Research Seminar

‘Anxieties and Asymmetry: South Korea and Extended Nuclear Deterrence’.

By: Professor Andrew O’Neil, Director, Griffith Asia Institute

As one of the United States’ longest standing allies, the Republic of Korea (ROK) is an important test case for examining the ongoing relevance of extended nuclear deterrence (END) in Asia in the twenty-first century. Of all America’s allies worldwide, few would disagree that South Korea has the most reason to feel threatened. Its primary strategic rival, North Korea, is a nuclear-armed state with an established track record of highly provocative behaviour. The ROK has edgy relationships with its larger neighbours, most notably Japan, its former colonial ruler, and also China, which remains a protector of North Korea despite having formal diplomatic relations and a major economic relationship with Seoul. Currently, and with an eye to the longer term, ROK policy makers have a range of good reasons to feel apprehensive about their security environment.

While extended deterrence assurances involving conventional military support have been proffered by Washington to Seoul since the conclusion of the Mutual Defence Treaty in 1953, only since 1978 have extended nuclear deterrence assurances been formally enshrined in the alliance relationship. Through successive nuclear security assurances contained in annual communiqués issued by the US-ROK Security Consultative Mechanism Committee, Washington has signalled its continuing commitment to END on the Korean peninsula.

How has END evolved as part of the US-ROK alliance? And how relevant is extended nuclear deterrence in the contemporary relationship between the two countries? In addressing these questions, the presentation advances three principal claims. First, contrary to themes in much of the contemporary literature, END has become more rather than less important to the US-ROK alliance over time. Second, South Korea has been increasingly reassured concerning the credibility of US extended nuclear deterrence. Third, while ROK policy makers believe END is important in deterring existential threats to national security, they are less convinced about whether it serves much purpose in deterring lower level provocations from Pyongyang below the level of war.

→ Thursday 22\textsuperscript{nd} March, 2012
→ N54 Room 2.02
→ Nathan campus
→ 12.30 -1.50pm

To RSVP, please contact Sylvia Gillard on (07) 3735 5322 or s.gillard@griffith.edu.au no later than 5.00pm Monday 19\textsuperscript{th} March 2012. This is a catered event.