


Impact on Nuclear Extended Deterrence

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CONTENTS

[I. Introduction](#)

[II. Report by Michael Schiffer](#)

[III. Notes](#)

[IV. Nautilus invites your responses](#)

I. Introduction

In this short report, Michael Schiffer raises three critical issues regarding extended deterrence in Northeast Asia: first, the security challenges extended deterrence is intended to address; second, the differing perspectives and interests of the players in the system; and finally, the interplay of shifting strategic considerations and a stable security settlement leading to a nuclear-free Korean Peninsula.

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II. Report by Michael Schiffer

Impact on Nuclear Extended Deterrence by Michael Schiffer

The Halperin proposal for a comprehensive security settlement for the Korean Peninsula raises three critical issues regarding extended deterrence in Northeast Asia: the security challenges extended deterrence is intended to address; the differing perspectives and interests of the players in the system; and the interplay of shifting strategic considerations and a stable security settlement leading to a nuclear-free Korean Peninsula. [\[1\]](#)

For the first, while the North Korean nuclear program may be both the most dangerous and even the most likely security challenge that faces the region, it is far from the only one. There are multiple demand signals that extended deterrence must respond to, including those that arises from the challenges of cross-domain deterrence in an era of technological change, and a need to balance the requirements of deterrence on Peninsula to assure that as we answer one problem - that of North Korea's nuclear program - by unhinging the region's broader deterrence-stable security environment or by displacing "solved" security anxieties only to create new ones, elsewhere, that lead to a less stable and less secure regional environment.

Second, consideration of extended deterrence requirements in Northeast Asia reinforces and underscores that nuclear diplomacy on Peninsula remains, as it ever has been, a multi-player game. There are not simply two sides. Interests and desired end states, even between close allies, are not particularly, or even well, aligned. One can not speak of the US and the ROK or the US and Japan as unitary entities with coterminous security interests. Extended deterrence considerations expose fault lines that suggest that these interests may be less than simple to elide through negotiations primarily conceived along two-player lines. The different perspectives and interests of issues related to the desired "end state" and views on unification of the Peninsula amongst and between the different players likewise reveal additional considerations for extended deterrence requirements.

Finally, shifting strategic considerations in the region render the basic question of "what is object of deterrence" that animates extended deterrence architecture (or should) somewhat slippery, and suggests both areas of tension between the Halperin proposal and other strategic considerations, but also suggests some possible answers too.

For South Korea, the goal of extended deterrence, "including the nuclear umbrella", is first and foremost about North Korea, it's nuclear and missile programs and history of provocations under "the nuclear shadow". The PRC is a secondary consideration in the ROK calculus. For Japan, on the other hand, the extend deterrence discussion is (almost) all about China, with North Korea a real but nonetheless secondary consideration. For the United States, in providing extended deterrence assurances, the goals are many and varied, including military stability on the Korean Peninsula; the broader global nonproliferation equities raised by the North Korean program (including keeping the cork in potential ROK or Japanese programs); alliance obligations to both Korea and Japan; part of the hedge against the rise of a China whose future trajectory remains elusive and uncertain; an essential element of broader US grand strategy as a resident Asia-Pacific power; and as a public good, provided for the region by the US, that serves as a net contribution to regional peace and stability (including addressing broad region-wide anxieties about China's rise). While some of these interests overlap, not all do, and adjustments to address certain issues or concerns may have unintended effects elsewhere. Any extended deterrence solution that leads to strategic decoupling between the US and Japan or Korea, Japanese or Korean pursuit of independent (nuclear) strike capabilities, or otherwise feeds into anxieties that may stoke a arms race dynamic elsewhere in the Asia-Pacific is unlikely to lead to a more stable regional order. Meeting the requirements across all demands without decoupling will be challenging. Moreover, solving the North Korea nuclear problem does not mean extended deterrence requirements on Peninsula melt away. North Korea will

still pose considerable conventional and unconventional assets that could threaten or be used in a provocation against the ROK or Japan (or potentially elsewhere), and new strategic domains (like space and cyber) provide additional challenges.

Shifting strategic considerations in a dynamic regional environment may also contribute to further exacerbating some of these difference and pose additional challenges for extended deterrence, on both sides of the ledger. These include the interplay between soft economic growth, fiscal constraints, and defense and security budgets; political turbulence and leadership transitions (in 2012 we have or will see new leaders or administrations in North Korea, South Korea, China, US, and Japan, with continued political fallout, in each, expected to last for a while); continued fast-paced technological change (including in new strategic domains such as space and cyber); and, mounting evidence of traditional state-centered realpolitik security drivers. These factors may well drive some of the players in a comprehensive settlement apart, and perhaps in non-obvious ways, and place a premium on efforts to calibrate extended deterrence right in the context of an effort to reach a comprehensive settlement and as a net contributor to regional stability.

So, what are requirements for extended deterrence? What of these requirements are potentially put at risk by the Halperin proposal in ways that may potentially have broader negative consequences? And, if so, what are the options to mitigate?

Broadly speaking, extended deterrence assurances must be tangible, credible, and visible, accompanied by declaratory policy that both assures allies and partners and maintains confidence even as it seeks to mitigate stoking a security dilemma.

The establishment of a NWFZ potentially speaks to modalities of how the US is able to tangibly and credibly and visibly demonstrate its extended deterrence commitments. If not addressed - and transit is but one relevant aspect - a NWFZ would run the risk of strategic decoupling between the US and both Korea and Japan (and potentially Taiwan) if the end result is that US capabilities and commitments to be able to continue to underwrite peace and stability in the region are no longer viewed as viable or credible. (Moreover, because of the strategic weight the US Northeast Asian alliances play in the region more broadly, strategic decoupling in Northeast Asia would be quickly followed by an unravelling of the US position in Southeast Asia, with broader Asian stability, especially as territorial issues, jockeying for control, of SLOCs, anxiety over energy security and the like are all on the rise.)

Some of these concerns can be addressed by broadening the concept of extended deterrence, as the United States has sought to do through alliance dialogues with Japan and the ROK in recent years, to stress the broader context which "includes the nuclear umbrella", but is not only the nuclear umbrella. This broadening is essential to be able to answer the object of deterrence question, be it North Korean provocations (including, during the interim, under the "nuclear shadow"), deterring a broader Peninsula war, or deterring other strategic threats and challenges in the region and globally. An increased reliance on conventional capabilities in theater, as well as prompt global strike and other global assets allow for a deemphasis of the role of nuclear weapons, consistent with the 2010 NPR and consistent with the requirements for a NWFZ. Given ROK concerns with deterring North Korean provocation, additional Alliance emphasis on counter-provocation planning (including plans for tactical to strategic counter-punch and escalation control measures) and a shared understanding of an acceptable level of crisis-stable uncertainty will be a necessary part of the mix, at least until such time as the parties to a comprehensive settlement have confidence that it is real and enduring.

This more robust conventional orientation for extended deterrence may help answer some of the tangible, visible and credible anxieties that might otherwise exist, and in so doing help maintain

regional stability, but it also runs up against another key element of the Halperin proposal: the necessity of a "no hostile intent" declaratory policy. The tension is not that the conceptual categories are mutually exclusive, but simply that it is somewhat challenging to balance the diplomacy of beefing up of capabilities while at the same time pledging one's good intentions.

One possible way to square these issues is to likewise promote missile defense, ISR, and the weighting of the defensive side of offense-defense mix required for effective extended deterrence which, combined with negative security assurances, can help provide a broader context in which a non-hostile policy can be seen as real and credible, and balanced against the requirement for the US to meet alliance obligations, reassure friends and partners, and provide effective deterrence. (That said, deepened US-ROK missile defense cooperation is unlikely to be viewed favorably by many in the PRC, which sees itself as the target of US efforts to gain nuclear hegemony, and would need to be mitigated accordingly.)

Lastly is a question of sequencing if North Korea can't be expected to relinquish its nuclear weapons until its security needs are met, but maintains that US extended deterrence commitments, however defensive in nature, undermine it's security. How to interact?

One possible solution, paradoxically, might be to allow the PRC to raise the salience of its nuclear extended deterrence commitment to North Korea even as the United States seeks to deemphasize the nuclear components of its commitments on Peninsula. (Although given the complexity of PRC-DPRK relations this might be counterproductive....). A second approach might include building a menu of Confidence Building Measures that can be worked through, perhaps in tandem with the potential "conditional" acceptance by Korea and Japan suggested, to build the necessary confidence.

Regardless, any or all of the above will require extensive and intensive alliance consultations to assure that progress in addressing North Korea's nuclear program do not have unintended consequences elsewhere, as well as a parallel track US-PRC comprehensive stability dialogue, perhaps as part of the strategic stability dialogue, given the interactions of strategic security issues on Peninsula with those of the region more broadly.

III. Notes

[1] The views and opinions expressed in this paper are the personal views of the author and do not reflect the views of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee or its Chairman.

IV. Nautilus invites your responses

The Nautilus Peace and Security Network invites your responses to this report. Please leave a comment below or send your response to: napsnet@nautilus.org. Comments will only be posted if they include the author's name and affiliation.

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