



The East Asian Studies Center presents:

Robert E. Kelly **"Nuclear Proliferation in Korea: Donald Trump and Potential South Korean Nuclearization"**



South Korea has recently debated obtaining nuclear weapons. Its American ally opposes this. This talk sketches this debate and argues that the US will have to coerce South Korea to block its nuclearization. The core arguments for South Korean nuclearization are: 1) The credibility of the US alliance commitment to South Korea is newly challenged by North Korea's development of an intercontinental ballistic missile. American involvement in a Korean contingency could now eventuate in a North Korean nuclear strike on the US homeland. 2) The American Republican party under Donald Trump is turning against alliance commitments. US rejoinders are: 1) South Korea's exit from the Nonproliferation Treaty might fatally wound it. 2) South Korean nuclearization would create yet more global possibilities of nuclear accidents and mishaps. 3) South Korean nuclearization might catalyze a regional nuclear cascade. 4) South Korean nuclearization would reduce North Korea's willingness to denuclearize. These nonproliferation-based arguments have not swayed South Korean public or elite opinion though, leaving the US a choice to either coerce a liberal democratic ally, or accommodate its nuclear aspirations.

Robert E. Kelly (@Robert_E_Kelly) is a Professor in the Department of Political Science and Diplomacy at the Pusan National University in South Korea. His PhD is from Ohio State University. His interests focus on security in Northeast Asia, especially the Koreas, and US foreign policy. He has published in academic journals such as the European Journal of International Relations, the International Studies Review, and the Pacific Review, as well as popular outlets such as Foreign Affairs, The New York Times, and the New York Review of Books. His complete writing may be found at his webpage: www.RobertEdwinKelly.com.

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EAST ASIAN STUDIES CENTER

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