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Regional Implications of Evolving Deterrence on The Korean Peninsula

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Key Premises & Questions

As North Korea's nuclear and missile capabilities advance (range, yield, mobility), it will be emboldened to use nuclear threats for coercive purposes

U.S. & ROK (and in some cases Japan) will take steps (in advance and in response) to strengthen tailored deterrence against possible DPRK coercive acts

Research Questions:

- 1) What are the range of possible DPRK objectives with nuclear weapons? How do perceptions of these objectives vary within the region?
- 2) What are plausible future U.S. & ROK options to strengthen deterrence?
- 3) How would Japan and China be impacted by and respond to these developments?



THAAD as Shadow of Future

U.S. deployment of THAAD to ROK in 2016 illustrates linkage of DPRK threat and regional security

China has different DPRK threat perception (existential deterrence, not coercion), viewed deployment in context of US-China strategic relations

Punitive soft sanctions on ROK – travel ban, targeting ROK firms, estimated economic damages > \$7 billion

Chinese actions aimed at ROK (not US) – wedge strategy.

3 “No’s” in fall 2017 – aimed at preventing trilateral coordination and MD integration.

Lessons learned? For China, some argue to hit harder next time.



DPRK Nuclear Objectives I

Deter U.S. Preventive Strikes

- Only rhetoric; not too important.
- Existential threat to North Korea comes from South Korea.
- Nuclear deterrence is not credible in preventing likely limited U.S. military strikes
- North Korea does not seem to worry too much about U.S. preventive actions
- Conventional military capabilities constitute the most important source of deterrence

- Bad news: North Korea's intention is not really defensive.
- Good news: North Korea can abandon nuclear weapons.



DPRK Nuclear Objectives II

Conduct brinkmanship diplomacy

- North Korea halted the operation of nuclear facilities for eight years as part of an agreement with the U.S. in 1994, and for a further seven years following an agreement in 2007.
- In return, the countries party to these agreements provided North Korea with assistance o \$2.5 billion and \$430 million respectively.
- What would we do this time?

Conduct limited military strikes against South Korea

- If North Korea fires 10 long-range artillery shells into the vicinity of Seoul, the South Korean military should retaliate by firing 30 shells back into North Korea.
- However, U.S. and ROK could not to further escalate, resulting in a cease-fire.
- An isolated poor North Korea would not lose too much whereas a rich and densely populated South Korea would lose a lot.



DPRK Nuclear Objectives III

Unify the Korean Peninsula

- Probably the original objective: North Korea would need to prevent the U.S. and Japan from assisting South Korea in the event of a full-scale war on the Korean Peninsula.
- North Korea might detonate a nuclear bomb off the coast of South Korea to make its threats credible.
- Even with the use of nuclear weapons, it would be difficult for North Korea to unify the peninsula by force, however.
- The Korean People's Army maintains massive fire power, but its mobile forces are useless. The KPA can destroy South Korea but not occupy it.
- South Korea is the tenth largest spender on defense; maintains balanced offensive and defensive forces; possesses more than 1,000 cruise/ballistic missiles.



Deterrence Options I

Much existing capability and structure, improved in recent years, plus ongoing ROK procurement programs for kill-chain, KAMD, KMPR; 4 D strategy

Attacking Targets in North Korea - strengthen deterrence by raising both the threat of punitive and unacceptable damage to North Korea and the credibility of precision counterforce targeting to limit damage from a North Korean nuclear attack.

- increasing the numbers of deployed South Korean and U.S. precision and prompt strike platforms
- fielding new intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) capabilities to improve real-time tracking of targets in North Korea



Deterrence Options II

Defending Against North Korean Attacks – deny attempts to provoke frequent crises or to instigate a limited war by expanding defensive capabilities to raise the risks and costs to Pyongyang.

- deploying additional U.S. forces or upgrading the U.S. Navy presence
- consolidating a layered South Korean missile defense
- upgrading artillery and rocket defenses with an Iron Dome–like system around Seoul and deploying additional counter-battery capabilities.

Augmenting Nuclear Capabilities - address both the deterrence and reassurance aspects of the alliance credibility problem caused by DPRK ICBM by enhancing the visibility of the nuclear element of the U.S.-ROK alliance.

- Engage South Korea more directly in discussions around nuclear operations
- Upgrade secure U.S. storage and operations infrastructure in the region in preparation for the forward deployment
- Deploy U.S. tactical nuclear weapons on South Korean territory and/or nuclear sharing arrangement w/ DCAs & B-61



Deterrence Options III

Trilateral Security Cooperation - improve coordination and contingency planning

- conducting joint exercises (for example, for interdiction or other crisis contingencies)
- creating a standing defense coordination structure
- integrating and networking missile defense capabilities into a regional system

Asymmetric Operations - instead of direct fire retaliation to North Korean provocations on land or at sea, employ more robust asymmetric responses

- conducting offensive cyber operations to cripple the North Korean intranet or interdict North Korean internet traffic flowing through China and Russia
- expanding the scope, scale, and responsiveness of social information warfare



Tailoring Challenges

Prioritization – peacetime deterrence vs. escalation & intra-war deterrence

- If peacetime, then denial and counter-force options ok, but latter especially raises crisis stability issues
- If intra-war, then punitive counter-value (prompt strike) options more effective, but issue of use-or-lose if perception of nuclear interdiction

Offense vs. Defense dominance shifting w/ technology change?

What constitutes “counter-value” for DPRK leadership?

Manipulating military balance can be useful, but raises political and economic challenges in US-ROK politics



Implications for Japan I

Japan has made significant contributions to ROK security over time:

Offering bases for the US forces in Korean contingencies

- Japan would provide main operating bases for US forces fighting in support of South Korea in the event of war and JSDF would protect these bases.

Helping South Korea establish the foundation of its defense industry

- South Korea used \$120 million in economic assistance package from Japan under the 1965 normalization agreement to construct part of the Pohang Iron and Steel Company for “military industrial base for national defense.”
- \$4 billion loan to South Korea in 1983, in what South Korea termed “economic cooperation for security.”

Making it possible for the Self-Defense Forces (SDF) to support US military operations for the defense of South Korea.

- In 1997, the United States and Japan agreed that Japan’s SDF would provide non-combat support to US forces in the “situations in areas surrounding Japan (SIASJ).”
- Reinterpretation of constitution, making it possible for Japan to start exercising the right of collective self-defense in 2014. Based on this change, new security legislation was enacted in 2015, which enabled the Japanese defense force to provide combat support to US forces fighting for South Korea.



Implications for Japan II

Japan is now more exposed to a future North Korean crisis, which has created domestic political complications and further tensions in Japan-ROK relations.

- In conflict, Pyongyang will demand that Tokyo not allow U.S. forces to use its bases and not commit Japanese forces to the defense of South Korea.
- This threat will put Japanese leaders in a difficult position, inevitably creating tensions in the U.S.-Japan relationship.
- This possibility is already slowly undermining the credibility of U.S. extended deterrence in the region supported by the U.S.-Japan alliance.

Japan is strengthening defense in light of North Korean nuclear and missile threat

- Deployment of a two-tiered ballistic missile defense system: the sea-based Standard Missile Three (SM-3) Block IA Aegis system and the land-based Patriot Advanced Capability Three (PAC-3) system.
- Installation of early-warning system and civil defense exercises.
- Debate on acquisition of additional strike capabilities to conduct counterforce operations against North Korean missiles and missile bases.



Implications for Japan III

2018 U.S. Nuclear Posture Review calls for low-yield nuclear options, which some Japanese analysts believe could provide damage limitation capability against DPRK mobile missile forces.

Japan wary of other nuclear options vis-à-vis U.S.-ROK alliance

- TNW could provide reassurance
- But would be high-priority DPRK targets and divert resources from more useful capability
- Would provide convenient excuse to North Korea to maintain its nuclear forces

Some Japanese experts concerned by ROK's growing/advancing cruise and ballistic missile capability; the rationale should be better explained

Preference for Trilateral Cooperation, but failing that, then division of responsibility with ROK taking on larger DPRK deterrence role freeing U.S. to focus on China.



Forthcoming Report

For release on June 12 – www.carnegieendowment.org

Includes additional material:

- DPRK nuclear forecast
- Assessment of Chinese views of options and future by Tong Zhao
- Policy considerations

