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**Does the Nonproliferation Tail Wag the Deterrence Dog?**
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In recent months there have been several U.S. government and private task force reports regarding future U.S. nuclear weapons policies and strategic force posture, all intended to inform the Obama administration's Nuclear Posture Review, which is expected at the end of this year. The studies underscore the important role that U.S. nuclear forces play in reassuring allies and bolstering extended deterrence, but a few foreshadow an emphasis on nuclear nonproliferation to a degree that the credibility of U.S. extended deterrence could be weakened (at least when viewed by allies like Japan or Korea). Devaluing the nuclear component of extended deterrence is feasible, but it must be done carefully and with a compensating effort to boost conventional military cooperation and strengthen other aspects of our alliances.

One statement highlighting the priority of nonproliferation was made last month by the influential Congressional Commission on the Strategic Posture of the United States. The commission's interim report notes that cooperation with other nuclear powers is essential to combat proliferation, by reducing and protecting nuclear stockpiles, keeping new nations from going nuclear, and safeguarding fissile material throughout the nuclear energy supply chain. The commission emphasized that the United States could "increase our chance of getting the kind of cooperation we need" by taking proactive steps to "decrease the importance and role of nuclear weapons."

The idea seems to be that if Washington can show Russia, China, and others that it's serious about reducing nuclear weapons or other strategic advantages, then it can get cooperation on security issues that matter most to Americans, such as preventing Iran or North Korea from becoming full-fledged nuclear powers and other objectives. These steps could include further cuts in the U.S. stockpile, movements toward CTBT ratification, and scaling back missile defenses or prompt global strike initiatives, among others. Some are laudable and appropriate, unless they undermine allied confidence in extended deterrence.

The commission's report explains extended deterrence as "one of [the] pillars" of U.S. nonproliferation strategy, in the sense that credible U.S. security guarantees allow key allies to forego their own nuclear deterrent. This suggests that the nuclear umbrella over Japan and South Korea is just a means to support U.S. nonproliferation policy. But policy makers must recognize the interwoven nature of the nuclear umbrella, extended deterrence, and the broader alliance relationships. You cannot pull one thread without affecting the others, and each ally's perspective is slightly different. U.S. reports have highlighted this in the NATO case, but it is no less true in Asia.

Linking extended deterrence, nuclear weapons, and U.S. nonproliferation goals in the context of America's East Asian alliances has a long history. Recently declassified notes from Japan's foreign ministry, for example, reveal that in 1965 former Prime Minister Sato Eisaku sought assurances from Defense Secretary Robert McNamara that the United States would be prepared to strike China with nuclear weapons if "war" broke out. McNamara gave that assurance, and the two discussed logistics to facilitate such a scenario. Later, McNamara explained that Washington was concerned about Tokyo's response to China's nuclear test and worried that failure to reassure Japan would trigger further proliferation in the region.

Japan knows this, and that's why Japanese policy makers occasionally remind their U.S. and regional counterparts (privately and publicly) about the importance of the U.S. nuclear umbrella and Japan's own capabilities to go nuclear if necessary. Sato did it in 1965, opposition leader Ozawa Ichiro said as much to leaders in Beijing in 2002, then Foreign Minister Aso Taro mentioned it after North Korea's 2006 nuclear test, and there are countless other examples. Perhaps last month's declassification of the Sato-McNamara notes itself was another subtle reminder.

South Korea has had similar moments with Washington, most notably when Seoul pursued a nuclear weapons program in the 1970s following a U.S. drawdown of forward deployed forces. Also, after North Korea's nuclear test Defense Minister Yoon Kwang-ung asked the United States to draw up a detailed nuclear strategy for protecting the South, though the request was rebuffed. Even this month, North Korea tried to tempt the new U.S. administration by offering to denuclearize "when the U.S. nuclear threat is removed and South Korea is cleared of its nuclear umbrella." Washington won't negotiate away the nuclear umbrella, of course, but this psychological game can sow doubt in the South if U.S. resolve is not continually demonstrated.

Balancing dramatic arms controls gestures toward countries like China and Russia (in order to get their cooperation on nonproliferation initiatives) with continued allied confidence in extended deterrence will be a tightrope for the Obama administration. On the one hand, concrete and coordinated steps toward global disarmament align well with the allies' long-held foreign policy priorities, and could allow for greater pressure on North Korea to denuclearize. On the other hand, extended deterrence could weaken if Washington

appears too eager to placate China and Russia on these issues in pursuit of the nonproliferation objective or if it permits a latent North Korean nuclear capability in exchange for safeguards against proliferation. Policy makers in Tokyo in particular would be uneasy if there is any significant narrowing of the U.S. nuclear advantage vis-à-vis China or signs of a pull back on missile defenses. Such perceptions could undermine the alliances more broadly.

The recent strategic posture reports emphasize the importance of consulting with U.S. allies during this critical time of nuclear policy debate, though there is often a perfunctory quality to these statements. Particularly in the U.S.-Japan alliance, a sense of frustration is returning to Washington that Japan continues to "cheap ride" on defense and cannot commit politically to a more active partnership. Meanwhile, Tokyo views Washington's courtship of North Korea and China with a wary eye, and sometimes resents the costs associated with hosting U.S. forces or following the U.S.'s diplomatic lead. Recent polls show that only a third of Japanese think bilateral ties are "good," the lowest point since 2000. Meanwhile, Seoul is concerned that deterrence could weaken when the Combined Forces Command disbands in 2012. The health of the alliances is precarious enough without suggesting that all is well from Washington's perspective as long as Japan and Korea do not test a nuclear weapon. That is not the measuring stick.

The alliances suppress regional competition and play a vital stabilizing role that goes well beyond nonproliferation. This is particularly important as China develops its military capability to support its diplomatic agenda. The alliances are also a catalyst for regional security cooperation involving different partners, and they foster other forms of diplomatic and economic cooperation. The alliances deliver value in a variety of ways, but they require constant tending to remain vibrant.

Nuclear terrorism is the greatest U.S. security concern at the moment, and the country can (and should) show leadership in strengthening nonproliferation and promoting nuclear disarmament. If succeeding in this effort requires a less dominant U.S. nuclear position, then it might be worth the trade off. One can argue that U.S. and allied security would be enhanced by an ever-shrinking global nuclear stockpile and tighter control over fissile material. Esoteric arguments about maintaining nuclear escalation dominance ring a bit hollow in today's security environment. But the nuclear umbrellas in East Asia have deep psychological roots, and we might damage those alliances if we start tugging at them too strongly or haphazardly.

Extended deterrence is an integral part of the alliances, and nuclear policy is one pillar supporting deterrence (not the other way around). The allies must be closely consulted as partners, not an afterthought, because strong political relations and displays of solidarity also support deterrence. In addition, if we rely less on the nuclear component for deterrence, then discussion about conventional military preparation and cooperation becomes more important. The current dialogue on roles, missions, and capabilities, for example, should become a higher priority, and we should utilize scenario-based planning more extensively. As we look to bolster nonproliferation efforts, let us use this as an opportunity to reshape extended deterrence for the 21st century in ways that strengthen and diversify our security and political relationships, which can reassure our allies as we seek a lower nuclear profile.