

CENTRE FOR KOREAN RESEARCH

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C.K. Choi Building Conference Room #120
1855 West Mall

Allied to Race? The U.S.-Korea Alliance and Arms Race

By Dr. Jae-Jung Suh (Johns Hopkins University)

The Republic of Korea has continuously increased its military spending since 2000 at a rate higher than conventional explanations would expect. Its spending grew at an average annual rate of 4% for the past 10 years, higher than would be warranted by the growth of its economy or government budget for the same period. It is also notable that South Korea raised its defense spending at a higher rate than North Korea at a time when Seoul was taking a more conciliatory policy of engagement, commonly dubbed sunshine policy. Its defense spending increased ostensibly in response to its policy goal to build a more autonomous military at least under the Roh administration, but closer examination shows that the U.S.-Korea alliance in fact strengthened during this period and served as driver of South Korea's military transformation. Furthermore, Roh's predecessor and successor have despite their opposite political orientations strengthened the military in a way that dovetail with changes in American strategy and military. This article examines the degree to and the ways in which the South's military transformation, in quantity and form, is attributable at least partly to the pressure that its alliance with the United States keeps on Seoul to maintain military readiness and interoperability.

J.J. Suh is currently Associate Professor and Director of the Korea Studies Program at The Paul H. Nitze School of Advanced International Studies (SAIS), Johns Hopkins University. He has previously served as Assistant Professor in Department of Government at Cornell University. An expert on the U.S.-Korea relations, U.S. policy toward Asia, international

relations of East Asia, international security, and IR theory, he has authored and edited numerous journal articles and books, including *Power, Interest and Identity in Military Alliances* (2007); *Rethinking Security in East Asia: Identity, Power and Efficiency*, co-editor (2004); “The Imbalance of Power, the Balance of Asymmetric Terror: Mutual Assured Destruction (MAD) in Korea,” and “The Two-Wars Doctrine and the Regional Arms Race.”

