France and Canada to join it in pressing for South Korea’s ratification of the NPT as a precondition for the French and Canadian sale of nuclear technology.”<sup>8</sup> Others assumed that Washington began pressuring Seoul to ratify long before March 1975.<sup>9</sup>

Literature describing South Korea’s path to NPT ratification lacks the support of archival documents. Most explanations draw from neither US nor Korean archives and insufficiently document how decisions in Seoul were made and whether US pressure was felt. Instead, many interpretations assume that Washington’s overall influence on South Korea’s military and diplomatic policies was responsible for Seoul’s decision to ratify the NPT.

This assumption is reinforced by a concurrent event in the United States Congress—some scholars argue that a joint US Congressional resolution passed on March 10, 1975 played a key role in persuading South Korea to ratify the NPT.<sup>10</sup> The resolution called on the Export-Import Bank of the United States (EX-IM Bank) to defer approval of loans for construction of a second US-supplied nuclear reactor in South Korea. This explanation sounds plausible on its face due to the short time between the congressional resolution and South Korea’s ratification of the NPT, which happened only nine days later. However, the short time between these events does not guarantee a causal relationship. In particular, the lack of empirical evidence from South Korean

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of Geography and the Vexations of History,” in *The Nuclear Tipping Point: Why States Reconsider Their Nuclear Choices*, ed. Kurt M. Campbell, Robert J. Einhorn, and Mitchell B. Reiss (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 2004), 262–3; Kang Choi and Joon-sung Park, “South Korea: Fears of Abandonment and Entrapment,” in *The Long Shadow: Nuclear Weapons and Security in 21<sup>st</sup> Century Asia*, ed. Muthiah Alagappa (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008), 377; Christopher Way and Karthika Sasikumar, “Leaders and Laggards: When and Why do Countries Sign the NPT?” *REGIS Working Papers* Vol. 16 (Montréal and Quebec City: Université de Montréal and McGill University, 2004), 14; Alexander Lanoszka, “Protection States Trust?: Major Power Patronage, Nuclear Behavior, and Alliance Dynamics” (Ph.D. diss., Princeton University, 2013), 194, 213, 215, 227; Kogan, “Coercing Allies,” 107.

<sup>8</sup> Hong, “The Search for Deterrence,” 499.

<sup>9</sup> See Choi, “The First Nuclear Crisis in the Korean Peninsula,” 75.

<sup>10</sup> Among others, see Ernest W. Lefever, *Nuclear Arms in the Third World: U.S. Policy Dilemma* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 1979), 86; Daniel Drezner, *The Sanctions Paradox: Economic Statecraft and International Relations* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 258; Reiss, *Without the Bomb*, 92; Hong, “The Search for Deterrence,” 499; Lanoszka, “Protection States Trust?” 213.

archives makes it difficult to understand the rationale behind South Korea's decision in early 1975. This working paper shows that it is unclear whether serious US pressure existed before the ROK government's decision to ratify the NPT, or at least that any such pressure was not as decisive as what the existing literature generally leads us to believe. Rather, some archival evidence indicates Washington began pressuring Seoul to curb its nuclear ambitions only when Korea's negotiations with France to purchase a reprocessing facility surfaced during summer 1975, after South Korea had already ratified the NPT.<sup>11</sup>

New evidence from South Korean archives does reveal that the rationale behind the ROK government's ratification decision was much more complicated than has been previously described. Based on extensive archival research in South Korea, Canada, and the United States, this paper suggests that South Korea's NPT decision was closely linked to a series of negotiations with Canada that led to a bilateral nuclear cooperation agreement (hereafter, the NCA).<sup>12</sup> Previous authors rarely attribute the ROK's decision to pressure from Ottawa. One of the few exceptions is Lyong Choi, who briefly explains Canada's pressure on South Korea, but still sees this issue in the context of Washington's simultaneous pressure.<sup>13</sup> In addition, citations provided by Choi are insufficient to carefully track South Korea's decision-making process—Choi provides only the name and number of the microfilm he consulted, which itself contains hundreds of documents. Canadian scholar Duane Bratt also noted in his book that “Canada made

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<sup>11</sup> See more details about Washington's active involvement in preventing Korea's import of French reprocessing facility in William Burr ed., “Stopping Korea from Going Nuclear, Part I,” *National Security Archive Electronic Briefing Book 582* (Washington, DC: National Security Archive, 2017), <http://nsarchive.gwu.edu/nukevault/ebb582-The-U.S.-and-the-South-Korean-Nuclear-Program,-1974-1976,-Part-1/>, accessed May 15, 2017; William Burr ed., “Stopping Korea from Going Nuclear, Part II,” *National Security Archive Electronic Briefing Book 584* (Washington, DC: National Security Archive, 2017), <http://nsarchive.gwu.edu/nukevault/ebb584-The-U.S.-and-the-South-Korean-Nuclear-Program,-1974-1976,-Part-2/>, accessed May 15, 2017.

<sup>12</sup> The full title of the ROK-Canada Nuclear Cooperation Agreement is ‘Agreement between Canada and the Republic of Korea for Co-operation in the Development and Application of Atomic Energy for Peaceful Purposes.’

<sup>13</sup> Choi, “The First Nuclear Crisis in the Korea Peninsula,” 75–6.

NPT ratification a non-negotiable condition for continuing with the CANDU export.” However, Bratt did not exclude that Washington had assisted the Canadians in pressuring the South Koreans to ratify the NPT.<sup>14</sup> Another study by Sung Gul Hong argues that Ottawa pressed Seoul to accept the US demand to ratify the treaty because “Canada was under strong US pressure to get South Korea to ratify the NPT prior to the package sale of the CANDU reactor and the NRX (National Research Experimental) reactor.”<sup>15</sup> His arguments are flawed in two aspects: first, it is not clear whether Canada was under strong US pressure. Available evidence only shows that the two governments shared information about this issue. Second, the package sale of two reactors was not used to persuade South Korea to ratify the NPT. Instead, the Canadian government made it clear that the NRX reactor was unbundled from the CANDU sale following India’s 1974 nuclear test.

By delving into the multilayered historical puzzle of the ROK government’s decision-making process, this paper argues that South Korea ratified the treaty to acquire Canadian heavy-water reactors. Generally seen as more proliferation-prone than light-water reactors, these heavy-water reactors would enable South Korea to rely less on US-supplied low enriched uranium and would produce significant amounts of spent-fuel suitable for reprocessing. This research thus highlights one lesser known cause of South Korea’s decision to commit to the NPT: the desire to maintain nuclear cooperation with Canada in the face of strengthened safeguards which Ottawa enacted after India’s nuclear test.

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<sup>14</sup> Duane Bratt, *The Politics of CANDU Exports* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006), 129.

<sup>15</sup> Sung Gul Hong, “The Search for Deterrence: Park’s Nuclear Option,” in *The Park Chung Hee Era: The Transformation of South Korea*, ed. Byung-kook Kim and Ezra F. Vogel (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2011), 492.

This paper also argues that the ROK government did not regard ratification of the NPT as the end of its military nuclear pursuits—South Korea suspended its weapons program in December 1976, exactly one year and nine months after the ROK National Assembly’s ratification of the NPT.<sup>16</sup> This delay undermined one of the NPT’s core purposes: motivating non-nuclear weapons states to abandon military nuclear ambitions in return for access to advanced nuclear technology and equipment for peaceful uses of nuclear power. For nearly two years, South Korea sought to play both sides of the deal. Therefore, South Korea presents an important case study for evaluating the effectiveness of the NPT on preventing the spread of nuclear weapons. Some literature on nuclear reversal argues that the emerging non-proliferation norm, when combined with domestic political systems, was central to enticing countries to abandon their nuclear weapons activities in general.<sup>17</sup> The quantitative research of Dong-Joon Jo and Erik Gartzke, however, demonstrates that the “normative constraints of the NPT do not exist” and “membership in the NPT tends modestly to encourage states to maintain pledges of nonproliferation.”<sup>18</sup> The South Korean case is notable in revealing the NPT’s modest and marginal role in promoting global nuclear non-proliferation in the very early years of the treaty—pressure from Ottawa was actually far more influential than treaties or norms.

## **The Emergence of a Global Nuclear Non-proliferation Regime and Its Limits**

The fate of the NPT in the 1970s was not as assured as it is regarded today. As one of the few issues on which Washington and Moscow cooperated during the Cold War, the future of the

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<sup>16</sup> US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) National Foreign Assessment Center, “South Korea: Nuclear Developments and Strategic Decision Making” (June 1978): 13. Declassified for released October 2005, [https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/DOC\\_0001254259.pdf](https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/DOC_0001254259.pdf), accessed May 20, 2017.

<sup>17</sup> See Herald Mueller and Andreas Schmidt, “The Little Known Story of De-proliferation: Why States Give Up Nuclear Weapons Activities,” ed. William C. Potter and Gaukhar Mukhatzhanova, *Forecasting Nuclear Proliferation in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Vol.1: The Role of Theory* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2010).

<sup>18</sup> Dong-Joon Jo and Erik Gartzke, “Determinants of Nuclear Weapons Proliferation,” *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 51/1 (2007): 86.



treaty regime relied on extensive participation from both sides, and in some cases the superpowers tried to persuade their junior allies to join the treaty. Yet some countries in the two blocs of the Cold War were reluctant to sign or ratify the NPT, delaying their accession for many years. On its face, this suggests that the influence of the United States and the Soviet Union over certain issues was not as strong as commonly assumed. To a certain extent, there was room for junior allies to pursue nuclear policies independent from the demands of their patron states. South Korea is one such case.

One of the reasons that the NPT failed to attract universal support at the beginning was the treaty's discriminatory nature. According to the treaty, only five states are recognized as nuclear weapons states (NWS): The United States, Russia, the United Kingdom, France, and China. According to Article II, all other States Parties to the NPT are obliged not to "receive", "manufacture", or "acquire" nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices. Nor are they allowed to "seek or receive any assistance" to manufacture those weapons and devices.<sup>19</sup> This non-proliferation obligation was imposed on the treaty's non-nuclear weapons states (NNWS) in exchange for civil nuclear assistance. India, Pakistan, and Israel remained outside the treaty regime, and North Korea withdrew from the treaty in 2003.

Unlike these outsiders, the NNWS of the treaty are considered to have forsaken any military nuclear aspirations. Yet a significant number of potential proliferators were unwilling to sign or ratify the treaty until well after it entered into force. Australia, which has the world's largest reserves of uranium, signed the NPT in February 1970, but ratified it almost three years later in 1973. Countries with advanced technology in the field of nuclear energy, such as West Germany and Japan, did not actively support the NPT negotiations in the first place and delayed

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<sup>19</sup> United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs, "The Treaty on the Non-proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT)," <http://www.un.org/disarmament/WMD/Nuclear/NPT.shtml>, accessed April 5, 2016.

their ratification process until the mid-1970s. With its first successful nuclear test in 1960, France was eligible for NWS status but did not join the treaty until 1992. Some countries also delayed ratifying the treaty until they abandoned their military nuclear ambitions. Argentina and Brazil, the well-known historic rivals in South America, pursued covert nuclear weapons programs in the 1970s and 1980s and only acceded to the NPT in 1995 (Argentina) and 1998 (Brazil), much later than other civilian nuclear powers.<sup>20</sup>

The United States constructed and pushed for this newly established non-proliferation regime together with the Soviet Union.<sup>21</sup> Yet hesitation in joining the NPT by key civil nuclear powers concerned the two superpowers and cast doubt on the future of the regime. That some potential proliferators up until the 1970s were allies or friends of the United States or the Soviet Union made the situation even more complicated. Among US allies and friends, the United Kingdom, France, and Israel developed nuclear weapons while Australia, Sweden, and Switzerland seriously explored the nuclear option in the early Cold War, but ultimately decided not to pursue weapons.<sup>22</sup> Taiwan also launched a nuclear weapons program—the *Hsin Chu Project*—a few years after China's first nuclear test in 1964. A series of US efforts to stop the

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<sup>20</sup> See T. V. Paul, *Power versus Prudence: Why Nations Forgo Nuclear Weapons* (Quebec City: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2000), 99–112.

<sup>21</sup> Popp, "Making of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Regime," 196–9.

<sup>22</sup> For the nuclear weapons options and the subsequent reversal decisions of Australia, Sweden, and Switzerland, see Jim Walsh, "Surprise Down Under: The Secret History of Australia's Nuclear Ambitions," *Nonproliferation Review*, 5/1 (1997); Jacques E. C. Hymans, "Isotopes and Identity: Australia and the Nuclear Weapons Option, 1949–1999," *Nonproliferation Review* 5/1 (2000); Waynes Reynolds, *Australia's Bid for the Atomic Bomb* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2000); Richard Broinowski, *Fact or Fission? The Truth about Australia's Nuclear Ambitions* (Melbourne: Scribe, 2003); Thomas Jonter, *The Key to Nuclear Restraint: The Swedish Plans to Acquire Nuclear Weapons during the Cold War* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016); Paul M. Cole, *Sweden without the Bomb: The Conduct of a Nuclear-Capable Nation without the Nuclear Weapons* (Washington DC: Rand Corporation, 1994); Reto Wollenmann and Andreas Wenger, *Zwischen Atomwaffe und Atomsperrvertrag: die Schweiz auf dem Weg von der nuklearen Option zum Nonproliferationsvertrag (1958–1969)* (Zurich: ETH, Forschungsstelle für Sicherheitspolitik, 2004); Paul, *Power versus Prudence*, 62–98.

Hsin Chu Project finally led Taiwan to terminate it in the late 1980s.<sup>23</sup> In the Cold War era, nuclear pursuits for non-peaceful uses were not monopolized only by a handful of “rogue states” or communist countries—the option was also explored by many US allies and friends including South Korea.

### **South Korea’s Contradictory Choices**

As one of the potential proliferators from the US-led bloc in the 1970s, South Korea is unique in that the Park administration adopted two contradictory choices in 1975: ratifying the NPT while not completely abandoning its nuclear weapons program. Some literature assumes that Seoul cancelled its clandestine nuclear project in 1975 and then ratified the NPT.<sup>24</sup> Yet according to a report written in 1978 by the US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), the Park administration suspended South Korea’s first nuclear weapons program only in December 1976.<sup>25</sup> Unlike the NPT ratification decision, the later choice to abandon the weapons program was made under US pressure after South Korea failed to acquire French reprocessing facilities in early 1976.<sup>26</sup>

South Korea’s second, later attempt to develop nuclear weapons was triggered by Jimmy Carter’s firm position on lessening South Korea’s military dependence on the United States. During his presidential campaign in 1976, Carter pledged that he would withdraw all US ground

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<sup>23</sup> See more details about Taiwan’s nuclear weapons program in Derek J. Mitchell, “Taiwan’s Hsin Chu Program: Deterrence, Abandonment, and Honor,” in *The Nuclear Tipping Point*, ed. Campbell, Einhorn, and Reiss; Vincent Wei-cheng Wang, “Conventional Deterrence, Soft Power, and the Nuclear Option,” in *The Long Shadow: Nuclear Weapons and Security in 21<sup>st</sup> Century Asia*, ed. Muthiah Alagappa (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2008); William Burr (ed.), “New Archival Evidence on Taiwanese ‘Nuclear Intentions’, 1966–1976,” *National Security Archive Electronic Briefing Book* 19 (1999); David Albright and Corey Gay, “Taiwan: Nuclear Nightmare Averted,” *Bulletin of Atomic Scientists* 54/1 (1998).

<sup>24</sup> Lanoszka, “Protection States Trust?” 193–4.

<sup>25</sup> National Foreign Assessment Center, US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), “South Korea: National Developments and Strategic Decisionmaking,” DOC-0001254259, June 1978, accessed July 23, 2016. [http://nautilus.wpengine.netdna-cdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/09/CIA\\_ROK\\_Nuclear\\_DecisionMaking.pdf](http://nautilus.wpengine.netdna-cdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/09/CIA_ROK_Nuclear_DecisionMaking.pdf).

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*; Choi, “The First Nuclear Crisis in the Korea Peninsula,” 80–8; Hong, “The Search for Deterrence,” 502–3; Kim, “Pursuit of Nuclear Weapons in South Korea,” 64–6.

forces and nuclear weapons from South Korea. In May 1977, he partially fulfilled this pledge by ordering the Department of Defense to withdraw one brigade of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Division by 1978 and planned to withdraw another brigade by June 1980.<sup>27</sup> In response, South Korea resumed its efforts to independently develop critical nuclear technology under a “hedging” strategy of expanding its civilian nuclear technology in a manner that maximized its latent military utility.<sup>28</sup> It is notable that NPT ratification did not stop Korea’s ongoing nuclear weapons program. Nor did NPT obligations prevent the ROK government from resuming its weapons program later during the Carter administration.

Why did South Korea make such contradictory choices? Archival evidence hints that the White House was neither concerned about South Korea’s nuclear weapons ambitions in the years prior to South Korea’s ratification, nor did it exert much pressure on Seoul before the Park administration resolved to ratify the treaty. Although the absence of archival evidence describing US pressure does not guarantee that it never occurred, this documentation gap requires us to question the conventional belief that the United States pressured South Korea into ratifying the NPT. If there was little such pressure by Washington, it is also useful to examine what other factors affected South Korea’s decisions.

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<sup>27</sup> Jimmy Carter, “Presidential Directive/NSC-12,” May 5, 1977, Jimmy Carter Presidential Library, accessed September 2, 2016. <http://www.jimmycarterlibrary.gov/documents/pddirectives/pd12.pdf>. However, Carter’s plan to withdraw US forces from South Korea was never implemented and eventually suspended in July 1979 because of extensive resistance within his administration and from the US Congress. See more details in Larry A. Niksch, “U.S. Troop Withdrawal from South Korea: Past Shortcomings and Future Prospects,” *Asian Survey* 21/3 (1981): 325–41.

<sup>28</sup> Hong, “The Search for Deterrence,” 509; Kim, “Pursuit of Nuclear Weapons in South Korea,” 67. Levite describes nuclear hedging as “a national strategy of maintaining, or at least appearing to maintain, a viable option for the relatively rapid acquisition of nuclear weapons, based on an indigenous technical capacity to produce them within a relatively short time frame ranging from several weeks to a few years.” It is also a strategy that lies “between nuclear pursuit and nuclear rollback.” Ariel Levite, “Never Say Never Again: Nuclear Reversal Revisited,” *International Security* 27/3 (2002): 59–69.

## **ROK-Canada Commercial Nuclear Deals**

The history of South Korea's nuclear program is embedded in the context of its trade relationships with foreign nuclear suppliers. In the early and mid-1970s, concerns over the 1973–74 global oil crisis and national security led the ROK government to accelerate both its civil and military nuclear programs. South Korea, a developing country in the 1970s, required imported nuclear technology and equipment to pursue this effort. Thus, securing the technology trade between South Korea and several supplier states was a key objective of the ROK government in setting its nuclear non-proliferation policy.

Although South Korea enhanced the legal and institutional groundwork for its nuclear power industry in the 1950s, it was not until the late 1960s that the Park administration focused on its grand plan for large-scale electricity production through nuclear power.<sup>29</sup> From 1971 onward, South Korea started constructing its first nuclear power plant under a contract with the Westinghouse company while negotiating with the United States for a second reactor. Both were light water reactors fueled using low-enriched uranium fuel supplied by the United States.

Unless strictly safeguarded, some nuclear technologies can be relatively easily converted from civilian to military purposes. In particular, heavy water reactors are considered a greater proliferation risk than light water reactors. Heavy water reactors use readily available natural uranium as fuel, bypassing the costly and difficult enrichment step necessary to produce light water reactor fuel, and a significant amount of weapons-usable plutonium can be extracted from

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<sup>29</sup> South Korea's Atomic Energy Law was enacted in 1956, being followed by the establishment of the Atomic Energy Agency (AEA) three years later. The ROK government also sent about 240 students abroad to study nuclear science and engineering during 1956–1964. Moreover, in 1959 construction began on a TRIGA Mark-II, South Korea's first research reactor, with partial financial support from the United States. The TRIGA Mark-II began operations in March 1962. See more details in Chang Sup Sung and Sa Kyun Hong, "Development process of nuclear power industry in a developing country: Korean experience and implication," *Technovation* 19/5 (1999): 305–16.

the irradiated natural uranium fuel by nuclear reprocessing. The Canada Deuterium Uranium (CANDU) heavy water reactor has the added ability to be refueled while in operation. This feature is useful for electricity production, but also makes precise accounting for the plutonium contained in spent fuel far more difficult. These characteristics can contribute to clandestinely producing weapons-usable plutonium.<sup>30</sup> In contrast, light water reactors use low-enriched uranium well under the 20 percent threshold seen as a proliferation risk. Furthermore, they are easier to safeguard because the fuel assemblies can be inspected under water and “the complexity of the operation to extract an assembly from the reactor core creates a level of proliferation resistance.”<sup>31</sup> Thus, it is logical to assume that South Korea would have regarded diversion of plutonium from US-supplied light water reactors fairly difficult.

Under these circumstances, the ROK government became interested in acquiring heavy water reactors and started negotiations with Canada. As the only producer of heavy water reactors in a nuclear market dominated by light water reactors, Canada was eager to attract new customers during the 1960s and 1970s. During this “golden age of the nuclear industry,” over 80 percent of all nuclear power plants were ordered.<sup>32</sup>

The President of Atomic Energy of Canada Limited (AECL), James L. Gray, visited Seoul in April 1973. The visit was arranged by Shaul Eisenberg, a German-born Jewish broker who had tried but failed to sell Britain’s Advanced Gas-Cooled Reactor (AGR) to South Korea in the 1960s. This time, Eisenberg, who had an extensive network with Korean government

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<sup>30</sup> Constance D. Hunt, “Canadian Policy and the Export of Nuclear Energy,” *University of Toronto Law Journal* 27/1 (1977): 72–3; Hong, “The search for deterrence,” 492.

<sup>31</sup> Jacques Bouchard, “The Future of Nuclear Power: Reducing Risks,” in *Routledge Handbook of Nuclear and Policy*, eds. Joseph E. Pillat and Nathan E. Busch (New York: Routledge, 2015), 372.

<sup>32</sup> Bratt, *The Politics of CANDU Exports*, 24.

officials, was working for AECL.<sup>33</sup> Through his arrangements, Gray met a number of high-level South Korean officials involved in nuclear energy affairs. During this visit, he learned that the ROK government was interested in purchasing Canadian heavy-water reactors, particularly because they would not need to depend on a single fuel supplier (i.e. the United States) once the reactors were constructed in South Korea.<sup>34</sup>

Two months after Gray's visit to Seoul, a Korean delegation led by Dr. Kyung-ho Hyun visited Canada to study the feasibility of heavy water reactors. Voicing concerns that South Korea's energy policy could be dominated by one country if Korea kept importing reactors from "a single country" (the United States), Hyun asserted that the ROK government should diversify energy sources. Upon their return from the visit, the delegation submitted a report concluding that heavy water reactors had technical advantages. The only downside would be a higher cost of construction than light water reactors, but the report argued that the construction cost could be offset by the lower fuel cost of natural uranium. The ability to burn natural uranium attracted attention from the Korean officials and President Park. Under the US-ROK Nuclear Cooperation Agreement, South Korea was only allowed to purchase US-origin enriched uranium. If the United States refused to supply it, Korea would have no other option but to shut down its US-provided light water reactor. In contrast, natural uranium could be purchased from Canada but also from many other countries.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> It revealed later that Eisenberg had received 18 million dollars of commission from the AECL and shared it with some strong men in Korean politics such as Hu-rak Lee. See Chung-hun Lee, *Nuclear Sovereignty of South Korea* (in Korean) (Seoul: Geulmadang, 2009), 190–1.

<sup>34</sup> Memorandum from R. C. Lee to File CK-151-1 (c.c. Campbell), May 7, 1973, Folder "Posting to Korea 1972.07-1974.-1", Vol.8-1, Record 13629 (hereafter, 8-1/13629), Ross Campbell Fonds, Library and Archives Canada.

<sup>35</sup> Lee, *Nuclear Sovereignty of South Korea*, 189–90.

Official negotiations began when Canadian Ambassador to Japan Ross Campbell visited Seoul in August 1973.<sup>36</sup> In the early stage of the negotiations, Canada sought to export two types of heavy-water reactors as a package: a CANDU reactor and a National Research Experimental (NRX) reactor. In his August 2<sup>nd</sup> meeting with ROK Minister of Science and Technology Hyung Sup Choi, Campbell stressed that “from Canada’s point of view both NRX and the power plant (i.e. CANDU) were part of one package.”<sup>37</sup> When Campbell met Acting Minister of Foreign Affairs Suk Heun Yoon on the following day, he clearly reiterated that selling two nuclear reactors (an NRX and a CANDU) as one package was in Canada’s interest.<sup>38</sup> Obviously, Canada’s initial position regarding reactor deals with Korea included a NRX.

At this occasion, Campbell also inquired about South Korea’s plan to ratify the NPT. Acting Minister Yoon explained to Campbell that “[f]ormal ratification ha[d] been delayed because the National Assembly ha[d] been occupied with budgetary and domestic debate,” while there was “no immediate plans to ratify this treaty” at the moment. Campbell briefly noted that “this was of practical interest to Canada because Canada was in the process of selling two nuclear reactors to Korea.”<sup>39</sup> Even though the Canadian Ambassador mentioned the necessity of South Korea’s NPT ratification, Canada did not appear to treat this issue very seriously at that time, especially when compared to Canada’s harsh pressure on Korea later in early 1975. The ROK government did not take it seriously either—as the National Assembly was firmly

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<sup>36</sup> Ambassador Campbell was in charge of Korean affairs as well at the time since the Canadian Department of External Affairs did not have its own embassy in Seoul until late 1973. It is also noteworthy that Campbell himself was deeply involved in the Canadian nuclear energy industry after leaving his diplomatic career. He worked as Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Atomic Energy of Canada Limited (AECL) from 1976 to 1979 and then went on to become President of the Atomic Energy of Canada International from 1979 to 1983.

<sup>37</sup> Memorandum, Kaufmann, August 15, 1973, 8-1/13629, Ross Campbell Fonds, Library and Archives Canada.

<sup>38</sup> Memorandum from Kaufmann to Johnston, August 9, 1973, 8-1/13629, Ross Campbell Fonds, Library and Archives Canada.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.



controlled by President Park, blaming it for the delay of the ratification process was hardly a persuasive argument.

Within a month, Canada sent South Korea a first draft of the ROK-Canada Nuclear Cooperation Agreement (NCA), which was a pre-condition for any commercial nuclear contract to be signed between the two countries. This draft comprised of seven articles relating to safeguards on nuclear-related information, material, equipment, and facilities transferred from Canada.<sup>40</sup> The ROK government—mainly the Ministry of Science and Technology (MOST) and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA)—worked to revise the Canadian draft. On February 5, 1974, the ROK Atomic Energy Commission (AEC) accepted the revised draft as the final version to be negotiated with Canada.<sup>41</sup> As South Korea's top decision-making organization on atomic energy-related issues, the AEC reported directly to the President. Its approval indicates that President Park supported the nuclear reactor deal with Canada.

Finalizing the NCA draft occupied an additional two months.<sup>42</sup> By April 1974, the negotiations produced a revised version of the ROK-Canada NCA which was not significantly different from the original one.<sup>43</sup> It is notable that Ottawa appeared to be more eager to go forward than Seoul in this early phase of the negotiation—when the MOFA explained the causes

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<sup>40</sup> Letter from Campbell to Choi, August 27, 1973, 4/J-06-0102/741.61CN, ROK Diplomatic Archives; Memorandum attached by the Agreement between the Government of Canada and the Government of the Republic of Korea for Cooperation in the Peaceful Uses of Atomic Energy from Canadian Embassy Seoul to Economic Research Division (MOFA), December 12, 1973, 4/J-06-0102/741.61CN, ROK Diplomatic Archives.

<sup>41</sup> Memorandum from MOST to MOFA, March 30, 1974, 4/J-06-0102/741.61CN, ROK Diplomatic Archives.

<sup>42</sup> Memorandum from Bureau of International Economy (MOFA) to Bureau of International Relations (MOFA), April 18, 1974, 4/J-06-0102/741.61CN, ROK Diplomatic Archives.

<sup>43</sup> Memorandum from MOST to MOFA, December 19, 1973; Memorandum from Bureau of International Relations (MOFA) to Bureau of International Economy (MOFA), January 7, 1974, 4/J-06-0102/741.61CN, ROK Diplomatic Archives.

of delay, the Canadian negotiators requested them to conclude the NCA as promptly as possible.<sup>44</sup>

By early May 1974, the ROK-Canada negotiations were almost complete. When the MOFA submitted the revised draft of the NCA to the Canadian Embassy on May 7, the latter estimated it would take roughly one week to receive a reply from Ottawa.<sup>45</sup> At this stage, both parties appeared to be waiting only for signatures. On May 18, however, the situation suddenly changed. India's unexpected test of a nuclear device using plutonium produced by a Canadian-origin heavy-water reactor complicated the entire nuclear deal between South Korea and Canada.

Progress on the reactor deal began to unravel in the weeks following India's test, though not immediately. On May 23, the Canadian Embassy in Seoul informed the MOFA that Ottawa agreed on the revised NCA draft and wanted to sign it at the earliest possible.<sup>46</sup> As late as May 29, both parties still discussed and agreed to allow the ROK-Canada nuclear cooperation agreement to come into force.<sup>47</sup> This agreement even came after a visit on May 27 by Canadian Ambassador John Alexander Stiles to the Korean Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs. In his visit, Stiles explained Canada's concern about the Indian test as well as the official position of the Canadian government. Disturbed by India's detonation of a nuclear device, the Canadian government suspended all nuclear assistance to India.<sup>48</sup> Despite the embarrassment of its

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<sup>44</sup> Transcript of Telephone Conversation, Geon-Yi Seo, Desk Officer in Division of Economic Investigation (MOFA) with D. Gordon Longmuir, First Secretary, Canadian Embassy Seoul, April 23, 1974, 4/J-06-0102/741.61CN, ROK Diplomatic Archives.

<sup>45</sup> Summary of Meeting, Kyung-chul Kim, Director for International Investigation (MOFA) and Seo with Longmuir, May 7, 1974, 4/J-06-0102/741.61CN, ROK Diplomatic Archives.

<sup>46</sup> Transcript of Telephone Conversation, Seo with Longmuir, May 23, 1974, 4/J-06-0102/741.61CN, ROK Diplomatic Archives.

<sup>47</sup> Transcript of Telephone Conversation, Seo with Longmuir, May 29, 1974, 4/J-06-0102/741.61CN, ROK Diplomatic Archives.

<sup>48</sup> Aide-mémoire from Canadian Embassy Seoul to MOFA, "Text of a Statement by the Secretary of State for External Affairs of Canada regarding the Explosion by India of a Nuclear Device," May 22, 1974, 4/J-06-0102/741.61CN, ROK Diplomatic Archives.

unintended involvement in India's nuclear weapons program, it appeared that the Canadian government still sought to conclude the nuclear cooperation agreement with Korea as originally planned, at least until the end of May 1974.

Yet Ottawa soon revised its position. After confirming that Canadian-origin technology had enabled India's nuclear weapons program, the Canadian government took action to prevent similar occurrences in the future. On June 10, Ambassador Stiles presented the MOFA with new, strict amendments to the NCA reflecting Canadian concerns about the possibility that reprocessed materials could be used in any future nuclear test, as India had just done. The amendment was intended to make it legally certain that South Korea could not use plutonium reprocessed from spent nuclear fuel produced in Canadian heavy water reactors to develop nuclear weapons.<sup>49</sup> Furthermore, Stiles mentioned informally that it would become difficult for Canada to conclude the NCA and to grant South Korea loans for nuclear reactors—for an estimated amount of 570 million Canadian dollars—if Korea did not accept the amendments.<sup>50</sup>

This amendment led to considerable debate within the ROK government. At first, the MOFA and the MOST quickly reached consensus that they were not in a position to reject the Canadian demands.<sup>51</sup> Yet on June 24, the Korea Atomic Energy Research Institute (KAERI) requested that the MOST delete the newly added phrase to the NCA prohibiting “all subsequent generation of nuclear material” to be used by South Korea. They found the new demand from Canada unprecedented and argued that nuclear facilities in South Korea were already under the

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<sup>49</sup> Summary of Meeting (with Canadian Aide-mémoire attached), Dong-won Shin, Director-general for International Economy (MOFA) with Stiles, June 10, 1974, 4/J-06-0102/741.61CN, ROK Diplomatic Archives.

<sup>50</sup> Summary of Negotiation, Bureau of International Economy (MOFA), July 13, 1974, 4/J-06-0102/741.61CN, ROKDA. See more details about the Canadian loan to Korea in Briefing for the Interdepartmental Meeting, Bureau of International Economy (MOFA), January 23, 1975, 5/J-06-0102/741.61CN, ROK Diplomatic Archives.

<sup>51</sup> Summary of Meeting, Kim, Director for Economic Investigation (MOFA) with Sung-chul Kim, Director for Planning, Bureau of Nuclear Energy (MOST), June 12, 1974, 4/J-06-0102/741.61CN, ROK Diplomatic Archives.

safeguards of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). They also suggested that facilities and equipment for research programs be excluded from the NCA, at least, if their government had no other option but to agree to the amendments.<sup>52</sup> Facing opposition from the KAERI, the MOST changed its position as well, and requested that the MOFA negotiate with Canada based on the original version of the NCA which predated the Indian test.<sup>53</sup>

Despite the disagreement, the MOFA continued to insist on accepting Canadian amendments as is—they regarded the acceptance of the amendments as being inevitable in order to conclude the NCA, secure the loan, and import the CANDU reactor as early as possible.<sup>54</sup> To ease the tension with the KAERI on the amendments, the MOFA tried to alleviate the KAERI's concern about the reprocessing of nuclear materials, which would be restricted under the NCA. In what would turn out to be wishful thinking, they argued that reprocessing for peaceful purposes would not be impossible, pursuant to Article IV (2b), if both parties agreed on it in writing at a later point.<sup>55</sup>

By the beginning of July, the MOST and the KAERI had come to accept the stricter Canadian amendments to the NCA. This came after the MOFA argued that Canada was only trying to clarify the concepts already contained in the previous draft of the NCA and was also demanding that other countries accept the same new amendments.<sup>56</sup> The MOFA was working to

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<sup>52</sup> Memorandum from KAERI to MOST, June 24, 1974, 4/J-06-0102/741.61CN, ROK Diplomatic Archives. The KAERI, affiliated with the Office of Atomic Energy which was under direction of the President, was a government body in charge of the practical work needed for the nuclear deal with Canada. This included constructing a CANDU reactor.

<sup>53</sup> Memorandum from MOST to MOFA, June 25, 1974, 4/J-06-0102/741.61CN, ROK Diplomatic Archives.

<sup>54</sup> Report from Bureau of International Economy (MOFA) to Foreign Minister, June 27, and July 6, 1974, 4/J-06-0102/741.61CN, ROK Diplomatic Archives.

<sup>55</sup> Summary of Meeting, Dong-hui Kim, Deputy Minister of Economy (MOFA) with Jin-hyu Kim (KAERI), June 29, 1974, 4/J-06-0102/741.61CN, ROK Diplomatic Archives.

<sup>56</sup> Transcript of Telephone Conversation, Kim, Director for Economic Investigation (MOFA) with Ki-won Kyung, (former) desk officer in the Division of Economic Cooperation (MOST), July 1, 1974, 4/J-06-0102/741.61CN, ROK Diplomatic Archives; Transcript of Telephone Conversation, Kim, Director for Economic Investigation (MOFA) with Kim (KAERI), July 6, 1974; Summary of Meeting, Kim, Director for Economic Investigation (MOFA) with

complete the negotiation by the end of July.<sup>57</sup> Despite articles in the *New York Times* and *Washington Post* on July 5 and 8 which characterized South Korea as a potential nuclear proliferator, prospects for the NCA appeared to be favorable as the ROK Cabinet immediately approved the Agreement on July 19.<sup>58</sup>

By August, however, the concerns about South Korean intentions being raised in the Western media contributed to a negotiating stalemate. The Canadian media started to criticize their government's nuclear deal with President Park who, they asserted, wanted to develop nuclear weapons to deter a North Korean military attack. In addition, they raised the issue of South Korea's non-ratification of the NPT.<sup>59</sup> This growing suspicion from Canada was further exacerbated by the ambiguous remarks of South Korea's Defense Minister at the National Assembly that his ministry was developing "new weapons." The MOFA later explained to Canada that the "new weapons" meant conventional ones which South Korea had been considering to develop or import.<sup>60</sup> While denying any allegation related to its nuclear weapons program, South Korea remained eager to conclude the NCA.

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Director for Planning (MOST), July 11, 1974, 4/J-06-0102/741.61CN, ROK Diplomatic Archives. Why MOST and KAERI changed their position at the time is still unclear. A phone conversation between Kim and Kyung on July 1 gave the impression that Kyung was pretending that MOST had not tried to oppose the MOFA before. One hypothesis is that a higher authority might have intervened to resolve this disagreement between MOST and MOFA.<sup>57</sup> Summary of Meeting, June 10, 1974; Summary of Meeting, July 11, 1974.

<sup>58</sup> Report, "The ROK-Canada NCA Negotiation," Bureau of International Economy (MOFA), July 13, 1974, 4/J-06-0102/741.61CN, ROK Diplomatic Archives; Agenda, "The 55<sup>TH</sup> Cabinet Meeting: the ROK-Canada NCA Negotiation," Minister (MOFA) to Chairperson of the Cabinet Meeting (i.e. President), July 18, 1974, 4/J-06-0102/741.61CN, ROK Diplomatic Archives; Memorandum from Division of Treaty (MOFA) to President, July 19, 1974, 4/J-06-0102/741.61CN, ROK Diplomatic Archives.

<sup>59</sup> *Ottawa Journal*, August 1, 1974, cited in Telegram CNW-0808 from Korean Embassy Ottawa to MOFA, August 3, 1974, 4/J-06-0102/741.61CN, ROK Diplomatic Archives.

<sup>60</sup> When a Congressman questioned him at the National Assembly as to whether he had any intent to develop "new weapons including nuclear ones" for the permanent security of South Korea, the Defense Minister replied that his ministry was developing "new weapons." Telegram WCN-0819 from MOFA to ROK Embassy Ottawa August 8, 1974, 4/J-06-0102/741.61CN, ROK Diplomatic Archives.

By contrast, the Canadian government became more careful with the increasingly negative domestic opinion towards exporting nuclear technologies, and refused to confirm when the Cabinet would deliberate on the ROK-Canada NCA. On August 3, the Canadian Embassy predicted that the domestic process for approving the NCA in Ottawa would be completed by August 8. However, Canadian officials changed their positions on August 7 and began saying that they could not receive the cabinet's approval because no regular meetings could be convened during the holiday season.<sup>61</sup> During this period, the ROK government regarded the stalemate as a result of the hostile domestic circumstances in Canada.<sup>62</sup>

Canada's suspicions of South Korea's nuclear energy program culminated in the fall of 1974. According to a nuclear policy review submitted to the cabinet on November 13, Canada was concerned about the possibility that South Korea's current plans for developing nuclear infrastructure could be redirected to support a military nuclear program. Acknowledging the risk that a Canadian nuclear reactor could be repurposed for military uses, the review further went on to recommend that Canada consider terminating the nuclear reactor negotiations with South Korea.

[...] The ROK's acquisition of the technology, facilities and fuel for a nuclear weapons programme would be materially assisted through the provision of Canadian nuclear reactors to the ROK. Elements within the ROK government may actually be pressing for the construction of

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<sup>61</sup> Transcript of Telephone Conversation, Kim, Director for Economic Investigation (MOFA) with Longmuir, August 3, 1974, 4/J-06-0102/741.61CN, ROK Diplomatic Archives; Telegram CNW-8012 from ROK Embassy Ottawa to MOFA, August 7, 1974, 4/J-06-0102/741.61CN, ROK Diplomatic Archives; Transcript of Telephone Conversation, Kim, Assistant Minister for Economy (MOFA) with Longmuir, August 27, 1974, 4/J-06-0102/741.61CN, ROK Diplomatic Archives; Telegram CNW-0856 from ROK Embassy Ottawa to MOFA, August 28, 1974, 4/J-06-0102/741.61CN, ROK Diplomatic Archives; Telegram CNW-1010 from ROK Embassy Ottawa to MOFA, October 12, 1974, 4/J-06-0102/741.61CN, ROK Diplomatic Archives; Transcript of Telephone Conversation, Director for Economic Cooperation (MOFA) with Canadian Embassy Seoul, November 1, 1974, 4/J-06-0102/741.61CN, ROK Diplomatic Archives.

<sup>62</sup> Transcript of Telephone Conversation, Kim, Assistant Minister of Economy (MOFA) with Nam-shik Han, Director for the Overseas Information Center, November 12, 1974, 4/J-06-0102/741.61CN, ROK Diplomatic Archives.

the infrastructure required for a nuclear weapons programme in order to obtain an early nuclear weapons option. [...] The risks of a Canadian heavy water reactor and associated technology contributing to nuclear weapons proliferation is sufficiently great that *consideration should be given to instructing AECL to terminate its negotiations with Korea* (despite the political embarrassment this may cause in terms of Canada's relations with Korea. [...])<sup>63</sup>

ROK Minister of Foreign Affairs Dong Jo Kim made an official visit to Canada precisely at this time of growing suspicions. In his November 15, 1974 meeting with Canadian Secretary of State for External Affairs, Allan MacEachen, Kim stressed that South Korea was under the US nuclear umbrella, and thus did not intend to independently acquire nuclear technology and equipment for military purposes. Noting that “Canada had been traumatized by India’s nuclear explosion,” MacEachen explained that Canada sought more stringent safeguards to exclude “any possibility of the use of Canadian equipment for an explosives programme.” In response, Kim ensured MacEachen that South Korea did not have any military nuclear ambition and would consider ratifying the NPT “if it were a pre-condition for the sale of a CANDU.”<sup>64</sup> The Canadian government recorded what Minister Kim had told MacEachen as follows:

The Canadian Government had requested some changes in the draft safeguards agreements, and the ROK had agreed without hesitation. The Minister said he knew the Canadian Government was also worried about the ROK’s ratification of the NPT. No one from the ROK’s area had ratified. However, if it were a pre-condition for the sale of a CANDU, the Minister said he “might” ask his government to ratify. South Korea had no intention of developing nuclear weapons. It had no time or energy to spare for such a purpose.<sup>65</sup>

This was the first time a top-level Korean official expressed South Korea’s intention to link NPT ratification to the CANDU reactor sale. What followed was an effort to induce South Korea to

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<sup>63</sup> Memorandum to Cabinet, November 13, 1974, File 646-74, Box 15, Vol.6451, RG2, Library and Archives Canada (emphasis added by author).

<sup>64</sup> Summary of Discussion between Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Korea, Mr. Dong Jo Kim, and Secretary of State for External Affairs, attached on Telegram 953 from Under-Secretary for External Affairs to Canadian Embassy Seoul, November 18, 1974, Folder: Political Affairs-Visits-ROK(3) 1974.11, Vol.9208 20-KOR-9, RG25, Library and Archives Canada.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

join the NPT with a combination of promises and threats. First, when discussing the sale of a Canadian nuclear reactor to Korea on December 12, 1974, the Canadian cabinet members were aware of and concerned about Korea's aspirations to develop nuclear weapons in the future. However, they also took into account the possibility of losing a nuclear reactor deal with Korea to the United States if they pushed Seoul too hard. In addition, some members of the cabinet raised the issue of the NPT's incomplete nature in assuring the NNWS's full compliance with the treaty's non-proliferation obligations. As a result, the cabinet only confirmed its original position to sell a nuclear power plant to Korea after the ROK-Canada NCA would be signed.<sup>66</sup>

A week later, though, the Canadian cabinet, which regarded the proposed sale of a nuclear power plant to Seoul as "too late to reverse," revised its previous decision by making Korea's ratification of the NPT a pre-condition for the deal. The Canadians agreed that the sale of a nuclear power plant to South Korea should be concluded once two conditions were fulfilled: "(a) conclusion of a satisfactory safeguards agreement; and (b) ratification by the Republic of Korea of the [NPT]." During the meeting, MacEachen did note that "Korea might be prepared to ratify" the treaty, of which he had been informed by his Korean counterpart a month before, and the cabinet agreed that "Canada should at least press the Korean authority to ratify the NPT."<sup>67</sup> On December 20, 1974, Donald S. MacDonald, Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources of Canada, delivered a speech in the House of Commons to announce "the decision of the government to require more stringent safeguards in respect of the sale abroad of Canadian

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<sup>66</sup> Cabinet Conclusions: Nuclear Policy, Privy Council Office, December 12, 1974, RG2, Series A-5-a, Volume 6436, Access Code: 90 (2/A-5-a/6436/60), Library and Archives Canada, accessed on July 22, 2016. <http://www.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/discover/politics-government/cabinet-conclusions/Pages/item.aspx?IdNumber=40004>.

<sup>67</sup> Cabinet Conclusions, "Sale of a Nuclear Power Plant to the Republic of Korea," Privy Council Office, December 19-20, 1974, 2/A-5-a/6436/60, Library and Archives Canada, accessed on July 21, 2016. <http://www.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/discover/politics-government/cabinet-conclusions/Pages/item.aspx?IdNumber=40050>.



nuclear technology, facilities and material.”<sup>68</sup> Having faced all these changes from Ottawa on the nuclear deal, Seoul also grew concerned about the possibility that the Canadian government would also demand additional stringent safeguards measures from them.<sup>69</sup>

### **Canada’s Ultimatum and South Korea’s Decision**

Following the cabinet decision, Canada sent South Korea a letter in the name of Secretary MacEachen on January 6, 1975. While informing South Korea of Canada’s decision to supply a CANDU reactor, MacEachen inquired once more about South Korea’s position on the NPT.<sup>70</sup> Two weeks later, Ambassador Stiles visited Minister Kim to follow-up on recent Canadian actions by submitting a new amendment to the NCA that indicated a somewhat ambiguous, but definitely tougher stance. During the meeting, Stiles made it clear that while the Cabinet decision had not touched upon the issue of supplying an NRX research reactor to South Korea, they were “willing to discuss” this offer once South Korea ratified the treaty. More ominously, for South Korea, he also conveyed a firm position from Ottawa that they would *reconsider the sale of the CANDU if South Korea refused to ratify the NPT*.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Statement by the Hon. Donald S. MacDonald Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources, December 20, 1974, attached to Telegram CNW-1243 from ROK Embassy Ottawa to MOFA, date unknown, 5/J-06-0102/741.61CN, ROK Diplomatic Archives.

<sup>69</sup> Telegram CNW-1243 from ROK Embassy Ottawa to MOFA, date unknown; Memorandum from Bureau of International Economy (MOFA) to Bureau of International Relations (MOFA), January 6, 1975, 5/J-06-0102/741.61CN, ROK Diplomatic Archives.

<sup>70</sup> Briefing for Interdepartmental Meeting, Bureau of International Economy (MOFA), January 23, 1975, 5/J-06-0102/741.61CN, ROK Diplomatic Archives.

<sup>71</sup> Summary of Meeting, Minister Kim with Ambassador Stiles, January 20, 1975, 5/J-06-0102/741.61CN, ROK Diplomatic Archives (emphasis added by author). The main points of difference in the new draft NCA proposed by Canada were as follows: “1) total reorganization and simplification of terms of agreement, 2) increased stress on safeguards and emphasis on development and application of atomic energy for peaceful purposes, 3) increased control by supplying country over material or nuclear material produced, reprocessed, enriched, fabricated, converted or stored in Korea, including future generations, 4) provision of sanctions should nuclear material be seen to be furthering a non-peaceful purpose and 5) signature and ratification required rather than simpler exchange of notes; exchange of instruments of ratification.”

Canada made it clear in January 1975 that the sale of the NRX reactor was not included in the Canadian cabinet's December 1974 decision to provide a CANDU reactor to South Korea.<sup>72</sup> Ambassador Stiles simply mentioned that Ottawa would be willing to discuss the NRX reactor sale with Seoul only after South Korea ratified the treaty.<sup>73</sup> However this was likely an empty promise, as the Canadian government would not have been in a position to formally make such a conditional offer for a less proliferation-resistant NRX reactor to South Korea in early 1975. According to Minister MacDonald's December 1974 speech, Canada was determined to "apply the maximum safeguards or restraints attainable to inhibit importing states from using nuclear supplies to further the production of nuclear explosive devices."<sup>74</sup> Against this backdrop, exporting another NRX reactor to a potential proliferator would have been seen as a lack of will in the Canadian government to keep its promise.

Presented with an increasingly stark offer by Canada, South Korea had little choice but to accept Canada's ultimatum—ratifying the NPT became necessary for Seoul to import Canadian heavy-water reactors at this critical stage of negotiations. With the military nuclear program still underway, access to plutonium derived from spent nuclear fuel irradiated in CANDU/NRX reactors was a necessity.<sup>75</sup> Failing to import the Canadian reactors would also derail Korea's parallel reprocessing deal with France.

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<sup>72</sup> Underlining US pressure on South Korea to ratify the NPT, in contrast, Hong argues that "as a package deal, Canada agreed to provide a 30,000-kilowatt NRX reactor—but on the condition that South Korea accept the US demand that it ratify the NPT. See Hong, "The search for deterrence," 492.

<sup>73</sup> Summary of Meeting, Kim with Stiles, January 20, 1975, 5/J-06-0102/741.61CN, ROK Diplomatic Archives.

<sup>74</sup> Statement by the Donald S. Macdonald, Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources, December 20, 1974, attached to Telegram CNW-1243 from ROK Embassy Ottawa to MOFA, December 31, 1974, 5/J-06-0102/741.61CN, ROK Diplomatic Archives.

<sup>75</sup> Gwang-mo Kim, "Park Chung-hee's Nuclear Development Policy: The Strong Challenge of a Top Secret Project" (in Korean), *Monthly Economy Talk* 209 (January 2017), accessed August 10, 2017, <http://www.economytalk.kr/news/articleView.html?idxno=142105>.

For the two months following Minister Kim's visit to Ottawa, the MOFA had been internally discussing ratification with other relevant ministries.<sup>76</sup> Yet when Canada eventually pushed South Korea again in January 1975, it appeared that South Korea could not finalize the negotiations unless they made a decision one way or the other: either accepting Canada's demand or abandoning the whole project of importing CANDU and NRX reactors. On January 20, immediately after the Canadian Ambassador's visit, a telegram was sent to the Korean Ambassador to Canada to inform him of the new amendment. The message noted that the government was considering requesting the National Assembly to ratify the treaty while simultaneously asking him to keep this fact secret for the time being.<sup>77</sup>

On January 23, an inter-ministerial meeting of high-level officials was held to discuss this Canadian demand under the chairmanship of the Minister of Trade and Industry.<sup>78</sup> Support for the deal was not unanimous—Ministry of Trade and Industry was doubtful of the economic benefits of taking loans from Canada to build nuclear reactors. On the other side, the Assistant Minister of Economy from the MOFA asserted that it was necessary to pursue this policy as planned since otherwise it could negatively affect the prospects of South Korea's cooperation with Canada. He argued that other countries might also become more suspicious about South Korea's nuclear energy policy. His opinion reflected the broader views of the MOFA, which deemed the ratification of the NPT inevitable and even desirable for various reasons related to

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid.; Summary of Meeting, Kim, Director for Economic Investigation (MOFA) with Longmuir, January 20, 1975, 5/J-06-0102/741.61CN, ROK Diplomatic Archives.

<sup>77</sup> Telegram WCN-0134 from MOFA to ROK Embassy Ottawa, January 20, 1975, 5/J-06-0102/741.61CN, ROK Diplomatic Archives.

<sup>78</sup> Participants included the following: Minister of Trade and Industry, Minister of Science and Technology, First Senior Secretary to the President for Economy, Deputy Minister for Administrative Management (Prime Minister's Office), Deputy Minister for Economy (MOFA), Deputy Minister for Economic Cooperation (Economic Planning Board), KAERI President, CEO of Korea Electronic Company.

the security, diplomatic, and economic environment of South Korea.<sup>79</sup> Finally, the participants in the meeting agreed to recommend President Park to push Canada for two heavy-water reactors (CANDU and NRX) in return for accepting Canada's major demand: ratifying the NPT. The three recommendations to the President resulting from the meeting were:

1. Two heavy-water reactors should be constructed with consideration given to the economic benefits, effective training, and employment of engineers.
2. If it is impossible to import two heavy-water reactors from Canada, the purchase of one reactor should be temporarily suspended. Instead, the government should call for international bids on nuclear reactors of all types at the earliest possible time. Heavy-water reactors should not be included in these bids since the market is dominated by only one producer.
3. Necessary measures should be taken to ratify the NPT and to conclude the NCA with Canada regardless of carrying forward the construction project of heavy-water reactors.<sup>80</sup>

The second recommendation indicates that South Korea was still eager to import an NRX reactor together with a CANDU. In contrast, Canada was becoming less willing to sell NRX reactors following India's nuclear test using plutonium extracted from the Canadian CIRUS (NRX) reactor. Moreover, the idea of calling for international bids on nuclear reactors was not necessarily realistic considering the state of the nuclear power industry in the 1970s. At that time, there existed only a limited number of suppliers capable of exporting their technology and equipment and reactor sales were heavily influenced by secret, bilateral negotiations between governments or between governments and companies.

The recommendation to exclude heavy-water reactors in the bids was not very credible either. Presumably, South Korea might have wanted to use it as a bargaining chip against Canada

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<sup>79</sup> Briefing for Interdepartmental Meeting, Bureau of International Economy (MOFA), January 23, 1975, 5/J-06-0102/741.61CN, ROK Diplomatic Archives.

<sup>80</sup> Report on Interdepartmental Meeting, Bureau of International Economy (MOFA) to Bureau of International Relations (MOFA), February 6, 1975 (translated from Korean to English by author), 5/J-06-0102/741.61CN, ROK Diplomatic Archives. "One producer" dominating the market of heavy water reactors in the second recommendation means Canada.

by leaking this position in advance if Canada remained steadfast in its cautious policy not to provide NRX reactors to potential proliferators. However, if this recommendation had been implemented and then Canada had subsequently abandoned its negotiations with Seoul, it would have ironically led South Korea to be more dependent on the US-offered light water reactors. Nonetheless, it is notable that all top-level Korean officials who attended the inter-ministerial meeting on January 23 managed to agree on the necessity of ratifying the NPT in order to continue the nuclear negotiations with Canada.

These three recommendations were approved by Prime Minister Jong-pil Kim within a month, and then submitted to President Park for his consideration.<sup>81</sup> On March 7, Park finally approved “submitting [the ratification of the NPT to the] special session of [the] National Assembly convening [on] March [11],” and on the following day, the ROK Vice Foreign Minister Lho informed US Ambassador Sneider of Park’s decision, detailing the ratification process at the National Assembly.<sup>82</sup> Promulgated in 1972, the *Yushin* Constitution enabled President Park to wield absolute power, ruling “without constraints in the absence of legislative and judicial checks-and-balances” and with a de facto life-long presidency bestowed on him.<sup>83</sup> He directly appointed a third of congressmen, and many others were also from the ruling Democratic Republican Party. This non-democratic parliamentary system controlled by President Park under the *Yushin* regime facilitated a rapid ratification process in the National Assembly without any substantial debates or deliberations over the treaty. Thus, once the green light had been given by the President, the treaty was promptly ratified by the National Assembly on March

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<sup>81</sup> Transcript of Telephone Conversation, Kim, Director for Economic Investigation (MOFA) with Sohn, Director for Electrical Power (Ministry of Trade and Industry), February 20, 1975, 5/J-06-0102/741.61CN, ROK Diplomatic Archives.

<sup>82</sup> Telegram 01529 from US Embassy Seoul to State Department, March 08, 1975, US NARA AAD.

<sup>83</sup> Hyug Baeg Im, “The Origins of the *Yushin* Regime: Machiavelli Unveiled,” in *The Park Chung Hee Era*, 233.

19. The instrument of ratification was then deposited to the United States, one of the three depository states, on April 23, 1975.

### **Washington's Limited Role**

US archival sources acknowledge that US pressure was not a very critical factor in South Korea's decision on the NPT. Some literature argues that the US government persuaded other nuclear suppliers such as Canada and France to press South Korea to ratify the treaty.<sup>84</sup> However, the Canadian effort was not motivated or led by US pressure. Rather, domestic and international pressure to strengthen Canada's nuclear safeguards following India's 1974 nuclear test influenced the Canadian government's decision. Canadian Secretary of State MacEachen held his own clear view that South Korea ratified the NPT under Canadian pressure by stating "[t]he Republic of Korea, *certainly at our suggestion or at our urging*, undertook to ratify the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty" at the Canadian House of Commons in December 1975.<sup>85</sup>

The Canadian government was not an intermediary pushing South Korea on behalf of the United States, but it did share relevant information with its neighbor. For instance, Canadian Ambassador Stiles informed US Ambassador Richard Sneider on November 4, 1974 that negotiations on the reactor sale with Seoul were nearly finished and awaited only final approval by the Canadian cabinet. Stiles also commented that the interest of Korean high-level officials in acquiring heavy-water reactors was "clearly evident" while notifying Sneider of ROK Foreign Minister's planned visit to Ottawa.<sup>86</sup> In December 1974, Stiles followed up with Sneider on Minister Kim's November 15 statement in Ottawa.<sup>87</sup> The United States was obviously aware that

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<sup>84</sup> Hong, "The Search for Deterrence," 499.

<sup>85</sup> House of Commons, "Minutes of Proceedings and Evidence of the Standing Committee on External Affairs and National Defence," Issue 32, December 2, 1975, Library and Archives Canada (emphasis added by author).

<sup>86</sup> Telegram 7328 from US Embassy Seoul to State Department, November 4, 1974, US NARA AAD.

<sup>87</sup> Telegram 08516 from US Embassy Seoul to State Department, December 23, 1974, US NARA AAD.

Ottawa had been working for South Korea's ratification of the NPT, but was not pressuring their Canadian ally to make the CANDU sale contingent on NPT ratification. In fact, the US Embassy in Ottawa lacked a clear information on Canada's position on the negotiations with Seoul even until early January; according to the embassy's telegram to Washington, the US diplomats knew that Canada was urging South Korea to ratify the treaty, but did not regard it as a condition for the CANDU sale.<sup>88</sup>

On January 24, 1975, the Canadian Embassy in Washington DC directly contacted the US State Department, informing that "[the] Canadian government had suggested to [the] ROK at very high level that [the] ROK ratify [the] NPT as a measure to assure [the] world community and [its] neighbors of the peaceful nature of its nuclear intentions." Canada was also interested in being informed about whether the US government had been also pressing South Korea on the same issue. A conversation between US and Canadian diplomats on January 24 clearly reveals the US position on South Korea's NPT ratification at that time: no rigid or specific pressure on the ROK government. The State Department replied to the Canadian Embassy as follows:

USG has consistently taken line that it hoped for widest possible adherence to NPT by all countries, including [the] ROK, and that this has been made plain to [the] ROK officials on a number of occasions over the past year or two. Question of nuclear safeguards has been under increased consideration in past several months on [a] world wide basis, but we have taken *no specific actions to make [the] NPT ratification a condition of any of our dealings with the ROK.*<sup>89</sup>

In late February 1975, Canada informed the United States of the ROK government's decision. According to a telegram sent by the US Embassy in Seoul to Washington, Canadian First Secretary Longmuir notified US Deputy Chief of Mission in Seoul on February 26 that the ROK

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<sup>88</sup> Telegram 0037 from US Embassy Ottawa to State Department, January 7, 1975, US NARA AAD.

<sup>89</sup> Telegram 016913 from State Department to US Embassy Seoul, January 24, 1975, US NARA AAD (emphasis added by author).

government made a decision to ratify the NPT adding the significant effect of “Canadian pressure in connection with CANDU reactor sale.” Longmuir mentioned that he had received this information from a ROK official “on a confidential basis that morning.”<sup>90</sup>

This paper does not intend to argue that the US government was never interested in having South Korea ratify the NPT before 1975. The US Embassy in Seoul would sometimes inquire the MOFA about South Korea’s plan to ratify the treaty as an effort to facilitate the universalization of the nuclear non-proliferation regime.<sup>91</sup> Contrary to conventional wisdom, however, the United States did not utilize specific diplomatic pressure on South Korea towards NPT ratification until late February 1975. Only from late February onward did Washington begin prioritizing South Korea’s ratification of the NPT. According to the State Department’s February 28 telegram to Seoul, Washington was “actively considering” a policy option to “press the ROK to ratify the NPT.” In this telegram, the State Department also added the fact that “the Canadians [had been] already pressing the ROK to do so.”<sup>92</sup> The timing of this communication is important—at the same time that the US State Department was weighing a policy of pressuring South Korea on ratification, the ROK government had already reached consensus on ratifying the treaty up to the level of the Prime Minister.

Eventually on March 4, State Secretary Henry Kissinger “instructed the embassy to press Korea to ratify NPT and to improve surveillance of nuclear facilities and technologies of south

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<sup>90</sup> Telegram 1239 from US Embassy Seoul to State Department, February 26, 1975, US NARA AAD.

<sup>91</sup> For instance, see Telegram 04957 from US Embassy Seoul to State Department, July 30, 1974, US NARA AAD. On February 26, 1975, Ambassador Sneider once again urged Korea to ratify the NPT when calling on Acting Foreign Minister. This demarche was made by the US State Department’s instruction (telegram 37797, not available on NARA AAD) which was not only targeted at South Korea but also at many other non-States Parties to the NPT. Telegram 01239 from US Embassy Seoul to State Department, February 26, 1975, US NARA AAD.

<sup>92</sup> Memorandum from F. R. Smyser and David D. Elliot to Kissinger, “Development of U.S. Policy toward South Korean Development of Nuclear Weapons,” February 28, 1975; Memorandum for George S. Springsteen (State Department), “ROK Weapons Plans,” US National Security Council, March 3, 1975, Folder 4, Box 9, National Security Advisor Presidential Country Files for East Asia and the Pacific, Gerald Ford Presidential Library.



Korea” while assessing “that South Korea could develop limited nuclear weapons and missile capability within ten years.” The US Embassy in Seoul, however, believed that South Korea’s nuclear capability could be more advanced than what Washington had estimated and argued that South Korea would “be able to develop nuclear weapons in less than ten years in light of technical skills.”<sup>93</sup> There still exists a possibility that Ambassador Sneider met and pressed President Park immediately after he received this instruction from Kissinger, but there is no evidence of any meeting between them or its impact on Park’s decision.

Furthermore, the fact that President Park approved ratification of the NPT on March 7 contradicts existing arguments that the March 10 joint Congressional resolution—which called on the EX-IM Bank to defer its approval of loans for constructing a second US-supplied nuclear reactor—played a key role in persuading South Korea to ratify the NPT. Arguments emphasizing the influence of the joint Congressional resolution cannot convincingly demonstrate that the US government used this joint resolution as a way to press Seoul to ratify the NPT. First, this argument has a factual flaw. Some scholars reiterated that the resolution passed on March 10, 1975.<sup>94</sup> In fact, a Senate resolution was not passed, but only introduced on March 7, 1975, while a House resolution was introduced three days later.<sup>95</sup> Introducing resolutions to Congressional committees does not carry the same weight as passing them.

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<sup>93</sup> Kim, “Pursuits of Nuclear Weapons in South Korea,” 59, 77. Kim’s explanations are based on two telegrams apparently only available on the form of microfilm at NARA. See Telegram 048673 from State Department to US Embassy Seoul, “ROK Plans to Develop Nuclear Weapons and Missiles,” March 4, 1975, NFL MR Case No. 94-146, #49, NARA; Telegram (number unknown) from US Embassy Seoul to State Department, “ROK Plans to Develop Nuclear Weapons and Missiles,” March 12, 1975, NFL MR Case No. 94-146, #28, NARA. The March 4 telegram was approved by the National Security Council on February 28, 1975, which means that US position on pressing South Korea to ratify the NPT had been almost decided in late February. See Memorandum from Smyser and Elliot to Kissinger, February 28, 1975, Ford Presidential Library.

<sup>94</sup> See footnote #10.

<sup>95</sup> S.J.RES.51, 94<sup>th</sup> Congress 1<sup>st</sup> Session, introduced by Congressman Adlai E. Stevenson on March 7, 1975 and then referred to the Senate Committee on Banking, Housing and Urban Affairs, US Library of Congress; H.J.RES.298, 94<sup>th</sup> Congress 1<sup>st</sup> Session, introduced by Congressman Thomas N. Rees on March 10, 1975 and then referred to the House Committee on Banking, Currency and Housing, US Library of Congress.

The order of these events is also important: the MOFA informed the US Embassy in Seoul of President Park's decision to ratify the NPT on the morning of March 8 (Korean Time). Even though the resolution was introduced to the Senate on March 7 (US Eastern Time), the tight gap in time between the introduction of the resolution and the ROK's notification, as well as the time difference between Seoul and Washington DC (Seoul is fourteen hours ahead) make it hard to argue that Park's decision was in reaction to Congressional action in the US Senate.<sup>96</sup>

Some could argue that Park's decision was spurred by the move of the US Congress toward more cautious positions on US civilian nuclear trade with South Korea. Yet shifting opinions in Congress does not equate to overt economic pressure from Washington to ratify the NPT. As explained, the ROK government reached consensus on NPT ratification up to the level of the Prime Minister during February 1975, regardless of any US Congressional pressure.

In fact, when Lho met Sneider on March 8, they agreed to inform the EX-IM Bank and the Senate Banking Committee of the ROK government's plan to ratify the treaty "in the very near future."<sup>97</sup> This agreement was a response to the March 7 telegram from the State Department regarding the EX-IM Bank's obligation to notify the Congress of its approval of loans to Kori-II nuclear plant. During preparation, the EX-IM Bank received a number of questions from the Senate Banking Committee. Among those questions, two questions were whether South Korea had nuclear fuel production or reprocessing capability and whether the fact that South Korea had not yet ratified the NPT would affect the bank's decision. The telegram noted that "EXIM approval of loan [did] not depend on NPT ratification," but "[i]t would be highly desirable if EXIM were able to reply to [the] Committee that Koreans ha[d] stated their

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<sup>96</sup> Telegram 01529 from US Embassy Seoul to State Department, March 8, 1975, US NARA AAD.

<sup>97</sup> Telegram 1529 from U.S. Embassy Seoul to State Department, March 8, 1975, AAD-NARA.

intention to ratify the NPT in [the] near future.”<sup>98</sup> If the State Department had used the EX-IM loan as an economic stick to push for Korea’s NPT ratification before March 1975, it would have been unnecessary to send such a telegram at that specific moment. The two governments had been aware that Korea’s ratification of the NPT would make it easier to deal with possible opposition from the US Congress or public about US assistance for South Korea’s nuclear energy projects. However, no specific evidence has surfaced revealing that the EX-IM loan issue was proactively employed to entice Seoul’s assent to ratify the non-proliferation treaty.

In addition, the joint US Congressional resolution was not specifically targeted on South Korea from its inception. Following the Indian nuclear test in May 1974, the US Congress became increasingly concerned about the spread of nuclear weapons, and thus they requested the President in 1974 to submit two reports by April 1975. The first of these reports was a review of all US laws and regulations governing the export of nuclear materials and data in order to determine their adequacy to prevent nuclear proliferation. The second was to review domestic and international safeguards for the same purpose. The loan for the second US reactor in Korea was the first EX-IM Bank loan for such a project which had been submitted to Congress under the new review procedures and thus the first to receive this degree of scrutiny.<sup>99</sup>

Some members of the US Congress felt that no such loan should be approved until they finished reviewing the two reports. Therefore, the reactor loan for Korea received Congressional attention in this context, not solely because of South Korea’s military nuclear aspirations. Senator Adlai E. Stevenson introduced his resolution urging for a temporary deferral—not prohibition—of the proposed EX-IM Bank transaction. The EX-IM Bank and the State Department still wanted to offer this loan to South Korea, yet the EX-IM Bank decided to

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<sup>98</sup> Telegram 051380 from State Department to US Embassy Seoul, March 7, 1975, US NARA AAD.

<sup>99</sup> Telegram 055955 from State Department to US Embassy Seoul, March 12, 1975, US NARA AAD.

temporarily withdraw its plan to request the Congressional approval of the loan in order to avoid hearings and action which might prejudice the EX-IM Bank's ability to gain an eventual Congressional approval.<sup>100</sup>

The US government's ambivalent policy towards nuclear non-proliferation before 1975 also explains why Washington was not actively pushing for Seoul to ratify the NPT. Despite the Nixon administration's achievements in enhancing arms control mechanisms through the landmark Antiballistic Missile Treaty (ABM) and the Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty (SALT), nuclear non-proliferation was assigned a low priority by President Nixon and his national security advisor, Henry Kissinger. The Kennedy and Johnson administrations' enthusiasm for tackling vertical and horizontal nuclear proliferation paved the way for the NPT, but this enthusiasm was not inherited by their successor, Nixon, who believed in the significant role of nuclear superiority in international politics.<sup>101</sup> Not only did Nixon oppose the NPT during his presidential campaign, but also he intended to "downplay its importance" when the treaty was sent to the Senate for ratification in 1969.<sup>102</sup> Nixon directed that "there should be no efforts by the US Government to pressure other nations, in particular the Federal Republic of Germany," to sign or ratify the NPT. While ordering to maintain "a tone of optimism" about the future of the NPT in public, he also directed that the US government should dissociate itself "from any plan to bring pressure to these countries to sign or ratify."<sup>103</sup> The fact that Washington did not press Seoul to ratify the NPT immediately after the latter signed it in 1968 can therefore be explained

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<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

<sup>101</sup> Francis J. Gavin, "Nuclear Nixon: Ironies, Puzzles, and the Triumph of Realpolitik," in *Nixon in the World: American Foreign Relations, 1969–1977*, ed. Fredrik Logevall and Andrew Preston (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 127.

<sup>102</sup> Gavin, *Nuclear Statecraft*, 117.

<sup>103</sup> National Security Decision Memorandum (NSDM) No.6, February 5, 1969, Richard Nixon Presidential Library, accessed May 31, 2016, [https://www.nixonlibrary.gov/virtuallibrary/documents/nsdm/nsdm\\_006.pdf](https://www.nixonlibrary.gov/virtuallibrary/documents/nsdm/nsdm_006.pdf).

by the Nixon administration's half-hearted attitudes toward the treaty during that same period. This position continued nearly until Nixon left the White House in August 1974.

Moreover, the chronological sequence is central to identifying when the US government began treating South Korea's nuclear aspirations seriously. It is not precisely known when Washington became suspicious on Seoul's nuclear intentions, but by mid-1974 the US Embassy in Seoul was expressing doubts about South Korea's nuclear desires and expected the ROK government would continue to delay ratification:

We have visceral feeling, based only on growing independence of [the] ROK attitudes toward defense matters and increasing doubts about durability of U.S. commitments, that most senior ROK defense planners desire to obtain capability eventually to produce nuclear weapons. In the meantime it probably [*sic*] that ROKG will continue to justify failure [*sic*] [r]atify on grounds it contrary [*sic*] to ROK national interest to do so until Japan and other neighboring Northeast Asian states have ratified.<sup>104</sup>

It was on December 2, 1974, however, when the embassy first confirmed that South Korea had made its decision "to launch initial stages of nuclear weapons development program" even though it was "still in rudimentary stage and lacking a number of critical items such as fuel re-processing and plutonium."<sup>105</sup> There exists a possibility that Washington may have received undocumented rumors or intelligence about Park's nuclear weapons program earlier than the US Embassy's December 1974 telegram. However, available US documents indicate that Washington started to take South Korea's military nuclear ambitions more seriously after this telegram arrived. On December 11, suspicions led to an inter-agency intelligence investigation of

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<sup>104</sup> Telegram 04957 from US Embassy Seoul to State Department, July 30, 1974, US NARA AAD.

<sup>105</sup> Telegram 8023 from US Embassy Seoul to State Department, December 2, 1974, Korea (4), Box 9, Ford Presidential Library. Hong stated in his article that a telegram dated on December 11, 1974 "reported South Korea's possible intention to develop nuclear weapons for the first time." See Hong, "The Search for Deterrence," 507. But this is not correct. The December 11 telegram was a reply from the State Department to the December 2 telegram sent by the US Embassy in Seoul which had already pointed out South Korea's nuclear weapons program.

South Korea's current and potential nuclear capability.<sup>106</sup> At the end of February 1975, the US government finally reached agreement that South Korea was in the initial stage of developing nuclear weapons.<sup>107</sup> This assessment was completed after South Korea resolved to ratify the NPT up to the Prime Minister level, which is another piece of evidence that South Korea did not ratify the NPT under specific US pressure.

## **Conclusion**

Declassified South Korean, Canadian, and US archival sources suggest that current explanations about the effect of US pressure on South Korea's decisions to join the NPT are inadequate. New documents show the ROK government began to take NPT ratification into serious consideration only when ongoing reactor sale negotiations with Canada were jeopardized. At the beginning of the negotiations, Canada was eager to conclude the NCA with South Korea in order to capture a new customer for their reactor designs. However, the Indian nuclear test triggered domestic and international pressures that led Canada to ask South Korea to ratify the NPT as a pre-condition to the reactor deal, bringing the negotiation to a stalemate.

Unable to withdraw from the negotiations at such a late stage without arousing suspicions, South Korea instead tried to turn the situation to its advantage. The ROK government tried to convince Canada to permit the purchase of two heavy-water reactors (CANDU and NRX) instead of the single reactor approved by the Canadian cabinet in exchange for the nonproliferation accomplishment the Canadian negotiators sought—South Korean ratification of

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<sup>106</sup> Telegram 271124 from Department of State to US Embassy Seoul, December 11, 1974, Korea - State Department Telegrams, to SecState - NODIS (2), Box 11, National Security Adviser Presidential Country Files for East Asia and the Pacific, Ford Presidential Library.

<sup>107</sup> Memorandum from Smyser and Elliott to Kissinger, February 28, 1975, Ford Presidential Library.

the NPT. Canada's "take it or leave it" offer, presented in January 1975, certainly influenced South Korea's decision to ratify the NPT.

The timing of ratification was clearly connected to South Korea's interest in securing nuclear cooperation with Canada. However, the ROK-Canada NCA was signed almost a year later, on January 26, 1976, rather than directly after Seoul ratified the NPT in March 1975. This delay stemmed principally from US and Canadian concerns about South Korea's continuing efforts to acquire reprocessing technology from France in 1975. These concerns further impeded progress in the ROK-Canada nuclear sale for about a year, but were finally resolved by South Korea's cancellation of its contract with France under strong pressure from the United States and Canada.<sup>108</sup>

The ROK-Canada nuclear cooperation agreement signed in 1976 was "the most stringent of all safeguards agreements to that time, containing several important conditions" including provisions for full-scope safeguards. Ottawa succeeded in ensuring that "all nuclear explosive devices, whether intended for peaceful uses or not, were strictly prohibited" and in requiring "prior consent for retransfers of all nuclear equipment, material, facilities, fuel, or technology." In addition, Canada's prior consent for the reprocessing of all generations of fuel was required by the agreement. This clause was added to prohibit any future attempt to extract plutonium from spent fuel produced in Canadian-origin reactors.<sup>109</sup> Having learned from its frustrating

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<sup>108</sup> The ROK-Canada negotiations on CANDU became closely interlinked with the ROK-France negotiations on nuclear reprocessing during the year of 1975. Focusing on the direct causes of South Korea's NPT ratification, however, this article does not intend to look into Korea's failed attempt to acquire French reprocessing technology. The US and Canadian pressure on the Park administration's negotiations with Paris will be an interesting research topic for the future.

<sup>109</sup> Bratt, *The Politics of CANDU Exports*, 130-1.

experience with India's unsafeguarded CIRUS reactor, Canada finally demonstrated its serious concern about nuclear proliferation and its ability to impose stronger safeguards on customers.<sup>110</sup>

This article demonstrated that arguments crediting US pressure for Seoul's decision to ratify the NPT are unsubstantiated, particularly those that credit Washington's unilateral leverage towards Seoul through its asymmetric alliance relationship. Rather than being completely dependent on the US government's instructions or guidance, the ROK government had more space to steer its position in the mid-1970s than has been originally described. This semi-autonomy for Korea was carved out within a favorable environment for nuclear customers generated by heightened competition in the nuclear market, as well as through the Nixon administration's indifference to nuclear proliferation. This article also uncovered evidence showing that South Korea did not consider abandoning its military nuclear option, even when it decided to ratify the NPT. Rather, South Korea attempted to make use of this decision to persuade Ottawa to sell them an NRX reactor, to no avail.


Thus, neither the effects of the NPT on preventing nuclear proliferation in its early life nor the role of the United States in strengthening the treaty regime should be overestimated. Potential proliferators did not join the NPT simply because of normative obligations to support nuclear non-proliferation, political calculations including pressure from other countries, or potential economic benefits. In the case of South Korea, the rationale behind the decision was more complicated. Korea's constrained but deliberate choice to join the treaty in March 1975 was prompted by its desire to acquire heavy water reactors in the face of stronger Canadian safeguards after the India's 1974 without completely abandoning its military nuclear ambitions.

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<sup>110</sup> However, Canada's nuclear non-proliferation policy after the Indian nuclear test was still inconsistent and often influenced by other external factors. For instance, Canada concluded a less stringent safeguards agreement with Argentina only several days after the ROK-Canada NCA was signed. See more details in Bratt, *The Politics of CANDU Exports*, 131-7.



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NPIHP is a global network of individuals and institutions engaged in the study of international nuclear history through archival documents, oral history interviews and other empirical sources. Recognizing that today's toughest nuclear challenges have deep roots in the past, NPIHP seeks to transcend the East vs. West paradigm to assemble an integrated international history of nuclear proliferation. NPIHP's research aims to fill in the blank and blurry pages of nuclear history in order to contribute to robust scholarship and effective policy decisions.

Within the Wilson Center, NPIHP is part of the History and Public Policy Program. NPIHP is co-directed by Christian Ostermann and Leopoldo Nuti, and coordinated by Evan Pikulski.

#### NUCLEAR PROLIFERATION INTERNATIONAL HISTORY PROJECT

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