

Distinctions of the ROK National Security Policy and the Pursuit of Military Independence during the Cold War

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The National Security policy of South Korea has been distinctly shaped by its historical experience during the Korean War. Facing a sudden invasion from North Korea, South Korea did not have any other option but to rely on the support of the US to conduct the war. The US began to strengthen the South Korean armed forces, based on its national security policy, as the armistice negotiations progressed towards the end of the war. Because South Korea lacked modern military technology and funds, the US planned a preponderant ground force, with a small navy and air force that could be supported by US capabilities. The concentration on ground forces called for self-reliance on the part of South Korea. Meanwhile, the South Koreans succeeded in concluding a ROK-US Alliance to secure US commitment for the defence of South Korea. Self-help efforts and the alliance with the US became two distinctive features of South Korean defence policy in the Cold War era. However, the US reduced its commitment to South Korean defence during the period of détente, although South Korea devoted its national resources to the Vietnam War. South Korean elites opened a new dimension to national self-defence efforts by producing basic weapons and developing independent military strategies. As a result, South Koreans were able to arm themselves with their own weapons. Later, with the increase of tension with the Soviet Union, the US changed its policy towards South Korea to re-institute its commitment to the defence of South Korea. In this context, South Korea continued its self-defence efforts, and tried to maintain the commitment of the US while gradually reducing its dependence on US capabilities for its defence.

I Introduction

The national security policy of the Republic of Korea (hereafter ROK or South Korea) has been influenced by the experience of the Korean War and by diplomatic connections with the United States of America (US). As a product of the United Nations (UN), the ROK was suddenly thrown, unprepared, into a total war due to the invasion by the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (hereafter DPRK or North Korea). The Korean War was South Korea's only experience of modern warfare. Although South Korea joined the Vietnam War, the size and impact of the Vietnam War was not a match for the Korean War's impact domestically. South Koreans understood modern warfare and learned its lessons in terms of

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their experience of the Korean War.

The alliance with the US was the basis of South Korea's national security policy from its inception. At the end of the war, ROK President Syngman Rhee pursued this alliance and finally concluded the Mutual Defense Treaty between the Republic of Korea and the US on October 1, 1953. South Koreans needed to rely on the US to protect their country from the possible aggression of Communist forces. As a result, South Korea's national security policy has been subordinated to the global security policy of the US.

The national security policy of South Korea relied on the US most of the time; however, South Korean administrations pursued a degree of independence from US influence from time to time. Under the rule of President Park Chung-hee, the ROK government invested in developing basic weapons capacity, along with some strategic weapons. At the same time, there were attempts to retake operational control from the United Nations Command or Combined Forces Command. Currently, ROK forces and US Forces in Korea (USFK) are again considering a new command structure to fit the new security environment surrounding the peninsula.

Most studies that consider changes in ROK national security policy focus on the changing international security environment in the Park Chung-hee era. Han, Yong-sup emphasises the Nixon Doctrine and the withdrawal of the 7th Infantry Division from the Korean Peninsula as the main factors pushing South Korea to move to emphasise self-defence.¹ Kim Il-young and Jo Seong-ryul adopted the same perspective.² Park Young-jun also acknowledged the importance of external changes to the security environment; however, he shed light on the personal aims of the South Korean leadership by citing presidential addresses.³ In the same vein, Park Il-song emphasised the changing security environment between 1970 and 1997 as a major factor prompting the self-defence movement in South Korea.⁴

These studies, however, have neglected to analyse the impact of South Korean efforts during the Korean War. In addition, most studies do not pay enough attention to ROK governments' indigenous military strategy and the defence projects carried out within its institutions. In this context, this paper attempts to analyse the efforts of South Korean governments from the Syngman Rhee era to the New Cold War to understand South Korean military strategy within varying security architectures. At the same time, the paper explores institutions involved in self-defence projects. Finally, the paper will assess the results of ROK self-defence projects to enhance the understanding of the reality of self-defence in a South Korean context.

II The Korean War and Self-defence Efforts

The Korean War was the largest tragedy in national history of Korea. With the surprise invasion by the DPRK on June 25, 1950, South Korea was dropped into a war that lasted for years. Since its establishment in 1946 as a constabulary force, the ROK Armed Forces did not have the strength to counter incoming North Korean forces. Three days into the

¹ Han Yong-sup, 'Dongmaengsogesoui Jajugukbang: Irongwa Siljeui Dilemma [Self Defense under Alliance: Dilemmas between Theory and Practice],' Han Yong-sup ed., *Jajunya Dongmaenginya: 2Isegi Hanguk Woigyoyui Jinro [Self Defense or Alliance: The Way of Korea's Security Diplomacy]* (Seoul: Orm, 2004).

² Kim Il-young and Jo Seong-ryul, *Juhanmigun [U.S. Forces in Korea]* (Seoul: Hanwool Academy, 2003).

³ Park Young-jun, *Hanguk Gukgaanbo Jeonryakui Jeongaewa Gaje [The Development of ROK National Security Strategy and Task]* (Seoul: Hanwool Academy, 2017).

⁴ Park Il-song, 'Jajugookbang Jeongchaekui Chujingwa Gunui Hyundaehwa, 1970-1997 [Conducting Self-defense Policy and the Modernization, 1970-1997],' *Gunsa*, Vol., 68 (2008), pp. 93-130.

invasion, South Korea lost its capital city. Except for the 6th Infantry and the 8th Infantry Divisions, most front-line divisions were forced to retreat from their intended positions. They lost their heavy equipment while crossing the Han River, due to the premature destruction of the bridge. Soldiers, civilians and government did not know how to fight a modern war, and the loss of life and property at the beginning of the conflict were very severe.

The ROK government was able to conduct the war with substantial support from the US. The US mobilised eight army divisions (the 1st Cavalry, the 2nd, 3rd, 7th, 24th, 25th, 40th, and 45th Infantry), the 1st Marine Division, the 7th Fleet, the 90th, 95th Task Force under US Navy Far East Command, and the 5th Air Force under US Air Force Far East Command. In total, 523,083 US soldiers joined the Korean War, accompanying 2,402 airplanes and 5 warships.⁵ US participation was decided on quickly, and the first battalion was dispatched to the Korean Peninsula within a week of the outbreak of the war.

The US adopted the policy of Koreanisation to promote the defence of South Korea. After the intervention of Chinese forces, the Truman Administration became determined to conclude the Korean War with negotiations. NSC 48/5 typified the direction of US policy at this time; the document stipulated the build-up of South Korean forces to deal with future Communist aggressions, as indicated in the following objective:

Permit the building of sufficient ROK military power to deter or repel a renewed North Korean aggression until the above current objective is attainable, continue to oppose and penalize the aggressor.⁶

The idea of arming South Korea was passed on to NSC 118/2, published in December 1951. The report set out the US goal: to end the war without harming relations with the Soviet Union, or affecting Taiwan and the seat of China in the UN. To this end, the US dedicated itself to establishing strong military capacity for South Korea.⁷

The main line of effort focused on establishing a substantial ground force for the ROK. Along with the Koreanisation policy, the US launched a 20 division-program for South Korea. President Truman sent a letter to the ROK government promising to build up South Korean forces after the announcement of NSC 48/5 on June 5, 1951.⁸ After continuing debate, US officials set the goal of increasing the ROK Army to 20 divisions in October 1952 and achieved this goal by November 20, 1953. The final division to be established was the 27th Infantry Division in Cheju Island. To maintain 20 divisions, the Eisenhower administration not only provided support in the form of supplies like ammunition and repair parts, but also gave economic support to sustain South Korean society as it developed these considerable armed forces.⁹

⁵ Gukbang Gunsayeonguso, *UNgunjiwonsa [The History of the Support of UN Forces]* (Seoul: Gukbang Gunsayeonguso, 1999), pp. 150-151.

⁶ U.S. NSC, NSC 48/5, Asia, US Objectives, Policies & Courses of Action, NSC 48 Series Folder #4, Asia US Objectives, Policies & Courses of Action to Southeast Asia, US Objectives & Courses of Action, Box 4 Lot 61D167 Entry A1 1583 A&B, RG 59, Policy Planning Council, Alphabetical Files, 1948-1961, NARA, College Park, MD.

⁷ Kyengho Son, 'Migugui Hangukjeonjaeng Jeongjeonjeongchaek Gochal [A Study on U.S. Armistice Policy for the Korean War],' *Miguksayeongu*, Vol., 36(2012), p. 148.

⁸ Kyengho Son (2012), p. 150.

⁹ President Eisenhower sent Dr. Henry J. Taska to investigate the South Korean situation, in terms of its armed forces build-up, on April 17, 1953. After two months of investigation, he submitted 'Strengthening the Korean Economy', which emphasised the importance of economic support to maintain large ground forces after the war. See Kyengho Son (2012), p. 158.

The ROK government subsequently played an active role in increasing the size of ROK Army at the end of the War. In fact, the 20 divisions represented the vision of the ROK military community. South Korean Military personnel had thought that 20 divisions would be necessary to defend their country from any future North Korean invasion. The idea was formally transferred to General Omar N. Bradley by Foreign Minister Im, Byung-jik on April 18, 1951, although the US Joint Chiefs of Staff were not initially enthusiastic. However, the members of the Korean Military Advisory Group (KMAG) had agreed to the idea as a practical means to replace US troops on the Korean Peninsula. This initiative eventually became the cornerstone of the military development program for South Korea. It is conceivable that ROK soldiers may have promoted this idea persistently to their counterparts in the US military during the Korean War.¹⁰

In addition, the ROK government developed its own defence program after the Korean War. Sensing the approaching end of the war, President Syngman Rhee issued Presidential order No. 813 to create militia units to raise defence preparedness and counter any future Chinese invasion, which would be expected to bring a mass of troops. With this order, South Korea was able to enlist 1,277,955 militia members into 3,985 battalions by October 6, 1952. Lieutenant General Shin Tae-young took command of all the militia units.¹¹ However, these militia units were then dismissed by the order of Ministry of National Defense on May 7, 1955. The South Korean government dismissed the militia while establishing 10 army reserve divisions, which have continued since 1955.¹²

The South Korean government made a significant effort to formalise the ROK–US Alliance at the end of the war. Initially, President Eisenhower was reluctant to agree to a defence treaty with South Korea, because his staff opposed to the idea. Meanwhile, the South Korean government was eager to conclude the treaty to get a guaranteed US commitment to defend South Korea. President Rhee suddenly released anti-Communist prisoners on June 18, 1953, aiming to threaten the negotiated end of the war. The US had almost reached the stage of signing the armistice treaty with the Communist leadership. Syngman Rhee showed his willingness to spoil the treaty by releasing prisoners, upsetting Communist negotiators. Surprised by this move, President Eisenhower soothed President Rhee by promising to conclude the defence treaty immediately after the war. The mutual defence treaty was concluded on October 1, 1953, according to the wishes of South Koreans.

III The Self-Defence Movement under President Park Chung-hee, 1

Right after the Korean War, the USFK revealed its defence concept in 1957. The idea was to allow North Korea to invade the territory of South Korea before taking counter-offensive action.¹³ Prior to this, the USFK and South Korean armed forces had held the concept of upholding the line of contact in the case of North Korean attack. However, the US and South Korean military then changed the policy: based on this new concept, the US established three lines of defence above the Han River. At the same time, the new defence

¹⁰ Kyengho Son (2012), pp. 152–155.

¹¹ Gukbangbu Gunsapyonchanwiwonhoe, *Gukbangsa, 1950.6–1961.5 [History of National Defense]* (Seoul: Gukbangbu Gunsapyonchanwiwonhoe, 1987), p. 74.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ Yukgunbonbu, *Yukgun 40nyun Baljeonsa [The History of the 40 Years' Development of ROK Army]* (Seoul: Yukgunbonbu, 1989), p. 111.

concept created three consecutive defence lines as far as the Nakdong River.¹⁴

This new concept demonstrated the US policy to maintain the status quo in South Korea. To the US, Indochina rather than Northeast Asia had become the focus of its national interest. Thanks to the normalisation of ROK–Japan relations and the emergence of a strong anti-Communist government in South Korea, Northeast Asian countries were able to stand firm against Communist aggression. In this context, the US tried to maintain the status quo in Northeast Asia and avoid another conflict like the Vietnam War. At the same time, Asia was a less significant theatre than Europe for US policy makers. In this sense, US military policy in South Korea had taken a defensive stance, to deter a possible North Korean invasion and while allowing a first advance by the DPRK toward South Korea. This policy was maintained into the 1960s.

During the détente era, the US reduced its hostility toward Communist countries and influenced its allies not to initiate conflict in the region. Since the late 1960s, the Nixon administration had sought to relieve US involvement in the Vietnam War due to severe criticism from the US general public and high inflation caused by the enormous cost of the war. President Richard M. Nixon declared a famous doctrine, which emphasised the self-help efforts of countries in the case of conventional war in Asia, on July 25, 1969. At the same time, the Nixon administration tried to enhance its relationship with China by exploiting conflict on the Sino-Soviet border. In this context, the US government recommended that South Korea make a rapprochement with North Korea. The US directed South Korea not to ruin the détente between the US and China.

Meanwhile, in January 1968 the US failed to deal properly with North Korea's armed provocation. North Korean infiltrators raided the Blue House, the presidential residence, on January 21, 1968, aiming to assassinate President Park. While the attempt failed, it was a great shock for South Korean society, because the infiltrators had made it as far as the last check point before the Blue House itself. However, the US government did not pay sufficient attention to this raid, instead the focusing on the seizure of the *Pueblo*, a US intelligence-gathering ship, two days later. US officials even held a secret meeting with North Korea at Panmunjom without giving notice to South Korea. Under such circumstances, President Park determined to pursue self-defence as a policy objective.

President Park Chung-hee announced his self-defence concept at the opening ceremony of a local railroad line on February 7, 1968. He proclaimed self-defence as ROK policy for the first time and suggested three ideas: moving from a UN-centred defence posture to a posture of self-defence, arming reserve forces of 2.5 million soldiers and constructing a small arms-producing factory within a year.¹⁵ Based on these suggestions, the ROK government established its Home Reserved Forces on April 1, 1968 with 1,662,413 personnel.¹⁶ To produce small arms, the South Korean government constructed a M-16 rifle producing plant by 1972.¹⁷

In the 1960s, South Korea was inferior to North Korea in terms of military capability. The DPRK achieved a continuing development of its armed forces throughout the 1960s. Specifically, the success of the Four Military Ways strategy was remarkable. Since 1962, North Korea had pursued the Four Military Ways: to upgrade all soldiers into cadres, to

¹⁴ Yukgunbonbu, *Yukgun Jedosa [The Institutional History of the ROK Army]* (Seoul: Yukgunbonbu, 1981), p. 334.

¹⁵ Gukbang Gunsayeonguso, *Gukbangjeongchaek Byunchonsa: 1945–1994 [The History of Defense Policy: 1945–1994]* (Seoul: Gukbang Gunsayeonguso, 1995), p. 166.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ *Ibid.* The plant was built with the support of the US after the strong protest of the South Korean government for negligence of the US as an ally on the occasion of the raid.

modernise the whole armed forces, to arm every citizen and to fortify the entire national territory. During the 1960s, North Korea was able to recover its military capabilities from the damage it experienced during the Korean War and even surpassed its previous capacity. At the beginning of the 1970s, its ground vehicles and jet aircraft each doubled those of South Korea, while its maritime vessel strength reached four times that of South Korea. The growth of the DPRK's military capability seriously undermined South Korea's national security.

In this security environment, the US government conducted a defence policy in line with its national interest in détente, without sincerely considering South Korean defence requirements. The Nixon administration announced a reduction of 42,000 soldiers in Asia and gave a notice to South Korea that the 7th Infantry Division would withdraw from the peninsula in 1971. This was decided at the same time that ROK was dispatching combat troops to serve outside its borders, in the Vietnam War. In addition, the Nixon administration dismissed the United Nations Commission for Unification and Rehabilitation of Korea (UNCURK) at the demand of Communist countries in the UN. At the same time, the United Nations Command (UNC) was replaced by Combined Forces Command (CFC) on November 7, 1978.

However, the dismantling of the UNC led to the institutionalization of the ROK–US Alliance at the level of military command. In fact, the US proposed to dismantle the UNC as a result of ceaseless requests from Communist countries in the UN. The UNC was the main body to command ROK and US forces, as well as forces sent by other UNC member countries: it thereby exercised operational control over ROK forces. The creation of the CFC allowed ROK officers to join the command structure, gaining the right to be involved in operational control and decision-making.¹⁸

The major goal of the Park Chung-hee's self-defence movement was to nurture South Korea's capacity to deter and defeat North Korean aggression without the support of the US.¹⁹ The main effort of this movement was to develop both basic and strategic weapons capability. Above all, the Park Chung-hee administration tried to equip South Korean armed forces with Korean-made basic arms. To this end, he ordered the establishment of Agency for Defense Development (ADD) in August 1970 with Presidential Order 5267;²⁰ the ADD became the cradle of defence technologies from then on.

The ADD had been expected to conduct research, develop weapons for each military service, develop technologies to localise weapons and heavy equipment and support military industries overall in terms of technology.²¹ In pursuit of these goals, the ADD recruited 50 researchers from the military with suitable credentials and rapidly expanded research organizations in the ROK. Initially, President Park and his Minister of National Defense adopted the concept of the ADD from the National Research Council of Canada, which supported civilian companies in the development of defence technologies and promoted the growth of the defence industry in a broader sense.²²

The ADD had played an important role in conducting the Beongae (lightning) Project,

¹⁸ Kyengho Son (2012), p. 53.

¹⁹ Han, Yong-sup, 'Hanguk Gukbangjeongchaekui Byunchongwajeong [The Change of ROK Defense Policy],' Cha Young-gu and Hwang Byung-mu eds., *Gukbangjeongchaekui Irongwa Silje [The Theory and Practice of Defense Policy]* increased and enlarged (Seoul: Orm, 2004), p. 79. It was announced at a new year's meeting with reporters in 1970.

²⁰ Homepage of the ADD, <http://www.add.re.kr> (accessed, December 1, 2018).

²¹ Gukbanggwahakyeonguso, *Gukbanggwahakyeongusoyaksa*, Vol. I [*The Brief History of ADD*], Vol. I (Seoul: Gukbanggwahakyeonguso, 1999), p. 59.

²² *Ibid.*

which developed technologies to manufacture rudimentary items of equipment such as helmets, grenades, Carbine rifles, mortars and rocket launchers beginning in November 1971. The Blue House ordered basic weapons and equipment to be produced domestically on an urgent basis, on November 13, 1971. After finalising this initiative, the ADD took charge of developing other selected items. The first Beongae planned to produce the M2 Carbine, M1919 A4/A6 machinegun, 60mm/81mm mortars, MK2 grenade, M18A1 anti-person mine, M15 anti-tank mine and M20A1/M20B1 rocket launcher from Korean factories.²³

The researchers and engineers of the ADD poured their energy to find ways to localise production. To manufacture weapons, blueprints and materials specifications had to be prepared. ADD applied reverse engineering skills to US-made goods to derive the standard design and original size of parts.²⁴ Thanks to the help of Clyde D. Hardin, Assistant Secretary for Research and Development of Defense, ADD was able to acquire a Technical Data Package for selected items. ADD conducted three test firings at the end of December 1971 and in January 1972, using weapon prototypes.²⁵ After these tests, ADD corrected flaws in certain prototypes and added new items for the second phase of Beongae by the end of February 1972.²⁶ For the final phase of Beongae, ADD improved the quality of prototype weapons to reach mass production by September 1972.²⁷

IV The Self-Defence Movement under President Park Chung-hee, 2

The Park administration moved systematically to nurture the production of basic weapons in South Korea. In April 1973, President Park ordered the ROK JCS to prepare a project to build the capacity to produce basic weapons with such goals as the following:

- To establish a military strategy to enable self-defence,
- To prepare a long-term military plan for the return of operational control,
- To produce basic arms (except high performance aircraft and missiles) followed by the development of heavy industry,
- To develop an independent military strategy and military development plan on the assumption that there will be no US soldiers in the 1980s.²⁸

ROK officers supported this idea widely. The ROK officer corps began to seek independent means to deal with US withdrawal from the peninsula. Before the Park's order, in 1969 a group of ROK Army officers developed the Army Defense Strategy 1971–1975, which supported a counter-offensive from the 37th Parallel, after allowing an initial advance by North Korea, and a move into North Korea focusing on the annihilation of the North Korean field army and avoiding a war of attrition.²⁹ At the level of overall strategic planning, Plan Taeguk 72 was reported to the president in April 1973, created on the

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 91.

²⁴ An Dong-man, Kim Byung-gyo, and Jo Tae-hwan, *Baeggom, Dojeongwa Seungriui Girok* [White Bear, the Record of Challenge and Victory] (Seoul: Planet Media, 2016), pp. 63–81.

²⁵ Gukbangwahakyegongso (1999), p. 91.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 92.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 92.

²⁸ Gukbangbu, *Yulgoksaup Eojewa Onul Grigo Naeil* [*The Yulgok Project, Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow*] (Seoul: Gukbangbu, 1994), p. 22.

²⁹ Yukgunbonbu, *Yukgun 40nyun Baljeonsa* [*The History of the 40 Years' Development of ROK Army*] (1989), pp. 260–261.

assumption that the armed forces' operations would deal with a North Korean invasion without external aid. The plan also proposed to advance into North Korea after recovering from an initial setback resulting from North Korean aggression.³⁰ In addition, President Park received the Joint Basic Military Strategy report and endorsed it as a basic strategy to promote the indigenous military build-up.

Officers of the ROK Army might have assumed that the initial setback was inevitable due to the lack of firepower available from the US military in case South Korea had to operate independently. This represented a major departure from the operational plans previously made by the US, reflecting the idea of retaining Seoul based on the lesson of the Blue House raid. The ROK plan pursued an advance into North Korean territory, unlike US plans which had stipulated that the demarcation line be upheld and to recover the *status quo ante bellum*. It is interesting to observe that army officers had developed this national strategy and operational plan independently of the US. Incidentally, the initiative was spearheaded by the ROK Army, just as the main effort towards self-defence focused on producing weapons and equipment for the ground forces thereafter.

Under the direct orders of President Park and with strong support from the ROK officer cadre, the first Yulgok Project was conducted from 1974 to 1981. During the period of this project, the ROK armed forces were able to increase the combat capabilities of army divisions dramatically by equipping the ROK Army with Korean-made M-16 rifles, M-60 machineguns, M48A3/A5 tanks and advanced 105 mm and 155 mm howitzers. For the ROK Navy, Korean high-speed missile boats were provided, and Korean destroyers and patrol boats were also under development. The ROK Air Force purchased F-4s and also equipped itself with F-5E/Fs, which were assembled in Korea. To supplement the defence budget, which reached 4% of GDP, the ROK government collected a defence tax beginning in 1976. South Korea spent 3.1402 trillion Korean Won over eight years. By the time the first Yulgok Project was complete, the capabilities of the South Korean armed forces had grown to 54.2% of North Korea's capabilities.³¹

In this context, the Korea Defense Industry Association (KDIA) was established to support private companies to begin defence projects. The South Korean government was determined to induce private companies to develop its defence industry; the South Korean government and the private sector lacked inspiration to direct the emerging defence industry. The defence industry was hardly on a satisfactory commercial basis; companies often faced financial problems due to improper price calculations. To tackle these problems, representatives of the companies created the KDIA on January 15, 1976; its first president was the Chairman of Gold Star (which has since re-branded as LG).³²

Since its creation, the KDIA made strenuous efforts to ensure reasonable laws and regulations for the defence industry. KDIA staff collected ideas from member companies to amend laws and regulations, listened to their complaints and called on the government to resolve these issues. Following this effort, President Park began in June 1977 to preside over meetings to promote the defence industry. Specifically, officials from the ministries of Defense, Commerce and Finance gathered and worked together to amend the relevant laws

³⁰ Yukgunbuonbu, *Yukgun Gihoikwanli 50nyun Baljeonsa* [*The History of the 50 Years' of Army Planning*] (Taejeon: Yukgunbuonbu, 2003), p. 163.

³¹ Gukbangbu (1994), pp. 34–37. Before the Yulgok Project, the capabilities of the ROK forces represented 50.8% of those of the North Korean forces. North Korea already had started its own defence program, 4 Military Lines, in 1962: 12 years before South Korea.

³² Hangukbangwisanyepjinheunghoi, *Sesangul Bakunun Global Power* [*The Global Power That Changes World*] (Seoul: Hangukbangwisanyepjinheunghoi, 2008), pp. 77–79.

and regulations to enhance the defence industry environment.³³ The KDIA was a good catalyst to promote the development of the defence industry by combining government and private companies.

President Park Chung-hee attempted to develop strategic weapons, initiating the development of both missiles and nuclear weapons. On April 4, 1972, President Park ordered a 'Plan for Developing the Aero Industry' to Dr. Shim Mun-sup, Director of the ADD. This was the code name of a project to develop missiles.³⁴ The scientists of the ADD struggled to develop a surface-to-surface missile with a range of 200 km modelled on the Nike Hercules. They needed to overcome the lack of basic technology and engineering methods required for such a project and were forced to make their own devices. Based on these efforts, and with some support from other countries, the ADD succeeded in launching Baekgom (the white bear) on September 26, 1978.³⁵

Unlike the missile development project, South Korea did not succeed in developing nuclear weapons. In 1972, President Park ordered the development of nuclear weapons. In response, Second Secretary of the Economy, O Won-chol, delivered the 'Atomic Nuclear Fuel Development Plan' to the president on September 8, 1972. This secret report set out the plan for the ROK to develop nuclear weapons.³⁶ The South Korean government tried to import nuclear technologies from France and Canada; however, due to intervention by the US, the South Korean initiative failed to develop the bomb.³⁷ President Park wrote a memorandum to US Defense Secretary James Rodney Schlesinger around August 25, 1975, committing South Korea not to develop nuclear weapons.³⁸

The first self-defence movement had brought an increase in military autonomy for ROK forces in terms of their combat capabilities. Because of the success of the Beongae and Yulgok projects, the ROK armed forces – especially the Army – acquired enhanced weapon capability. From then on, South Korean forces began to arm themselves with modern equipment instead of World War II-style weapons. In addition, it is conceivable that the ROK government had its own, indigenous strategic defence plans based on its domestic capabilities. Because South Korea lacked the firepower and manoeuvrability that had been provided by US forces, ROK officers devised their own plans to protect their country from North Korean aggression. This effort coincided with self-defence projects focusing on the production of basic weapons and equipment in Korea, mainly for ground forces.

However, the ROK government could not retain structural independence from US forces even after the initial self-defence movement. The ROK Navy and Air Force, in particular, needed support from US forces. The initial self-help movement focused on enhancing South Korea's Army rather than a balanced increase of all defence forces. South Korea used 43.3% of its investment budget for the Army, 15.8% for the Navy and 22% for the Air Force.³⁹ This unbalanced investment made South Korea's Navy and Air Force vulnerable to North Korean aggression and the support of the US necessary. In terms of command authority, the ROK armed forces could gain a wider range of autonomy: ROK officers

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 84.

³⁴ An Dong-man, Kim Byung-gyo, and Jo Tae-hwan (2016), p. 108.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 274–287.

³⁶ O Dong-ryong, 'Park Chung-heeui Wonjapoktan Gaebal Bimil Gyehoikseo Wonmun Balgul [The Discovery of Park Chung-hee's Original Plan for Development of Atomic Bomb],' *Monthly Chosun*, (August 2008), pp. 190–199.

³⁷ For South Korean nuclear development, see Ha Young-seon, *Hanbandoui Haekmugiwa Segyejilseo [Nuclear Weapons on the Korean Peninsula and World Order]* (Seoul: Nanam, 1991).

³⁸ No Jae-hyun, *Chongwadae Biseosil [The Secretary Office of Blue House]*, Vol. 2 (Seoul: Joongangilbosa, 1993), pp. 80–81.

³⁹ Gukbangbu (1994), p. 31.

joined the Combined Forces Command and took part in major decision-making processes. In addition, the ROK JCS could retake independent operational authority in the case of anti-infiltration operations.

V The Self-Defence Movement in the 1980s

In the 1980s, the world experienced the rise of tension following the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. In this era, South Korea maintained strong ties with US President Ronald Reagan who, unlike his predecessor, did not mention the possibility of withdrawing US troops. When President Chun Doo Hwan visited the White House, President Reagan publicly announced that he had no plan to pull out US troops from the Korean Peninsula; he even added 3,000 soldiers to the USFK.⁴⁰

On the other hand, the South Korean government abandoned the development of strategic weapon capacity at this time. After his inauguration, President Chun stopped the missile development program. In fact, the US was concerned about the ROK missile program even before the success of Baekgom. To gain support from the US and to supplement his own political legitimacy, President Chun stopped the program and dismissed the scientists and engineers who had been involved in the program. Later, the Chun administration resumed the missile development program after the Aung San terrorism attack by North Korean agents against President Chun in 1983.⁴¹

However, South Korea maintained the momentum of the self-defence movement. The South Korean government started the second Yulgok Project from 1982 to 1986. During the second phase, Type 88 tanks rolled out, Korea type 155 mm self-propelling howitzers appeared and multi launching rocket systems were unveiled.⁴² These heavy weapons were the fruits of the continued development efforts from the first Yulgok Project. The ROK Navy introduced Korean-made destroyers and patrol boats as well as high speed missile boats. The ROK Air Force replaced its F-86 squadrons with F-4 and F-5 aircraft and deployed Jegongho, an F-5 enhanced with Korean technologies.⁴³ After the completion of the second Yulgok Project, the South Korean armed forces reached 60.4% of North Korean military strength.⁴⁴

In the 1980s, the ADD played a different role compared to its participation in the 1970s. The ADD was assigned to develop specific weapons and equipment of comparable strength rather than directly purchasing equivalents from foreign countries. In the 1970s, especially in the case of the Beongae projects, the ADD was at the centre of weapons and equipment development. However, at this time, the South Korean government adopted a 'dual foci' policy: the ADD should focus on major weapons and weapons customised for the Korean battle environment, and private companies should achieve weapon development through imitation and enhancement of models from other countries.⁴⁵ At the same time, the research and development share of the budget decreased in the 1980s compared to the 1970s. The budget for research and development in the defence budget was 2.1% in FY 1981 and 1.3% in 1985; previously, the annual ratio of the research and development budget had been

⁴⁰ Don Oberdorfer, *The Two Koreas* (Reading, Massachusetts: Addison-Wesley, 1997), p. 137.

⁴¹ An Dong-man, Kim Byung-gyo, and Jo Tae-hwan (2016), pp. 347–355.

⁴² Gukbangbu (1994), pp. 38–39.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, pp. 39–40.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ Gukbanggwahakyeonguso, *Gukbanggwahakyeongusoyaksa*, Vol. II [*The Brief History of ADD*, Vol. I?] (Seoul: Gukbanggwahakyeonguso, 1999), p. 19

2.5% in the 1970s.⁴⁶

The ROK armed forces – this time the ROK JCS – disclosed a new concept of strategy the ‘Joint Long Term Military Strategy Planning’ in 1983. This concept argued for a rapid counter-offensive in the case of a North Korean invasion and to shift to an offensive as soon as possible. The so-called ‘rapid response strategy’ and ‘offensive defence’ were the foci of the strategy. However, this strategy stipulated that the end state of the conflict was to recover the *status quo ante bellum*.⁴⁷ This shows the influence of the US over the ROK armed forces and the abandonment of independent strategy for national defence based on self-help principles. ⁴⁸ Ironically, South Korea began to pursue a more limited strategy in spite of its increased capabilities in the 1980s due to the influence of the USFK. In this sense, ROK self-defence efforts in the 1980s can be characterised as less independent compared to those of the 1970s.

The third Yulgok Project began in 1987 and ended in 1992 under the rule of President Roh Tae-woo. President Roh had fewer problems with legitimacy compared to his predecessor. The Roh administration deployed Type 88 tanks to the ROK Army and increased the army’s aviation capabilities to deal with massive North Korean armour units. At this time, the ROK Army was able to mount three mechanised divisions. In addition, the project had programs for the ROK Navy, to develop advanced Korean destroyers, the KDX, and to import a new anti-submarine patrol airplane, the P-3Cs, as well as submarines. At the same time, the project had a program to import F-16s.⁴⁹ For Navy and Air Force weapons, the third Yulgok Project pursued direct purchases from the US. As a result, the third Yulgok Project enabled South Korea to reach 71% of the military strength of North Korea.⁵⁰

In the late 1980s, the South Korean government enlarged the role of private companies in the defence industry. Thanks to rapid economic growth and the accumulation of capital, private sector research and development funding reached 2% of GNP in FY 1988. At the same time, the number of researchers in the private sector increased to 47,000. The speed of technological development far exceeded the previous achievement of the ADD. In this context, the South Korean government adopted new policies for the defence industry. Under this new direction, cooperation between private companies, universities and institutes was recommended as a new model for the development of the defence industry, rather than relying on the ADD. Meanwhile, the ADD began to take on overall oversight but delegated direct research involvement except for developing certain critical weapons. In addition, companies were recognised as major actors in the promotion of cutting-edge weapon development. In this regard, the KDIA changed its role to enhancing policies to promote the export of Korean-made weapons and equipment rather than soliciting government financing.⁵¹

South Korea continued its self-defence program alongside the revival of the US commitment to support the defence of South Korea. This is an interesting point, because South Korea started its self-defence program due to a decreasing US commitment. This shows that South Korean leaders had arrived at a firm consensus in support of self-defence.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

⁴⁷ Jeong Jae-yeol, ‘Hangugui Jeonmyonjeok Gunsajeonryak Baljeonbangan Yeongu [The Study on Ways for the Overall Development of Military Strategy],’ Korea National Defense University, National Security Course Thesis, 2018, pp. 23–24.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ Gukbangbu (1994), pp. 40–44.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 47.

⁵¹ Hangukbangwisanyecopjinheunghoi (2008), pp. 120–122.

However, in the 1980s, the program pursued an additional goal: to achieve US support for the political legitimacy of the Presidential administration. In addition, the main direction of the self-defence movement shifted from self-development to direct purchase from the US. At the same time, because of its increasing naval and air capacity, the South Korean armed forces began to reduce their reliance on the US forces for naval and aerial operations.

VI Conclusion

During the Korean War, the Syngman Rhee administration attempted to establish a basic defence posture relying on a massive concentration of ground troops to deal with future Communist aggression in the form of ground attacks. At the same time, President Rhee managed to cement the ROK–US alliance using brinkmanship tactics. These self-help efforts, symbolised by massive ground troops and the conclusion of the ROK–US alliance, were major factors that formed the enduring shape of ROK security policy during the Cold War era.

President Park Chung-hee pushed a self-defence initiative, stimulated by US security policy and the US failure to handle North Korea's armed provocation against the Blue House with sufficient seriousness. He created a master plan for national self-defence and pursued it vigorously. To a certain degree, he was able to achieve this by producing basic arms and launching missiles. The Beongae and Yulgok projects aimed to produce basic weapons and equipment within a limited time; the ADD had played an important role in localisation of weapons and equipment with the support of KDIA.

Like their President, South Korean army officers developed an independent strategy for national defence as the withdrawal of US forces from Korea was gradually pursued. This strategy would respond to an initial advance by North Korean armed forces with a push back into North Korean territory, contrary to US operational plans regulating the recovery of territory to the *status quo ante bellum*. Later, the South Korean armed forces followed the US concept of military operations based on stopping at the current demarcation line.

South Korean governments continued their self-defence program even after the US revived its previous commitment for South Korean defence during the New Cold War in the 1980s. However, personal motivations on the part of presidents hampered the development of strategic weapons, while the self-defence efforts were re-directed and the role of the ADD changed from direct research and development to overall management of national efforts and the direct development in specific areas. At the same time, the KDIA probed possible Korean exports of military goods rather than soliciting government support for military suppliers. In the late 1980s, South Korea could reduce its dependence on US military power thanks to its increased operational capabilities.

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