

Extended Deterrence and Strategic Stability in Northeast Asia  
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Extended deterrence attracted a great deal of political and intellectual attention during the Cold War; after all, it was essential to keeping the peace in a Europe divided by the Iron Curtain and threatened by the conventional and nuclear forces of the Warsaw Pact. Strategic stability also attracted a great deal of attention; after all, it was synonymous with avoiding nuclear catastrophe. With the end of the Cold War and the passing of concern about East-West military conflict, these two concepts lost their salience as the attention of policy makers and analysts shifted to new problems.

But in recent years, they have regained their salience. Of course, the strategic landscape is entirely different. From a European perspective, this is clearly evident in NATO's rising debate about how to ensure its deterrence and defense posture is effective for the 21<sup>st</sup> century challenges. And given shifts in Russia's policy and posture, there is obvious concern in Washington, Paris, London, Brussels, and Moscow—and many other capitals—about whether and how strategic stability can be strengthened.

But our focus here is not Europe but Asia—more specifically, Northeast Asia. Here, the historical context is entirely different. Here, there are new concerns about extended deterrence and strategic stability. Moreover, the situation is complicated by the increasing interconnectedness of our world—a central factor for East Asians concerned about extended deterrence and strategic stability in Northeast Asia is what happens in Europe to extended deterrence and strategic stability.

To explore and illuminate these contexts, concerns, and connections, I will proceed as follows. I will begin with a brief discussion of the challenges of extended deterrence and strategic stability as we came to understand them during the Cold War. I will then review developments since the end of the Cold War in terms of their impact on these concepts. Then I will turn to contemporary Northeast Asia. I will review the overlapping but not identical security perceptions of Japan and South Korea as well as the efforts of the United States to strengthen cooperation with its allies to adapt extended deterrence to 21<sup>st</sup> century purposes while also preserving strategic stability with China. This will include a brief review of the comprehensive U.S. approach to strengthening regional deterrence architectures and of some of the

challenges ahead for the United States and its two regional allies. I will close with some observations about the impact of what happens in Europe on Northeast Asia.<sup>1</sup>

Extended deterrence is a promise to protect an ally from attack. It has two objects—the potential attacker and the ally. For the potential attacker, it is a message of deterrence—of American intention to respond to an attack on an ally or even to strike preemptively if a threat is imminent. For the ally, it is a message of assurance—that deterrence will be effective, war will be avoided, and the ally will remain safe and secure. In history, extended deterrence is uniquely associated with nuclear deterrence and has been reflected in both nuclear declaratory policy and nuclear force postures. Accordingly, it is commonly referred to as a nuclear umbrella. But extended deterrence is reinforced by other means, especially the presence of conventional forces in adequate numbers to defeat conventional attacks. During the Cold War, both the United States and Soviet Union extended deterrence over their allies. Today, the United States is the only extender of deterrence. Whether this will remain so in the future is an open question.

From an American perspective, extended deterrence actually preceded central deterrence. That is to say, the United States provided a nuclear-backed guarantee to its allies in Europe, not least by deploying nuclear-armed bombers there, before the Soviet Union in the 1960s acquired the ability to attack the United States with nuclear-tipped ballistic missiles. Once the Soviet Union acquired that ability, a major challenge for extended deterrence came into focus: would it be credible to Moscow for the United States to threaten nuclear attack on the Soviet Union in a war in Europe if this also put the American homeland at risk? And if this threat were not credible, could the Soviet Union “de-couple” the United States from the defense of its allies with nuclear threats to the continental United States? Would it be possible for the United States to continue to assure its allies in Europe in such a strategic circumstance? British Defense Minister Denis Healey quipped in the 1960s that deterrence of the Soviet Union ought require that extended deterrence only be 5 percent credible, given the terrible consequences of war, while the assurance of allies would require that it be 95 percent credible, given the cost they would pay if deterrence were to fail. NATO’s unique nuclear sharing arrangements, whereby some allies maintain nuclear-capable aircraft to deliver U.S. nuclear bombs in time of war, was a partial solution to this problem. France’s skepticism about U.S. credibility was one important factor—among many—in its decision to acquire an independent nuclear deterrent.

The concept of strategic stability had similarly deep roots in the Cold War. The idea was born of the nuclear arms race and the fear that each side had that the other might gain some advantage and see benefit in striking first with nuclear weapons in time of war. It took nearly a decade of competition around the time of

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<sup>1</sup> Many of the arguments presented here were first elaborated in Brad Roberts, *Extended Deterrence and Strategic Stability in Northeast Asia* (Tokyo: National Institute for Defense Studies, 2013).

the Cuban missile crisis for people in the United States and Soviet Union to come to understand that the interest in strategic stability was mutual and required mutual acceptance of vulnerability to nuclear attack. This was called mutual assured destruction—which is often incorrectly called the policy of one or both sides, when it was simply recognition of a fact that could not be avoided.

With the end of the Cold War, the context for both extended deterrence and strategic stability began to shift. With the Presidential Nuclear Initiatives of the early 1990s, the United States brought home all of the nuclear weapons deployed in Northeast Asia. They had been in Korea but not Japan and also aboard naval surface vessels. It removed nuclear-tipped Tomahawk cruise missiles from attack submarines but retained the ability to re-deploy them in time of crisis. The United States also began to bring home U.S. nuclear weapons deployed in Europe, to the point where 95 percent had been withdrawn by 2007. But it retained the nuclear umbrella in its declaratory policy—that is, its promise to use nuclear weapons in defense of its allies.

On strategic stability, the end of the Cold War brought an end to the arms race and, for a while, at least, a loss of concern about nuclear vulnerability vis-à-vis Russia. Russia was no longer seen as an enemy and the focus of U.S. strategic policy shifted increasingly to the problem of regional challengers such as North Korea arming themselves with nuclear weapons and long-range ballistic missiles. For the strategic nuclear relationship with Russia, the United States began a search for alternatives to mutual assured destruction as an organizing concept, and U.S. policymakers spoke increasingly of a shift to mutual assured security.

By 2009, the incoming Obama administration recognized that the strategic landscape had shifted yet again. It recognized the need to renew the focus on extended deterrence and indeed to strengthen both the deterrence of nuclear-armed regional challengers like North Korea and the assurance of U.S. allies facing new nuclear threats. The administration also recognized the need to try to work with both Russia and China to strengthen agreement about the requirements of strategic stability. Both had become increasingly vocal in recent years about their concerns that developments in the U.S. strategic posture were troubling to their views of strategic stability. The developments of particular concern to them were of U.S. ballistic missile defenses and conventional prompt strike capabilities that, they feared, could be used by Washington to attack their nuclear forces preemptively without fear of effective retaliation on the U.S. homeland.

In 2009, the Obama administration also began dialogues with U.S. allies on these matters. It originally did so in the context of the Nuclear Posture Review, when the administration invited all of those states with a stake in U.S. nuclear policy and posture to express their views. Japan and South Korea were among those allies most eager to seize this opportunity and the resulting dialogues were sustained and substantive. They had a real impact on U.S. declaratory policy and on U.S. force posture decisions.

The dialogues of 2009 brought home to decision-makers in Washington, Tokyo, and Seoul the value of sustained, substantive, high-level dialogues on extended deterrence and strategic stability. In NATO, a mechanism for such dialogues has long existed in the form of the High-Level Group and the Nuclear Planning Group. In these two bilateral alliances in Northeast Asia, no similar mechanisms existed—so they had to be created. Accordingly, in 2010 the United States and Japan established the Extended Deterrence Dialogue (EDD) and the United States and South Korea established the Extended Deterrence Policy Committee (EDPC). These mechanisms have three main functions. The first is to ensure continued policy transparency and coordination. The second is to undertake joint exploration of new problems of extended deterrence, primarily through the use of tabletop exercises that identify potential future decisions and the information needed to support them. The third is to enable Japan and South Korea to become familiar with the U.S. military capabilities devoted to their defense, with visits to bases and airfields, for example.

These dialogues, and unofficial dialogues that have run in rough parallel, have helped to bring into focus the similar but not identical security perceptions of Japan and South Korea. Both feel threatened by a nuclear-armed North Korea, especially one controlled by such an unpredictable and bellicose leader. Both have heard the rhetoric emanating from Pyongyang about the use of nuclear weapons to attack U.S. military forces in the region and those who host them. Both worry about the rise in conventional provocations following North Korea's nuclear tests (and see the so-called stability/instability paradox at work here). Both also worry about the potential de-coupling effects of threatened North Korean nuclear attacks on the U.S. homeland. Both are having newly energetic debates about what more might need to be done to redress the situation created by North Korea's success in developing nuclear weapons. Both worry about what it will be like to live in a world in 2020 when North Korea might have 60-80 or more nuclear weapons and the associated long-range delivery systems.

But Japan is also concerned about China in a way that South Korea is not. Japan feels pressured by China's rise and especially its assertiveness in the maritime environment, where China seeks to create the conditions for the settlement of multiple territorial disputes on terms favorable to it. Japan is much more concerned about Chinese nuclear coercion than nuclear attack.

A key additional factor in regional security perceptions is the deep and abiding animosity between South Korea and Japan. They are both allies of the United States but they are not allies of each other. The conditions that might make that possible are very remote, given historical experience and contemporary political and territorial disputes that continue to reveal the depth of existing grievances. Yet cooperation between them and with the United States is essential for both deterrence and assurance.

On strategic stability, Japan again has an interest that South Korea does not, given Japan's focus on the China factor. Japan's key concern is about the future of the China-U.S. nuclear relationship.

The China-U.S. nuclear relationship is quite different from the Russia-U.S. nuclear relationship. Politically speaking, nuclear weapons are in the background, not the foreground. China's forces are few (though they are being modernized in a manner that is increasing the number capable of delivery at long ranges). Numerical parity does not exist. But China has argued that parity exists qualitatively, in the sense that each side is capable of inflicting unacceptable damage on the other, thus making mutual deterrence reliable.

Moreover, the United States has not explicitly accepted mutual vulnerability as the basis of strategic stability with China as it has with Russia. And China wants to know: does the U.S. accept or reject this principle? China argues that acceptance by the United States would ease Chinese concerns about strategic stability and relax its modernization program. It argues that rejection by the United States would have the opposite effect. The United States has neither accepted nor rejected mutual vulnerability. The Obama administration, like its two predecessors, has told China that missile defense protection of the American homeland is intended to negate the deterrents of regional actors like North Korea and Iran but not the deterrents of major powers like Russia and China. But this is an incomplete answer.

Japanese experts observe this dialogue and strongly argue that the United States should not accept mutual vulnerability as the basis of strategic stability with China. They argue that doing so would be understood in Beijing as a signal that the United States would agree to be deterred in a future crisis and thus would not be expected by Beijing to defend its interests or its allies. This, they argue, would be a message of appeasement and would prove dangerous.

As the United States has worked with Japan and South Korea to build sustained, effective consultations on these topics, it has also sought to work with China to build a parallel dialogue on strategic stability. It has sought a mechanism where Washington and Beijing could discuss their mutual concerns about developments in the strategic posture of the other. Such a mechanism might help to dispel some misperceptions and concerns, while adding some predictability and also greater clarity about strategic intentions. China has repeatedly rejected U.S. initiatives in this area. It prefers to rely on unofficial dialogue to signal its concerns and has so far been unreceptive to arguments that a nuclear relationship based on suspicion and worst-case military planning is contrary to the commitment of Presidents Xi and Obama to work toward a "new type major power relationship." This "new type" relationship is intended to emphasize the avoidance of conflict and "win-win" outcomes, as opposed to the tendency of "old type" relationships between rising and dominant powers to lead to war.

An additional factor in this strategic landscape is China's shifting view of U.S. extended deterrence. Historically, China has been ambivalent about U.S. extended deterrence in Northeast Asia; but today, this ambivalence is giving way to clear opposition. Historically, China resisted a major U.S. military presence in East Asia but accepted it as useful for providing regional stability in a Cold War context and containing Japanese militarism. Today, China sees U.S. alliances as having an increasingly anti-China focus and accordingly it fears encirclement and containment by the United States alliance system. Chinese experts also argue that America's strong commitment to its allies in Northeast Asia, especially with its promised "re-balance" of military forces into the region over the next five years, has emboldened U.S. allies to challenge China's interests in dangerous and destabilizing ways.

The EDD and EDPC have helped to ensure sustained leadership focus in Tokyo, Seoul, and Washington on the effort to adapt extended deterrence to 21<sup>st</sup> century requirements. That effort is built on the comprehensive approach to strengthening regional deterrence architectures set out by the Obama administration in 2009 and 2010, building on the work of the two preceding presidential administrations. That approach has six main elements:

1. To ensure a solid foundation of strong alliances that are politically active and effectively focused on real problems in the security environment.
2. To maintain a balance of conventional forces favorable to allied interests.
3. To deploy and improve ballistic missile defenses, both regional and U.S. homeland.
4. To improve conventional strike capabilities, especially with regard to the missing capabilities for prompt strike at long range.
5. To ensure resilience in the cyber and space domains.
6. To tailor the nuclear component to specific geographical, historical, military, and political requirements.

This is an approach to regional deterrence that gives both the United States and its allies important responsibilities for contributing to deterrence and assurance. It embeds the nuclear umbrella in a much larger construct.

Looking to the future of U.S. efforts to strengthen extended deterrence and strategic stability in Northeast Asia, a number of challenges stand out and are likely to become increasingly politically salient in the years ahead.

First, there will be difficult decisions about how much ballistic missile defense is enough in the region. An increase in the number and capability of U.S. and allied ballistic missile defense sensors will enable increased integration of those sensors and some improved effectiveness against both North Korean and Chinese missile launches. Combined with improvements to missile defense interceptors, this will bring difficult questions for both Tokyo and Seoul (and Washington) about how which systems to acquire and where and how to deploy them. China is also pressuring both U.S. allies to not take further steps to develop missile defense and

cooperate with the United States. Its concerns are both military and political. Militarily, Beijing fears that the credibility of its deterrent will be jeopardized. Politically, it fears that the United States is using technical cooperation on missile defense to create a de facto multilateral alliance system aimed at the encirclement and containment of China.

Second, there will be new questions about how much of what kind of conventional strike systems should be fielded by the United States and its allies in Northeast Asia. South Korea and the United States have agreed that South Korea should develop and deploy conventionally-armed ballistic missiles capable of reaching the full territory of North Korea. This has helped to reignite interest in Japan in similar capabilities—a move that would have far-reaching and negative political implications in the region. The United States has still not decided whether to deploy Conventional Prompt Global Strike (CPGS) systems and, if so, what types and in what numbers. As with BMD, there will be a threshold of capabilities beyond which China will perceive a new threat to its vision of strategic stability.

Third, there will be new debates about the current tailored nuclear approach in Northeast Asia. In 2009, the Obama administration took the decision to retire the stored nuclear-armed Tomahawk missiles because it saw them as redundant in a nuclear arsenal capable of deploying nuclear weapons to support U.S. allies with non-strategic delivery systems with dual-capable aircraft (DCA). It made the promise that these DCA would be globally deployable in support of U.S. allies anywhere. It also emphasized that the primary means by which the United States extends nuclear deterrence to its allies is with the strategic triad of bombers and land- and sea-based ballistic missiles. It also worked with its allies to develop the dialogue mechanisms so that the consultative process with them would be more “NATO-like.” In both Tokyo and Seoul, there appears to be broad support for these decisions. Although assurance appears to be high in both capitals, there is also a rising debate in both countries about the requirements of effective deterrence and about U.S. credibility.

Fourth and finally, there is likely to be rising concern about strategic stability in the China-U.S. nuclear relationship as the two enter what seems likely to be a period of increased friction and a possibly more closely connected action-reaction cycle in their strategic forces. China appears to be at a point where it is beginning to deploy multiple warheads atop land-based systems and may do so with sea-based systems in the not too distant future. The United States is entering a cycle of modernization of its nuclear forces, where the sharp rise in Chinese nuclear forces capable of reaching the United States will play an important role in the U.S. debate about what future forces are needed.

Let me close with a few words about the impact of developments in Europe on extended deterrence and strategic stability in Northeast Asia. Experts on these topics in Northeast Asia closely watch developments in Europe. They look for signs of rising or falling confidence in extended deterrence. They look for concerns about

the credibility of the United States as a security guarantor. They look for signs of appeasement of Russia, concluding that this foreshadows choices to appease China as well. Some Japanese experts criticized the NATO strategic concept of 2010 for failing to take a sufficiently global view of the nuclear problem (NATO's call on Russia to re-locate its nuclear weapons out of the Euro-Atlantic security area could result in new threats to Japan, much as an early version of the INF treaty might have done). Today, these observers in Northeast Asia watch closely actions taken by NATO in follow up to its commitment to sustain its nuclear sharing arrangements, with the conviction that a failure to do so will result in a U.S. decision to retire those very capabilities that are supposed to be "globally available."

In sum, the changing strategic landscape in Northeast Asia is bringing with it new efforts by the United States, Japan, and South Korea to strengthen extended deterrence to deal with new challenges while also preserving strategic stability with China. The region is complex and dynamic. The opportunities to strengthen extended deterrence are many and the new approach for the 21<sup>st</sup> century is bringing benefits. But the challenges to strategic stability are significant and growing. A key aspect of complexity is the impact of the outside world on Northeast Asia—and vice versa.

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