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South Korean Interest in Nuclear Weapons Grows with North Korean Belligerence

by John Hayward 30 Aug 2017

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A majority of South Koreans now support acquiring nuclear weapons, and the leader of a left-wing opposition party broke ranks to call for just such an investment on Wednesday.

Kim Dong-cheol of the People's Party [said](#) during a party workshop that it was time to reconsider South Korea's longstanding commitment to a nuclear-free Korean Peninsula since the other half of the peninsula does not seem very interested in getting rid of its nukes.

Kim essentially said it was time to consider all options in the face of North Korea's increasing belligerence and advised asking the United States to share control of its nuclear weapons in the theater if Pyongyang conducts another nuclear bomb test or launches another intercontinental ballistic missile. The former possibility remains the [subject of much debate](#), but the latter seems highly likely.

“The moment we give up the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula, there would be no room for us to stand, and this would shake our party identity,” another member of the People’s Party objected during the meeting. A party spokesman rushed to assure the media that Kim was expressing his own “personal opinion,” not the position of the party.

[CNBC](#) quotes polls that show 60 percent support for nuclear arms from South Koreans, particularly from the older residents, who presumably both remember the Korean War and are weary of living with constant threats from the deranged regime to the north. CNBC speculates that general anxiety about unpredictable dictator Kim Jong-un is driving many South Koreans to change their minds about developing a nuclear arsenal.

One of those South Koreans is retired Lt. General Chun In-bum, who [worked for](#) the presidential campaign of dovish liberal Moon Jae-in but left to become a visiting scholar at Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies after his wife became embroiled in an embezzlement scandal. His offer to shoot his wife with a pistol if she did anything wrong evidently did not sway the court.

Moon himself is sounding a good deal less dovish these days, while Chun thinks it is time for both the United States and South Korea to consider nuclear weapons for the South under the control of either Washington or Seoul.

“We’ve been saying that ‘all options are on the table,’ and maybe we should take a look at this in more detail,” Chun said,

adding that a little hope for “sanctions and other means to persuade North Korea to give up their nuclear weapons” still remains. One of his reasons for arming South Korea is that China could interfere with America’s ability to deflect or avenge a North Korean attack.

Of course, as CNBC notes, China would also be less than thrilled with South Korea developing a nuclear arsenal; Beijing is already running a fairly damaging economic boycott against South Korea to protest the deployment of the American THAAD anti-missile system. Non-proliferation experts note that South Korea would most likely face sanctions from a variety of countries if it pursued nuclear weapons in defiance of long-standing international agreements.

With nuclear weapons a distant possibility for the time being, South Korea’s Defense Minister Song Young-moo is [meeting](#) with U.S. Defense Secretary James Mattis this week to discuss increasing South Korea’s ballistic missile inventory and possibly moving more American planes and warships to the Korean Peninsula.