

Session 5: Nuclear Deterrence and Conventional Deterrence

Chad Peltier

National Defense University

Summary

Broadly revolving around the contemporary division between conventional and nuclear deterrence capabilities, the three panelists focused their remarks on the real and potential effects of both nuclear and conventional prop global strike capabilities on the ability of the United States to deter and assure its allies.

Beginning the discussion on conventional and nuclear deterrence, Clark Murdock reminded the audience of the assumption that assurance and extended deterrence are undergirded by *perceptions* of credibility. Traditionally, policy makers and scholars have focused on the perception of United States' credibility as understood by two actors – the potential aggressor and the recipient of extended deterrence. He then introduced the concept of credibility towards a third audience – the United States domestic population - Congress in particular. He followed this assertion by comparing and contrasting Secretary Gates' recent speeches in Europe and Asia. He noted Gates' opinion that the US is an indispensable security partner in Asia, while lambasting the European “inability to sustain even modest operations” through NATO. He concluded by remarking that the US Asian allies are “carrying their weight” relative to you Europe.

Elaine Bunn spoke about conventional prop global strike, a concept that remains only in research and development, but seeks to develop a capability that is able to deliver conventional strikes anywhere in the world in under an hour. Proponents of conventional prop global strike argue that by recognizing that other conventional weapons lack the ability to strike quickly against varied threats and nuclear weapons might not be preferred in every

situation, a conventional prop global strike capability would be more usable and therefore more credible. While there was some discussion that such a flexible capability might be destabilizing to China or Russia, strategic dialogues and confidence-building mechanisms would help assuage fears.

Brad Glosserman primarily argued that strategic assets for extended deterrence must be more broadly defined. In short, the United States must employ a wider array of tools for extended deterrence and assurance than simply military capabilities. Recognizing the pursuit of the nuclear global zero goal, the United States will need support from its allies, increased integration, and credibility. He argued that allies can do more in their alliance and that states are now unable to pass off costs easily because of their integrated economies. This issue belies the need for a better way to apportion burdens. Finally, Glosserman expressed concern over the logic of offensive strike capabilities because of our lack of understanding of their potentially destabilizing effects.

* The views expressed herein do not necessarily reflect the views of the Asan Institute for Policy Studies.

* The views expressed here are panel overviews of the Asan Plenum. They do not necessarily reflect the views of the author or the institutions they are affiliated with.
