



Reflections on Contemporary Issues on Extended Nuclear Deterrence

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Background

For much of its history the United States was not interested in extended deterrence. (ED) It refused to participate in alliances, and was generally averse to getting into warfare - and thus to threatening to do so - on behalf of others. Then, in the revolution in American foreign policy after World War II, the United States became and remains the foremost practitioner of extended deterrence, including of extended *nuclear* deterrence. (END)

The standard concerns about practicing ED, and about trying to benefit from it, are familiar, extensions of standard concerns about alliances laid out in alliance theory. There is the serious credibility problem with ED threats. There is the concern about free riding by the government being protected. There is the fear of entrapment, which both protector and beneficiary display. There is concern about moral hazard arising from the protected party. There is concern that an ED commitment is inherently fluid because it reflects the deterrer's perceived interests, which can readily change.

There are two ways to think of deterrence as "extended." One is that ED provides threats to protect others beyond the national territory. In the other deterrence is "extended" in order to start protecting the deterrer far from home, before threats get a good deal closer. This is a kind of geographical extension of the concept of general deterrence. In general deterrence threats of a nasty response are used to deter someone from, in terms of *policy and planning*, seriously preparing a confrontation and a possible attack. One way to use ED is to deter someone from getting close *geographically* to a confrontation and possibly moving to attack. In addition, practicing extended deterrence offers opportunities to show why one's commitments and threats should be taken seriously, well before the opponent has prepared a challenge.

After World War II the second version of ED came naturally to the US and USSR. There was the Soviet determination to have a security glacis in Eastern Europe, for example. Various versions of the domino theory were influential in the US. Kennan's conception of containment, for instance, called for deterrence of steps to pull several of the world's great centers of economic and military resources under Soviet control, and thus inhibit any Soviet effort to make war on the US directly. It was said, apropos Western Europe, South Korea, South Vietnam, etc. that it was far better for the US to be defended (by deterrence or actual fighting) far from home.

One reason this distinction is valuable is that it alters the conception of the credibility problem. For a government taking the second view, the credibility problem in any ED effort becomes somewhat less about having the necessary will and more about whether it has the necessary capabilities for taking significant action at a distance. For the US today, more than for others, deterring in order to smother possible threats of attack involves using ED to help structure/manage the overall strategic environment and

various regional strategic environments. The US has long argued that a congenial international environment for pursuing US interests and activities is a crucial component of its security. The US is powerful enough to affect the international environment (at least the US has long believed this), and one of its standard tools has been ED, as part of its elaborate network of allies and client states and a component of various security management regimes.

One problem with discussions of the credibility of American ED is widespread use of only the first conception of ED within a standard concept of national interests derived from classic alliance theory and the realist framework. It is far more suitable to take up within the second conception, particularly the notion that the US often practices ED with systemic security management in mind. It is also best to see US ED efforts as often operating within a liberalist framework.

An additional point about ED and the credibility problem is that ED has a more complex credibility problem than is generally appreciated, and this is even more true of END. First, an ED threat must be believable (and perceived as such) in terms of the deterrer's *capabilities*. Next it must be believable in terms of the deterrer's *will* – positive and negative. There is the will to act, the strength of the determination to do so, and then there is the will to bear the costs involved, which is somewhat separate matter. Then, the ED threat must be believable in terms of the deterrer's *willingness to do the necessary level of harm*. (The will to do awful things.) This is much more important now than during the Cold War, particularly to END. Finally, the threat must be believable in terms of the deterrer's willingness to do the necessary level of harm *long enough* – to persist in doing awful things.

It is worth noting how various governments came to fall under the scope of US extended deterrence. What caused such a relationship to emerge? The answer is surprisingly complicated. The list of relevant factors includes:

- 1) being considered *directly vital* by the US – as an ally or as strategically crucial. This was true of West Germany and other key countries in Western Europe in the development of NATO.
- 2) being considered vital *symbolically*. This could be as a symbol of US security interests, such as with the ROK in June 1950, or for the credibility of US deterrence commitments in general – like the ROK in 1950 and South Vietnam in the 1960s.
- 3) being considered very important *politically* by the US. Israel is a good example.
- 4) be considered by the US as important in how they relate to other American commitments. During the Cold War this applied to Yugoslavia, Sweden, and Saudi Arabia for example.
- 5) considered by the US very important for a congenial, supportive international environment. This is how the Truman Doctrine emerged vis-a-vis Greece and Turkey. These routes to being embraced by American ED can operate independently or in conjunction, and can be assessed within either a realist or liberalist framework.

The same routes are involved in how governments have become targets of US ED. Perhaps the most common route has been posing a threat to places of value

symbolically. This has been very dangerous because it has sometimes made American ED quite unpredictable and very open ended, such as the American concerns about deterrence credibility in light of the alleged interdependence of commitments in this regard.

Current Issues in American Extended Nuclear Deterrence

American ED, and particularly END, is currently a sensitive subject. Much of the impetus behind this the effort to develop the latest US Nuclear Posture Review. For some time allies and others have been both awaiting the NPR and hoping to help shape it. So have think tanks, security-issue organizations, and the entire US national security bureaucracy.

Over the years it has often been predicted, with reference to its commitments, that the US will retrench, reducing its involvement in international political, particularly security, affairs. This was common in the wake of the Vietnam War and it was widely expressed in early commentaries after the Cold War. There are similar opinions today about what to expect after the war in Iraq. In earlier cases there was considerable concern about the future of American ED and it has now emerged again. The essence of the concern is always heightened anxiety about both the credibility and stability problems associated with extended deterrence. And there continues to be some tension between deterrence credibility and the requirements associated with deterrence stability.

Issue #1: What will become of the US nuclear arsenal?

The current US strategic nuclear arsenal is at roughly 2000 deployed warheads and bombs, under the 2200 maximum allowed under the US-Russian agreement of 2002. The usual estimate is that the US now has approximately 3500-4000 strategic nuclear weapons in reserve, stored but available to be deployed as replacements, or to offset shifts in others' holdings and thus as a hedge against the emergence of a major political competitor seeking to match the US arsenal. The chief factor shaping the US arsenal continues to be the Russian arsenal.

The weapons have been regularly certified as in good condition by the weapons labs but are getting quite old – both the weapons and the delivery vehicles. For today's threats the weapons are generally too big and too imprecise; collateral damage from using them would probably be greater than desirable. Each leg of the nuclear triad is described as needing significant upgrading. The arsenal infrastructure is also aging. Many weapons lab facilities over 50 years old. The US no longer maintains a facility for nuclear testing, has just a small capability to make nuclear pits, and the request to fund a Reliable Replacement Warhead program has been blocked in Congress by those who see it as an effort to make nuclear weapons much more useable.

There are similar concerns about the personnel. Expertise in the repair of old weapons and design of new ones is being lost as the scientific and technical personnel retire. In the services the nuclear weapons career track is not attractive with the

downgrading of the weapons since the end of the Cold War. It is not a major subject at the military academies.

Essentially, the US inclination has been to let nuclear weapons gradually die out but this is challenged by those who see the weapons as of considerable value and by other states which continue to improve their nuclear weapons and, in some instances, enlarge their arsenals. This is due not only to the value they place on nuclear weapons but to a desire to reduce the American technological advantage here and out of concern about the American numerical advantage, the latter providing a considerable US ability to possibly preclude others' nuclear retaliation in a conflict.

The outcome of the NPR is hard to predict precisely but it appears it will call for only modest shifts; there is no plan for the strategic arsenal to disappear soon; President Obama has expressed a strong desire for elimination is proposing an agreement with the Russians to cut the two arsenals only to between 1500 and 1650 – the high end being only 50 below the low end of the existing agreement. There will be a strong reaffirmation of US ED to reassure allies. The US will continue to prevent the development of a MAD posture with any other nuclear power; US policy at both the nuclear and conventional level is to remain more powerful than any competitor, potential competitor, or potential group of competitors. Meanwhile, the slow deemphasis on nuclear weapons in security policy will continue. There will also be an attempt to get the support necessary to do some modernization. The pace on BMD will slow a bit but there will be no reversal of its slow buildup; there will be more emphasis on theater and lower level BMD, with cuts in funding mainly for national BMD.

This cautious hedging approach will face strong challenges from right and left. For years, outfits like the Arms Control Association have pressed for reductions to 1000 strategic nuclear weapons or less, asserting this is a requirement if the US is to have any credibility on the nonproliferation issue. Numerous groups and important experts have urged that the US lead in pressing for complete nuclear disarmament and for a complete ban on producing fissile materials (the US no longer produces them). They insist the administration work hard for ratification of the comprehensive ban on nuclear tests.

On the other side there is strong support for revamping the strategic arsenal and for developing new nuclear weapons more useable in terms of accuracy, damaging hard targets, producing lower collateral damage, etc. This is considered important for strengthening END as well – the argument here being that it is not for the US to decide what deters enemies and reassures friends, it must adapt to what others' think, especially what worried allies think

As for reflections on all this, the first point of interest is that the United States is perhaps the most vigorous current proponent, among nuclear powers, of the view that nuclear weapons are of little use and appeal. As one analyst puts it, the US is foremost among the great powers in "stigmatizing nuclear weapons." China, Russia, Britain, and France seem very unlikely to want to pursue nuclear disarmament – they think their nuclear arsenals have considerable value. As for lesser powers India, Pakistan, Israel,

and North Korea think their huge security concerns make nuclear weapons necessary. This suggests that the US cannot lead others to adopt its view that nuclear weapons are slowly fading in importance and will eventually have to fade away. This also clearly suggests that the US will not cut its strategic nuclear weapons much further for the time being – it is not about to create any peer competitors. Fears about END based on declining US holdings of nuclear weapons are uncalled for.

The graver threat to strategic forces may come from the slow but steady improvement in American BMD capabilities. The US has been gradually doing better with the technology. It is also very interested in both selling its BMD technology to others and linking up their systems with its own. It is supportive of BMD technological progress by allies in Europe and Israel. This is likely to slowly degrade the utility of every other nuclear weapons force. This invites expectations that US END will remain capable of handling the necessary missions well into the future. Doubts about the US capability have to rest on other grounds.

The most feasible way to abandon nuclear deterrence would be to have everyone outgrow the weapons and let the nuclear arsenals gradually decay because the international situation improves so much that the weapons become increasingly irrelevant. But this is apparently not feasible now. Lots of progress in this direction has been made but it seems to be slowing and a plateau may be emerging, inviting a continued role for END.

Issue #2: What is Needed to Reassure Allies?

This issue has various facets. Several allies link effective nuclear deterrence to the physical presence of American nuclear weapons in their neighborhood. The US does this only in keeping some 200-250 (for planes) in Europe, many of which could be turned over to the allies in the event of a war under arrangements dating from the 1950s and 1960s that are still operative. While the US sees them as primarily symbolic and without a serious mission, various analysts and others are quite concerned about the Russians stockpile of some 14,000 tactical nuclear weapons, presumably maintained to offset their weakness in conventional forces and lack of resources to fix that. So far the US acknowledges the need to reassure friends and allies about END but doesn't propose basing lots of nuclear weapons again on their territories – this is not seen as an option. The US no longer maintains such nuclear weapons for use on land.

A number of allies think the US should respond to a nuclear attack on them with a nuclear response, and their analysts in various nations would like a nuclear response for a major conventional attack. This is possible but not guaranteed. The US has never ruled out the first use of nuclear weapons, and actively prepares for a possible second use, but does not guarantee either. (This is discussed further below) Doing so would be contrary to the general US de-emphasis on nuclear weapons. The US is not prepared more suitably for nuclear weapons for either.

Fears periodically circulate among American friends and allies that the US is not, or soon will not be, interested in defending them, particularly by using nuclear weapons. The Bush Administration vigorously pursued a policy of detaching American forces abroad from being typically dedicated to, prepared mainly for, defense of a set geographical area, and of leaving that mission to local forces in Europe, Korea, etc. US forces are now designed, structured and equipped to move to a trouble spot almost anywhere; largely static defensive forces are giving way to - offense-oriented – forces. This is said to indicate that the US will not usually put a high priority on defending others; if it participates it will be on a limited basis.

This applies even in South Korea, the ally that faces the most impressive immediate threat of attack. The US is cutting its forces in Korea, giving them missions outside the country, turning over defending the country mainly to the ROK armed forces, and moving the remaining American forces out of the initial line of fire in a war. The Combined Forces Command which has always been run by an American will soon be replaced by cooperating separate commands under the overall leadership of a South Korean officer.

This is really a contemporary version of the Nixon Doctrine. However, whether it will erode the credibility of American ED and END, like the Nixon Doctrine did, is unclear. The American position is that its smaller, more mobile forces are now so much superior to potential opponents that they will make an enormous difference in a war, and thus ED is actually being strengthened. And the allies are, relatively speaking, much stronger vis-à-vis their potential opponents than they were during the Cold War. Still, if the US is not planning to use large conventional forces and is thinking only of supplementing its allies' own efforts, it is hard to imagine how the US would readily turn to nuclear weapons. There is also, in East Asia, real concern that China will soon have conventional forces far more capable than any other nation in the region, and they can be expected to want a much stronger version of American ED and END than US plans currently contemplate.

More broadly, there is the additional fear allies sometimes display that the US feels it does not “need” its allies. With the disappearance of the Cold War, the sharp decline in the severity of the threats the allies face (even the ROK), the huge American conventional military superiority, and the fact that it is hard to integrate allied forces into effective coalitions with American forces for many kinds of military operations, it is easy to see why the US does not need its allies militarily in the same way as it used to. Recently, in fact, the US has preferred to act militarily on its own or has wished it had done so.

Finally, there is a fair amount of anti-allies/friends sentiment in the US these days, especially in the Congress. Partly this is over alleged free-riding by the allies – Afghanistan being the latest case in point. The US complains constantly about the failure of many allies to emphasize training, procurements, and spending on *power projection* elements – modernization, mobility, advanced communications, etc. The US has been at odds, for years, with its allies about how best to deal with nuclear proliferation, the allies

much more averse to using sanctions, military pressure, or military intervention. The allied concern is that this broad perspective is undermining the domestic political base of American ED. By extension that would apply to END too.

Something worth remembering that pertains directly to END is that during the Cold War, European allies were uneasy about the American conception of Flexible Response because it envisioned efforts to hold a war with the Soviet bloc below the nuclear level and having the allies contribute considerably more conventional forces to that effort. The European response was essentially to do less so the US would continue to do more, and to keep early escalation to the nuclear level much more probable so that in invading Moscow would face a higher probability of escalation to the strategic nuclear level. It was not enough for the US to plan to defend Western Europe; the allied relationship should put the American homeland at greater risk by turning ED more into END. Such thinking affected ROK security policy for years. Japan's national security policy has been to never do enough to defend itself, keeping the US responsible for greater involvement at greater risk. From this perspective, US deemphasis on nuclear weapons, and its insistence that allies take major responsibility for defending themselves, reduces that risk.

Issue #3 What are the functions and goals of US END?

The discussion here is best divided into two parts, the narrow perspective and a broader one. In the narrow perspective the answer starts with the use of END to solidify deterrence of threats against US friends and allies and thereby to reassure them. This is a residual function now because the threats the allies faced in the Cold War have disappeared or become relatively weaker. A residual function but not an unimportant one. It is important in the way insurance is. The disaster it helps cope with may be improbable, but curbing concerns about the improbable relieves a great deal of strain. In particular, US END (and ED) is an important form of hedging against worst possible cases, thereby allowing more resources to be assigned to other pressing matters, and it is certainly welcome.

An obvious related function is use of END to prevent nuclear proliferation. In part the goal is to prevent proliferation by enemies of American allies (and therefore of the US) by convincing them that there is no political/military advantage to be gained in their neighborhood by developing nuclear weapons. The other goal is preventing proliferation by convincing allies or clients that the US provides an alternative form of deterrence, protection and reassurance with its own. This is related directly to the first goal because nuclear proliferation is something governments have often considered when they felt they had no allies or had guarantees from allies that were insufficient or unreliable. The US also wants to prevent its allies from turning to excessive or highly provocative conventional military capabilities or to chemical and biological weapons. Prevention of all these kinds of hedging is to come from the US substituting its own.

Next the US has used END to save its allies from painful national debates about national security and nuclear weapons, particularly Germany and Japan. The US set up a

committee in NATO to shape alliance policy on nuclear weapons precisely to give the Germans a voice on nuclear deterrence by the alliance and forestall nasty domestic political conflict among them. The disruptive nature of such debates is one reason that nuclear proliferation has often been pursued very secretly even in democracies, to avoid not only the pressures from outside but to evade severe domestic political warfare that can lead to weakening attachment to an alliance and then weaken the alliance by what was referred to at the end of the Cold War as the nationalization of security policy in countries like Germany and Japan.

The US has also used its nuclear umbrella to help avoid the emergence and reciprocal stimulation of nuclear arms competitions among its friends and associates. The US has a long-standing desire to maintain the nuclear taboo or the strong reluctance to use nuclear weapons, something a continued growth in nuclear arsenals could undermine.

Turning to a much broader view, the US has long used ED, including END, to help shape and manage regional and global security systems. In supplementing efforts to reinforce the nonproliferation regime and nuclear taboo; the US used deterrence not just for the value of these things in themselves but because they are integral parts of large-scale security arrangements the US is deeply interested in, having typically done much to generate them. END and ED have, for the same reason, been used to help dampen local and regional conflicts, not only involving allies and friends but other states. With rogue states the goal has been not just deterring their direct threat to the US and its friends but the indirect threat posed by their capacity, and often intent, to disrupt regional security arrangements (Iran being a paramount example these days).

We can broaden this perspective still further. The US has often been urged to adopt a policy of either encouraging regional balances of power (in regional systems important to the US) or engaging in offshore balancing – occasionally participating in regional balances to keep them healthy – so as to greatly ease the possibility of major threats emerging from those regions. The reason this is urged so often is that the US has never been interested in it in its modern national security policy. The basic US strategy for vital regional security systems has been to head a *dominant coalition to control each of those systems*. It has little interest in real “balancing” when it can avoid it. This has required a second component of US strategy - having the world’s dominant power projection capability. The US has not envisioned regional systems running themselves; it has assumed it must ultimately run such systems and needs suitable forces for this, in place and readily able to be sent. This has meant the US being the dominant military power in each of those systems. This is primarily how containment really worked in practice.

I mention all this because ED and END have been very important components of this overall strategy and strategic posture. The way this strategy has been pursued since the end of the Cold War bears directly, therefore, on the future of END. The US now operates even more as a hegmon globally than during the Cold War, when important sectors of international politics were beyond its influence. Its security strategy starts with

maintaining its conventional military dominance vis-à-vis any other state or plausible combination of states. At the nuclear level the US indicates it will not tolerate the return of a complete MAD relationship with any competitor. This means not only superiority at the strategic level but some considerable capacity, offensive and defensive, to preemptively and defensively cripple a good portion of any opponent's attack or retaliatory nuclear capabilities.

A third element is the determination to minimize being subjected to the nuclear deterrence, nuclear blackmail, of any rogue state and to have that extend to its friends and allies. That is partly why the US objects to nuclear proliferation by Iran or North Korea but not India. Missile defense is supposed to help here, if vigorous nonproliferation efforts do not work sufficiently. So is END. All of them are to cripple the political/military advantages for others of being a nuclear power.

Finally, a national grand strategy is never just military – it serves an overall political perspective and strategy. In this regard the key is that the US is not a *status quo state*. Many analysts believe it is, especially in depicting it as a hegemon or as operating an empire. Many official American analyses of deterrence start with the US as the deterrer against an “aggressor.” In fact, in its fundamental attitude toward international politics since Woodrow Wilson, it has been in favor of markedly changing the international system. And it has been a prime advocate of doing so by stimulating changes in the domestic nature of many of its members. This shapes the American conception of the international system most conducive to achieving other American goals and advancing American interests. Almost as important is that the United States is, in this, not particularly patient. It thinks history is on its side but likes the idea of giving it a good push.

American foreign policy and national security strategy has been, since sometime in World War II, highly globalist in orientation. It has long had a strong tendency *to define its national interests in global terms*. (With the end of the Cold War it is the most globalist state, in this sense, in the world.) This makes many regions and nations far more “strategic” in the US view than on the basis only of their military or economic importance. In the Cold War, and periodically since then, it has led the US to therefore see its credibility on the line in far more places than might be expected. Looking for the US to focus on its “core national interests” misses this important element.

The most important manifestation of this now is associated with democracy. The United States has consistently said, for years, that security will flourish, for the US and others, if democracy and capitalism spread. It has become a strong advocate of democratic peace theory, reinforcing the perceived link between the spread of democracy and security, something escalated in importance by the Bush Administration. One implication, for a state with a strong globalist orientation, is that the United States cannot be indifferent if a well established liberal democracy is attacked, and certainly not if it is in danger of being overrun. That would undermine the spread of democracy, not just in that case but by inviting similar ones. This means the United States therefore has an implicit commitment to help protect every such nation, even if no explicit alliance with it

exists. The United States is in the business of ED, and essentially END, with respect to well established democracies almost automatically. This is the most fundamental way to approach the question of whether American extended deterrence is reliable.

Further, the US uses ED to reassure allies and deter attacks on them not just to benefit the allies and the US in a specific instance but because the allies and alliances are components of overall US security management. The allies are components not just in perhaps participating in deterrence or some military combat, but in the sense that the democracies constitute a community the existence of which is a cornerstone of American security.

Issue # 4 When would/should the US use nuclear weapons on behalf of its friends and allies?

One obvious possibility, of considerable interest to some allies, is that the US respond with nuclear weapons to a nuclear weapon attack on an ally or friend. One reason for doing this would be that it is a comparable response, appropriate in a logical and emotional sense, and is powerfully bolstering END for the future, minimizing the chances of a recurrence of this situation in END. Another reason for a nuclear response could be the hope that it would destroy the attacker's remaining nuclear weapons or would deter the attacker from using any more. A related reason for such a response would be the hope that it would halt the conflict at every level, saving allied or friends lives. Finally, the nuclear response might be adopted in the belief that failure to do so would erode the American alliance system, with allies abandoning it or reliance on it. An obvious consequence if this happened would be at least some nuclear proliferation.

Another possibility, also of interest to some allies, is a nuclear response by the US to a major conventional attack on an ally or friend, possibly by the use of fairly precise nuclear weapons to hold down the effects. This might be done because a large conventional attack would probably be quite devastating for the friend or ally, and a conventional response by the US might add to the damage if the conflict dragged on, even if in the end it worked out well - a nuclear response might be used in hopes of ending all fighting immediately. However, this seems a less likely possibility than the first one.

In fact, in both instances it seems unlikely the US would readily choose to respond at the nuclear level unless the nuclear attack was substantial and looked like it would continue. One obvious reason is familiar from the debate over the credibility of extended nuclear deterrence during the Cold War: if the attacker has numerous nuclear weapons and can reach US forces or territory, why would the US risk suffering a nuclear retaliation by using on behalf of its ally? What ally would be worth the risk when the enemy has already demonstrated willingness to use nuclear weapons.

A second reason, often noted, is that if the US enjoys great military superiority at the conventional level it will feel strongly pressured to respond in a conventional way because it can do so successfully. This would only add to what would be an American

inclination, in terms of its security management responsibilities in mind, to limit escalation of the weapons used in the conflict to the greatest extent possible. The fact that another state has violated the nuclear taboo, for instance, would be a compelling reason to try to avoid adding yet another violation of it, as a contribution to reaffirming and reinforcing the norm. Still another consideration would be that a nuclear response would be another step toward seeing nuclear weapons as normal. This could be very damaging to security management due to its corrosive effect on barriers to use of the weapons. As a result, it seems most likely that the US would keep the use of nuclear weapons as a last resort in favor of exploiting its conventional level military superiority.

Thus, whereas the discussion on the previous issue strongly suggests that the US can be counted on to respond very strongly to an attack on its democratic friends and allies, the discussion on this issue indicates that the response will almost certainly not be nuclear – unless the attack involves multiple nuclear weapons. It seems rather likely that the US will approach a nuclear response as a last resort. This will not be comforting to some allies.

Playing the most important role in managing systemic security would have yet another potential implication for US ED and END that could be quite uncomfortable. To reaffirm and reinforce the norm, the most appropriate result of the conflict would be removal of the attacking regime. That would very strongly uphold the credibility of American extended deterrence. It would also be appropriate because of the level of irresponsibility displayed by the attacker, irresponsibility that threatened the stability of the international system and its security management to an intolerable degree, could not be allowed to take place again. However, the standard view as to how deterrence is best operated in such situations is that the deterrer should not take military action that threatens the existence of either the regime or its nation because that is most likely to provoke the use or further use of nuclear weapons. This would constitute an acute dilemma. Hints of it have been already displayed in the North Korean situation when the North's actions have fallen well short of the use of nuclear weapons. This dilemma is made even more acute by the prevalence these days of a situation that existed in the early years of the Cold War. Regimes that might be targeted for military elimination these days by the US in a retaliatory action would typically attempt to deter this, or would fight back, by hitting targets other than the US. The chief costs of the further use of nuclear weapons by the opponent would quite possibly be borne by American allies or friends. Once again, this has been evident in the North Korean situation.

A final point is one noted early in the development of deterrence theory. In ED and END, as in deterrence in general, the point of the threat of imposing unacceptable harm is to *prevent* an attack or other unacceptable behavior. Once an attack has taken place nonetheless, the decision situation changes and a new assessment of what is the most appropriate thing to do must be made. The point of a deterrence is not (normally) to be able to seize an opportunity to show that you meant it. This need to reconsider applies not only to the US but to the party or parties who have suffered the attack. The attack will shift perceptions, cost assessments, images of the opponent, etc. In this sense, the response to a challenge to ED or END can never be automatic.