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Key Developments in Global Affairs

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CHAPTER 3

Alliances and Extended Nuclear Deterrence in Europe and Asia

Névine Schepers

Compounding and simultaneous strategic developments in Europe and Asia are placing increasing pressure on US-led alliance systems in both regions to adapt to a heightened nuclear risk environment. They also highlight the role of extended nuclear deterrence in alliance relationships and the deterrence and assurance challenges for the United States as a security provider confronted with the near-term prospect of facing two major nuclear powers – Russia and China – at the same time in addition to threats posed by North Korea.



US and Italian Air Force F-35 Lightning IIs, F-16 Fighting Falcons and a B-52 Stratofortress, fly over the Adriatic Sea during exercise Astral Knight 19 on June 4, 2019. *Joshua R. M. Dewberry / US Air Force*



2022 marked both the 60th anniversary of the Cuban Missile Crisis, long viewed as the time when the world came closest to nuclear war, and a present turning point in the world's assessment of nuclear risks. Russian President Vladimir Putin's launch of a full-scale invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022 – building on the illegal annexation of Crimea and the start of Russian aggression in the Donbas in 2014 – has taken place under the shadow of Russia's vast arsenal of nuclear weapons, used to deter military intervention from other states, particularly NATO allies. Thinly veiled nuclear threats by Putin and his close associates and discussions of nuclear use scenarios have served as a regular reminder of the risks of nuclear escalation and highlighted states' reliance on nuclear deterrence: for defensive purposes in the case of NATO and its allies which possess nuclear weapons – France, the United Kingdom, and the United States – and for both defensive and coercive purposes in the case of Russia. Membership applications to NATO by Finland and Sweden have underlined the appeal of benefiting from a formal nuclear security assurance.

In parallel, China's unprecedented nuclear expansion and modernization continue at a rapid pace and without any arms control or strategic dialogue

framework in place with the United States. Beijing's military rise and provocative activities in the Asia-Pacific, notably in the South China Sea and the Taiwan Strait, are of great concern to US allies in the region. In particular, Japan and Australia have significantly reassessed their defense and security environment in recent years in view of Chinese actions and are firmly centering their future within the framework of their respective alliance relationships with the United States, including the nuclear umbrella it provides. For South Korea (officially the Republic of Korea, ROK), a record year of missile testing by North Korea, which fired nearly a hundred missiles in 2022, combined with Pyongyang's growing nuclear stockpile, serve as a stark reminder of the necessity of strengthening deterrence, in particular through Seoul's alliance with the United States, including its nuclear security guarantees.

The 2022 US Nuclear Posture Review states that by the 2030s, the United States will face two major nuclear powers – Russia and China – as strategic competitors and potential adversaries for the first time in its history.¹ This places increasing pressure on alliance systems in Europe and Asia while also highlighting the interconnectedness between both regions through their reliance on the



United States as a security provider. Academic research has looked at the interdependence of commitments to different allies, noting the material and resource constraints that it places on the security provider if faced with simultaneous crises.² It has also shown that in the case of a crisis in one region, allies from the other region fear abandonment and de-prioritization by the United States.³ As the war continues in Europe and competition with China intensifies, allies in Europe and Asia are paying close attention to how the United States deters both Russia and China, addresses the threat posed by an increasingly capable nuclear North Korea, and provides assurances to allies. They also look at one another to see where and how they can compensate for security gaps that will emerge as the United States manages risks of escalation with two major nuclear powers at the same time in addition to the persistent nuclear threat posed by North Korea. For instance, allies are investing in conventional capabilities aimed at strengthening deterrence, with significant decisions being sped up given long timeframes between procurement decisions and actual deployments.

Increased focus on the frameworks of US alliance structures in Europe and Asia, the fast-moving security environments in which they operate, and the

rising nuclear threats that they seek to deter requires a careful look at the specificities of each region, particularly how extended nuclear deterrence is practiced and where nuclear risks can be alleviated. Extended nuclear deterrence, often referred to as a “nuclear umbrella,” is a commitment by a nuclear weapon state to deter and, if necessary, respond across a spectrum of non-nuclear and nuclear escalation scenarios to defend another state. Such a commitment implies the potential use of nuclear weapons as a means of response. However, no use of force on behalf of an ally or partner is triggered automatically. This makes the commonly used term “nuclear security guarantee” somewhat misleading despite its widespread acceptance in policy and academic circles alike.

Amid a worsening security environment, the United States and nuclear umbrella states in Europe and the Asia-Pacific are promoting the strengthening of deterrence, both in theory – through strategy documents and political statements – and in practice – by increasing defense expenditures and procuring new capabilities. This chapter seeks to examine the implications for extended nuclear deterrence dynamics in Europe and the Asia-Pacific in the context of accelerating security crises in both regions. It first provides an overview



of the concept of extended nuclear deterrence itself and the particularities of US-led alliance systems. A second section looks at extended nuclear deterrence in Europe, how it is practiced in the NATO context, and how Russia's war in Ukraine has precipitated a strengthening around the nuclear umbrella. A third section focuses on the United States' alliance structures in the Asia-Pacific with Japan, the ROK, and Australia and recent developments in the defense postures of these three states. Finally, a fourth section will discuss how developments in each region affect the deterrence calculus in the other.

What Constitutes a Nuclear Umbrella?

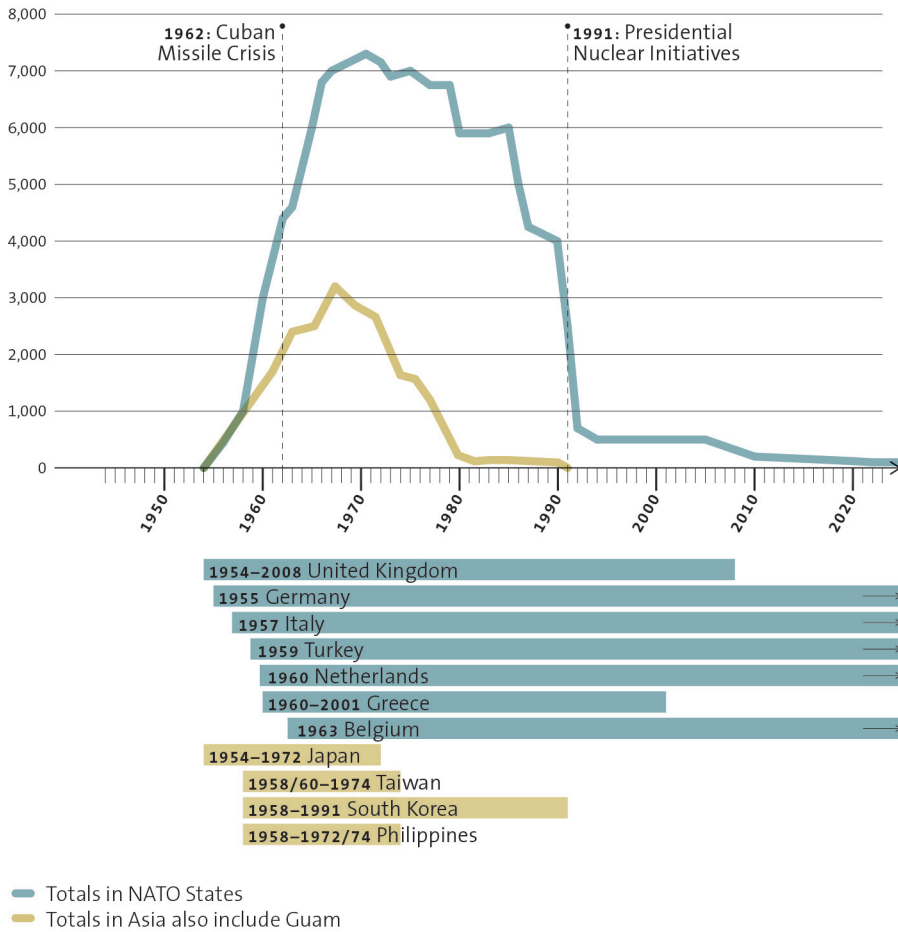
The US-centered alliance system remains unique in its geographical scope, resilience, range of frameworks and, in specific cases, the commitment by the US military to defend its allies by the possible use of nuclear weapons should deterrence fail. Official US nuclear declaratory policy states the following: "As long as nuclear weapons exist, the fundamental role of nuclear weapons is to deter a nuclear attack on the United States, our Allies, and partners. 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."⁴ The formulation

of "Allies and partners" allows for ambiguity regarding the scope of the nuclear umbrella and was introduced in the 2010 US Nuclear Posture Review.⁵ However, only NATO allies, Japan, the ROK, and Australia are considered to be formally covered by the US nuclear umbrella. This is because of the defense treaties that form the basis of the military relationships and, beyond that, the ways in which the United States operationalizes extended nuclear deterrence in all four cases. The 1949 North Atlantic Treaty, the 1951 ANZUS Treaty with Australia and New Zealand (although the US suspended its treaty obligations to New Zealand in 1985 following the latter's declared anti-nuclear policy), the 1953 Mutual Defense Treaty with the ROK, and the 1960 Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security with Japan all provide a legal grounding for US security guarantees.

None of these treaties mention nuclear deterrence specifically, but the mutual-defense relationships have come to include it in their implementation through declaratory policy, force structure, and dialogue mechanisms that address nuclear deterrence specifically. Declaratory policy includes references to the US nuclear umbrella in defense strategies by these allies specifically, US nuclear doctrine, and joint political statements to communicate



Estimated Numbers of US Nuclear Weapons Deployed in Europe and Asia



Sources: Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists; Federation of American Scientists; Office of the US Secretary of Defense; National Resources Defense Council.



intent. Force structure entails US nuclear capabilities themselves and their deployment as well as exercises. Consultations or dialogues on extended deterrence through set formats provide opportunities to determine allies' assurance requirements. While in theory the US may extend its nuclear umbrella even wider than over NATO allies, Japan, the ROK, and Australia – over Taiwan, the Philippines, or Israel for example – it implements extended nuclear deterrence in practice consistently and increasingly so only in the case of NATO, Japan, South Korea, and Australia. While parallels and linkages exist, the four alliance structures differ in their framework, implementation, historical development, public perception, and the specific threat landscape that they address. These differences will be explored in more detail in further sections.

The United States is not the only provider of nuclear security guarantees. In the context of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), language regarding mutual defense, similar to NATO's Article V, has implied a Russian nuclear umbrella over Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan. However, there is little evidence of extended nuclear deterrence in practice within the CSTO itself. The three Central Asian states are part of a nuclear-weapon free

zone, and Kazakhstan is even a state party to the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons and a fierce advocate for nuclear disarmament. Russia's bilateral relationship with Belarus is the only possible exception, given that Belarus may become a host for Russian forward deployed nuclear weapons in the future following a constitutional change and dual-aircraft capability certification.⁶

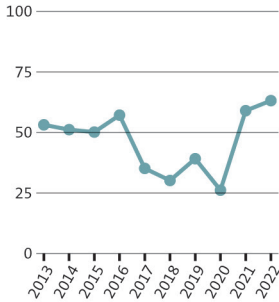
The act of extending nuclear deterrence is in itself an interesting component of international relations. It first entails deterrence, which, in the security domain, means preventing an armed attack or form of aggression. Nuclear deterrence introduces the threat of retaliation by highly devastating nuclear means, even in the case of first use. The scope of damage that nuclear weapons can inflict heightens the consequences of deterrence failure significantly.⁷ A functioning nuclear deterrent requires both credible nuclear capabilities and a communicated willingness to use them.⁸ Extended nuclear deterrence, by definition, extends the coverage of a state's nuclear deterrent to other states – generally allies that do not possess nuclear weapons themselves – which makes credibility significantly more difficult, as it depends not just on the adversary's perception but also the ally's. According to political



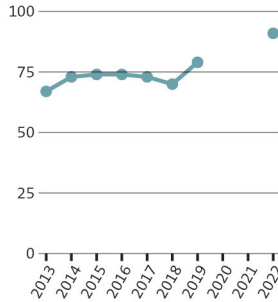
Evolution of Allied Opinions of the United States 2013–2022

- Percentage of respondents who have a favorable view of the United States
- Percentage of respondents who believe Australia's alliance relationship with the United States is important for Australian security

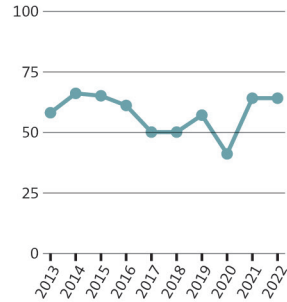
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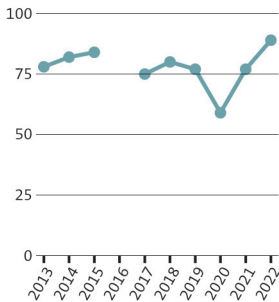
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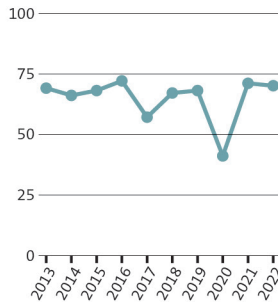
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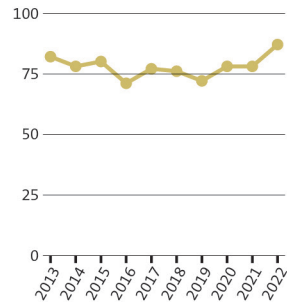
SOUTH KOREA



JAPAN



AUSTRALIA



Sources: — PEW Research Center; — Lowy Institute

scientist Mira Rapp-Hooper, “nuclear security guarantees are perhaps the most extreme promise one state can make to another” given their unilateral nature and the ambiguous language in which they are framed.⁹ A state providing such a guarantee commits to an ally’s defense, including through

nuclear means if the security provider deems it necessary, acknowledging that this may result in becoming the target of nuclear retaliation. For a state benefiting from extended nuclear deterrence, it represents the ultimate assurance of its security and sovereignty.¹⁰



Qualifying nuclear security guarantees as “the most extreme promise” is not an exaggeration when considering the level of confidence in the United States that it requires of allies. After all, nuclear authority always remains with the US president. Credibly extending deterrence therefore also requires constant assurance efforts. Experts and officials often describe the challenge of assurance in the case of NATO by quoting Denis Healey, Britain’s defense minister in the late 1960s: “It takes only five per cent credibility of American retaliation to deter the Russians, but ninety-five per cent credibility to reassure the Europeans.”¹¹ Numerous public debates in the last 60 years have wondered whether the US would sacrifice Washington, DC/Seattle/New York for Tokyo/Seoul/Vilnius. Such fears were heightened in the last several years following President Donald Trump’s regular criticisms of and threats to withdraw from alliances. Assuring allies requires substantial and consistent consultation efforts from the United States. These have been increased under the Biden administration, which has sought to strengthen alliance relationships by placing them at the core of its defense strategy.¹² Much remains to be done, however, to restore credibility, reassure allies, and adapt extended deterrence mechanisms for evolving threat environments while also ensuring nuclear risks are reduced,

the threshold for nuclear use is raised, and arms control measures are pursued in coordination with allies.

Extended Deterrence in Europe: NATO

NATO presents the most formalized case of extended nuclear deterrence commitment through the independent strategic nuclear forces of the United States supplemented by nuclear sharing arrangements. France and the United Kingdom, as nuclear weapon states with their separate capabilities and launch authorities, also contribute to NATO’s security. While US strategic nuclear forces form the core of security guarantees to NATO, they are often overshadowed in European policy debates by the additional nuclear sharing agreements that enable a greater form of participation by non-nuclear allies in nuclear planning. These nuclear sharing arrangements, which are unique to NATO, involve the deployment of around 100 US nuclear weapons in six European bases located in Italy, Germany, Belgium, the Netherlands, and Turkey.¹³ These non-strategic nuclear weapons remain in the custody of US Air Force personnel, and the US president maintains launch authority over them. However, European host nations provide both the dual-capable aircraft and air force personnel to support nuclear missions.



All NATO allies except for France take part in the Nuclear Planning Group, which serves “to exercise collective political control over NATO’s nuclear mission.”¹⁴ Allies pushed for nuclear sharing arrangements early on because they questioned the credibility of US guarantees and wanted greater influence over nuclear weapons policy.¹⁵ The United States agreed to such arrangements because it feared allies would choose to develop their own nuclear weapons programs and also due to other factors including financial reasons. The Nuclear Planning Group, along with other nuclear-related NATO bodies,¹⁶ provides a framework for consultations on nuclear strategy, policy, force structure, and safety. US officials use these frameworks to discuss issues beyond those that relate to US forward-deployed nuclear weapons in Europe, viewing them as broader forums to brief NATO allies on technological developments, arms control negotiations, and other sensitive issues related to nuclear forces. The consultation mechanism, while based on the nuclear sharing arrangement, is extensive and, arguably, as important as the forward-deployed weapons themselves. NATO allies’ involvement in the nuclear mission also includes conventional support of nuclear operations in so-called SNOWCAT exercises (Support Nuclear Operations With

Conventional Air Tactics) and in the annual Steadfast Noon nuclear force exercise.

NATO’s nuclear posture has undergone several changes since the end of the Cold War. First is the change in quantities, with the number of forward-deployed nuclear weapons to Europe being reduced from 8,000 non-strategic weapons at the height of the Cold War to 200 in the early 1990s to around 100 nuclear gravity bombs today.¹⁷ Most of these reductions took place under the 1991 Presidential Nuclear Initiatives, when the United States withdrew the bulk of its non-strategic nuclear weapons from Europe. By the late 1990s, the United States also lowered the readiness criteria for NATO-assigned nuclear forces, and the Nuclear Planning Group discarded plans for the use of nuclear weapons against any particular adversary.¹⁸ Some allies, notably Germany and Canada, raised the possibility of reducing reliance on nuclear deterrence through proposals involving the withdrawal of all US nuclear weapons from Europe, thereby relying solely on US strategic assets, or the adoption of a no-first-use nuclear doctrine. While nuclear deterrence became less prominent in NATO debates at the turn of the century, these suggestions did not find broad support within a growing alliance that welcomed



former Warsaw Pact countries more concerned about Russia.

In the two decades following these reductions, nuclear sharing arrangements took on a more political role, becoming a symbolic element of NATO nuclear deterrence and more crucially of the “linkage between European and American security.”¹⁹ Regular waves of support for arms control as well as disarmament solutions within NATO countries have translated into public debates, including within some European parliaments, on the role and necessity of nuclear sharing arrangements. Since the entry into force in 2011 of New START, the last arms control treaty between the United States and Russia that limits strategic nuclear weapons, a key objective for the US and NATO allies has been the reduction or elimination of Russian non-strategic nuclear weapons. In that context, US non-strategic nuclear weapons deployed in Europe could be put on the negotiating table, but only within the framework of a mutual and verifiable treaty. Such a prospect seems extremely unlikely since February 2022, even more so following Russia’s decision in February 2023 to suspend its participation in New START.

Over the last decade, NATO has steadily updated its nuclear posture in various ways. The Alliance has

strengthened its declaratory nuclear policy through consistent references to nuclear deterrence in summit communiqués, statements by the Secretary General and in the latest Strategic Concept, providing common language for allies. The gravity bombs themselves are being replaced by a newer model, the B61-12, which allows for increased accuracy and has lower-yield options. Host countries are all procuring F-35 fighter jets, with the exception of Turkey, which was expelled from the F-35 program following its purchase of the Russian S-400 missile defense system. The procurement decision for Belgium, the Netherlands, Germany, and Italy ensures the continuation of their nuclear sharing mission.

Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022 has provided an acute reminder of the role that extended nuclear deterrence plays for NATO. It also highlighted differences between allies and partners, with Ukraine clearly not benefitting from NATO’s Article V guarantee. For Finland and Sweden, whose partnership with NATO was more enhanced than Ukraine’s, full NATO membership represents an additional layer of security guarantee now deemed necessary in the face of Russian aggression, including the “supreme guarantee of the security of the Alliance” provided



by nuclear deterrence.²⁰ NATO cohesion and condemnation in response to Russia's war in Ukraine has remained steadfast. For the most part, allies have also closely coordinated their responses, or pointedly their lack thereof, to Russian nuclear rhetoric. Yet, Russian attempts at nuclear coercion and use of nuclear rhetoric will require a re-examination of various nuclear use scenarios and agreement by all allies on how to manage these different potential levels of escalation.

Extended Deterrence in Asia: A Network of Alliances

The United States' network of alliances in the Asia-Pacific is distinct from NATO and operates largely on a bilateral basis. Further coordination exists through formats such as the Quad, which includes the United States, Japan, Australia, and India, as well as through broader joint military exercises and through trilateral coordination meetings among the United States, the ROK, and Japan. However, these are nowhere near the level of conventional military integration and coordination that exists within NATO. Historical differences and developments, a broader geographical scope, and a larger diversity of interests have hampered the prospect of a defense alliance similar to NATO that would have included the ROK, Japan, and Australia during the Cold War. These

divergences continue to exist today, primarily due to different security priorities, placing limits on how far certain cooperation formats can go.

Neither the ROK, Japan, nor Australia have nuclear sharing agreements with the United States. Past deployments of US nuclear weapons in Japan between 1954 and 1972 and in the ROK between 1958 and 1991 never included allied involvement through dual-capable aircraft or the level of consultation that exists in NATO's Nuclear Planning Group. Today, extended nuclear deterrence is solely provided through US strategic nuclear forces. Non-proliferation considerations were prevalent during the Cold War and played an important role in the continued provision of US nuclear security guarantees. All three states considered the development of an indigenous nuclear weapon capability, with Seoul actively pursuing a program in secret in the 1970s.²¹

The threat landscape which extended nuclear deterrence arrangements in the Asia-Pacific address has set the tone for their prominence in alliance relationships. The US-ROK alliance is centered on the nuclear and conventional threat posed by North Korea, one whose geographical proximity to the ROK has meant deterrence



issues have been front and center of the relationship. A growing and diversifying North Korean nuclear and ballistic missile arsenal, reinforced by an increasing number of missile launches in the past few years, and the dim prospects for denuclearization provide a strong imperative for the US-ROK alliance to strengthen deterrence capabilities. At the level of the alliance, this is being implemented through the revival of the Extended Deterrence Strategy and Consultation Group in 2022 to enhance high-level exchanges, US plans to exercise strategic assets in the region such as combined training of fighter jets, or the deployment of a carrier strike group, and improved information sharing and joint exercises.²² Communication on these developments remains sensitive, however, as a recent public spat between Seoul and Washington about defining joint military exercises involving scenarios of North Korean nuclear use as “joint nuclear exercises” demonstrated.²³ For the United States, “joint nuclear exercises” would imply a level of involvement in nuclear planning that exists in a limited fashion only with NATO, hence the official pushback against using such a term in the Korean context.

The semantics dispute reflects ROK aspirations for greater involvement in extended nuclear deterrence mechanisms modelled on NATO that

regularly resurface in public, expert, and even official discussions.²⁴ Such aspirations are often linked with or tap into pro-nuclear public sentiments,²⁵ whereby public officials – including even the president²⁶ – claim that a domestic nuclear option remains a possibility. The requirements for reassuring the ROK are therefore more delicate than for other US allies. The close proximity of the nuclear threat that South Koreans face partly explains why South Korean officials and the public may look for stronger and more visible deterrence symbols. For Washington, this involves a balance between deepening extended deterrence and enabling allies to contribute more conventionally on the one hand, and managing proliferation risks on the other. Furthermore, Washington’s clear focus on China as the primary challenge to US national security and target of deterrence efforts places pressure on Seoul, which has long pursued a policy of “strategic ambiguity” vis-à-vis China, its largest trading partner and a key player in any future framework involving North Korea’s nuclear capabilities.²⁷

The United States increasingly shapes its defense strategy with the objective of countering Chinese aggressive and coercive actions in the region. While the ROK has refrained from aligning



itself with US China policy, Japan is largely in agreement with US assessments of Chinese security threats, although they are framed more carefully in its defense strategy. Japan's reliance on US extended nuclear deterrence has mostly existed in the background during and in the immediate post-Cold War era given Japan's history as the only state to have been the target of nuclear weapons use in war. Public references in US and Japanese political statements and policy documents began to appear more regularly following North Korea's first nuclear test in 2006. Yet, Japanese officials also became particularly fearful of abandonment with little opportunity to discuss specific extended nuclear deterrence concerns, leading to the creation in 2010 of the Extended Deterrence Dialogue. The twice yearly consultation mechanism has largely been a success, enabling regular high-level exchanges on nuclear deterrence issues, visits to US nuclear sites which contribute to extended nuclear deterrence, and participation in table-top exercises and scenario planning.²⁸

Alignment on China has also led Australia to seek even closer defense ties with the United States through AUKUS, a new trilateral defense partnership launched with the United States and the United Kingdom in September 2021. Canberra's reliance

on US nuclear security guarantees has been stated publicly and consistently in Australian defense documents, including the 2016 Defense White Paper, and occasional statements by public officials. Yet, compared to Japan or the ROK, Australia's reliance on extended nuclear deterrence has been less conspicuous and less present in US statements. Australia does host the joint intelligence facility at Pine Gap, which plays a crucial role in US early warning systems, and is perhaps the most visible component of deterrence cooperation. Recent announcements of the planned deployment of US nuclear-capable bombers to Australia serve further deterrence signaling purposes.²⁹ Both North Korean and Chinese nuclear developments have increased the value of extended nuclear deterrence for Australia and shifted conversations in Canberra on how to contribute to US deterrence efforts in the region.³⁰ The procurement of nuclear-powered submarines armed with conventional missiles under AUKUS is one outcome of these considerations, which would provide Australia with a significant conventional deterrence capability in the long term while increasing defense cooperation with the United States and the United Kingdom.

The United States' nuclear security guarantees have not formally applied



to Taiwan since the 1970s. However, Taiwan likely fits within the ambiguous scope of the US formulation “Allies and partners.” Concerns regarding the operationalization of the informal US nuclear security guarantee to Taiwan and how this would involve other allies have grown more prevalent with the prospect of scenarios regarding a potential Chinese attack to reclaim Taiwan. These concerns are increasingly addressed in the context of bilateral consultation mechanisms – to a lesser extent with the ROK, where discussions are linked to deterring potential North Korean opportunistic behavior that may occur in parallel to an escalation around Taiwan.

Nuclear Reverberations Across Alliances

Deepening great-power competition in both Europe and Asia has placed considerable strain on the United States, which has to balance the requirements of simultaneously deterring two nuclear competitors – Russia and China – and a persistent nuclear threat, North Korea. This challenge was not unforeseen but has become much more pressing in the last year as a result of Russia’s war of aggression, the subsequent breakdown of arms control discussions between the United States and Russia, closer relations between Russia and China, the intensification and acceleration of

China’s nuclear build-up – as well as North Korea’s at a smaller but still increasingly dangerous scale.

Planning for contingencies related to a Chinese invasion of Taiwan and North Korean aggression, both of which involve risks of nuclear escalation, while Russia continues to threaten European security through its war of aggression in Ukraine brings allies face to face with the likely prospect of having US capabilities and attention spread too thinly between two regional theaters and two nuclear adversaries. Russia’s failure to swiftly or decisively take control of Ukraine, as well as the failure of nuclear threats to deter NATO allies from supporting Ukraine through constant weapons deliveries or from imposing sweeping sanctions on Russia, provides important lessons for China. At the very least, such considerations may have delayed Beijing’s plan to take over Taiwan by force, as it will need to make sure it can do so rapidly. Observed changes to China’s nuclear forces – increasing and diversifying the number of nuclear systems, progress toward operationalizing a working triad, likely changes toward a launch on warning posture – all predate Russia’s invasion. So far, China maintains its declaratory no first use policy, which it would gain little benefit from discarding



prematurely, if at all. Given that no first use is at the core of China's nuclear doctrine, Beijing may refrain from engaging in the same type of rhetorical nuclear threat-making as Russia. During the G20 in Bali in November 2022, Xi Jinping and Biden highlighted their opposition to "the use or threat of use of nuclear weapons in Ukraine,"³¹ in what has been understood as an implicit rebuke of Putin's nuclear threats.

North Korea is similarly observing developments in Europe and retaining some lessons from it, but these are unlikely to change initial North Korean aims in terms of its nuclear and missile developments. A Russian success would prove that nuclear weapons work as a tool of coercion and deterrence, strengthening Pyongyang's hold on its nuclear deterrent and making any already distant prospects for denuclearization a pipedream. A Russian defeat, while serving as a cautionary tale, would not ultimately change North Korean nuclear developments, as the Kim regime sees them as the ultimate guarantee of its survival. A Russian defeat would likely leave US alliances around the world stronger, which does not benefit the North. China's failure to provide direct military assistance to Russia, at least as of this writing, may be the most direct lesson the North can take.³²

For US allies in Asia, the war has illustrated that nuclear security guarantees are essential for deterrence. Ukraine does not benefit from the US nuclear umbrella over NATO and was invaded by Russia. The war has also reinforced the common front that NATO allies have been able to uphold in their denunciations of Russian aggression and military support for Ukraine, perhaps raising expectations of solidarity among US allies in Asia in the event of an attack, despite the absence of a treaty or mechanism joining them all together. The ROK, Japan, and Australia have all firmly denounced Russian actions and taken part in sanctions against Moscow. In recent strategies or political statements, they have also all emphasized their commitment to the stability of the region and the rules-based international order as well as cooperation with like-minded partners. The war in Ukraine has shown the lengths to which autocratic nuclear states are willing to go in pursuit of their revisionist aims, raising the fear that "Ukraine may be East Asia tomorrow," in the words of Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida.³³

Kishida, in remarks delivered at the June 2022 NATO Summit, also stated that "the security of Europe and of the Indo-Pacific is inseparable" and called for increased cooperation with



NATO, echoing the NATO Strategic Concept, which outlines the need for strengthened dialogue and cooperation to “tackle cross-regional challenges and shared security interests.” The presence of the heads of state of Japan, the ROK, Australia, and New Zealand at the NATO summit – a first – was a symbolically strong and visible signal of cooperation between European and Asian allies. Further steps to operationalize cooperation with NATO have included high-profile visits by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg to Japan and the ROK in January 2023; the opening of a ROK diplomatic mission to NATO; Japanese, South Korean, and Australian involvement with the NATO Cooperative Cyber Defense Center of Excellence; and cooperation by all states with NATO’s Science for Peace and Security Program, including the recent launch of a dialogue platform titled “Futures in the Indo-Pacific.”³⁴ While most cooperation takes place in fields related to emerging technologies, countering disinformation and maritime security, there are opportunities for dialogue on how extended nuclear deterrence is operationalized across alliances. Deterrence and assurance requirements in Asia are different, as was established in previous sections, but greater exchanges regarding consultation formats, processes, and insights into practices of extended

deterrence may be useful, particularly for South Korea and Australia.

As US allies in Asia move closer to each other and to NATO, China will also sharpen its rhetoric denouncing nuclear sharing and what it sees as Cold War practices. The development, however unlikely, of NATO-like nuclear sharing arrangements in Asia has been one of China’s greatest concerns in terms of US alliances. Beijing has currently latched onto AUKUS in particular as the outlet for its aggressive multilateral nuclear diplomacy – with little success so far – but will likely broaden the scope of its ire in the wake of Japanese defense ambitions and South Korean President Yoon’s nuclear remarks, in which he declared that the ROK would consider building its own nuclear arsenal if the threat it faces from the North continues to increase. The risk here is for China to become an active dissenter in multilateral nuclear forums, joining Russia in the ranks of those working against the system. Given the need, particularly for the United States, to increase dialogue with China on nuclear issues, it seems likely that the broader context will complicate these efforts even further.

The convergence of deterrence crises in both Europe and Asia and the quick pace of developments has led



to significant policy decisions in allied countries linked to important conventional capabilities or defense modernization policies, tying their fates closer to the United States and placing their faith in the long term on the nuclear security guarantees that it provides. These fast developments, while obviously not happening in a vacuum, run the risk of missing steps, notably public debates and consultations not being implemented properly or even failing to deliver entirely, adversely affecting the credibility of extended nuclear deterrence. Australia's submarine procurement or NATO membership for Sweden are two such examples in which, given the long-term implications of these choices, public debates may still turn against them or, should officials be unable to deliver, could send conflicting signals to adversaries.

Further repercussions of a re-focus on deterrence policies in allied countries can be expected. Domestically, a return to the forefront of deterrence arguments forces debates in countries that have long been uncomfortable with the realities of extended nuclear deterrence.³⁵ In Japan, for instance, the public broadly supports signing the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, which, among other things, condemns the practice of extended nuclear deterrence.³⁶ Regionally, actions taken by the US and its

allies under the framework of deterrence, while defined in reaction to those of perceived adversaries, are carefully observed by those same states, leading to action-reaction cycles, particularly in the absence of dialogue. Internationally, a resurgence of deterrence-forward strategies and little progress on disarmament measures will have implications for the global nuclear order in the medium to long term with further polarization likely within the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty regime.

Managing Deterrence without Arms Control

Rising nuclear threats in both Europe and Asia have highlighted the crucial role that extended nuclear deterrence plays in alliance relationships as well as the increasing challenge for the United States to deter two major nuclear powers at the same time, in addition to threats posed by North Korea. As the only state to practically extend a nuclear umbrella, the United States faces requirements in terms of capabilities, coordination, and leadership that should not be underestimated. Assuring various allies, balancing their requests for more involvement or further visibility of nuclear or other strategic assets in either region, and offering persuasive arguments in domestic political debates on nuclear security guarantees all create challenges



for extended nuclear deterrence and its operationalization by the United States.

The absence of arms control or disarmament measures to temper unrestrained competition creates further risks of escalation as a return to deterrence dynamics is occurring without any concrete parallel progress on risk reduction in either region. US-Russia arms control is in limbo following Russia's suspension of New START in February 2023, no high-level bilateral dialogue on nuclear issues was ever established between the United States and China, and steps toward a framework eliminating North Korea's nuclear weapons program fizzled out after the failure of the 2019 Trump-Kim Hanoi summit. European allies' closer history with arms control, through NATO consultations as well as the implementation of conventional arms control measures, has no direct equivalent in Asia. Asian states may also take another lesson from the war in Ukraine, which is that nuclear arms control efforts cannot work unilaterally and have little use when one negotiating side actively manipulates nuclear risks or shuns any attempts at increasing transparency or predictability.

NATO and the US network of alliances in the Asia-Pacific are built around much more than nuclear security

guarantees, which are only a subset of broader mutual defense commitments. Their longevity and resilience reflect continued political, financial, and military investments since their inception while shared security interests have ensured continued US engagement in both transatlantic and transpacific theaters. The United States and allies have strengthened conventional deterrence over time, enhanced dialogue and consultation mechanisms, and added layers of further defense cooperation elements. Yet, the nuclear umbrella has also endured and remains a decisive element of US commitment to its alliances in Europe and Asia that is unlikely to disappear in the near to medium-term future.

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