Suspension of Nuclear Programs:
Enduring Korean Rivalry

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Abstract

This paper investigates whether or not enduring rivals adopting non-proliferation policies permanently abandon their nuclear weapons programs. The author’s argument is that enduring rivalry is better understood as fluctuating between increasing and decreasing tension phases; the fluctuation is determined by security threats and international status. Domestic factors such as regime type and economic conditions, however, have little influence on the rivalry fluctuation.

The paper also argues that enduring rivals’ nuclear proliferation and non-proliferation policies correspond to these different rivalry phases. Enduring rivals initiate nuclear weapons programs when the rivalry passes an increasing tension phase and suspend, rather than give up, the programs during the decreasing tension phases and as long as the rivalries are not terminated. Enduring rivals may give up their nuclear weapons programs only when the causes of rivalry cease to exist, such as South Africa. This argument is tested in the context of the Korean enduring rivalry, and it is found that both South and North Korea initiated or reactivated their nuclear weapons programs when their security threat perceptions were intensified, but suspended the program when their security threat perceptions were mitigated.

The results suggest that while it is not unreasonable to question the credibility of nuclear-capable enduring rivals’ non-proliferation policies, the non-proliferation regimes need to address security guarantees and/or regional security arrangements instead of focusing on legal and technical restrictions.
Introduction

Revisiting the nuclear weapons option available to some nuclear-capable states (such as Argentina, Brazil, South Africa, Belarus, Ukraine, South Korea, and Taiwan) has constituted a puzzle in nuclear proliferation literature. This article attempts to answer whether enduring rivals adopting non-proliferation policies have permanently abandoned their nuclear weapons programs, or have simply suspended them. This paper argues that a regional enduring rival may initiate a nuclear weapons program when the rivalry passes an increasing tension phase. However, an enduring rival may consider the suspension of its nuclear weapons program during the rivalry’s decreasing tension phases. Enduring rivals may suspend, rather than give up, their nuclear weapons programs—as long as the rivalries are not yet terminated.

Adherence to the NPT and acceptance of the IAEA safeguards do not certainly mean a state would give up its abandoned nuclear weapons program indefinitely. The cases of Iraq, Iran, South Korea, North Korea and Taiwan demonstrate that the abovementioned non-proliferation arrangements did not preclude these states from pursuing nuclear weapons capabilities.

The first part of this article proposes the theory that explains the phenomenon under question, and elaborates on the conceptions and dynamics of enduring rivalry. It also explicates on the causal link between enduring rivalry dynamics and the suspension of nuclear weapons programs and, finally, lays out the terminology this study employs.

The second part examines the Korean rivalry as a case study and investigates the initiation and the development of the two Koreas’ nuclear weapons programs within the framework of their enduring rivalry.

Enduring Rivalry: Conceptions and Dynamics

Enduring rivalry is defined as “a competition between the same pair of states resulted by well-entrenched causes and represented in severe and repeated conflicts over an extended period of time. It
involves six or more militarized disputes between the two states over a period of 20 years.”¹ Enduring rivalry participants perceive each other as the “principal opponent.”² In enduring rivalries, “competitions [are] over some stakes that are viewed as important.”³ The bulk of the literature on enduring rivalry focuses on its initiation and termination processes more than its development.⁴ The latter is mostly analyzed through the “volcano model”—enduring rivalries persist in an ever-increasing escalatory process.⁵ By so doing, these works fail to recognize that rivalries fluctuate along “increasing tension” and “decreasing tension” phases.

Stinnett and Diehl have identified six factors that influence enduring rivalry development.⁶ However, these factors were conceived as conditions that exist prior to the initiation of the rivalry; they may identify the initiation of a rivalry rather than the phases it passes through, throughout its development. Other scholars have introduced terms of “rivalry phases” or “rivalry patterns.”⁷ Goertz and Diehl proposed six

patterns of rivalry (increasing, flat, concave, convex, decreasing and wavy) and concluded that there is a Basic Rivalry Level (BRL) around which “periods of conflict and detente are ‘random’ variations.”8 Yet an operationalization of the BRL term is missing, while questions concerning the determinants of rivalry fluctuations and their impacts on the rivals’ policies were left unanswered. Cioffi-Revilla identified three distinct phases of enduring rivalry evolution: “lock-in,” “maturation,” and “termination,”9 but used the large-N analysis that leaves little space for the determination of the conditions of each phase. Instead of this “convex” pattern, I propose the “wavy” one as it outlines a rivalry that “goes through clearly defined periods of escalatory and de-escalatory conflict over the course of its life”10 and, according to Goertz and Diehl, runs from 8.9 to 26.9 percent of all enduring rivalry cases from 1816 to 1976.

My argument is that enduring rivalry is better understood as fluctuating between increasing and decreasing tension phases. This fluctuation depends on the state of international status and security threats. International isolation and rising security threats of at least one side of the dyad lead to the intensification of security threat perception. Insecure, enduring rivals take hostile steps to enhance their security. The intense security perception and the steps that follow constitute what I call an “increasing tension phase.” On the other hand, international integration and mitigation of security threats lead to a reduction of the security threat perception. A reduced security threat perception, in its turn, induces enduring rivals to retreat from steps taken during the increasing tension phase.

The reduced security threat perception and the following relaxation steps constitute the “decreasing tension phase.” However, the latter is temporary as long as the causes of rivalry persist. Economic factors appear to have little influence on a rivalry’s fluctuations. Unlike Bennett’s conclusion on the positive correlation between improved eco-

8 Ibid., p. 100.
10 Goertz and Diehl, “The ‘Volcano Model’,” p. 104.
nomic conditions and rivalry termination,\textsuperscript{11} supporting evidence suggests that a calculus of economic benefits/losses, at best, plays a partial role within the international status of the rival, either international isolation or integration (See Figure 1).

### Explaining the Suspension of Nuclear Weapons Programs

Realist approaches tend to perceive the decision to nuclearize/denuclearize as one to be taken once and forever. While Saira Khan has been successful in advancing a more inclusive explanation for nuclear proliferation in protracted conflict/enduring rivalry regions, her analysis presupposes the continuity of the conflict in a stable pace with little attention being paid to the possibility of conflict fluctuation.\textsuperscript{12}

Enduring rivals’ nuclear policies have also been accounted for by domestic politics, bilateral incentives and the general consensus against


\textsuperscript{12} Saira Khan, \textit{Nuclear Proliferation Dynamics in Protracted Conflict Regions, A Comparative Study of South Asia and the Middle East} (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Ltd., 2002).
nuclear weapons. T.V. Paul develops a theory that views these policies as resulting from changes in regional security environments, but this theory was only limited to the low and moderate conflict zones. This study builds upon Paul’s prudential realism theory, which argues that states’ behavior is not governed by worst-case assessments, as hard realism proposes, but they “balance their interests and capabilities so as to minimize the security challenges they pose to others and in the expectation of reciprocal benign behavior in return.” Extending to nuclear proliferation, Paul’s theory asserts that a non-great power decides to nuclearize or to denuclearize according to the level and type of the security threats it faces.

However, this paper’s arguments differ from Paul’s in the perception of enduring rivalry. Paul implicitly presumes that enduring rivalry maintains stability along its life course. But this is not necessarily the case with enduring rivalries. That is why this theory cannot explain why some states involved in enduring rivalries revisit their nuclear policies. It is true that India, Pakistan and Israel did not forego their nuclear weapons. Yet others, like Egypt, South Korea, and Taiwan, committed themselves to not developing such weapons although their respective adversaries keep declared or ambiguous nuclear weapons programs. Indeed, Paul has pointed out that “if a technologically capable state in a high-conflict region forsweares nuclear arms, it does so largely as a function of countervailing deterrent capability . . . [and that] an ally under a security umbrella would desist from acquiring nuclear weapons.” But he did not address how enduring rivalry developments affect the decision to forego nuclear weapons.

Non-proliferation cases were described in the terms: “abandon,” “dismantle,” “forbear,” “forego,” “give up,” “and “renounce,” but the meanings of these terms, indicate that there is no substantial difference among them. Rather, they are used interchangeably to convey the same message: a retreat from conducting nuclear weapons programs. Thus,

15 Ibid., p. 22.
attention should be paid to a term differentiating between “definite” and “temporary” non-proliferation policies—namely, suspend. The dictionary definition of “suspend” is “to debar or cause to withdraw temporarily from any privilege, office, or function . . . to cause (as an action, process, practice, use) to cease for a time: stop temporarily.”

Consequently, the following is proposed by this paper to explain the suspension of nuclear weapons programs:

- Regional enduring rivals’ security policies are determined by the level and type of regional security threats that they face. Domestic factors, such as democratic transitions, decision-makers succession or economic situation, have little to do with these policies.
- Enduring rivals’ nuclear proliferation and non-proliferation policies correspond to the level and different phases of their rivalries. Hostile steps taken during the increasing tension phase may include pursuing nuclear weapons capability (either initiation or reactivation) as a way of deterrence. While the relaxation steps taken during the decreasing tension phase may include the suspension of these programs instead of giving them up.
- Enduring rivals may give up their nuclear weapons programs only when the causes of rivalry cease to exist. Otherwise nuclear non-proliferation policies they might take indicate the suspension of these programs.

Defining Terms

**Nuclear-capable State**

A state that has the potential to produce nuclear weapons. This nuclear potential comprises the first two (out of eight) steps in the nuclear ladder: 1) The establishment of a basic nuclear infrastructure (reactor and personnel); and 2) the development of an infrastructure to produce weapon-grade material (a separation plant for the production of plutonium, or uranium enrichment facility).17

Abandonment of Nuclear Weapons Program

This means the permanent and complete abandonment of existing nuclear weapons capability by a state that once possessed it. However, since no inspection regime could ever be developed that would eliminate the possibility of secret conversion from civilian nuclear energy production to military weaponization,\(^\text{18}\) the abandonment of a nuclear weapons program is only established when the causes of rivalry cease to exist.

Suspension of Nuclear Weapons Program

This refers to a situation in which a nuclear-capable state’s previously initiated (or reactivated) nuclear weapons program is dormant. A nuclear weapons program is suspended when the aforementioned nuclear capability is maintained while efforts pertaining to producing nuclear devices, including weapon-grade uranium enrichment and spent fuel reprocessing, are kept inoperative.

Embedded in the “suspension of nuclear weapons program” phrase is its non-declaratory nature, and a commitment not to produce nuclear weapons or the adherence to the NPT could be used as a camouflage. A state planning to violate its official commitment and continue to develop the program is not expected to go publicizing such a plan. Thus, evidence of “suspension” could be discerned from: (1) observing the existence of a nuclear capability, when the enduring rivalry is not terminated, and/or (2) the reactivation of the weapons program after being declared to be abandoned. Then, what takes place during the period between the country’s “official commitment to abandon the program” and its “reactivation of the program” would be nothing but suspension.

Suspension of nuclear weapons programs goes in tandem with decreasing tension phases of enduring rivalry. That is because the other


two alternatives—the abandonment of the program, or developing it—would not be available. An enduring rival cannot afford giving up its nuclear weapons program as long as its respective rivalry persists. Concurrently, it is motivated by international integration and mitigation of security threats not to continue the development of the program.

The Korean Enduring Rivalry: Initiation and Phases

Phase I

Throughout the first decade after the end of the Korean War, there were four militarized disputes between North and South Korea between 1954 and 1964. Seoul gained security assurances through the Mutual Defense Pact with the United States and Declaration of the Sixteen in 1953. Also, two American divisions stationed in the ROK after 1955 and U.S. nuclear weapons were deployed there in 1957. For North Korea, the withdrawal of the Chinese troops in 1958 was compensated for in 1961 by the conclusion of treaties with both China and the Soviet Union that provided extensive military support.

Both Koreas enjoyed a balance in their respective international status but it turned relatively toward the South’s favor. Between 1948 and 1960 South Korea preferred exclusively the development of relations with Western countries to a greater international integration, and resident embassies were established in only 17 countries. In the United Nations, while both Koreas were denied full membership, South Korea acquired permanent observer status in 1949. Also, from 1947 to 1961, only South Korea was allowed to participate in UN debates on the Korean question. As for North Korea, in 1960 it had membership of 49 international organizations. In 1961 and 1963, the DPRK had full diplomatic relations with 15 and 18 countries respectively.

Phase II

From mid-1960 until late 1970, hostility intensified between the two Koreas. There were seven militarized disputes between North and South Korea between 1964 and 1979.

A large part of the U.S. Military Assistance Program expenditures were directed to the ROK. The international status balance turned to South Korea’s favor in the mid-1960s. South Korea had 67 and 76 in 1963 and 1967—compared to 18 and 25 respectively for North Korea in the same years.22 In the United Nations, the ROK remained recognized as the sole legitimate government of Korea, and the voting pattern on the Korean question favored South Korea in 1965–1966.23 This meant a high degree of international isolation for the North, especially with the Soviet military and economic aid suspended, following the Soviet-Chinese schism in 1961 and the DPRK’s alliance with China. In the late 1960s, the North’s military threat was manifested in the assassination attempt on the ROK’s President, the landing of 120 provocateurs on the eastern seacoast, the seizure of the USS Pueblo in 1968, and downing of the US EC-121 aircraft in 1969.

However, the situation turned to the North’s favor in the late 1960s and the early 1970s. Pyongyang’s diplomatic partners, including five Western European nations, increased from 25 to 87 between 1967 and 1975, while those of South Korea increased only from 76 to 92,24 and Pyongyang sent its first permanent observer mission to the UN. In addition, the Nixon Doctrine of 1969 and the détente between the United States and the Soviet Union, as well as China in 1971 had serious implications for South Korea, unlike the North which gained substan-

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23 Ibid., p. 306.
tial security and economic support from China. President Park saw these developments as a serious peril to the nation’s survival since the United States would not intervene in case of a second invasion from the north.

Despite the ostensible improvement of bilateral relations in the early 1970s (the 1972 Joint Communique and exchange of national unification proposals in 1973), the two Koreas mistrusted each other and perceived the dialogue as a tactical move. Moreover, in a direct response to the departure of the U.S. Seventh Division from South Korea, President Park enforced emergency laws, and in 1973 recalled his troops from Vietnam to assume defense responsibilities at home. In 1974, North Korea’s second attempt to assassinate the ROK’s President was followed by the discovery of a vast cross-border network of underground tunnels that posed a serious military threat to South Korea.

The most hostile response by South Korea could have been the initiation of its nuclear weapons program. By that time, the ROK had already developed a nuclear program dating back to the early 1960s. The decision to start the nuclear weapons program had been taken at some point between 1970 and 1971 after the U.S. decision to withdraw its Seventh Division. President Park instructed the establishment of “a clandestine Weapons Exploitation Committee [WEC], answerable only to the Blue House, after faster and better armed North Korean speedboats overwhelmed a South Korean patrol boat in June 1970 and forced it to the North.” A former high-ranking member of the WEC is reported as telling U.S. investigators that in 1970 “the WEC voted unanimously to proceed with the development of nuclear weapons.”

South Korea negotiated the purchase of a reprocessing facility from France in 1972, and in 1973 began recruiting Korean nuclear profession-

26 Ibid., pp. 13–14.
27 Ibid., pp. 25–26
29 Oberdorfer, The Two Koreas, p. 68.
als abroad and procuring materials and equipment needed for nuclear weapons. The program remained secret until the United States learned about it in 1974–1975, and threatened to withdraw all American forces from South Korea. The latter yielded to the pressure, shut down the project, and acceded to the NPT in April 1975. Nonetheless, it sought anew to get the French reprocessing facility in 1975. Accordingly, the United States warned that such an agreement would jeopardize U.S.-ROK security relations, and pressured Canada to cancel the sale of a heavy water reactor to South Korea. Again, South Korea backed off and canceled the contract with France.

Shortly afterward, the international status of North Korea significantly improved. By 1975 it had become a member of 141 international organizations, having 87 diplomatic partners, compared with the ROK’s 92. The UNGA adopted a resolution that effectively called for the end of the UN Commission in Korea and the withdrawal of foreign forces. Following the fall of Vietnam and Cambodia in 1975, Kim Il Sung was ready even to escalate and reunify the peninsula militarily. In April 1975, the U.S. Ambassador in Seoul “appealed to Washington for an urgent review of American policies in view of the ‘declining ROK confidence in U.S. commitment.’” Nonetheless, the Ford administration declined military options lest of escalation, and later the Carter administration declared in 1977 that it would withdraw all U.S. troops from South Korea, and decided to remove its nuclear weapons deployed there.

The push that the ROK’s nuclear weapons program received at this point is remarkable. In August 1977, the Ministry of Science declared plans to construct its reprocessing plant without foreign assistance. Moreover, in response to Carter’s plan, the Ministry of Defense pre-

31 Oberdorfer, *The Two Koreas*, p. 69.
34 Oberdorfer, *The Two Koreas*, p. 64.
35 Ibid., p. 64.
36 Ibid., p. 79.
pared a report, according to which the ROK could develop a nuclear weapon by the first half of 1981. Here, as was the case in 1974–1975, South Korea retreated from going ahead with its nuclear weapons program due to American pressures—including the threat of economic sanctions. Later on, the United States suspended the withdrawal plan in 1979. Nonetheless, the South Korean civil nuclear program was progressing between 1977 and 1979. In particular, in 1977 the first nuclear power plant went critical, and two others were under construction in 1979.

**Phase III**

Between the late 1970s and the late 1980s, the Korean rivalry was notably mitigated. There were five militarized disputes between North and South Korea between 1979 and 1989.

The U.S. cancellation of the withdrawal plan complemented other policies to enhance the ROK’s sense of security; particularly, the U.S. deployment of tactical nuclear weapons in South Korea in the late 1970s and the start of the annual Team Spirit exercises in 1977. At the same time, North Korea’s relations with the Soviet Union and China were improving. The Chinese help for North Korea went ahead effectively, as manifested during the visit of the Chinese Communist Party Chairman and Premier in 1978. On the other hand, North Korea started to support direct and indirect Soviet interventions, after it had rejected the Brezhnev Doctrine. In effect, the DPRK and the USSR reached rapprochement as manifested in the exchange of visits in 1984–85 by Kim Il Sung and the Soviet Vice Premier in which Moscow agreed to resume military assistance and help in the construction of North Korea’s first nuclear plant.

On the international level, a balance between the two Koreas existed. In 1980, with President Park’s “open doors” policy, the DPRK had

39 Ibid.
100 diplomatic partners, as compared to the ROK’s 112—of these, 61 recognized both Koreas. By 1982, the DPRK had 105 as opposed to the ROK’s 117 diplomatic partners (of which 68 had concurrent relations with both), and South Korea enjoyed membership of 17 out of 26 UN organizations. At the same time, the UN annual debate on the Korean question was suspended from 1976 by mutual agreement of all parties concerned.

**Phase IV**

The late 1980s and early 1990s was a period of rising tension between the two Koreas, even though they were involved in only three militarized disputes between 1989 and 1992. The reasons for this increased tension phase included the accelerated growth of North Korea’s international isolation. North Korea perceived that the Soviet shift toward the South would render its collapse like the East German model, and warned Moscow that it would utilize any weapons to prevent this scenario.

Of no less significance was the Chinese shift toward South Korea. This dual shift rendered the DPRK, which had in the past been used to playing off one nation against the other, abandoned. The DPRK’s sense of insecurity was enhanced when in 1988 the United States placed it on the terrorist list and imposed further sanctions. Moreover, the impact of the first Gulf War of 1991 was also believed to have alarmed North Korea. Indeed, North Korea joined the UN but that “was a reflection of its weak position” since being admitted simultaneously with South Korea. North Korea’s heightened sense of insecurity resulted in its decision to initiate its nuclear weapons program based on its latent nuclear program dating back to the 1950s.

The United States urged North Korea in their first bilateral meeting in 1992 to permit IAEA inspections on its nuclear facilities. Only under enormous pressure did the DPRK eventually sign the IAEA safeguards agreements.

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agreement. However, the DPRK declared in March 1993 its intention to withdraw from the NPT after the IAEA inspectors found that plutonium had been diverted from the Yongbyon reactor, which subsequently caused the IAEA to demand mandatory “special inspections.” However, in June 1993, the United States and North Korea signed a statement to suspend the effectuation of the withdrawal in return for the American pledge not to use or threaten to use nuclear weapons against the DPRK.

Yet at the end of 1993, the CIA estimated that Pyongyang might have obtained enough plutonium for one or two Hiroshima-type bombs,45 at a time when the IAEA inspectors were denied access to nuclear facilities. In March 1994, the IAEA resolved that it could not ascertain that no fissionable material was being diverted.

When the United States set aside both the military and the sanctions options,46 the negotiation process with North Korea to halt the program concluded with the Agreed Framework of 1994. This agreement provided for the exchange of the DPRK’s graphite-moderated reactors with light-water reactors that were to be offered through a U.S.-led international consortium, the DPRK would remain a party to the NPT and obliged to the latter’s safeguards system. In return, the United States pledged not to use or threaten to use nuclear weapons against the DPRK. Both parties agreed to reduce barriers to economic cooperation.

**Phase V**

Between 1994 and 2002, the rivalry was mitigated. Each Korea has received sufficient political and security assurances during this period from the United States. As for South Korea, a total of 37,000 U.S. troops remained to serve in the ROK while the American nuclear umbrella extended over its territory. For North Korea, the 1994 Agreed Framework meant a breakthrough for international integration, with $4.5 billion worth of potential economic assistance, and the pledge to transfer

advanced technology. During the same period, only two military incidents were reported (the North Korean submarine incursion in September 1996 and the launching of a North Korean ballistic missile in August 1998).

On the international level, North Korea received considerable aid from the international community, when it faced a near-famine situation in 1995–1996. Most importantly, the first summit ever between the two Koreas’ leaders was held in Pyongyang in June 2000. A wide spectrum of inter-Korean cooperative activities followed, ranging from family reunification visits through economic pacts to conducting joint military working groups. After this summit, the DPRK joined its first regional security organization, the Asian Regional Forum, and established diplomatic relations with Britain, Germany, Belgium, the Philippines and several other countries.

Phase VI

From the year 2002, tension increased once again in the Korean rivalry. Through its direct involvement since the onset of the Korean conflict and its continued military presence on South Korean soil, the United States was no longer an outsider. In addition, the 1994 Agreed Framework, with its important implications, was negotiated bilaterally between the United States and the DPRK; all indicate that the United States has made itself almost a party to the Korean rivalry. South Korea and Japan had to bear the lion’s share of the costs of providing the LWRs through the Korean Peninsula Energy Development Organization (KEDO), but both were absent from the negotiation table in Geneva in 1994.

Since North Korea, in January 2002, was labeled by President Bush as a part of the so-called “Axis of Evil,” the U.S. military campaigns against Afghanistan in 2002 and Iraq in 2003 have increased the DPRK’s sense of insecurity. North Korea interpreted its inclusion in the “Axis of Evil” as “[singling] it out as a target or preemptive nuclear attack,” and the invasion of Iraq as “stepping up the preparations for a second

Korean War.” 48 This coincided with the unfulfilled commitments provided for in the Agreed Framework, even though North Korea has expanded its international support base after 1994. Under the Bush administration, the United States halted contacts aiming at normalizing relations, while the LWRs deal was going so slowly that it could not meet its target date of 2003.

This increasing tension was manifested in the revival of North Korea’s nuclear weapons program in 2002. In response, KEDO suspended heavy-fuel oil shipments to North Korea, which in turn reactivated its nuclear facilities at Yongbyon, declaring the Agreed Framework nullified, and withdrawing from the NPT in January 2003. In January 2003, the ROK did not rule out the possibility of war if the crisis was not peacefully resolved. 49 In June 2003 the United States announced its determination to realign combat forces in the ROK south of Seoul. This was believed to allow the United States to launch a preemptive attack against the North’s nuclear facilities. 50 In a prompt response, North Korea declared that it would develop a nuclear deterrent force. However, both parties agreed to join the Six-Party Talks (the United States, North Korea, South Korea, Japan, Russia and China) in August 2003 in Beijing. Nevertheless, the talks failed as the DPRK insisted on its demand that the United States should abandon its “hostile policy” and sign a mutual non-aggression pact in return for the dismantling of its nuclear deterrent force.

The Korean Enduring Rivalry Fluctuations and Nuclear Proliferation/Non-Proliferation Policies

The bulk of literature interprets South Korea’s nuclear policies in terms of changes in the security guarantees provided by the United States. 51 Of course, the alliance shift played a key role, but this theory

lacks demonstrating the regional context of the case and the incorporation of the alliance relationship within its larger framework. As for North Korea, most scholars view its nuclear policy as a bargaining chip to get economic support. This view also lacks the incorporation of the security motivation within the larger framework of the enduring rivalry. Supporting evidence suggests that economic factors influenced Pyongyang’s decision to initiate and later suspend its nuclear weapons program only within the context of its international isolation. On the other hand, analyses of the two Koreas’ non-proliferation policies have perceived these policies as either “giving up,” “forbearance,” or “renunciation” of nuclear weapons programs; without realizing that reactivation of the programs indicate that they were only suspended.

The decreasing tension in Korean rivalry between 1953 and the mid-1960s (Phase I) turned into an increased tension phase starting from the mid-1960s until the late 1970s (Phase II). During this phase, the two Koreas switched positions on the rising security threat perception, according to their international status and the security threats each party faced. In the beginning, it was North Korea that had an intensified security threat perception. The DPRK’s intensified security threat perception at the time resulted in its initiation of coercive and hostile steps in the late 1960s.

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, when it was its turn to face intensified security threat perceptions, South Korea initiated a nuclear weapons program in 1970–71. Indeed, South Korea retreated from developing its nuclear weapons program twice during this period (in 1975 and in 1977), but that was not “abandonment” since the program was reactivated. Nor was it a “suspension” because in both situations,

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the ROK was induced through pressure rather than incentives from its ally to give up its nuclear weapons program. Pressured by its major ally and unable to get alternative external support due to a series of diplomatic setbacks, the ROK saw its international isolation growing. That also came at a time when the security threats from the North were on the rise. That is why ostensible improvement between the two Koreas in the early 1970s could only be seen as disingenuous.

In the late 1970s (Phase III), the rivalry entered into a decreasing tension phase. Security assurances and international integration of the two Koreas helped reduce their security threat perceptions. With that in mind, the ROK’s decision in 1980 to shut down the nuclear weapons program⁵⁴ is the one that is “suspension.” First, unlike the 1975 and 1977 cases, by the year 1980 South Korea received further security guarantees from its superpower ally—in the form of incentives, rather than pressure. These security guarantees were accompanied by an improvement in the ROK’s international status. Second, South Korea continued the development of its civil nuclear power program, as the nuclear infrastructure and personnel remained in place.

Again, in the late 1980s and early 1990s increasing tension surfaced (Phase IV). The DPRK’s intensified security threat perception pushed it to develop nuclear weapons. However, since the 1994 Agreed Framework (Phase V) addressed North Korea’s security concerns and its desire to join the international community, the DPRK’s security threat perception mitigated. As a result, between 1994 and 2002, the rivalry passed through a decreasing tension phase. That is why the DPRK chose to suspend its nuclear weapons program. Interestingly, this is the only case in which there is an insinuation of the “suspension” of nuclear weapons programs. Article 3 of the 1994 Agreed Framework provided for the freeze of North Korea’s graphite-moderated nuclear reactors and related facilities, but the eventual dismantlement of these reactors and facilities was conditioned by the completion of the LWRs that were intended to replace the graphite-moderated reactors. In contrast, when in 2002 (the beginning of Phase VI) the security situation of North Korea deteriorated due to the U.S. threats and the Agreed Framework unfulfilled promises, the DPRK’s security threat perception

⁵⁴ Oberdorfer, The Two Koreas, p. 151.
intensified once again, which resulted in its decision to reactivate its nuclear weapons program.

Here, it is important to examine alternative explanations: economic and domestic factors. Economic indicators of South Korea reveal the irrelevance of economic factors in its decisions either to initiate or to suspend its nuclear weapons program. Oberdorfer outlines below the ROK’s economic progress during the 1970s, the period in which South Korea initiated its nuclear weapons and continued its development with ups and downs through the 1970s until it was suspended in 1980:

The overall results of the development program that Park put in place between 1961 and 1979 were spectacular. In broad terms, according to the World Bank, South Korea’s inflation-adjusted GNP tripled in each decade after Park’s first year in office, thereby condensing a century of growth into three decades. At the same time, the country dramatically reduced the incidence of poverty, from more than 40 percent of all households living below the poverty line in 1965 to fewer than 10 percent in 1980. Per capita income shot up from less than $100 annually when Park took power to more than $1,000 at the time of his death.

Moreover, South Korea’s GNI per capita annual growth rate (See Figure 2), does not support a correlation between the country’s economy and the fluctuation of its enduring rivalry.

As Figure 2 shows, the ROK’s GNI grew constantly between 1970 and 2002, except for the years 1996 and 2000. At the same time, fluctuations in the GNI per capita since 1970 correspond neither to the increasing tension and decreasing tension phases nor to the decisions to go or not to go nuclear.

Unlike the ROK, North Korea rarely issues public statements on its economy, yet a reasonable estimate of the country’s economy is still discernable. For the mid-1960s (the beginning of Phase II), estimates of the North Korean economy are contradictory. Donald Macdonald claims that the targets of the First Seven-Year Plan (1961–1967) were not achieved. By contrast Joseph Chung asserts that the North Korean

55 Ibid., p. 37.
56 Macdonald, The Koreans, pp. 212–43.
national income annual growth rates were 12.7% and 16.6% during 1947–67 and 1954–67 respectively, and its national income per capita during these four years ranked the DPRK high among the developing countries.\(^5^7\) What can be discerned from these opposing estimates is that the negative effects of the then USSR/DPRK split were limited; it did so within the context of international isolation. In the late 1980s and early 1990s (Phase IV), the North Korean economy, as Barry Gills points out, has been in a spiral of contraction that represented an intensification of North Korea’s long-standing structural crisis.\(^5^8\) In December 1993, the regime in Pyongyang made a surprising statement, admitting that the major targets of the current seven-year economic plan had not


been met and that the economy was “in a grave situation.”

However, there is little evidence to suggest a direct link between the DPRK’s declining economy and the increasing tension phase, including the nuclear crisis. First, if initiating the nuclear weapons programs was as a bargaining chip for energy supplies, North Korea could have sought a foreign assistance for the LWRs, under Article IV (2) of the NPT, as it did in the mid-1980s with the USSR. Rather, North Korea’s approval to receive the LWRs is better explained in terms of ch’emyon—face-saving. Amidst the nuclear crisis in November 1992, the Minister of Atomic Energy, Choi Hak, told IAEA inspectors: “Even if we had done it [cheating], we would never admit it.” Second, major economic indicators of North Korea before and after the nuclear crisis show a continuity of deterioration, rather than improvement:

The BOK [Bank of Korea] said the situation facing the North Korean economy in 1995 was worse than in the preceding year, with the economic growth rate as measured by gross domestic product (GDP) registering an estimated minus 4.6 percent. In 1994, the economic growth rate as computed by the BOK was minus 1.8 percent. The North Korean economy has continued to shrink since 1990, according to the BOK. The BOK estimated North Korea’s gross national product (GNP) last year [1995] at $22.3 billion, bringing the per capita GNP to $957. This compares with $451.7 billion or South Korea’s GNP that year and about $10,000 for its per capita GNP. North Korea’s GNP and per capita GNP ranked around 60th and 100th in the world, respectively in 1995.

Indeed, the annual supply of heavy fuel oil to North Korea (which was provided for in the Agreed Framework), was given top priority by Kim Il Sung in July 1994 to ease the shortage of energy. But the relevance of North Korea’s economic crisis is better accounted for in terms of its international isolation. The DPRK negotiator, Kang, in a conversa-

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60 Ibid., p. 278.
tion with the U.S. chief negotiator on the nuclear issue Gallucci, referred to the establishment of political and economic ties to compensate North Korea for the loss of the Soviet Union and the policy shift of China, as the "bargaining chips" the United States possessed.63

The same applies to the increased tension phase in 2002, and consequently the reactivation of the DPRK’s nuclear weapons program. The North Korean economic indicators in the late 1990s show little improvement. The DPRK’s GNP in 2000 was about $16.8 million ($757 per capita); in 1999 the economy grew by 6.2% and in 2000 by 1.3%.64 Viewing the larger context, the hostile U.S. policy was accompanied by a severe economic crisis in North Korea. However, a causal link between the economic situation in the DPRK and its decision to reactivate its nuclear weapons programs is missing.

In retrospect, considering the early 1990s nuclear crisis, if Pyongyang’s nuclear weapons program was traded for economic incentives in principal, the North Korean economy should have responded positively to the incentives that the 1994 Agreed Framework offered. This argument is corroborated by Pyongyang’s conduct in 1995–1996. During this period, North Korea faced a near nationwide famine; the U.S. Census Bureau estimated that almost 1 million North Korean died from famine between 1994 and 1998. Moreover, the IMF reported that between 1991 and 1996 the national output had fallen by half and industrial output by two-thirds.65 However, Pyongyang did not opt for the resumption of its nuclear weapons program as a bargaining chip. Rather, it made a peaceful appeal to the international community for help; asking the UN in August 1995 for almost $500 million in immediate food and fuel shipments. Thus, it can be safely assumed that in 2002 it was the security threats and international isolation, rather than domestic economic problems, which propelled Pyongyang to reactivate its dormant nuclear weapons program.

As for domestic political systems, evidence suggests that they were unrelated to the two Koreas’ enduring rivalry fluctuations and, conse-

63 Ibid., pp. 351–52.
65 Oberdorfer, The Two Koreas, p. 408.
quently, their nuclear policies. The decisions to initiate the South Korean nuclear weapons program in 1970 and to continue it throughout the 1970s were taken by President Park who exercised virtually unchecked authority. Park’s successor, Chun Doo Hwan, who also ruled undemocratically, was the one who took the decision to suspend the program in 1980. On the other hand, North Korea initiated, suspended, and then reactivated its nuclear crisis has initiated the nuclear weapons program under the same regime. Some might argue that the North’s real cause for the development of its nuclear program is to secure the regime’s legitimacy which has been continually challenged since the death of Kim Il Sung in 1994. Nonetheless, the fact that the DPRK over 20 years “has promoted the development of nuclear weapons . . . very consistently” questions the post-Kim Il Sung regime security argument. Indeed, regime stability has been an ever-present concern for Pyongyang, yet being a motivation for pursuing nuclear weapons is a remote possibility, especially if the economic reforms that the regime has embarked on since the late 1990s are indicators of pursuing other options for regime stability.

Conclusion

Throughout an examination of the two Koreas’ nuclear cases studies, the hypotheses of this article proved valid. Each Korea initiated or reactivated its nuclear weapons programs when its security threat perception was intensified (Phase II for South Korea and Phases IV and VI for North Korea). The ROK suspended its nuclear weapons program when its security threat perception was mitigated (Phases III, IV, V and VI). Also, The DPRK suspended its nuclear weapons program when the rivalry was passing a decreasing tension phase as well (Phase V). It also suggests that domestic conditions, either political or economic, have lit-

tle impact on enduring rivalry developments as well as nuclear proliferation and non-proliferation policies. Enduring rivals may give up their nuclear weapons programs only when the causes of rivalry cease to exist, as the case of South Africa amply demonstrates. South Africa initiated its nuclear weapons programs when its enduring rivalry with regional neighbors was passing through an increased tension tense phase. It gave up its nuclear weapons program only when the causes of rivalry ceased to exist. South Africa’s domestic conditions, either political or economic, had little impact on enduring rivalry developments as well as nuclear proliferation and non-proliferation policies.

These findings are important for contemporary non-proliferation policy. First, there is a rationale to question the credibility of nuclear-capable enduring rivals’ non-proliferation policies. There appears to be no compelling reason to believe that when enduring rivals, like Iran, adhere to the non-proliferation regime or official commitments not to develop nuclear weapons, they really intend to give up the nuclear option. As a consequence, existing non-proliferation regimes, resting primarily on legal and technical restrictions which have not prevented a committed state from acquiring the nuclear weapons capability, urgently need to address security guarantees and/or regional security arrangements. Second, this kind of “prudence” those regional enduring rivals could show by suspending their nuclear programs challenges the argument that Third World proliferators behave “irrationally” and are more ready to risk nuclear confrontation. Conducting a cost-benefit analysis and making decisions that are responsive to the changing circumstances, indicate a high degree of rationality. However, Third World proliferators would be capable of practicing nuclear deterrence as well.