

## **Extended Deterrence and Assurance in Korea**

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### **US Extended Deterrence in Korea**

US extended deterrence in Korea has changed in ways that US physical commitments are reduced after the end of the Cold War while rhetorical assurances remain unchanged. There are several examples.

1. USFK deployment posture:  
Along the DMZ → below the “Han River”  
This was NK demand in the 1980s & 1990s
2. Scales of joint exercise:  
Massive scale (Team Spirit) → a series of small scale exercises (Key Resolve, Eagle, Ulji Focus, etc.)
3. Tripwire:  
Common sense → becomes nonsensical outdated concept  
In the past, SK practically was a tripwire in East Asia in the global superpower rivalry.  
In the post-Cold War era, US position has changed.  
DOD officials rebuffed SK Prime Minister’s request to maintain tripwire on March 18, 2003
4. USFK Mission:  
Sole purpose was to deter and defeat NK & defend SK → strategic flexibility and maximize optimal use of USFK for different purposes in other regions  
South Korea worries about possible reduction of deterrence capabilities & unwanted involvement in US conflicts with third party
5. Unity of command:  
Firmly maintained → wartime OPCON transfer and CFC dissolution in December 2015
6. US security guarantee to NK:  
Unthinkable → a series of guarantees since the eruption of NK nuclear problem in the early 1990s

## **The US New Nuclear Posture Review**

The United States released a new Nuclear Posture Review (NPR) on April 6, 2010. The NPR amends the pre-existing conditional negative security assurance to clarify a new, strengthened NSA strategy: “The United States will not use or threaten to use nuclear weapons against non-nuclear weapons states that are party to the NPT and in compliance with their nuclear nonproliferation obligations.” As long as non-nuclear weapon states join the NPT and carry out their obligations, even if they attack the U.S. or its allies with chemical or biological weapons, to say nothing of conventional weapons, the U.S. clearly declares that it will not retaliate with nuclear weapons.

As opposed to the past when the option was preserved for nuclear retaliation against North Korea in the event of an invasion of South Korea, if North Korea joins the NPT and abandons its nuclear weapons, the U.S. promises not to use nuclear weapons to repel North Korean aggression. This “*no nuclear retaliation*” policy against non-nuclear NPT member states is targeted at North Korea for denuclearization but its impact will be very little.

### *Implications to the ROK Security*

Nothing will change the current policy of U.S. extended nuclear deterrence on the Korean peninsula as long as North Korea holds on to nuclear weapons. Ironically, however, South Korean security could be weakened after North Korea’s denuclearization because of the huge loophole created by the new NSA.

Denuclearization does not guarantee a peaceful North Korea; that could be made possible only by revolutionary changes in the DPRK leadership. Once North Korea gives up nuclear weapons, the U.S. nuclear umbrella will disappear from the Korean peninsula. Then, South Korea must confront, without nuclear deterrent, the still formidable North Korean asymmetric military capabilities such as chemical and biological weapons, forward-deployed artillery, missiles, submarines and special force.

Although the U.S. security commitment will remain and may be reinforced by other, non-nuclear elements as the new NPR indicates, it will not be easy to reassure either South or North Korea that extended deterrence without the nuclear component is as solid as before. In comparison, if North Korea forgoes its nuclear weapons, the U.S. nuclear umbrella will be gone, and the overall U.S. deterrence system will be punctured by a huge, nuclear hole.

## **Safeguards to the Diminishing U.S. Nuclear Umbrella**

The Korean peninsula today is no more stable and secure than during the Cold War. The old threat of potential confrontation has remained as before. The Yeonpyong shelling was the first direct open attack on the South Korean territory by the North Korean regular army in 60 years after the outbreak of the Korean War.

At the same time, U.S. decision to reduce the role of nuclear weapons inevitably will have the effect of shrinking the nuclear umbrella for the allies. However good intention it has for international peace and stability, this decision may send wrong signal to the North Korean leadership that US security commitment is weakened, and could be exploited by it.

Considering the uniqueness of security threat faced by South Korea, a *Korean Peninsula Tailored Deterrence Architecture* is needed, including the presence of American tactical nuclear weapons in South Korean territory. It is rather ironic that U.S. tactical nuclear weapons are deployed in Europe where there does not exist any imminent nuclear threat to U.S. allies in the region. There is no other place in the world except South Korea that deserves first-hand access to the U.S. extended nuclear deterrence.

Frustration prevails that it is unlikely that the North Korean nuclear crisis will be resolved through negotiations anytime soon. The Six-Party Talks, which started in August 2003, have borne no fruit and in fact, bought time for the DPRK. North Korea quadrupled nuclear capacities during the talks, conducted two nuclear tests, built up uranium enrichment capabilities and secretly provided Syria with an upgraded version of the 5MWe reactor.

Such slim prospects of a negotiated resolution justifies preparing for a tailored deterrence architecture that properly reflects the unique security conditions on the Korean peninsula as a *twin tool* to push the negotiated settlement on one hand and to reinforce credibility of U.S. nuclear umbrella on the other.

**Figure 1: The Korean Peninsula Tailored Deterrence Architecture:  
The Dual-Track Approach**

