# [SE3-CV-2] NATO and Extended Deterrence

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## Full Summary

The Asan Plenum 2011 panel "NATO and Extended Deterrence" was moderated by Michael Lekson, the Deputy Provost of the United States Institute of Peace's Academy for International Conflict Management and Peacebuilding. The panel included NATO experts Jennifer Laurendeau of the U.S. State Department's Office of European Security and Political Affairs; Elaine Bunn, a Distinguished Research Fellow at the National Defense University's Center for Strategic Research; and Paul Schulte, a Senior Associate with the Carnegie Nuclear Policy Program and Carnegie Europe. The panel addressed the role of nuclear deterrence in NATO's management of security challenges throughout its history. The panel discussed NATO's experience as a case study of extended nuclear deterrence with a view to identifying possible insights for issues relating to extended deterrence in East Asia. The NATO alliance and the American alliance with the Republic of Korea are the only two examples of a treaty-based U.S. security guarantee, explicitly including its nuclear deterrent, against a powerful adversary immediately adjacent to the territory being guaranteed. Both the similarities and the differences in the two situations could have lessons for East Asia.

Mr. Lekson began with an overview of deterrence issues faced and addressed by NATO from its inception to the Intermediate-range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty. Lekson explained how the U.S. nuclear deterrent represented a strategic guarantee to European NATO allies against a dangerous Soviet threat. This guarantee was needed in the form of nuclear weapons because NATO conventional forces never matched those of the Soviet Union/Warsaw Pact, given their substantial cost to maintain and a weakened and demobilized Europe after World War II. A nuclear deterrent would act in place of this discrepancy in conventional forces. In addition, President Eisenhower believed that limited nuclear war was a fallacy and any conflict with the Soviet Union would quickly escalate into total war, which limited the need for conventional weapons. This approach also allowed for a sufficiently low level of defense spending to maintain U.S. budget discipline. The alliance over time evolved to become integrated and formalized as Western Europe increasingly unified under the European Community. Meanwhile, nuclear weapons were deployed on the territory of NATO Europe and non-Soviet Warsaw Pact states.

Tensions between NATO and the Soviet Union ebbed and flowed along with the level of threat as perceived by NATO allies. The advent of Intercontinental Ballistic Missiles (ICBMs) eventually led to the SALT agreements that limited the superpowers' threat to one another. Tensions again reached a high level with NATO's 1979 dual-track decision: to deploy U.S. INF missiles in Europe in response to the Soviet Union modernizing similar missiles targeted at Europe, while the U.S. would also seek to negotiate INF limits with the USSR. When NATO INF deployments began, the Soviet Union walked away from all arms control talks.

A turning point occurred when Presidents Reagan and Gorbachev agreed to eliminate U.S. and Soviet INF missiles in 1987 on a global basis. Dr. Laurendeau explained that while the INF Treaty was the product of Cold War relationships, it inaugurated a period in which NATO allies began to reconsider the role of nuclear weapons in their defense strategy and look again at military requirements. In 1991, following consultation with European and Pacific allies, President Bush announced the Presidential Nuclear Initiatives (PNIs) to reduce the types and numbers of nuclear weapons at sea and deployed in Europe and Korea. With the breakup of the former Soviet Union, a new set of concerns emerged, focused on the threat of proliferation and the need for effective control of nuclear weapons and material. Coupled with NATO's effort to build a more cooperative relationship with Russia, as reflected in the 1997 NATO-Russia Founding Act, this new political context supported a sea-change in NATO's nuclear policy. It inaugurated a period in which the number and types of U.S. nuclear weapons assigned to NATO dropped dramatically and the readiness of remaining systems, as well as the role of nuclear weapons in NATO's overall military doctrine, was reduced. Discussions are ongoing within NATO on the future role of nuclear weapons in its strategy as part of NATO's Defense and Deterrence Posture Review. The review epitomizes NATO's unique consultative process which has characterized the alliance from its nuclear build-up to its draw-down.

This consultative process was then described by Ms. Bunn, who highlighted four of its important characteristics. First, NATO nuclear consultations occur routinely on multiple levels, including at the defense minister level in the Nuclear Planning Group, among Ambassadors in the North Atlantic Council, in the High Level Group of senior experts, and all the way down to the working level. Second, consultations are broad as well. They include all members of NATO regardless of whether they have nuclear weapons based in their country, with the exception of France at its own choice with regard to nuclear-specific groups. Third, consultations have been most intense in times of a changing strategic environment. For example, consultative bodies were most active during the debates over the INF dual-track decision and its implementation. Fourth, consultations eventually expanded to include missile defense and other consultative issues beyond nuclear, since

effective deterrence also involves conventional forces and political solidarity. A key example is the extensive consultative process for the decision to participate in the Strategic Planning Initiative.

The final panelist, Mr. Schulte, then suggested lessons that can be drawn from NATO's experience. He cautioned that although many activists see the role of deterrence as eliminated in the post-Cold War world, allies have differing strategic cultures that influence their willingness to eliminate nuclear weapons. For example, for many states in the former Soviet bloc, there is a living memory of what it means to be occupied. These states are therefore more likely to see the efficacy in nuclear deterrence than those that have been shielded from such experience, such as some countries in Scandinavia. Likewise, they are less likely to be optimistic about Global Zero, the campaign to eradicate nuclear weapons. Such diversity leads to questions regarding NATO's enlargement, especially given that the alliance's consensus-based rule means that every state has a veto. Schulte explained that NATO's experience proves that the size and unity of an alliance such as NATO adds to deterrence, but also makes decisions more difficult. He closed by reiterating as a lesson for East Asia that a smooth decision process is easiest when allies have similar strategic cultures. During the robust question and answer session, questioners expressed doubts about the future of NATO's nuclear deterrent. One questioner noted that as part of the elder President Bush's PNIs, the U.S. pulled all nuclear weapons out of Asia without reciprocity. The questioner wondered whether the same could happen to Europe if a change occurs in the political environment. Laurendeau pointed out that numbers of Russian Non-strategic Nuclear Weapons (NSNW) had also been reduced in the context of the PNIs. More generally, she responded that the U.S. Nuclear Posture Review makes clear the U.S. position that any changes to NATO's nuclear posture should only be made after a thorough review within, and decision by, the NATO Alliance as a whole. NATO's public statements on this issue underscore the need for Russian reciprocity. Schulte added that many within NATO are working to prevent unilateral action. Such norms and processes of consultation, emphasized Schulte, are difficult to stop once begun, making unilateral action unlikely.

A member of the audience then asked about the possibility of a grand bargain with Russia to guarantee Europe's security without nuclear weapons. Laurendeau in response cautioned that although grand bargains are always an appealing vision, they are rarely feasible. There is an inherent challenge because Russia has not been particularly transparent about its holdings of NSNW, but it does have many more than are assigned to NATO today. Lekson added that grand bargains almost never happen in the area of arms control; senior leaders tend to go for limited agreements that can be reached at the time.

The final questioner, doubtful that nuclear weapons are needed in Europe, argued that extended deterrence does not need to equal U.S. NSNW on the ground in Europe. The questioner added, "It is a fundamental mistake to say that extended nuclear deterrence depends on earmarked systems." In response, Schulte and Laurendeau agreed with one another that although there are multiple opinions, extended deterrence is as much about reassuring allies as stopping adversaries. Lekson noted that once nuclear weapons are withdrawn from a country, their redeployment would be extremely difficult. Bunn then summed up these thoughts with a telling analogy: as one can have a healthy marriage without wearing a wedding band, it may be possible to have effective deterrence without forward-deployed nuclear weapons. For those already wearing a wedding band, however, taking it off signifies something different than for those who never wore one.