

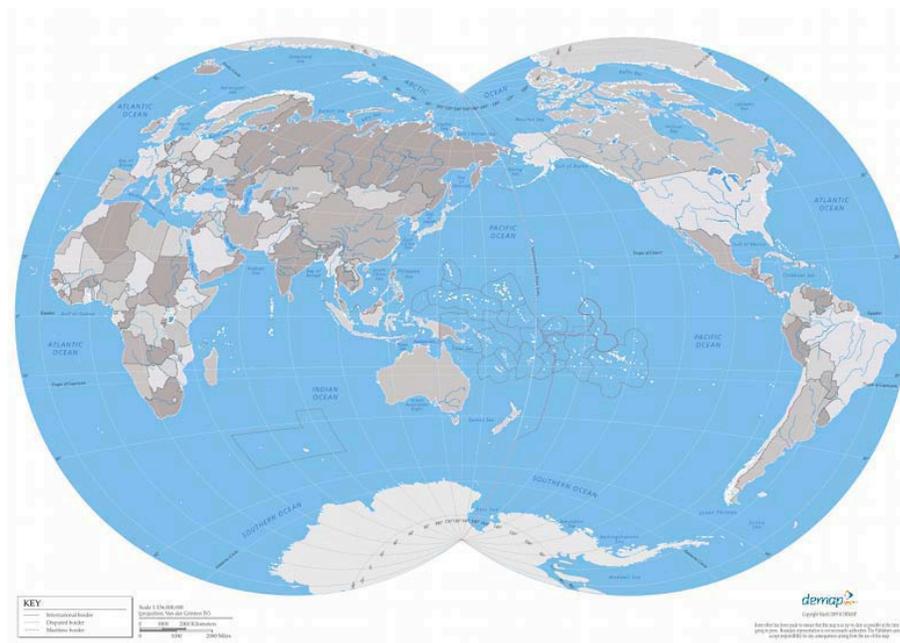
## Changing Dynamics of U.S. Nuclear Extended Deterrence in Korea

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## **U.S. Extended Deterrence in Korea**

Since the beginning of the Korean War in 1950, ROK national defense has the security ties with the United States as the major pillar sustaining effective deterrents against North Korea. The ROK-U.S. mutual security treaty signed after the war is a legal foundation upon which the bilateral security relationship has developed for the past six decades. For the United States, provision of security guarantee for the allies is made possible by its strategy of extended deterrence. Enlarging the scope of projection of deterrent capabilities, from the United States territories to allies' territories, extended deterrence has been a strategic pillar of U.S. defense and foreign policy. And it is a foundation for the ROK-U.S. security ties until today.

A subset of extended deterrence is nuclear extended deterrence—what is called, nuclear umbrella. During the Cold War, nuclear extended deterrence was a cornerstone to counter possible attacks by formidable conventional forces of the communist countries in both Western Europe and Asia. Then, nuclear extended deterrence indeed was a symbol of security commitments by the United States for its allies. Since the end of the Cold War, however, the United States has put less weight on nuclear extended deterrence with or without intention.

In September 1991, President Bush took an initiative to withdraw most of tactical nuclear weapons from abroad. The immediate effect of this decision came to be denuclearization of South Korea. One motivation of this decision is believed to be an attempt to persuade North Korea to give up its nuclear weapon development program. Despite this unilateral gesture, Pyongyang was determined to continue and finally succeeded the nuclear program, leading to a partial failure of the elder Bush's initiative.

In recent years, a worrying view emerges in South Korea that U.S. nuclear umbrella has diminished since the end of the Cold War. A typical American response to this view is that it is nothing but a suspicion of U.S. security commitment to South Korea, and that such an attitude will undermine robustness of the bilateral alliance. But the United States needs to be more willing to listen to South Korea's strategic concerns. As a key security

partner, South Korea has legitimate interest to the possible repercussions to be made by U.S. Administrations' various defense posture changes. The new Nuclear Posture Review (NPR) released by the Obama administration on April 6, 2010 is no exception.

### **Pre-existing “Conditional” Negative Security Assurance**

Notwithstanding the elder Bush's unilateral nuclear initiative, U.S. nuclear umbrella for South Korea has remained intact largely due to the “conditional” negative security assurance (NSA). It was in 1978 during the Carter administration when the United States administration publicly announced the NSA policy. At the U.N. Special Session on Disarmament, then-Secretary of State Cyrus Vance stated that the United States will not use nuclear weapons against any non-nuclear-weapon state party to the NPT or any comparable internationally binding commitment not to acquire nuclear explosive devices. However, he added that an *exception* could be made in the case of an attack on the United States, its territories or armed forces, or its allies, by a non-nuclear weapon state “allied to” or “associated with” a nuclear weapon state in carrying out or sustaining the attack.

It is because of this *exception* clause that the pre-existing NSA is called a “conditional” NSA. Taking the example of the Korean peninsula, its key effect is that even if North Korea were a non-nuclear member state of the NPT, the United States could still retaliate against it with nuclear weapons if it attacked South Korea. This condition, as a strategic link backing up America's pledge of a nuclear umbrella for South Korea, served an important guarantee to deter North Korean invasion. In other words, by leaving open the option of nuclear retaliation against North Korea (whether it develops nuclear weapons or not) in the event that it were to invade the South with conventional weapons, as it did at the start of the Korean War, this maximized the deterrent effect and discouraged the North from making military provocations.

### **The Obama Administration's New NPR and NSA**

The Obama administration's new NPR delivers five points as the core of the new nuclear policy:

- Preventing nuclear proliferation and nuclear terrorism;

- Reducing the role of U.S. nuclear weapons in U.S. national security strategy;
- Maintaining strategic deterrence and stability at reduced nuclear force levels;
- Strengthening regional deterrence and reassuring U.S. allies and partners;
- Sustaining a safe, secure, and effective nuclear arsenal.

The status of U.S. nuclear extended deterrence is directly relevant to the second point. The NPR establishes that the “fundamental role” of its nuclear weapons is to deter nuclear attacks against the United States and its allies. It also amends the pre-existing negative security assurance to clarify a new, strengthened NSA strategy: “The United States will not use or threaten to use nuclear weapons against non-nuclear weapons states that are party to the NPT and in compliance with their nuclear nonproliferation obligations.”

A major feature of this new NSA is that it has eliminated the *exception* clause of the pre-existing conditional NSA which left open the option of nuclear retaliation. As long as non-nuclear states join the NPT and carry out their obligations, even if they attack the United States or its allies with chemical or biological weapons – to say nothing of conventional weapons – the United States clearly declares that it will not retaliate with nuclear weapons. In other words, as opposed to the past when the option was left open for nuclear retaliation against North Korea in the event of an invasion of the South, from now on, if North Korea joins the NPT and abandons its nuclear weapons, the United States promises not to use nuclear weapons to repel a North Korean invasion.

The Obama administration does not disguise the fact that the new policy of “no nuclear retaliation” against non-nuclear NPT member states is targeted at North Korea. At a foreign press conference, principal deputy under-secretary of defense James Miller explained that one reason for the new policy was to entice North Korea to give up its nuclear weapons and return to the NPT.

Regarding the new NPR, critical views have already begun to be aired by both within and without the United States. For example, critics suggest that the conditions under which

nuclear weapons cannot be used are too specific and thus, damage the element of “strategic ambiguity” which deters America’s enemies from using armed forces; that it is irrational to proscribe America’s use of nuclear weapons even if the U.S. mainland suffers massive casualties from a chemical or biological attack; and that one cannot expect that North Korea and Iran will stop their nuclear programs just because the United States promises not to make any nuclear threats.

Nothing will change in U.S. extended deterrence in Korea as long as North Korea holds on to nuclear weapons. Ironically, however, South Korean security can be weakened after the North’s denuclearization because of the huge loophole created by the new NSA. Once North Korea gives up nuclear weapons, U.S. nuclear umbrella will disappear from the Korean peninsula. Then, South Korea must confront still formidable North Korean asymmetric military capabilities such as chemical/biological weapons, forward-deployed artilleries, missiles, submarines and special force. Although U.S. security commitment will remain and may be reinforced by other non-nuclear elements as the new NPR indicates, it will be difficult to reassure either South or North Korea that extended deterrence missing nuclear component is as solid as before.

In the past, with conditional NSA, the United States provided qualified nuclear security guarantee to North Korea and all-weather security assurance to South Korea. After the new NPR and the NSA omitting the *exception* clause, the United States is willing to provide unqualified nuclear security guarantee to denuclearized North Korea and rather managed security assurance to South Korea. In comparison, once North Korea is denuclearized, U.S. nuclear umbrella will be gone, and U.S. overall defense umbrella will be punctured a huge nuclear hole. And a traditional U.S. security blank check will be replaced with a fixed amount check.

### **Impacts on the North Korean Nuclear Crisis**

The initial North Korean response to the new NPR was negative. On April 9, a Foreign Ministry spokesperson pointed out that the new NPR leaves North Korea and Iran as targets for nuclear retaliation and complained that it is no different from the hostile policy

of the early Bush administration, which set North Korea as a target of nuclear preemptive strike and habitually made nuclear threats. At the same time, the spokesperson criticized the new NPR for completely overturning the pledge made in the September 19<sup>th</sup> Joint Declaration not to use nuclear weapons and for throwing cold water on the prospect of re-opening the six-party talks. Finally, the spokesman declared that the North will continue to increase and modernize its nuclear stockpile as much as it deems necessary. As a result, it is quite unlikely that the Obama administration's new NSA will be able to entice North Korea to give up nuclear weapons.

At this juncture, it should be noted that since the outbreak of the North Korean nuclear crisis there have been constant worries that U.S. nuclear umbrella has weakened. The North Korean argument that it must develop nuclear weapons due to the nuclear threat from the United States is gaining growing acceptance in the international community as time passes. Since the nuclear problem occurred in the early 1990s, North Korea has persistently attacked U.S. attempts to stop its nuclear development using this "American threat argument." This strategy can claim to have earned some measure of success.

For example, the North successfully used the nuclear issue as a lure to achieve the first U.S.-North Korea high-level talks after the Korean War. As a result, in the June 11, 1993 Joint Declaration, the United States formally pledged not to use or threaten to use armed force, including nuclear weapons, against North Korea. The United States made similar promises in the Geneva Agreed Framework signed on October 21, 1994 and the September 19<sup>th</sup> Joint Declaration agreed upon at the 4th round of the six-party talks in 2005. President Clinton reassured Kim Jong Il with his personal letters as well.

In the early 1990s, North Korea has used *desertion of nuclear development programs* as bait to extract repeated promises from the United States not to use military forces including nuclear weapons. And after 20 years later, the North is using *abandonment of nuclear weapons* as a pretext for insisting on the signing of a peace treaty and deactivating the armistice agreement which has formed the foundation of the ROK-U.S.

joint deterrence against North Korea. This is the reality of the North Korean nuclear crisis today.

### **South Korea's Non-Nuclear Weapon Policy**

Despite North Korea's determined efforts for acquiring nuclear weapons, South Korea has firmly adhered to its non-nuclear weapon policy since its first announcement in 1990. Geostrategic circumstances on the Korean peninsula, however, tend to provide a strong rationale for the international community to be suspicious of sincerity of South Korea's non-nuclear weapon policy. North Korea's nuclear weapon program has only added to the suspicions.

Contrary to this traditional wisdom, North Korea's nuclear crisis has actually increased authenticity of South Korean's non-nuclear weapon policy. Despite the North's two consecutive nuclear tests in three years, South Korean government has shown no hint of changing current policy. Emotional public voices for responding in kind by going nuclear on its own are overwhelmed by sensible and mature opinions to follow international nonproliferation norms in a responsible manner. The Obama administration's reducing role of nuclear weapons will not agitate the firmness of South Korea's current policy either.

To South Korea, its commitment to non-nuclear weapon policy is on a par with its commitment to alliance with the United States in two ways. On the one hand, U.S. extended deterrence including nuclear umbrella has filled the security vacuum incurred by the South's non-nuclear weapon policy. The history of the bilateral alliance proves that U.S. nuclear umbrella is efficient and effective to deter North Korea. On the other hand, as a credible and responsible ally, South Korea is not careless enough to behave in a way that its strongest ally most dislikes it to behave. Therefore, suspicion of South Korea's non-nuclear weapon policy is outdated and futile, and should not lay a shadow over the future partnership of the ROK-U.S. alliance.