

## STRATEGIC TRANSFORMATION: ANALYZING SOUTH KOREA'S NATIONAL SECURITY STRATEGY UNDER PRESIDENT YOON SUK-YEOL

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### Abstract

This article analyzes South Korea's new National Security Strategy (NSS) released in June 2023 under President Yoon Suk-yeol. The study situates the NSS in the context of rapidly changing regional and global geopolitics, examining the factors driving the emergence of this new strategy. The article primarily uses secondary document analysis methods to identify the content of the NSS; the research clarifies significant changes in South Korea's approach to national, regional, and global security issues. The research results not only provide insights into South Korea's national security strategy but also contribute to a better understanding of the geopolitical dynamics reshaping the regional order.

**Keywords:** East Asia, foreign policy, National Security Strategy, South Korea, Yoon Suk-yeol

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### 1. Introduction

In the context of profound global geopolitical upheavals, studying and analyzing the NSS of countries playing important roles in the East Asian region becomes more urgent than ever (Bernal, 2023). In particular, the emergence of South Korea's new NSS in June 2023 under President Yoon Suk-yeol marks a significant turning point in the country's security policy planning process, *"reflecting changes in perceptions of the regional and global security environment as well as Seoul's growing geopolitical ambitions"* (Lee, 2023). Against the backdrop of intensifying US-China strategic competition, increasing non-traditional security threats (Kiet & Hiep, 2025), and the continuing complex situation on the Korean Peninsula, a thorough analysis of South Korea's new NSS not only provides insight into the strategic orientation of one of the key countries in Northeast Asia but also helps illuminate the geopolitical trends reshaping the regional security structure. The NSS is one of the most important strategies of recent South Korean Presidents (Yeo, 2023). Since President Yoon Suk-yeol announced the NSS, there has not been any official, specific study on the content of the NSS. Therefore, researching this topic is essential in the context of South Korea making strategic adjustments to its foreign security policy that differ from former President Moon Jae-in (Yeo, 2023).

This article aims to comprehensively analyze the content of South Korea's new NSS, placing it in a broader historical and geopolitical context, while assessing its potential impacts on the East Asian regional security structure. By examining the strategic objectives, core principles, and policy orientations set out in the NSS, this study will clarify significant changes in South Korea's approach to national, regional, and global security issues. In particular, the shift in policy towards North Korea, the balanced approach in relations with major powers, and South Korea's ambition to enhance its global role will be analyzed in detail.

## 2. Methods

This article employs secondary document analysis as its primary research methodology to examine South Korea's NSS released in June 2023 under President Yoon Suk-yeol. The document analysis approach is particularly well-suited for this study as it allows for a comprehensive examination of the official NSS text while contextualizing it within the broader geopolitical landscape. The methodology focuses on a detailed analysis of the NSS document published by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Korea. The researchers have conducted a systematic content analysis to identify key themes, strategic objectives, core principles, and implementation directions outlined in the document. This approach enables the researchers to extract and categorize critical components of South Korea's security policy under President Yoon's administration.

The document analysis method is complemented by a comparative historical perspective, as the researchers situate the 2023 NSS within the context of South Korea's previous security strategies, particularly those issued since 2004. This comparative approach helps highlight the significant shifts in security policy between the Yoon Suk-yeol administration and the previous Moon Jae-in government, especially regarding approaches to North Korea, relations with the US and Japan, economic security issues, and global engagement. The researchers have also incorporated contextual analysis by examining the NSS within the broader framework of regional and global geopolitical developments, including US - China strategic competition, emerging non-traditional security threats, and changing dynamics on the Korean Peninsula. This contextual approach enhances understanding of the strategic rationale behind South Korea's policy adjustments.

In general, the methodology's strength lies in its focus on the direct analysis of official policy documents, allowing for objective identification of policy priorities and strategic thinking. However, as with any document analysis approach, the study primarily reflects declared policy intentions rather than implementation outcomes. The researchers address this limitation by conducting a critical assessment of the NSS's strengths and weaknesses, considering potential implementation challenges and geopolitical implications.

## 3. Results

### 3.1. NSS: *Background and development*

The emergence of South Korea's new NSS in 2023 marks "*a significant turning point in the country's security policy planning process*" (Bernal, 2023). To better understand the importance and context of this document, it needs to be examined within a broader historical and geopolitical context. Historically, South Korea has had a tradition of issuing NSS since 2004, under President Roh Moo-hyun. Since then, each successive

administration has published its own version, reflecting changes in the security environment and state policy orientations. A notable feature is the coexistence of two versions: a public version and a classified version (Lee, 2023), which demonstrates the sensitive and complex nature of national security issues. In the current geopolitical context, South Korea's release of the new NSS in June 2023 can be seen as a response to profound changes in the international order. Notably, it occurred almost simultaneously with Germany's publication of its first NSS since World War II. This coincidence reflects a global trend, in which countries are actively adjusting their security strategies to cope with an increasingly unstable and unpredictable world.

South Korea's new NSS, with its vision of becoming a "*global pivotal state for freedom, peace, and prosperity*" (Lee, 2023), demonstrates Seoul's ambition to enhance its international standing. This reflects the recognition of South Korea's increasingly important role in global issues, beyond the traditional scope of Northeast Asian regional security. At the same time, the emphasis on values such as freedom, democracy, and prosperity shows that South Korea is seeking to position itself more clearly in the camp of liberal democratic countries (Ministry of Foreign Affairs Republic of Korea, 2023). This can be understood as a response to the increasing ideological competition on a global scale, especially between major powers.

In general, South Korea's new NSS in 2023 is not just an ordinary policy document, but also a statement about the country's position and ambitions in a rapidly changing geopolitical context. It reflects Seoul's efforts to balance traditional relationships, address emerging security challenges, and assert its role on the international stage. Careful study and analysis of this document will provide valuable insights into South Korea's strategic orientation in the coming years.

### **3.2. Content of the NSS**

#### *a) Practical basis of security challenges*

The NSS identifies the practical basis of several important security challenges that South Korea is facing in the new context:

*First*, the most urgent issue is North Korea's continued enhancement of nuclear capabilities and other weapons of mass destruction (WMDs). In particular, North Korea has recently "*threatened to deploy tactical nuclear weapons and even the possibility of a preemptive nuclear strike*" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs Republic of Korea, 2023). Therefore, it is more important than ever to strengthen the defense capabilities of the South Korean military and consolidate the strong South Korea - US relationship. Additionally, as trilateral security cooperation between South Korea, Japan, and the US becomes increasingly important to counter North Korea's nuclear and missile threats, there is an urgent need to transform the "fractured" South Korea - Japan relationship into a future - oriented partnership, easing territorial dispute tensions between the two countries (Ministry of Foreign Affairs Republic of Korea, 2023).

*Second*, "*the intensifying competition between the US and China is changing the international order, profoundly affecting the political and security situation in the Indo - Pacific region*" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs Republic of Korea, 2023). China is leveraging its economic growth to continue enhancing its military capabilities and expanding its political and economic influence in the region and the world (Hiep et al., 2023). In response, the US is strengthening alliances and partnerships with like-minded countries, with South Korea and Japan being the most important US allies in Northeast Asia.

*Third, “the increasingly close link between economics and security is intensifying economic security competition among major powers, especially between the US and China”* (Ministry of Foreign Affairs Republic of Korea, 2023). The multilateral trade order established in the era of globalization is facing serious challenges as major powers pursue protectionism. At the same time, economic security tensions between major countries have led to the “weaponization” of key industries and resources, increasing disruptions in global supply chains. The supply chain crisis resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic has been exacerbated by the Russia - Ukraine war, causing disruptions in the supply of energy, food, and raw materials, while weakening the global economy (Kiet & Hiep, 2025).

*Fourth, “new security threats such as infectious diseases, climate change, and cyber attacks are negatively impacting many aspects of human living environments”* (Ministry of Foreign Affairs Republic of Korea, 2023). These challenges cannot be addressed solely through individual country responses but require the cooperation of all countries in the world, especially major powers. However, countries always prioritize national interests, even increasing competition to protect those interests rather than cooperating to solve problems (Kiet et al., 2025).

Overall, South Korea faces multifaceted security challenges in the current global context. These include North Korea’s nuclear threats, US-China competition reshaping the international order, the intertwining of economics and security, and emerging non-traditional threats. To address these challenges, South Korea must strengthen its defense capabilities, enhance alliances, particularly with the US and Japan, navigate economic security complexities, and promote international cooperation. The NSS recognizes the need for a comprehensive approach to ensure South Korea’s security and prosperity in this evolving landscape.

#### *b) Security objectives*

The NSS identifies three national security objectives that South Korea pursues under President Yoon Suk-yeol. The NSS outlines the vision of a “*global pivotal state for freedom, peace, and prosperity*” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs Republic of Korea, 2023). This reflects the Yoon Suk-yeol administration’s ambition for South Korea to play a larger, more proactive role in regional and global issues:

*First*, protect national sovereignty and territory while enhancing citizen safety. The Yoon Suk-yeol administration will resolutely defend sovereignty and territory against any forces threatening the interests of the South Korean nation and people. In particular, South Korea will proactively prevent North Korean provocations, including nuclear and missile threats, while strongly repelling and retaliating against any provocative actions by North Korea. Furthermore, South Korea will thoroughly protect the lives and property of citizens against security threats that may arise in various fields such as economy, society, and environment.

*Second*, establish peace on the Korean Peninsula and prepare for future unification. The Yoon Suk-yeol administration will promote lasting peace on the Korean Peninsula through a principled and consistent approach to North Korean issues. While simultaneously persuading North Korea to make the right choice for the future, South Korea will work with the international community to achieve a peaceful solution to North Korea’s nuclear issue (Keyu, 2022). Additionally, South Korea will strengthen the will and ability for national unification to create a foundation both domestically and internationally for a unified, free, democratic, and peaceful Korea.

*Third*, lay the foundation for East Asian prosperity and expand the country's global role. South Korea will strengthen solidarity with countries that share core values such as freedom, democracy, and human rights for global peace and prosperity. South Korea will also pursue international cooperation based on rules and fairness. Furthermore, by leveraging advanced science and technology capabilities, South Korea will actively contribute to solving other global issues for the progress of humanity (Keyu, 2022).

Overall, South Korea's NSS under President Yoon Suk-yeol outlines three key objectives: protecting sovereignty and citizen safety, establishing peace on the Korean Peninsula while preparing for unification, and expanding South Korea's global role. These objectives aim to position South Korea as a "*global pivotal state for freedom, peace, and prosperity*" (Lee, 2023) through principled approaches and international cooperation.

*c) Core principles for implementing security objectives*

The NSS identifies core principles to accomplish the three national security objectives above. The Yoon Suk-yeol administration has identified three core principles in areas such as diplomacy, defense, inter-Korean relations, economic security, and new security threats (Ministry of Foreign Affairs Republic of Korea, 2023):

*First*, actively deploy diplomacy to promote national interests. Expand the scope of common interests, thereby broadening the foundation for international cooperation. Strengthen solidarity in the international community based on the values of freedom and democracy. Implement specialized cooperation programs suitable to regional and national situations. Enhance South Korea's role and contribution in addressing major issues facing the international community.

*Second*, strengthen national security through enhanced military power. Develop a future-ready military supported by advanced science and technology. Establish a comprehensive defense posture based on the solid alliance between South Korea and the US.

*Third*, establish inter-Korean relations based on "reciprocity" principles. Pursue the goal of complete denuclearization of North Korea with the cooperation of the international community. Strive to improve the human rights and humanitarian situation of the North Korean people.

*Fourth*, proactively ensure economic security interests. Establish a multi-layered, integrated response system through public-private cooperation. Lead in setting international standards in cooperation with major countries. Play a more active role in setting agendas and problem-solving in international economic cooperation organizations.

*Fifth*, proactively respond to new security threats. Deploy a robust crisis prevention system against non-traditional security challenges. Establish effective early warning systems and public-private cooperation to respond to crises. Strengthen cooperation with the international community against new security threats such as cybersecurity, climate change, and infectious diseases.

Overall, South Korea's NSS outlines five core principles to achieve its objectives: active diplomacy, enhanced military power, reciprocity-based inter-Korean relations, economic security, and proactive responses to new threats. These principles aim to strengthen South Korea's international position, defense capabilities, and resilience against emerging challenges, while promoting stability and cooperation in the region.



*d) Implementation directions*

The NSS emphasizes the importance of strengthening alliances with the US and Japan, enhancing the alliance with the US, and transforming the “fractured” relationship with Japan into a future-oriented partnership (Ministry of Foreign Affairs Republic of Korea, 2023):

*First*, strengthen cooperation on economic security and advanced technology between South Korea and the US. In an era where economy and security are closely related, market changes and competition in advanced technology directly affect national security (Ministry of Foreign Affairs Republic of Korea, 2023). Therefore, at the US-ROK Summit in April 2023, the Yoon Suk-yeol administration agreed to establish a Dialogue on Emerging and Critical Technologies between the national security councils of both countries to further enhance cooperation on economic security and advanced technology. Based on the South Korea-US advanced technology alliance, they will aim to build a supply chain alliance in advanced industries. A stable and flexible supply chain as well as an orderly functioning foreign exchange market are essential factors for sustainable growth and financial stability of both countries. Furthermore, expanding mutual investment between South Korean and US companies in key industries such as semiconductors and batteries will bring mutual benefits and economic prosperity to the people of both countries. Additionally, cooperation will be strengthened in advanced and critical technology areas such as AI, quantum technology, biotechnology, aerospace, nuclear energy, renewable energy, environmental solutions, and healthcare (Ministry of Foreign Affairs Republic of Korea, 2023).

*Second*, elevate the trilateral South Korea-US-Japan cooperation to a new level. In the new NSS, South Korea takes a warmer approach towards Japan. The Yoon Suk-yeol administration “*prioritizes cooperation with Japan in addressing regional and global issues*” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs Republic of Korea, 2023), while removing content describing historical issues and territorial disputes with Japan mentioned in the previous administration’s NSS. The NSS states that as countries sharing universal values such as democracy, market economy, human rights, and rule of law, South Korea, the US, and Japan recognize the increasing threat from North Korea’s nuclear and missile capabilities as well as the growing instability of global supply chains (Ministry of Foreign Affairs Republic of Korea, 2023). These challenges, along with many other emerging ones, make this trilateral cooperation more important than ever. This is reflected in three actions:

(1) Strengthen South Korea - US - Japan security cooperation to counter North Korean provocations. The leaders of South Korea, the US, and Japan met at the NATO Summit in June 2022 and agreed on the need to enhance security cooperation to counter North Korea’s nuclear, missile, and other provocative actions. In November 2022, the three countries held the second Trilateral Summit in Phnom Penh (Cambodia), agreeing to share real-time North Korean missile warning information among the three countries (Woo, 2022). At the trilateral summit held in May 2023 on the occasion of the G-7 Summit, the leaders decided to elevate South Korea – US – Japan cooperation to a new level (Korea Herald, 2023). The Yoon Suk-yeol administration will strive to establish a strong trilateral security cooperation framework to effectively deter North Korea’s nuclear and missile threats, while contributing to peace and stability in the region.

(2) Promote South Korea - US - Japan economic security dialogue. The leaders of South Korea, the US, and Japan agreed to establish a trilateral economic security dialogue mechanism to recognize the importance of cooperation in ensuring supply chain stability

and cooperation in advanced technology and energy fields. Under this agreement, the National Security Councils (NSCs) of the three countries held the inaugural trilateral economic security dialogue in Honolulu, Hawaii in February 2023. The three countries will enhance crisis response capabilities against supply chain instability through economic security dialogue and strengthen cooperation in developing and protecting critical and emerging technologies.

(3) Expand South Korea – US – Japan cooperation on global issues. The Yoon Suk-yeol administration will cooperate and maintain close communication with the US and Japan based on the common consensus on the strategic importance of the Indo-Pacific region to pursue a “Free, Peaceful, and Prosperous Indo-Pacific Strategy”. Based on shared values, South Korea will expand cooperation with the US and Japan not only in security but also in economic, supply chain, and socio-cultural areas. To achieve this, the three countries will maintain close dialogue between leaders and officials while promoting active exchanges in various fields, including youth and socio-cultural exchanges, to strengthen the foundation for future cooperation.

*Third*, promote denuclearization through the “Bold Initiative” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs Republic of Korea, 2023). In this strategy, South Korea demonstrates a change in its approach to North Korea, with the current administration’s policy of “deterrence, prevention, and dialogue”, also known as the “3D” approach, showing a significant difference from the Moon Jae-in administration’s “peace”-focused policy. While the previous administration prioritized the goal of “de-escalation and dialogue”, President Yoon Suk-yeol’s approach implies “a stronger stance against North Korea’s continued nuclear development, while emphasizing the need for military preparation and responsive action” (Kim, 2023). Additionally, the strategy sets out a “Bold Initiative” with measures to improve living conditions for North Korean people, establish economic cooperation plans, reduce military tensions, and establish peace conditional on North Korea taking substantial steps towards denuclearization.

In 2022, President Yoon Suk-yeol proposed the “Bold Initiative” in his speech marking South Korea’s 77th Liberation Day. This initiative is considered “a comprehensive government action plan aimed at achieving complete denuclearization of North Korea and promoting lasting peace and prosperity on the Korean Peninsula” (Seliger, 2022). The “Bold Initiative” includes the following measures: (1) if North Korea genuinely returns to denuclearization negotiations, the Government will lead discussions by implementing initial measures to improve living conditions for North Korean people; (2) once a denuclearization roadmap is agreed upon, comprehensive measures including economic, political, and military fields will be implemented simultaneously and gradually in accordance with the progress made in denuclearization. At the economic level, the government aims to establish an “Inter-Korean Joint Economic Development Committee” (tentative name) to discuss economic cooperation plans between North Korea and South Korea, focusing on 5 major projects in three areas: (1) infrastructure development; (2) improvement of living conditions, and (3) economic development. At the political and military levels, measures will be taken to reduce military tensions and establish substantial peace on the Korean Peninsula.

*Fourth*, the NSS also mentions some important strategic orientations in the country’s foreign policy. In the context of complex regional and global geopolitical developments, President Yoon Suk-yeol has demonstrated a multidimensional and balanced approach in relations with major powers. Regarding bilateral relations with major powers, this

document shows a diverse and flexible approach. While reaffirming the importance of the South Korea-US alliance, the strategy also proposes a cautious and calculated approach towards China and Russia. Particularly in relations with Beijing, South Korea calls for building a “healthier and more mature relationship” based on the principle of “mutual respect and reciprocity”. This can be understood as an effort to balance maintaining important economic and trade relations with China and protecting South Korea’s national interests.

Regarding Russia, the strategy proposes a comprehensive reassessment of diplomatic policy, with the goal of managing bilateral relations in a stable manner based on international rules. This reflects Seoul’s caution in positioning its foreign policy in the context of the Russia - Ukraine conflict and increasing global geopolitical tensions. The strategy also emphasizes the importance of strengthening regional cooperation, especially with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). This shows Seoul’s recognition of ASEAN’s strategic role in the regional security structure and its desire to diversify its foreign relations. Notably, this strategy demonstrates a clear shift in the ideological approach of the new administration. The emphasis on concepts such as “democracy”, “human rights”, “freedom” and “anti-authoritarianism” reflects an increase in the use of value elements as a foundation for foreign policy. This can be understood as an effort to strengthen South Korea’s position among democratic and free countries and enhance relations with allies sharing these values. Finally, the declaration on deploying the Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) system as a matter of national security sovereignty demonstrates a tougher stance in protecting South Korea’s security autonomy. This marks a significant change from the previous administration’s policy, reflecting President Yoon Suk-yeol’s determination to pursue national security interests, despite external pressure.

In general, South Korea’s NSS demonstrates a multidimensional and flexible approach in foreign policy, combining maintaining strategic balance in relations with major powers, strengthening regional cooperation, and affirming the country’s position in the international community based on democratic and liberal values.

### **3.3. Strengths and Weaknesses of NSS 2023**

South Korea’s NSS 2023 represents a significant shift in the country’s approach to regional and global security challenges. Through analyzing the content of the NSS, it generally has five main strengths: *First*, the NSS presents a holistic view of national security, including both traditional and non-traditional threats. As stated in the document, the strategy addresses “*crises that occur frequently over centuries happening simultaneously*” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs Republic of Korea, 2023). This comprehensive view allows South Korea to better prepare for diverse security challenges. *Second*, the strategy particularly emphasizes reinforcing the US-South Korea alliance and improving relations with Japan. The NSS recognizes “the urgent need to transform the deteriorated South Korea-Japan relationship into a future-oriented cooperative partnership”. This focus on alliance-building could enhance South Korea’s security posture and regional influence (Bernal, 2023). *Third*, the NSS acknowledges the increasing connection between economic and security issues. The strategy aims to “prevent excessive dependence on certain countries for critical minerals” and strengthen economic cooperation with like-minded countries. This approach could help South Korea reduce vulnerabilities in supply chains and key industries. *Fourth*, the strategy presents a vision of South Korea as a “*global pivotal state contributing to freedom, peace, and prosperity*” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs



Republic of Korea, 2023). This reflects Seoul's ambition to play a larger role in global affairs, potentially increasing its diplomatic influence. *Fifth*, while emphasizing value-based diplomacy, the NSS also calls for developing relations with China through "mutual respect and reciprocity". This balanced approach aims to maintain important economic relationships while protecting national interests.

Besides the strengths, the implementation of South Korea's new NSS has five main weaknesses: *First*, the strategy's emphasis on enhancing military capabilities and alliances, especially with the US and Japan, could be seen as confrontational by North Korea and China (Park & Mochizuki, 2024). Specifically, The "Bold Initiative" faces particular implementation challenges evidenced by recent developments. Since its announcement in 2022, North Korea has conducted over 35 missile tests and publicly rejected the initiative as "absurd" (Shin, 2022). Furthermore, North Korea's constitutional amendment in January 2024 declaring itself an "irreversible nuclear state" fundamentally contradicts the denuclearization premise of the "Bold Initiative". These concrete developments illustrate the significant gap between strategic ambition and realistic implementation in North Korea policy. *Second*, although the NSS introduces the "Bold Initiative" for denuclearization, it lacks specific details on implementation. The document states that "lasting peace" is the goal, but the path to achieve this remains unclear. *Third*, while the US-South Korea alliance is crucial, overemphasis on this relationship could limit South Korea's strategic autonomy and flexibility in addressing regional issues. *Fourth*, the strategy's focus on reducing economic dependence on certain countries (implicitly China) could have short-term economic consequences. South Korea's trade with China accounted for 22.8% of total trade in 2022 (683,9 billion USD) (Hankyoreh, 2023), making rapid decoupling difficult. Specifically, China's reactions to South Korea's security decisions illustrate the potential costs of pursuing certain aspects of the NSS. Following the 2016 THAAD deployment decision, China implemented numerous retaliatory measures against South Korea, causing substantial economic damage. Official Chinese tourism to South Korea dropped by 48.3% in 2017, and the Lotte Group, which provided land for the THAAD system, was forced to close 87 of its 99 stores in China, resulting in losses exceeding USD 1.7 billion (France24, 2017). South Korean cultural products were also informally banned, with K-pop concerts canceled and Korean television dramas removed from Chinese streaming platforms (France24, 2017). *Fifth*, the ambitious goals outlined in the NSS may face practical challenges in implementation, especially in areas requiring multilateral cooperation or significant resource allocation. In addition, domestic political dynamics significantly impact South Korea's ability to implement its NSS. This apparent consensus masks deeper divisions. The progressive opposition Democratic Party, which holds a majority in the National Assembly, has consistently criticized President Yoon's harder line on North Korea and his pivot toward the US, arguing it unnecessarily provokes regional tensions. These political constraints extend to institutional capacity. The creation of new economic security frameworks requires significant bureaucratic reorganization. However, interagency coordination remains challenging, with the Ministry of Trade, Industry and Energy often pursuing economic interests that conflict with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' security objectives. These institutional have hindered the effective implementation of integrated economic-security initiatives outlined in the NSS.

Overall, South Korea's NSS 2023 presents a comprehensive and forward-looking approach to national security. The strategy's strengths lie in its holistic view of security challenges, focus on alliance-building, and recognition of the importance of economic security. However, the strategy also faces potential pitfalls, including the risk of

escalating regional tensions and implementation challenges. As President Yoon Suk-yeol stated, *“the world is experiencing an unprecedented turning point in history, and stability and prosperity are being challenged by conflicts over values, ideas, and interests on a global scale”* (Bernal, 2023). South Korea’s new NSS attempts to navigate through these complex challenges, balancing traditional security concerns with emerging threats and global ambitions. The success of this strategy will depend on South Korea’s ability to implement its vision while maintaining regional stability and economic prosperity.

### **3.4. Policy Recommendations**

Based on the analysis of South Korea’s NSS and the challenges in its implementation, the research proposes the following key policy recommendations:

*First*, the South Korean government needs to manage the tension between economic interests and security priorities, therefore it should focus on implementing a more calibrated approach to economic security. It should consider creating a tiered economic interaction system that distinguishes between critical technologies that need protection and non-sensitive areas where continued economic cooperation with China poses minimal security risks. Establish an Economic Security Council bringing together representatives from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Trade, Industry and Energy, and the National Intelligence Agency to coordinate policy implementation across government agencies. Develop sector-specific risk assessment mechanisms, allowing for targeted decoupling measures rather than comprehensive decoupling, minimizing economic disruption while protecting core security interests. Pursue a supply chain diversification strategy through strengthened economic partnerships with Southeast Asian nations, India, and other middle powers, reducing excessive dependence on both China and the US.

*Second*, the South Korean government should focus on addressing the implementation gap in North Korea policy. South Korea should reshape the “Bold Initiative” with more realistic short-term objectives, focusing on stabilizing the security situation rather than immediate denuclearization, which current empirical evidence suggests is unlikely to occur in the near future. Establish clear standards and metrics to measure progress, with specific reciprocal actions tied to verifiable steps by North Korea. Create a multilateral diplomatic framework including China to increase pressure on North Korea while maintaining dialogue channels, acknowledging China’s important role in influencing North Korean behavior. Develop humanitarian engagement options that can be pursued regardless of denuclearization progress, providing incentives for North Korean engagement while addressing human security needs.

*Third*, the South Korean government needs to strengthen institutional capacity to implement strategy to enhance NSS implementation effectiveness. Therefore, South Korea should consider investing in specialized training programs for diplomatic and security personnel focused on emerging technologies and their security implications, addressing knowledge gaps currently hindering effective policy implementation. Establish a dedicated Strategy Implementation Office within the National Security Council to monitor progress, identify implementation bottlenecks, and coordinate responses across government agencies. Develop formal consultation mechanisms with private sector stakeholders whose cooperation is essential for implementing economic security measures. Create transparent evaluation frameworks to assess policy outcomes against strategic objectives, allowing for evidence-based adjustments to implementation methods.

*Fourth*, the South Korean government needs to balance alliance management with strategic autonomy, ensuring diplomatic flexibility while maintaining security commitments. Therefore, South Korea should articulate a more distinct regional vision that complements but is not dependent on the US Indo-Pacific strategy, emphasizing South Korea's unique position and interests. Develop independent diplomatic initiatives targeting middle powers such as ASEAN countries, Australia, and India to create additional layers of security cooperation beyond the alliance with the US. Establish structured dialogues with China on specific non-controversial issues such as climate change, public health, and disaster management to maintain communication channels despite broader strategic tensions. Enhance indigenous defense capabilities in critical areas to reduce dependence on US systems while maintaining interoperability with allies.

*Fifth*, the South Korean government must focus on fostering domestic consensus on strategic direction. South Korea needs to focus on establishing a bipartisan committee on national security to develop areas of consensus that can transcend electoral cycles, providing greater policy continuity. Engage civil society and academic organizations in public education efforts about complex security challenges, building broader understanding of strategic trade-offs. Develop evidence-based messaging that clearly communicates both security benefits and economic costs of strategic choices, enabling more informed public debate. Create formal consultation mechanisms with opposition parties on critical security decisions to promote greater inclusivity in policymaking.

In general, these recommendations acknowledge the practical challenges facing South Korea's NSS deployment while offering pragmatic approaches to enhance its effectiveness. By adopting more nuanced implementation strategies that balance security needs with economic realities, South Korea can more effectively pursue its vision of becoming a "*global pivotal state for freedom, peace and prosperity*" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs Republic of Korea, 2023). Enhance indigenous defense capabilities in critical areas to reduce dependence on US systems while maintaining interoperability with allies.

#### 4. Recommendations

South Korea's new NSS under President Yoon Suk-yeol marks a significant shift in Seoul's approach to national, regional, and global security issues. Through a comprehensive analysis of the NSS's content, this study clarifies important changes in South Korea's foreign and security policies, as well as the country's growing ambition to play a larger role on the international stage. *First*, the NSS demonstrates a tougher approach to the North Korean issue, with a policy of 3D replacing the previous administration's focus on "peace". The proposed "Bold Initiative" serves as a comprehensive framework to promote denuclearization and improve inter-Korean relations, reflecting a conditional and reciprocity-based approach. *Second*, the NSS shows a more balanced and pragmatic approach in relations with major powers. While reaffirming the importance of the South Korea-US alliance, the strategy also calls for building a "healthy and mature" relationship with China. This reflects Seoul's efforts to maintain a strategic balance between the two major powers while protecting its national interests. *Third*, the NSS demonstrates South Korea's clear ambition to enhance its global role. The emphasis on values such as democracy, human rights, and freedom not only reflects South Korea's positioning within the group of liberal democracies but also expresses its desire to contribute more actively to solving global issues. However, the

implementation of this NSS faces many challenges. The tougher approach to North Korea may lead to increased tensions on the peninsula. Meanwhile, efforts to balance between the US and China may become more difficult in the context of intensifying strategic competition between the two powers. South Korea's new NSS reflects a multifaceted and flexible approach to foreign and security policy, aimed at dealing with an increasingly complex geopolitical environment. It also demonstrates Seoul's ambition to position itself as a "globally pivotal state for freedom, peace, and prosperity". These changes could have significant impacts on East Asian security dynamics in the coming years.

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