

# CONVENTIONAL FORCE ISSUES AND A KOREA-JAPAN NWFZ

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The purpose of this note is to specify the requirements for four papers to be written for one panel in the Nautilus Institute Research Workshop on Extended Deterrence and NWFZs in East Asian Security in Tokyo on November 11, 2011. One goal of the workshop is to assess the desirability and viability of United States assurances of nuclear extended deterrence as a core part of the security policies of Japan and the Republic of Korea, and, to explore and test the possible structure, viability and problems of relying on conventional instead of nuclear extended deterrence.

Accordingly, three papers will explore and test the possible structure, viability and problems of reliance by Japan and the Republic of Korea on United States conventional extended deterrence, in concert with its regional allies' capabilities, with one paper each from the perspective of Japan, the Republic of Korea, and China.

A fourth paper will explore the related but more specific and narrow questions of the role of United States assurances of extended nuclear deterrence to the Republic of Korea in respect of nuclear, conventional or chemical attacks on Seoul, and the possible structure, viability and problems of reliance on United States conventional extended deterrence, in concert with its regional allies' capabilities.

## I. BACKGROUND

As early as 1972, researchers and policy-makers in Japan and elsewhere have explored concepts of a Northeast Asian nuclear weapons-free zone. Nautilus Institute is exploring the viability of a particular approach to such NWFZ based on the goal of a bilateral (South) Korea-Japan NWFZ,<sup>1</sup> with the door open for North Korean entry at the outset or at a later date.<sup>2</sup> The provision by the United States of assurances of extended nuclear deterrence to Japan and the Republic of Korea is a key issue in discussing such a proposal, since the governments of both countries rely on and incorporate such an assurance into their defence policies and planning, particularly in regard to the DPRK and China. Although it is possible, as the case of Australia shows, for a country relying on US extended nuclear deterrence to be a party to a NWFZ, there is an inherent contradiction at the very least in spirit, in asking nuclear weapons states to observe their commitments to not use nuclear weapons to attack the non-nuclear parties to a NWFZ if the latter non-nuclear states are hosting conventional forces that directly and indirectly support nuclear operations against them.

It seems likely, therefore, that a NWFZ in Northeast Asia would unfold in carefully crafted stages, the first stage being the stabilize and align perceptions of great power relations with respect to the DPRK nuclear weapons threat; the second stage, once the DPRK nuclear threat is removed, being the further reduction of the role played by nuclear weapons in great power relations in the region,

leading to China's entry into strategic nuclear disarmament talks; and the third stage, built on the foundation of a regional NWFZ, being the creation of a regional cooperative security institution, primarily directed to managing the Sino-Japanese relationship. Only in this third and final phase would non-nuclear states no longer rely on US nuclear extended deterrence, although in all three stages, US nuclear extended deterrence is only a last resort reserved for existential threats to US and allied security. How long these stages might take (they might overlap) is unknowable—but the first stage could easily take a decade (or much less); the second stage could easily take two decades; and the third stage could take generational time (three plus decades). However, the strategic gains—immediate reduction of the risk of nuclear war in Korea, the removal of the DPRK nuclear threat, putting the lid more firmly on Japanese and South Korean nuclear weapons aspirations, and inducing China to begin a cooperative security strategy based on partnership with Japan and Korea, can begin from the day that a NWFZ treaty comes into force.

Before a discussion of a NWFZ and conventional versus nuclear deterrence can begin, however, it is essential to establish a common understanding or a baseline as to the state of nuclear extended deterrence today. The question facing the governments of Japan and South Korea (and of great relevance to China and the DPRK) is whether US nuclear extended deterrence has been transformed by the last two decades of change in US nuclear doctrine and forces, starting with the removal of US nuclear weapons from Korea in February 1992, that render it unreliable and impotent compared to the Cold War period. This shift is not due to the inherent difficulty faced by a nuclear weapons state that extends deterrence, that is, to the incredibility of rendering itself hostage to the situation of a nuclear protégé/ally – in the worst, clichéd imaginary case, being willing to sacrifice Tokyo or Seoul for Los Angeles. Nor is this an issue because of any doubts about the fundamental commitment by the United States to the defence of Japan or South Korea. Rather, the proposition to be tested is that the US defence commitment to Japan and South Korea is more robust in intention and capacity than ever, but in reality, is already wholly non-nuclear in character. In other words, the governments of Japan and South Korea keep calling for, and receiving, symbolic assurances of US intent to provide nuclear protection in the face of a nuclear attack; but US military policy, force structure, and for the last two decades, practice, is to respond to regional threats with massive, overwhelming, conventional force.<sup>3</sup>

As Jeffrey Lewis puts it:

“There is a widening, yawning even awesome gap between the rhetoric of traditional nuclear extended deterrence, and the reality of targeting, delivery, detonation, and termination of nuclear war on the Korean Peninsula.... One US Administration after the other has told allies what they wish to hear, calculating that a little loose rhetoric is surely less harmful than an anxious ally. I believe that this has been a short-sighted policy and, over-time, is detrimental to allied security. Allies have been allowed to develop dramatically exaggerated notions of the role that nuclear weapons play in their defense.”

Lewis's argument will be examined in more detail at the workshop, including by Lewis himself. However, it is clear that for any NWFZ proposal to be viable, the governments of Japan, South Korea, and the United States need to be convinced on three matters:

- a. That short of existential attack on these allies, assurances of US nuclear extended deterrence to their countries in the face of nuclear attack is a chimera. Underlying this proposition is the further assumption that any American President will view a nuclear attack on an allied city (or indeed, on any city) as an existential threat to the United States.
- b. That the United States remains completely committed to the defence of these allies, including in the face of threat of or in the aftermath of a nuclear attack, relying on conventional capacity, in concert with their own defence preparations and their own contribution to allied deterrent capacities.
- c. That conventional extended deterrence by the United States, together with the capacities of its regional allies, is adequate to deter a nuclear attack, or to compel an antagonist to desist from further use of nuclear weapons, and to limit the damage from such attack before cessation of hostilities and for the duration of combat. In all probability, *any* nuclear attack would lead the United States, in concert with all its allies, to mount a conventional campaign to systematically dismember and terminate the leadership and political system of a nuclear aggressor state.

The papers in this panel are intended to specify what force structure would be required for such a conventional deterrence strategy, the role of US and allied forces in such a capacity, and problems posed for a NWFZ that might arise from adoption of such a strategy.

## II. SPECIFIC RESEARCH QUESTIONS FOR THE PAPERS

Nuclear weapons can have three different effects on allies, partners, neutrals, competitors, adversaries, and enemies, viz: deterrence, compellence, or reassurance—often simultaneously in varying ratios over time.<sup>4</sup> This note outlines how one might examine the relative impact of relying eventually and in phased gradations only on conventional US and allied military forces in the Asia Pacific region – specifically concerning Korea and Japan.

### 1. Has conventional *deterrence* already, partly or wholly, replaced nuclear deterrence in US alliances in Asia-Pacific (with respect to Korea, Japan)?

If so, then what is the current status of the evolving relationship between nuclear and conventional forces today, compared to that of the Cold War (“As CINCPAC Admiral William Crowe stated in 1985: “U.S. forces, nuclear and non-nuclear, are indivisible.”

What, from the 2010 US Nuclear Posture Review and other statements of declaratory doctrine, is the relationship envisioned today between conventional and nuclear forces in US nuclear extended deterrence strategy?<sup>5</sup>

**2. Has conventional *compellence* already, partly or wholly, replaced nuclear compellence in US alliances in Asia-Pacific (with respect to Korea and Japan)?**

Do US nuclear forces currently have warfighting (compellence) missions that are necessarily nuclear in nature, that is, cannot be achieved without resort to nuclear weapons and by only using conventional forces?<sup>6</sup> If so, which ones?

Relatedly, which, if any, existing allied force structures and capacities need augmenting to function in purely conventional, non-nuclear mode?

**2. What core concept of deterrence is intended with reference to “conventional deterrence” in the Asia Pacific region, or with respect to specific regional conflicts?**

A typical post-Cold War Pentagon framing (1999) is: “The major categories of conventional forces are land, naval, aviation, and mobility forces. It is primarily these forces that provide the United States the ability to support the defense strategy, which focuses on shaping the international environment and responding to a full range of crises. Toward these objectives, conventional forces conduct forward presence missions, engage in a range of smaller-scale contingencies, and conduct combat operations up to and including major theater wars.”<sup>7</sup>

Or, during the Bush Administration (2005): “Nuclear Response CONOPS [Concept of Operations]<sup>8</sup> provides the deterrent “umbrella” under which conventional forces operate, and, should deterrence fail, provides options for a scalable response.”<sup>9</sup>

Or, more recently, from the Obama Administration’s *Nuclear Posture Review Report*, April 2010

- The United States will continue to strengthen conventional capabilities and reduce the role of nuclear weapons in deterring non-nuclear attacks, with the objective of making deterrence of nuclear attack on the United States or our allies and partners the sole purpose of U.S. nuclear weapons.
- The United States would only consider the use of nuclear weapons in extreme circumstances to defend the vital interests of the United States or its allies and partners.
- 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.”<sup>10</sup>

Finally, most recently (2011): “We must also maintain a robust conventional deterrent. Deterrence and assurance requires the ability to rapidly and globally project power in all domains. In turn, force posture – both rotational and forward based – shall be geographically distributed, operationally resilient, and politically sustainable through visible partnering efforts.”<sup>11</sup>

Is the core, underlying concept of deterrence in all these statements one of “offensive realism,” that is, deterrence aimed first and foremost at avoiding a blitzkrieg attack by forward-deploying forces backed up by mobilization of massive countervailing military power?

Is avoiding a limited war the main game?

Or, is the idea to avoid having to fight a protracted war with an aggressor state relying on attrition to force American withdrawal?

All of the above?

In terms of “shaping the environment” in ways favorable to US interests (sometimes referred to as “dissuasion” of competitors in the context of nuclear strategy), do US conventional forces already play a “pivotal deterrent” role in relations between allies and adversaries in the region, that is, the US conventional deterrent force stands between two one or more actual or potential adversaries (such as Japan-China, China-Taiwan, North-South Korea, Korea-Japan) rather being a simple, partisan deterrent force extended only to allies (a pivotal deterrent can be extended partly to adversaries as well) as was the case during the Cold War?

If so, is this pivot role compatible with nuclear deterrence?

Which of these concepts of deterrence, conventional deterrence, and conventional extended deterrence, is most conducive to the establishment of a KJ-JWNFZ?

**3. Is conventional deterrence sufficiently credible (or can it be made such) for it to be the basis of extended deterrence, and how does this compare with the credibility of US nuclear deterrence?**

What indicators exist to measure the credibility of commitment to engage in conventional military actions but not use nuclear weapons?

What does historical evidence suggest with regard whether past US resolve to fight conventional wars is a way to define a threshold of US and allied cost below which the US has not been driven to use nuclear weapons?<sup>12</sup> Is there reason to believe that the United States would ever lower this threshold and incur a lesser cost before resorting to nuclear weapons, thereby degrading the credibility of current or future commitments?

For example, what does the history of US military campaigns in the region tell us about resolve and nuclear escalation thresholds of cumulative casualties, rates of casualties, and costs?

**4. What conventional capacities have been or might be deployed that have already or likely would induce actual or potential US and allied competitors or enemies (DPRK, China, Russia) to *increase* reliance on nuclear weapons, because they cannot match nor offset these conventional capacities, they view such forces to be more controllable and less destructive than nuclear weapons, and therefore, more dangerous; and as a result, they prefer retention of nuclear weapons in what Michael Gerson calls “an asymmetric response to US conventional superiority”?**<sup>13</sup>

How does observed destabilizing impact of conventional arms competition compare with similar impacts that can be imputed to US nuclear capacities in the region in terms of prompting nuclear armament or proliferation, and can the effects be distinguished from those arising from conventional superiority in relation to Chinese and DPRK nuclear weapons decisions?

Is this dynamic likely to make a NWFZ impossible because China or North Korea might find that they are less secure facing a purely conventional allied force operating from a NWFZ that becomes an effective sanctuary against nuclear attack in light of their likely conventional inferiority in responding to US-allied conventional forces engaged with Chinese or North Korean forces (or both).

(Note: Obviously, this questions interrelates with the specification of conventional capacities that may be needed with regard to substituting conventional forces for the nuclear warfighting missions addressed in question 2 above)

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## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> See *Korea-Japan Nuclear Weapon Free Zone (KJNWFZ) Concept Paper*, Nautilus Institute, May 6, 2010, at <http://www.nautilus.org/initiatives/korea-japan-nwfz/concept-english.pdf>; Michael Hamel-Green, “Implementing a Japanese-Korean Nuclear Weapon Free Zone: Precedents, legal forms, governance, scope and domain, verification and compliance, and regional benefits”, *Austral Special Report* 10-02A, 28 September 2010, at <http://www.nautilus.org/publications/essays/apsnet/reports/2010/hamel-green.pdf/view?searchterm=hamel-green>; and Richard Tanter and Peter Hayes, “Beyond the nuclear umbrella: re-thinking the theory and practice of nuclear extended deterrence in East Asia and the Pacific”, *Pacific Focus*, Vol. 26, No. 1 (April 2011), at <http://www.nautilus.org/publications/essays/napsnet/reports/Beyond-the-Umbrella-Tanter-Hayes>.

<sup>2</sup> How the DPRK would enter such a zone is a complicated issue that will be treated in a separate paper, but conceptually and legally, it is possible for the DPRK to be party to a NWFZ even before it dismantles its nuclear weapons, provided it commits to the goals of the treaty; or it might join later after having fully denuclearized to international standards of verification of compliance with non-nuclear status per the Nuclear Non Proliferation Treaty and IAEA safeguards system. For the purposes of examining conventional versus nuclear extended deterrence, we will assume that the DPRK remains the object of US deterrence strategy extended to Japan and the ROK.

<sup>3</sup> See, for example, the statement by Admiral C. Blair (ret), “With the single exception of planning and developing non-nuclear missile defense systems against nuclear ballistic missiles, past attempts to plan the use of nuclear and non-nuclear weapons in an integrated campaign plan have not persisted. In nuclear wargames over the years, for both military commanders and appointed officials, once nuclear weapons were introduced into a campaign, nuclear escalation considerations dominated the conflict, rather than questions of the effective use of tactical nuclear weapons within an otherwise non-nuclear campaign that had not escalated. This syndrome has even been true for the use of nuclear weapons at sea, where collateral damage considerations are far less than they are on land. In wargames and planning, even when an adversary like North Korea resorts to the use of chemical weapons (like nuclear weapons, a weapon of mass destruction) commanders and officials have shown a preference for refraining from retaliatory use of nuclear weapons if the United States and the Republic of Korea can fight through the chemical weapons with non-nuclear forces and prevail.” In “Integration and Separation of Nuclear and Non-nuclear Planning and Forces,” in Taylor Bolz, editor, *In the Eyes of the Experts, Analysis and Comments on America’s Strategic Posture, Selected Contributions by the Experts of the*

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*Congressional Commission on the Strategic Posture of the United States*, United States Institute Of Peace Press, Washington DC, 2009, pp. 77-78 at: <http://www.usip.org/files/In%20the%20Eyes%20of%20the%20Experts%20full.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> Deterrence is used here to mean an action taken to stop an antagonist from taking a step that it intends to take.

Compellence means an action taken to force an antagonist to change their current behavior to a more desirable one.

Reassurance means an action taken to create confidence in an antagonist or an ally that they are secure and need have less or no fear. These terms are used in the literature of coercive diplomacy, especially in relation to nuclear strategy.

<sup>5</sup> Some cases in point which might be examined in detail and with respect to immediate rather than general deterrence include:

- Deterrence of limited nuclear attack on ROK (by DPRK) by threat of massive conventional retaliation after one or more nuclear attacks
- Deterrence of limited nuclear attack on Japan (by DPRK, or by China directly or in certain contingencies involving China and the United States) by threat of massive conventional retaliation after one or more nuclear attacks
- Deterrence of existential attacks of many (scores) nuclear weapons falling on many cities of an ally or on the United States at the same time as the ally, by threat of massive conventional retaliation
- Deterrence of lesser conventional attacks on ally (DPRK on ROK, Japan; China on ROK or Japan)
- Deterrence of chemical or bio WMD attacks on ally
- Deterrence of EMP attacks
- Reassurance of allies with respect to all of the above, suggesting that dual-use bombers may be usefully retained for symbolic deployments in a crisis.

<sup>6</sup> Some cases in point of past war-fighting missions of US nuclear weapons that might be examined included :

- Pre-emptive attack of deployed WMD forces on high alert and about to attack US or allied forces
- Preventive war against an adversary
- WMD interdiction and/or elimination
- Wide-area destruction or disablement of armored forces
- Deep underground targets (leadership, command and control, WMD, for example)
- Hardened surface targets (HARTS or hardened artillery sites, for example)
- Dispersed WMD-armed mobile missiles
- Air and missile bases in reinforced concrete
- Destruction of large infrastructure such as bridges, ports, refineries
- Large ships at distance from anti-ship missiles such as aircraft carriers
- Anti-submarine warfare depth charges
- Ballistic missile defense

<sup>7</sup> US Secretary of Defense, *Annual Report to the President and the Congress - 1999*, at: <http://www.dod.gov/execsec/adr1999/chap5.html>

<sup>8</sup> CONOPS refers to Concept of Operations, as defined in DOD's *Dictionary of Military Terms* (2011) as "A verbal or graphic statement that clearly and concisely expresses what the joint force commander intends to accomplish and how it will be done using available resources. The concept is designed to give an overall picture of the operation." p. 74, At: [http://www.dtic.mil/doctrine/new\\_pubs/jp1\\_02.pdf](http://www.dtic.mil/doctrine/new_pubs/jp1_02.pdf)

<sup>9</sup> US Secretary of Defense, *Annual Report to the President and the Congress - 2005*, p. 61, at:

[http://www.dod.gov/execsec/adr\\_intro.html](http://www.dod.gov/execsec/adr_intro.html) The Secretary of Defense stopped issuing the Annual Report in 2005.

<sup>10</sup> U.S. Department of Defense, *Nuclear Posture Review Report*, April 2010, p. xiv, at:

<http://www.defense.gov/npr/docs/2010%20nuclear%20posture%20review%20report.pdf>

<sup>11</sup> US Joint Chiefs of Staff, *The National Military Strategy of the United States of America, 2011, Redefining American Leadership*, February 2011, p. 13, at: [http://www.nti.org/e\\_research/source\\_docs/us/departement\\_defense/reports/15.pdf](http://www.nti.org/e_research/source_docs/us/departement_defense/reports/15.pdf)

<sup>12</sup> Regional interventions that might be salient to this question include:

- Pearl Harbor, led to defeat of Japan, first use of NWs to reduce invasion cost and securing victory.
- Korean War, protracted, high cost, attempted to use nuclear compellence, failed; nuclear threat played little role in settlement of war.

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- 1958 Taiwan—responded massively to Chinese shelling, naval and aerial, did not rely on nuclear threat directly in crisis, although likely played a role
  - Vietnam—1966-75; responded massively, failed, did not use NWs although considered briefly (Jason)
  - 1969: EC121 shootdown, Pueblo...deterrence failed, nuclear threat played no role (Nixon's order countermanded).
  - Korea: 1976 Aug crisis...deterrence failed; conventional forces completed their "mission" (tree cutting); nuclear deterrence may have played role in DPRK's stand-down.
  - Korea: 1991-2006: US attempted reassurance and compellence via engagement, ie, to stop NKs from proliferation; failed, reverted to conventional and nuclear deterrence.
  - Korea: 2010: NK covert conventional and blatant conventional attack; if perception of own nuclear deterrence bolstered NK motivation to attack, US nuclear deterrence failed or simply not salient.

<sup>13</sup> M. Gerson, "Conventional Deterrence in the Second Nuclear Age," *Parameters*, Autumn, 2009, p. 44, at: <http://www.carlisle.army.mil/usawc/parameters/Articles/09autumn/gerson.pdf>