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## The Biggest Korean Nuclear Risk Could Come From The South

By: Geoffrey Ingersoll – April 30, 2013

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While the world fights to rid North Korea of its limited nuclear arsenal, South Korea is pushing for its own nukes.

"A less obvious, but increasing, possibility is that South Korea might dash hopes of keeping the Peninsula non-nuclear," writes Ted Galen Carpenter, a senior defense analyst with the Cato Institute, in Real Clear Politics.

The effects of South Korea getting nukes could be devastating to the region.

"With every other country in Northeast Asia then having nuclear weapons — including Japan which would over time push to develop its own weapons — then you have the potential for a regional nuclear arms race," Dr. Bruce W. Bennet, a Korean nuclear deterrence expert at the Rand corporation, told Business Insider.

Though the U.S. and a South Korea just inked an extension to America's "nuclear umbrella" over the South, some experts say that the agreement can only last so long. Especially if South Koreans continually question whether the U.S. will actually pull the trigger, when push comes to shove.

"Unless [Washington] can induce North Korea to give up its nuclear program, there is a growing possibility that South Korea will not sit idly by and depend solely on the United States ... South Korean political leaders can resist a pro-nuclear majority in public opinion for only so long," wrote Carpenter.

Around two of every three South Koreans think the country should develop its own nuclear capacity. There have even been outspoken politicians advocating for it.

Bennet says the two-thirds majority is more indicative of a population that just wants its government to do something, *anything*, to deter North Korean aggression — but it doesn't necessarily mean building nukes.

"The closest analogy I can draw is France in the 1950s," says Bennet, "many of the French conservatives thought that the United States, though we had promised to do so, would not protect against a Soviet invasion."

Except France eventually developed its own nuclear program.

Bennet said the South is unlikely to do so as of yet, but, depending on the effects of budget cuts in the U.S., may decide in the coming years that it is in their best interest.

"That kind of arms race could get nasty. The development is expensive, and the leaders have to justify the budgets to their people — so you have to say things like during the Cold War, like 'better dead than red' — where suddenly you've got countries accusing each other of posing mortal threats," say Bennet.

This would unleash a dangerous destabilizing effect from Seoul to Beijing, says Bennet.

As for North Korea, most analysts say that it can't produce a nuclear ballistic missile — and that may be a problem. Bennet says U.S. taunts about not having the capability to nuke anything actually serve as motivation to try and nuke something, though most likely only a test.

"China's fourth nuclear test was a missile out over their deserts. North Korea could do the same thing, or it may just put one out over the sea areas just to demonstrate that it can," said Bennet.