


Mutual Trust: Collective Hedge

 The NAPSNet Policy Forum provides expert analysis of contemporary peace and security issues in Northeast Asia. As always, we invite your responses to this report and hope you will take the opportunity to participate in discussion of the analysis.



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Mutual trust is an important part of today's interconnected world. Countries require a certain amount of mutual trust in order to conduct daily and ordinary transactions: funds transfers, goods, and logistics -to name a few.

However, when applied to the security realm at the State-to-State level, mutual trust can become a weapon and an obstacle. Mutual trust expectations not met, can negatively impact other aspects of the relationship if not continually monitored and managed.

For example, countries in the Asia Pacific have numerous interrelationships defined by commercial arrangements, trade regimes, UN conventions, etc. Each agreement required a certain level of mutual trust and had to be structured in ways providing a clear benefit to the State.

International Relations theories and *realpolitik* tell us that States, above all, will do what's in their self-interest. Therefore it should not be a shock when States "hedge" against the most earnest and solemn assurances. Today's *solemn promise* can easily become tomorrow's *broken promise* with simple words like, "Go" or "Execute".

However, today's floating casino cannot become tomorrow's aircraft carrier without years of sustained effort. What becomes of newly-acquired military capabilities? As a former U.S. Secretary of State rhetorically asked, "What's the point of having this superb military you're always talking about if we can't use it?" There are no monopolies on truth or curiosity; questions of this sort are almost certainly not limited to the Western hemisphere. Greater capabilities allow for a greater range of intentions to be expressed in kinetic ways.

Hedging is a natural and responsible reaction to perceived shortfalls of mutual trust.

It would be hugely irresponsible to not hedge against a latent and growing threat. However, that is exactly what many countries are doing when it comes to preventing nuclear proliferation in Northeast Asia. Or in confronting transnational threats like climate change adaptation, energy security, or water scarcity, etc.

All these problems require certain levels of mutual trust to arrive at innovative solutions. The most innovative of solutions usually require at least some proprietary intellectual property rights. Moreover, problems that cross political boundaries usually also require solutions that cross political boundaries.

Technological and cultural solutions to these issues usually require all parties to change what they are currently doing to some degree. Some countries reflexively fear external changes as excuses to trample on sovereignty but it bears emphasizing: the problem is what tramples on sovereignty, not necessarily the solution.

Strong civil societies with their niche capabilities can credibly put a local face on a global solution. They offer an in-place, easily accessible way for governments to implement a solution, when they choose to do so.

Blind trust is never the answer. However, since hedging usually begets more hedging, careful management of the issue should allow enough trust for all sides to kick many cans down the road while focusing on the biggest cans posing the most proximate threats. Where trust doesn't exist, it is wise to implement measures to increase some level of trust and to hedge.

—[Roger Cavazos](#), NAPSNet Contributor

*The **Nautilus Peace and Security Weekly Report** presents articles and full length reports each week in six categories: Austral security, nuclear deterrence, energy security, climate change adaptation, the DPRK, and governance and civil society. Our team of contributors carefully select items that highlight the links between these themes and the three regions in which our offices are found—North America, Northeast Asia, and the Austral-Asia region. Each week, one of our authors also provides a short blog that explores these inter-relationships.*

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Nautilus Institute

2342 Shattuck Ave. #300, Berkeley, CA 94704 | Phone: (510) 423-0372 | Email:

nautilus@nautilus.org