Challenges to U.S. Extended Deterrence on the Korean Peninsula and Devising a Strengthened Allied Deterrence Strategy against North Korea

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Executive Summary

The Republic of Korea (ROK)-U.S. alliance has endured North Korean challenges for nearly seven decades and deterred North Korean aggression into the South. Amid diplomatic stalemate, North Korea’s nuclear and missile capabilities have increased despite mounting international pressure and economic sanctions against North Korea. The ongoing massive nuclear modernization and the armament of China and Russia’s nuclear forces in the region are challenging U.S. policymakers, and the credibility of the U.S. extended deterrence is now being questioned more by its allies and partners.

Considering the negative repercussions from a ROK pursuit of developing national nuclear weapon capability, this paper is focused instead on exploring ways within the bilateral alliance framework to effectively strengthen the U.S. extended deterrence commitment to ROK against North Korea.

Derived from traditional deterrence theory and two policy reports, this paper analyzes U.S. extended deterrence on the Korean Peninsula through five significant factors which are deeply associated with U.S. extended deterrence posture: North Korea’s Motivation/Capability, Deterrer’s Capability, Deterrer’s Communication, Deterrer’s Credibility, and Assurance to ROK.

North Korea’s motivation behind the development of its nuclear and missile capabilities may be limited to intimidation, coercion, and deterrence in use of its nuclear weapons. However, as the number of North Korea’s nuclear arsenal and Intercontinental Ballistic Missiles (plus Submarine Launched Ballistic Missiles) increase significantly enough to credibly threaten the continental United States, North Korea’s nuclear doctrine can be modified to become more aggressive, undercutting the reliability of the U.S. extended deterrence on the Korean Peninsula.

Deterrer’s Capability includes conventional, nuclear forces and missile defense from both the ROK and United States. The capabilities of both armed forces are robust, and they are maintaining qualitative superiority by further modernization and development. Military capabilities should be buttressed by using other nonmilitary means of economy, information and diplomacy for deterrence.

Deterrer’s Communication is demonstrated by U.S. high-ranking officials’ statements and strategic documents that reiterate a strong commitment to provide extended deterrence to the ROK.

Deterrer’s Credibility is reinforced by various evidence such as a mutual defense treaty, high-level bilateral security consultative mechanisms, combined exercises, and the presence of the United States Forces Korea (USFK)—and especially both the ROK’s and United States’ increased efforts to strengthen extended deterrence from the bilateral meetings.

U.S. Assurance to Allies cannot be separated from U.S. extended deterrence. As evidenced by ally’s dilemmas such as De Gaulle’s Doubts, the Leaky Umbrella, Healy’s Theorem, and Defending the Status Quo Ante, the United States needs to address and manage allied concern for the reliability of U.S. extended deterrence.
Here are some recommendations:

- strengthen the current regularly held ROK-U.S. bilateral security consultative meetings;
- establish a multilateral U.S. extended deterrence consultative group in Asia;
- enhance the credibility of the ROK’s conventional deterrence against North Korea;
- strengthen the level and scope of the ROK-U.S. bilateral combined exercise; and
- exploit all the nonmilitary means such as diplomacy, economy, and information.

The views presented in this work represent those of the author and do not represent the views of the Republic of Korea government or the Republic of Korea Army.

Introduction

In the 68 years since the ROK-U.S. mutual defense treaty was signed on October 1, 1953—two months after the signing of the armistice agreement which brought to a halt the Korean War—the bilateral alliance has endured a myriad of challenges from North Korea, and it has successfully deterred any North Korean major hostilities into the South, maintaining the status quo on the Korean peninsula. As seen in a recent joint statement from the ROK-U.S. presidential summit in May 2021, both presidents reaffirmed a mutual commitment to a strong combined defense posture based on the bilateral mutual defense treaty, and the U.S. commitment to provide extended deterrence using its full range of capabilities was affirmed by the U.S. president. Also, the bilateral alliance which primarily focused on security issues around the Korean Peninsula in the nascent period has evolved into a more broadened, comprehensive strategic alliance for a better future, further cooperating deeply in a variety of areas such as climate change, global health and emerging technologies, green energy, supply chain resilience, and so forth.\(^1\) With its developed economy and strengthened military, the ROK has become one of the states that can help strengthen many important bilateral issues with the United States, and its expanded global role is also widely recognized.

As such, the ROK-U.S. allied deterrence over North Korea has worked for nearly seven decades, allowing the ROK to become one of the most prosperous nations with a lot of potential to contribute to the world. However, it seems starkly different if we look at the ongoing progress of North Korea’s unabated nuclear and missile programs. North Korea was observed to have reactivated the Yongbyon nuclear reactor starting from July 2021, and there have been many signs throughout its territory clearly showing that North Korea is not hindered from resuming and developing its nuclear weapons program.\(^2\) The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) reported that North Korea showed signs of operating the nuclear reactor, including the discharge of cooling water.\(^3\) And the director general of IAEA announced that North Korea’s nuclear

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program is going “full steam ahead.” There have been no intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs) or nuclear tests since it declared its self-imposed moratorium on nuclear weapons and long-range missile testing in December 2017, which was rescinded by its leader about a year later. But it continuously conducted numerous short-range ballistic missiles and Submarine Launched Ballistic Missiles (SLBMs) tests, which are obviously serious violations of United Nations Security Council (UNSC) resolutions. However, the bilateral negotiation process for the denuclearization of the Korean peninsula is at a stalemate. While the United States called for North Korea to take initial actions seriously for the denuclearization, North Korea iterated that the United States should end its hostile policy, but exactly what that entailed is unclear. Even the definition of the “denuclearization on the Korean Peninsula” itself is not mutually recognized. Since the Hanoi US-DPRK summit in 2018, there hasn’t been any progress made in the negotiations between the two nations. In the meantime, North Korea is pursuing its own program and developing advanced and sophisticated technology, which is aggravating the stability in the region.

The new U.S. administration has revealed that its policy toward North Korea would be based on taking a practical, calibrated approach, adding that it is always open to diplomacy with North Korea. Also, the approach entails that the United States will consult with its allies in making decisions regarding dealing with North Korea. In the meantime, the United States is closely implementing its own bilateral sanctions and UN sanctions against North Korea. However, North Korea hasn’t shown any signs of resuming the bilateral talks that have been halted since the summit in 2018. The lack of trust, which is primarily driven by North Korea’s past notorious behavior of having the United States make concessions to North Korea and then suddenly withdraw from its commitments from past agreements (such as when North Korea withdrew its commitment a few days after the Leap Day Agreement in 2012), is also making it hard for U.S. policymakers to believe what North Korea would be willing to do for denuclearization. Furthermore, dealing with North Korea has become a much more difficult task, especially since it has shut down its border since the Covid-19 breakout in early 2020 and hasn’t shown any willingness to go back to the negotiation table, though U.S. officials keep saying that the United States is willing to negotiate without preconditions. A variety of different approaches toward North Korea have been made by the previous administrations but none of them achieved denuclearization on the Korean Peninsula. There appears to be no perfect, risk-free approach left at this moment. North Korea policy is indeed a land of lousy options for the United States. As for the inter-Korean relations aspect, the ROK and North Korea, based upon Article II of the Panmunjom Declaration, established the Comprehensive Military Agreement (CMA) as a confidence-building measure to reduce the tension and mitigate the risks of conflict on the Korean Peninsula. It was signed on September 19,

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2018.\(^9\) Both militaries increased cooperation in 2018 and 2019 but have failed to cooperate since then.\(^10\) Other than the resumption of a military communication hotline between the South and North, there hasn’t been any progress made with North Korea despite the ROK’s sincere and persistent overture to engage and negotiate, and any further progress is not likely to be made any time soon.

The lacking (or at least limited) amount of information from inside North Korea may be one challenging element for Korea watchers in evaluating the current situation and predicting the future in North Korea. However, one thing for certain is that North Korea is continuously developing its nuclear and missile program, advancing nuclear and missile technologies, and materializing its weapons into its arsenal, and it is on the track of becoming more threatening to the ROK-U.S. combined defense posture as time goes by. Also, it is arguably right to say that the current U.S. and UN economic sanctions against North Korea couldn’t stop its nuclear and missile programs, though those sanctions are placing North Korea under difficult conditions to certain degrees, regardless of the suspicions that there have always been loopholes in its implementation. And North Korea is using sanctions-evasive techniques to gain revenue by selling illegal weapon systems and its technologies to third countries and proactively engaging in illicit cyber-criminal activities.\(^11\) North Korea has already demonstrated its long-range ballistic missiles capabilities by testing several ICBMs in 2017, which were presumed to be capable of reaching the U.S. mainland, including most of the western states in the United States.\(^12\) It goes without saying that the ROK, Japan, and most of the U.S. bases stationed across the Pacific Ocean are already within the radius of North Korean nuclear and missile threats. While the U.S. STRATCOM has enough confidence in dealing with anything North Korea can do with its nuclear and missile capabilities at this moment, considering its vigilant intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) capabilities and robust missile defense system, North Korean threats are rapidly increasing in intensity around the clock and becoming more credible at this juncture.\(^13\) On the contrary, according to recent polling conducted by the Arms Control Association of U.S. congressional staff members, while there was unanimous support for the ROK-U.S. alliance from the respondents, 40 percent of them viewed U.S. extended deterrence arrangements for North Korea as “inadequate,” and even 45 percent of respondents were “unsure,” leaving only 15 percent responding as “adequate.”

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them indicated that the United States lacked in its communication to deter North Korea and assure the ROK of its extended deterrence posture in the region.\textsuperscript{14}

In the meantime, U.S.-China competition in the Indo-Pacific region is incrementally intensifying more than ever. With its rapid accumulating strength in economy, military, and technology, China is trying to increase its sphere of influence in the region, undercutting U.S. dominance and driving a wedge between the United States and its allies. China is rapidly expanding its nuclear arsenals and pursuing platform diversification in its strategic nuclear forces as well as its indigenous massive conventional military buildup.\textsuperscript{15} The U.S. Department of Defense estimated that China could have 700 deliverable nuclear warheads by 2025 and 1,000 warheads by 2030.\textsuperscript{16} China is not participating in any nuclear arms control talks like the New START agreement between the United States and Russia, and it remains unclear whether China would talk with the United States on that issue while massively amassing its nuclear stockpiles. Also, China developed hypersonic missiles technology and operationalized them in its theater force, which is expected to evade conventional missile defense systems by flexibly gliding into the target. China’s hypersonic missile test in August 2021 surprised many U.S. experts by its accuracy and unprecedented capability in hitting the target.\textsuperscript{17} Many U.S. high-ranking officials stated and testified in recent Senate hearings that China is the “pacing threat” to U.S. security, which most of them echoed, calling for the United States to take bold measures to check against Chinese aggressions by working with its allies and partners. In this context of great powers competition in the region, along with Chinese preference on maintaining stable conditions in its northeastern periphery, China is not likely to cooperate with the United States and the ROK in achieving denuclearization on the Korean Peninsula in the foreseeable future unless North Korea’s nuclear and missile program is directly posing a serious threat to its security.

Russia, which remains the United States’ largest nuclear competitor, is expanding and modernizing its nuclear arsenal as well. Despite its declining defense expenditure, Russia is expected to challenge the United States by emphasizing new weapon systems and continuing to present key threats by using its advanced space, cyber, and intelligence capabilities.\textsuperscript{18} Although its stake in North Korea may not be as great as China, Russia is backing China in reinforcing ties with North Korea, which achieves their primary objective of undermining U.S. influence in the broad Indo-Pacific region as well. As raised by many people who have doubts and criticisms in the weakening UNSC sanctions against North Korea, China and Russia appear to have more interest in closely coordinating with North Korea based on the recurring attempts by both nations to push for the lifting of sanctions on North Korea during UNSC meetings, acquiescing to their partner’s

\textsuperscript{18} U.S. Office of the Director of National Intelligence, \textit{Annual Threat Assessment}, 10-11.
illegal and endless pursuit of nuclear and missile programs despite strong oppositions from most of the countries.\(^\text{19}\)

Based on these challenging factors to paving the way to achieving denuclearization on the Korean Peninsula, a set of questions linger around the future reliability of the U.S. extended deterrence to the ROK. If this stalemate in denuclearization negotiation continues and North Korea accelerates its nuclear and missile program, someday there will be an inflection moment when North Korea’s nuclear and missile capabilities reach the threshold where it may be assessed to be an actual and credible threat to most of the continental United States (CONUS) regardless of the assumption on how soon they will achieve that. Notwithstanding the fog of uncertainties in the future security environment, the fundamental question to many Koreans is: “Can the ROK rely on U.S. extended deterrence over the Korean Peninsula in the future?” In other words, “Will the U.S. president take a risk to save Seoul for Los Angeles or Washington?” Not only North Korea but also its neighboring partners are massively modernizing and building up their nuclear forces, presenting serious challenges to U.S. security and its ability to provide extended deterrence to its allies in the region. What are the options for the ROK to counterbalance North Korea’s ever-increasing nuclear and missile capabilities? Is the current U.S. extended deterrence over the Korean Peninsula reliable and strong enough to deter any type of North Korean nuclear blackmail and actual attacks? What are the recommendations for both the ROK and the United States to take to bolster current U.S. extended deterrence posture against North Korean threats in the years ahead?

**ROK’s Pursuit of Its Own Nuclear Weapons to Counter North Korean Nuclear Threats?**

There have been lively discussions among the ROK’s domestic academia and research institutes on whether the ROK should develop its own indigenous nuclear weapons either independently or in consultation with the United States. These voices are not new. Whenever there have been North Korean nuclear tests or any signs of significant improvement in North Korean missile and nuclear capabilities, there have been strong domestic urges within the ROK to support this option to meet with North Korean nuclear challenges.\(^\text{20}\) Also, the ROK’s public interests in developing its own nuclear weapons are influenced by the outlook that the U.S. administration might convert to an off-shore balancing strategy, making its allies and partners feel anxious and uncertain about where the U.S. alliance policy will be heading in the future.\(^\text{21}\) In an Asan Institute survey in 2021, nearly 70 percent (69.3 percent) of South Korean respondents either supported or strongly supported the opinion that South Korea should develop its own nuclear weapons to counter North Korea’s nuclear threats. And the respondents’ reasons behind the development of homegrown nuclear weapons by the ROK was almost evenly distributed between “counter-balancing against North Korea,” “increasing South Korea’s influence in the world,” and a “necessity to have nuclear sovereignty,” which indicates that a majority of Koreans are seeking

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\(^{21}\) Ibid., 30.
more autonomy in their security in not only deterring against North Korea’s threat but also in other factors by acquiring their own nuclear weapons.\(^\text{22}\)

The discourse regarding the ROK’s pursuit of indigenous nuclear weapon development is not only rooted in the ROK side but there are also U.S. scholars who argue that the ROK should build its own nuclear bomb. In a Washington Post op-ed in September 2021, Jennifer Lind and Daryl G. Press from Dartmouth University argued that South Korea may choose to build its own nuclear weapon and invoke Article X of the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) which allows member states facing “extraordinary events that have jeopardized the supreme interests of its country” to withdraw and acquire nuclear weapons because South Korea is facing existential threats from North Korea possessing nuclear weapons. And both argued that the United States should back South Korea in taking that nuclear path by supporting it publicly in a variety of international forums.\(^\text{23}\) In the meantime, while Stephen M. Walt from Harvard University did not indicate the ROK specifically because his focus was on European allies, he argued that removing U.S. nuclear commitment and allowing allies like Japan and Germany to acquire nuclear weapons would not be terrible from a U.S. perspective.\(^\text{24}\) His fundamental argument was that it is reasonable to fold the U.S. nuclear umbrella to its allies because shielding allies under U.S. nuclear is very costly and risky given adversaries’ increased nuclear arsenals and capabilities. He concluded that “nuclear weapons are extremely useful for deterring direct and all-out attacks on one’s own homeland but not much else.”\(^\text{25}\)

Considering the cost calculus of extending its nuclear capabilities, the United States may not be able to afford to support its allies like it could during the Cold War because its adversaries have grown their capabilities. Also, he added that convincing people that the United States might use nuclear weapons for its allies isn’t easy, indicating that assurance to allies of its commitment to provide extended deterrence is challenging.\(^\text{26}\)

However, the ROK acquiring its own nuclear weapon is not likely to be in the United States’ official interests, and for now it has never been publicly endorsed by U.S. government officials. The United States has advocated a nonproliferation policy throughout history. The NPT was created in 1968 to prevent nonnuclear weapon states (NNWS) from joining the nuclear club. And the United States’ primary concerns were its European and Asian allies going nuclear. By extending a nuclear umbrella to its allies, the United States was able to prevent chaotic nuclear proliferated international order except for four countries: Israel, India, Pakistan, and North Korea.\(^\text{27}\) Because the allies were reassured by the United States that they could be protected from nuclear attack and intimidation from any potential adversary, they decided not to develop nuclear


\(^\text{25}\) Ibid.

\(^\text{26}\) Ibid.

weapons.\(^\text{28}\) Furthermore, it would be even less probable that the ROK would make its sole decision to develop its own independent nuclear weapon without consultation with its ally who serves as a fundamental pillar of the ROK’s security. Taking independent steps in its security might lead the bilateral alliance to fall into pieces, aggravating the security concerns by itself.

Even if the United States consents that the ROK would need its indigenous nuclear weapons to further deter North Korean nuclear blackmail or attacks in the future, with the ROK’s invocation of Article X of NPT, how would the United States fend off any other calls from its allies and partners to do the same? It would be evident that letting the ROK go nuclear would easily lead to nuclear proliferation in the region like the fall of dominoes, which most of us would not want to see. What about the response from countries in other regions? The decision for the ROK to go nuclear would instigate the need for developing nuclear weapons from not only neighboring countries in the region but also from other regions as well. Therefore, it is evident that this option will lead to a global nuclear arms race, creating incessant instability in the world. If the United States does not see this as plausible and reasonable, it is not likely to be discussed between officials from both governments at any time soon.

So, then what does this mean for a nonnuclear ROK facing growing North Korean nuclear threats? The only option that the ROK should focus on is strengthening the current U.S. extended deterrence over the Korean peninsula by closely coordinating and communicating with the United States. Rather than explaining the advantages and disadvantages of the ROK going nuclear independently, which has less feasibility, this paper will focus on analyzing the current U.S. extended deterrence posture on the Korean Peninsula by exploring elements and mechanisms and suggesting ways to build more confidence from both countries in deterring any type of North Korean nuclear aggression on the Korean Peninsula.

Concepts and Analytical Framework of U.S. Extended Deterrence

For preventing any confusion in understanding the concept of extended deterrence and its related terminology in this paper, careful definition of each key concept is necessary. In the DOD Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms, “Deterrence is the prevention of action by the existence of a credible threat of unacceptable counteraction and/or belief that the cost of action outweighs the perceived benefits.”\(^\text{29}\)

There are two approaches in deterrence strategies. Deterrence by denial “seeks to deter an action by making it infeasible or unlikely to succeed, thus denying potential aggressor confidence in attaining its objectives.” Deterrence by punishment “threatens severe penalties if attack occurs.”\(^\text{30}\) Depending on how a state would want to achieve deterrence—either emphasizing the denial of benefits or compelling the cost from the adversary—these two approaches can be differentiated.

Deterrence can also be categorized into two by which subject it is applied to. Direct or central deterrence refers to “efforts by a state to prevent attacks on its own territory—which is mostly the U.S. in this case”, and extended deterrence refers to “discouraging attacks on third

\(^{28}\) Ibid.


parties, such as allies or partners.”

Therefore, extended deterrence is applied further beyond U.S. territory into third parties. Also, “umbrella” or “shield” is often used to describe different ways of expressing extended deterrence.

In the meantime, the common misperception about extended deterrence is to think only about the nuclear aspect of deterrence. But actual extended deterrence encompasses not only U.S. nuclear forces but also its conventional forces, missile defense, and even its actual presence on an ally’s territory, which can be sometimes referred to as the “trip-wire effect.” The range of U.S. extended deterrence is well delineated in many official statements made by U.S. presidents and U.S. secretaries.

In traditional deterrence theory, there are three components for deterrence to work—the 3Cs: capability, communication, and credibility. And deterrence should meet all of these criteria to achieve a successful outcome. Capability “consists of having the means to influence behavior.” It is the most straightforward enabling component to deterrence by denial or deterioration punishment against a potential adversary. Also, it entails not only military capability but also other nonmilitary capabilities such as diplomacy, economy, and information. Communication “consists of transmitting the intended message to the desired audience.” The message should clearly convey U.S. political willingness to an adversary by using all kinds of capabilities for an adversary’s actions. Lastly, credibility “consists of maintaining a level of believability that the proposed actions may actually be employed.” This element is dependent upon the adversary’s point of view on U.S. resolve and its capability. Credibility of deterrence is also related to individual or national reputation because past failure of a political leader or a state to meet with commitment could lead to challenge deterrence later. However, it would be challenging to simply apply only these three criteria from traditional deterrence theory into the case of U.S. extended deterrence against North Korea on the Korean peninsula because it cannot explain deterrence failure driven by the factors such as the adversary’s misperception or miscalculation. Also, it does not have enough explanatory power in explaining the ally’s anxiety on the U.S. extended deterrence commitment.

There are two compelling analyses regarding the U.S. extended deterrence against North Korea. A RAND report published in April 2021 provides a useful tool to analyze U.S. extended deterrence posture on the Korean peninsula. In this report, it derived 12 variables with three categories from 39 cases of U.S.-led extended deterrence from 1945 and compared the two cases

31 Ibid., 3.
35 Ibid.
36 Ibid.
37 Mazaa, Understanding Deterrence, 11.
of deterrence posture in the Korean peninsula with the Taiwan Strait.\textsuperscript{39} The three categories are North Korea’s motivation, clarity of the U.S. deterrence message, and credibility of the U.S. deterrence message. Under North Korea’s motivation, there are four variables: dissatisfaction with the status quo, fear that the strategic situation is about to turn, North Korea’s national interest, and sense of desperation or urgent need to act. Variables for the clarity of the message include types of aggression to be prevented, actions to be taken in the event of aggression, and forceful and timely communication. Lastly, the credibility of the U.S. extended deterrence message category includes the strength of the local military capability, automaticity of a U.S. response, U.S. political commitment, and U.S. national interest. While the status of deterrence posture in the Korean peninsula is assessed to be healthy, with most of the 12 variables being assessed to be strong, the author of the report concluded that the case of the Taiwan Strait is much more challenging, considering the weaknesses in the clarity and credibility of the U.S. deterrence.\textsuperscript{40}

In the meantime, a policy paper by the U.S. Air Force Institute for National Security Studies (INSS) in 2013 provides a different approach in analyzing U.S. extended deterrence. The biggest departure from RAND’s analysis is that the INSS report posits assurance aspect as is important as extended deterrence. The concept of assurance is closely related to extended deterrence but also separate from it. The level of U.S. extended deterrence to its allies does not always lead to a commensurate level of assurance to its allies. Assurance is defined in this report as “the means and methods employed to convince a U.S. ally or partner that the United States can guarantee its safety from intimidation, coercion, or attack by foreign actors.” The fundamental argument is that the credibility of the U.S. extended deterrence and assurance strategies is the function of both political resolve and military capabilities.\textsuperscript{41} The analytics in this report have three key categories: political resolve, political-military support, and military capability. Political resolve includes public statements and personal diplomacy by national leadership, national strategic guidance, national policies on use of force, and defense treaties and security agreements. Under political-military support, visible engagement such as bilateral consultations and joint exercises, basing arrangements, and regular rotations variables are included. Lastly, military capability has three components, which are conventional, nuclear, and missile defense.\textsuperscript{42}

While both reports provide useful and compelling tools to analyze U.S. extended deterrence posture on the Korean peninsula, both analyses also have weaknesses. The first report basically lacks enough explanations on the assurance aspect, which may also have a significant impact on U.S. extended deterrence, and it considers variables from the status of the current posture primarily and not from projections of where it is expected to be heading. On the other hand, the second report does not have enough explanation on North Korea’s motivation and capability and its binary and mixed-between components of political resolve and military capability may not explain all other potential aspects which can influence the outcome of extended deterrence and assurance. Furthermore, neither of them gives enough explanations on surrounding factors such as geopolitical aspects like ongoing developments in broad great power competition in the Indo-Pacific regions which may also have a huge impact on both U.S. extended deterrence and assurance strategies on the Korean Peninsula.


\textsuperscript{40} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{41} Anderson, Larsen, and Holdorf, \textit{Extended Deterrence and Allied Assurance}, 7-31.

\textsuperscript{42} Ibid.
Therefore, considering the strengths and weaknesses of traditional deterrence theory and both compelling policy reports, the analysis of the U.S. extended deterrence on the Korean Peninsula in this report would like to focus on five categories: the adversary’s motivation/capability, deterrer’s capability, deterrer’s communication, deterrer’s credibility, and assurance to allies. These are not exhaustive elements to each other, and at the same time not all the elements are considered but rather designed to draw out factors that would have a significant impact on U.S. extended deterrence posture on the Korean Peninsula now and in the future. And based on its analysis, this report would like to suggest a few recommendations in the end.

Adversary’s motivation and capability will analyze North Korea’s National Security Strategy and its military capability with a primary focus on its trajectory on developing nuclear and missile capabilities. And it will further discuss the possibility of how North Korea’s increased capability could make changes to its strategic motivation. Deterrer’s Capability will analyze both ROK and U.S. capabilities including not only military capabilities ranging from conventional force, strategic nuclear force, and missile defense but also other means of capability such as economy, diplomacy, and information. Deterrer’s communication will explore previous U.S. high-level official statements and official security strategy documents such as the interim National Security Guidance, National Defense Strategy (NDS), and Nuclear Posture Review (NPR), and will mainly focus on recently made official statements and documents. Deterrer’s credibility will focus on the visible engagement of U.S. extended deterrence, such as the mutual defense treaty, security agreement, bilateral high-level security consultative body, a few examples of bilateral combined exercises, and the basing of USFK. Lastly, assurance will focus on the four main challenges to U.S. extended deterrence identified in an INSS paper and will explore ally’s anxiety and concern about its perception toward the credibility of U.S. extended deterrence which the United States might need to address. Rather than providing full lists of factual evidence from each element, this article would focus on a few brief examples which are closely related to the status of U.S. extended deterrence posture on the Korean Peninsula, thereby drawing a conclusion and suggesting a few recommendations in the end.

Analyzing the Status of U.S. Extended Deterrence Posture on the Korean Peninsula

1. Adversary’s Motivation/Capability

North Korea’s Strategy

According to a U.S. Defense Intelligence Association (DIA) 2021 report on North Korea military power, there are two main objectives in North Korea’s national security strategy. One is to ensure the Kim regime’s long-term security and the other is to retain the capability to exercise a dominant influence over the Korean peninsula. As Kim Jong Un said in his remarks at the 8th Worker’s Party Congress in January 2021, “building the national nuclear force was a strategic and predominant goal.” His vision was clear that North Korea can directly hold the United States at risk and thereby deter and compel it into policy decisions beneficial to North Korea, and at the same time, North Korea can wield its dominant influence over the ROK. North Korea’s constant

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44 Ibid., 5.
efforts to drive a wedge between the ROK and the United States have been persistent because the disbandment of the ROK-U.S. alliance will be significantly in North Korea’s favor. The recent North Korean ambassador’s call for removing United Nations Command (UNC) after the end of war declaration clearly shows North Korea’s desire for removing the presence of U.S. forces on the Korean peninsula. Some further argued that North Korea will try to dominate the Korean Peninsula by forceful unification under a North Korean regime. After achieving regime security under North Korea rule, North Korea will then seek to depend less on China and challenge U.S. influence in the region by becoming a regional nuclear power, which is its ultimate third national objective, according to the report.

North Korea sees its nuclear capability as a credible deterrent against U.S. intervention, which it sees as constantly threatening its regime. As seen in the examples in Iraq and Libya, where the United States sought regime changes, North Korea appears to believe that abandoning its nuclear weapons will lead to regime change by U.S. invasion. Also, increased nuclear capability gives North Korea more confidence in threatening the nuclear-absent ROK. In March 2013, Mr. Kim stated that “the DPRK’s nuclear armed forces represent the nation’s life which can never be abandoned as the imperialists and nuclear threats exist on earth.” Therefore, considering the main objectives of North Korea’s national security strategy, it is hard to believe that North Korea will easily give up its nuclear weapons as long as it does not change its view that having a credible nuclear deterrent is the only guarantee for its survival and achieving its national security objectives. Even strengthening U.S. unilateral and UN-led economic sanctions against North Korea couldn’t stop it from developing its nuclear and missile programs. It is evident that the current level of pressure on North Korea is not enough to change its view. Unless North Korea acquires other measures that can replace its nuclear weapons as a guarantee for achieving both regime security and maintaining dominant influence on the Korean peninsula—or even to become a regional independent power, it would be hard to imagine a sincere approach from North Korea through currently stalled denuclearization negotiations in the future.

North Korea’s Armed Forces

The size of North Korea’s active-duty military forces, which includes army, special forces, navy, air force, and the Strategic Force, is about 1.28 million strong. A significant amount of its forces are deployed south of the Pyongyang-Wonsan line (70 percent of its army, 60 percent of its navy, and 40 percent of its air force), allowing it to launch a surprise attack on the South. North Korea’s special operation forces, designed for such rapid offensive operations like infiltration and raid, total about 200,000. Its reserve forces are estimated to be 7.62 million strong. North Korea’s overall armed forces have a numerical superiority over the ROK’s.

North Korea’s Strategic Forces is estimated to have 13 missile brigades dispersed over its territory operating various types of missiles including SCUD (~500-1,000km), Rhodong

(~1,300km), and Musudan (3,000km–) missiles. While it remains unclear whether it acquired atmospheric reentry techniques in its long-range missile delivery system, it tested Hwasung-12 (5,000km–), and Hwasung-14/15 (10,000km–), which can reach up to the western coastline of the continental United States.50 Also, North Korea is sophisticating advanced techniques such as road-mobile launch, maneuverable reentry vehicles, space launch vehicles and solid-propellant missiles to further diversify and have more flexibility, survivability, and promptness.51 From 2015, North Korea started to test SLBMs with its Bukkuksong missiles (1,000km–), and its recent tests include a North Korea-claimed new hypersonic missile.52

According to the Arms Control Association, it is estimated that North Korea possesses 40-50 nuclear warheads as of 2021 with its capability to expand its stockpiles from uranium enrichment using its centrifuge facilities, though estimates vary from different sources.53 There were six nuclear tests from 2006 to 2017. Through the nuclear tests, North Korea is assessed to be capable of miniaturization of nuclear warheads.54 And North Korea announced in January 2021 that they were developing tactical nuclear weapons.55 The last nuclear test in 2017 was a thermonuclear or hydrogen bomb which was detonated with 50 to 300 kilotons of explosive power, which would be 3 to 18 times as powerful as the one dropped in Hiroshima in 1945.56 Not only are nuclear warheads seriously threatening but also it is estimated to have 2,500–5,000 tons of chemical weapons since it started to develop a chemical weapons program in the 1980s. And it has biological warfare capability, which North Korea may consider using during wartime or as part of its hostile provocation campaign.57 Both chemical and biological capabilities are components of North Korea’s weapons of mass destruction (WMDs) along with its nuclear weapons, posing as key formidable threats to ROK-U.S. combined defense posture.

Looking Ahead to Increasing North Korea’s Nuclear and Missile Threats

Another RAND report even further estimated that North Korea could possess 200 nuclear weapons and dozens of ICBMs by 2027, considering the rate of its estimated annual production of 12-18 nuclear weapons from five key nuclear weapons sites including Yongbyon, Kangson, Bungang, and Sowi-ri. While the report expected that North Korea would still be likely to use its nuclear weapons for intimidation, coercion, and deterrence against the ROK and the United States, it did not rule out the possibilities that North Korea may use nuclear weapons under the condition of internal instability by waging a limited or major diversionary war.58

Kim Jong Un announced that the development of its nuclear program is for self-defense but not to start a war. But he also stated that he would use nuclear weapons to respond to an

50 Ibid., 35-38.
53 Davenport and Masterson, Congressional Perspectives on U.S. Policy, 2.
58 Bennet et al., Countering the Risks of North Korean Nuclear Weapons, 49.
invasion and may use them to prevent an attack.\textsuperscript{59} The specific point of time for his use of a nuclear weapon is unclear. Above all, significantly increased capability and numbers in its nuclear warheads and long-range missiles may give North Korea broader options in its use of nuclear weapons, which is a serious threat to ROK-U.S. defense posture on the Korean peninsula. Especially, North Korea’s having the ability to credibly launch a nuclear attack against the U.S. territory might give North Korea enough confidence to believe that it could deny the United States from exercising its nuclear umbrella on the ROK. In this regard, numerous nuclear warheads with ICBMs (or possibly SLBMs) will enable North Korea to disperse them throughout its territory to increase survivability and to allocate for different kinds of use for different countries, including its identified counterforce targets regarding USFK and ROK Armed Force’s key military facilities as well as counter-value targets in ROK and U.S. territory, and even neighboring countries such as China and Japan.\textsuperscript{60}

Therefore, while it is still uncertain whether North Korea’s use of a nuclear weapon on the Korean peninsula is more probable as its nuclear and missile program accelerates its pace, it is certain that North Korean threats are continuously growing and the ROK-U.S. combined capabilities to defeat and deny North Korean nuclear and missile threats are being more and more challenged, heightening the allied concern for the future credibility of the U.S. extended deterrence.

2. Deterrer’s Capability

**ROK-U.S. Conventional Force**

By 2022, the ROK is projected to become the fifth or sixth largest country in terms of defense expenditure, surpassing that of Japan.\textsuperscript{61} Its size of active-duty military is reducing as part of the Defense Reform 2.0 plan to about a half-million and its reserve forces totals about 3.1 million. The strength of USFK is about 28,500, including the 8th Army headquarters and its subordinate the 2nd infantry division along with a rotational armored brigade combat team (ABCT), a combat aviation brigade, an artillery brigade and an air defense artillery brigade, a military intelligence brigade, a signal brigade, and its sustainment forces.\textsuperscript{62} The USFK also has other components of the military including U.S. Naval Forces Korea, U.S. Marine Forces Korea, Special Operations Command Korea, and U.S. Air Forces Korea. The size of U.S. augmented forces during wartime is about 690,000 with 160 vessels and 2,000 aircraft in accordance with Time Phased Forces Deployment Data (TPFDD) based on the Article II of the ROK-U.S. mutual defense treaty.\textsuperscript{63} The size of the combined ROK-U.S. conventional force during contingency may be a smaller in strength number, but it is enjoying overwhelmingly qualitative superiority than North Korean conventional military.


\textsuperscript{60} Bennet et al., *Countering the Risks of North Korean Nuclear Weapons*, 54.


\textsuperscript{63} Ibid.
Currently, the ROK armed forces is building up its own “counter WMD system,” which consists of the strategic strike system and Korea Air and Missile Defense (KAMD). The strategic strike system includes both deterrence by denial and deterrence by punishment capabilities, and it focuses on developing long-range surveillance and precision strike capability. The development of the strategic strike system gained momentum from the lifting of the missile guidelines from the ROK-U.S. summit in May, which lets the ROK have longer-range and more capable missile arsenals without any restrictions. The ROK is also acquiring SLBMs to counter against North Korean nuclear-armed submarine threats. It remains unclear how soon the ROK will complete its own indigenous counter WMD system, but the ROK’s military modernization effort will be expected to significantly contribute to strengthening combined defense posture against North Korean nuclear and missile threats.

U.S. Strategic Nuclear Force

The U.S. Strategic Nuclear Forces has three legs of a nuclear delivery system—the triad. The triad consists of long-range land-based ICBMs, long-range SLBMs, and long-range heavy bombers depending on whether the platform is based on land, sea, or air. In accordance with the NEW START agreement, the United States has reduced the number of warheads to 1,467 and deployed launchers to 675 with 800 total launchers. Although the new U.S. Nuclear Posture Review (NPR) is still underway, the recent NPR 2018 reaffirmed U.S. commitment to the nuclear triad and modernization of each component and it is not likely to halt at any moment.

As introduced in the NPR 2018, the U.S. Navy developed a new low-yield version of the W-76 warhead for the existing Trident II (D-5) system to meet the demands for tailored and flexible capabilities to address adversaries’ coercive nuclear use. The U.S. Navy began deploying W-76-2 in February 2020, and it appears to replace some of the higher-yield strategic nuclear warheads while maintaining the same numbers of its SLBM warheads. Compared to preexisting W-76-1 of 100 kt of explosive power, the new W-76-2 warheads yield less than 10 kt.

The U.S. Air Force is developing a ground-based strategic deterrent (GBSD) with improved accuracy and reliability, and it will replace the current Minuteman III by 2036. Current U.S. heavy bombers include B-2 and B-52H, and it is also acquiring new B-21 bombers around 2025. The U.S. Navy is replacing its current Ohio-class submarines with new Columbia-class submarines starting from 2031. And each platform also is replacing current warheads with W-87-

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64 Ibid., 76.
1(ICBM) and W93(SLBM), and some of the warheads are conducting the life extension program (LEP).\textsuperscript{71} As such, the United States is maintaining its strategic nuclear force to meet with challenges posed by adversaries by modernizing and strengthening its strategic nuclear triad.

In the meantime, following the 1991 U.S. Presidential Nuclear Initiatives, and further confirmed by the 1992 Joint Declaration of the Denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula, the United States withdrew all its non-strategic nuclear weapons deployed on the Korean Peninsula, which “peaked at its all-time high of approximately 950 warheads in 1967.”\textsuperscript{72} And after the NPR 2010 was announced, the Tomahawk Land Attack Missile-Navy (TLAM-N)—the U.S. Navy’s nonstrategic nuclear cruise missile deployed in the region—was retired, so the U.S. extended deterrence assets toward its allies in Asia became dependent upon the U.S. strategic triad.\textsuperscript{73}

**ROK-U.S. Missile Defense**

As part of the ROK’s development for nuclear and WMD counter systems, KAMD is the ROK’s indigenous multilayered missile defense system. The ROK is developing domestic technology to enhance its missile capabilities and at the same time interoperability with USFK missile defense systems deployed on the Korean peninsula such as THAAD and PAC-III.\textsuperscript{74}

Along with the USFK missile defense system, the ROK is currently employing not only the Patriot Missile System (PAC-3) purchased from the United States, but also its locally developed Korea Medium Range Surface to Air Missile (KM-SAM) (Cheolmae-II), which is an area aerial defense system. KM-SAM is further developed into KM-SAM block-II with increased accuracy and range.\textsuperscript{75}

Developing a long-range surface to air missile (L-SAM) for intercepting missiles at an altitude of 40-60 km\textsuperscript{76} and a low-altitude missile defense system (LAMD) by the ROK’s local manufacturing company would be other examples for the ROK’s efforts to acquire robust indigenous multilayered missile defense systems.\textsuperscript{77}

While it is also not clear when the ROK’s multilayered KAMD will meet the criteria for final operational capability against growing North Korean missile threats, the ROK’s acquisition of KAMD will significantly increase deterrence by denial capability against North Korea’s myriads of missile threats.

\textsuperscript{71} Ibid.


In the meantime, the ROK and the United States have been developing a 4D Strategy, which is a comprehensive counter missile strategy that was mutually agreed on during the 46th Security Consultative Meeting (SCM) in 2014. 4D refers to detect, disrupt, destroy and defend, which are essential elements for effectively countering missile threats. The alliance has specified the strategy into the 4D Operational Concept for the planning and decision-making phase and the 4D Execution Concept for the practical implementation using not only counter-missile capabilities but also the diplomacy, information, and economy realms of the capabilities from both countries to effectively respond to nuclear and missile threats from North Korea.78

Other Means

Diplomacy

The United States showed an openness to have a dialogue with North Korea even when it was testing its missiles. Mr. Sung Kim, the U.S. special envoy to North Korea, expressed that the United States harbors no hostile intention toward North Korea and diplomatic engagement with North Korea will be the only way to make progress. He stressed that the United States’ calibrated and practical approach will remain open to diplomacy with North Korea, and he is ready to meet North Korean counterparts at any time and any place without preconditions.79 Unless North Korea conducts serious provocation, which may have a serious impact on the stability of the ROK-U.S. defense posture in the region, the United States is likely to pursue diplomatic approach with North Korea as one of the principal means to make progress in denuclearization.80 There is significant bipartisan support among U.S. policymakers that the United States should deal with North Korea’s thorny issues such as nuclear and missile problems diplomatically to reduce risks and achieve denuclearization on the Korean Peninsula. The diplomatic approach is ideally the primary channel for the United States at this moment, and this effort should be closely coordinated with other means of national power against North Korea. At the same time, the United States has been constantly serving as one of the leading voices in raising the perennial North Korean nuclear and missile problems through multilateral organizations such as the UN, garnering the international pressure against North Korea.

Economy

The United States is currently implementing two broad types of sanctions against North Korea. One is its unilateral sanctions and the other is sanctions identified in the UN Security Council Resolutions.

The United Nations Security Council passed a total of 9 resolutions for the North Korean nuclear weapons program. The first Resolution 1718 was passed after North Korea’s first nuclear test in 2006. The last one was Resolution 2397 in 2017, which bans not only trade of arms and military equipment but also a variety of areas of products, personal goods, and scientific

80 Davenport and Masterson, Congressional Perspectives on U.S. Policy, 20-21.
cooperation with North Korea except for humanitarian assistance, after North Korea launched a Hwasung-15 ICBM.  

Compared to the UN-led sanctions, the U.S. unilateral sanctions on North Korea restrict broader economic activities and specifically target larger lists of individuals or groups that are involved with North Korea’s missile and nuclear development program and cybercrime activities. Lifting and making changes to currently imposed U.S. unilateral sanctions would be more intricate and difficult than UN sanctions due to its legislature process requiring approval from the U.S. Congress.

While the United States hasn’t publicly shown any interest in lifting sanctions to make progress in denuclearization with North Korea, there is criticism that even its unilateral sanctions against North Korea were never rigorously enforced. And there is plenty of evidence that North Korea is evading sanctions and gaining revenues from illegal activities. Still, economic sanctions are a powerful instrument to deal with North Korea’s illegal nuclear and missile programs to get it back to the table, but only if it is rigorously enforced in collaboration with like-minded countries. Regardless of efficacy and negative repercussions, the United States needs to continue to enforce sanctions to prevent North Korea from acquiring funding to develop its programs and push it back to the negotiations. Along with other instruments, economic sanctions are one of the critical tools to pressure North Korea with difficult economic situations for its unabated nuclear and missile programs.

**Information**

North Korea is hypersensitive to outside information and especially criticism against its regime. Considering its primary objective of long-term regime security, North Korea sees outside information such as foreign media as a key threat to its ideological control and internal stability. And North Korea tightened control of the information by having its Ministry of State Security (MSS) carry out counterintelligence operations such as enforcing censorship laws on foreign media and monitoring its people through “technical surveillance, communications monitoring, recruited citizens, and random inspections,” thereby making sure to prevent its people from being exposed to outside information. As seen from North Korea’s series of past intense responses to the ROK’s installment of loudspeakers and broadcasting propaganda along the border, along with sending leaflets through air balloons to North Korea’s territory, it appears clear that North Korea is extremely wary of an inflow of outside information to its people. As suggested by the RAND report, both the ROK and United States can exploit information operations as one of the options to enhance deterrence over North Korea’s nuclear and missile threats by focusing on North Korean

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87 Ibid., 58.
human rights violations and corruption of its regime and leaders, thereby dissuading it from building more nuclear weapons.  

3. Deterrer’s Communication

Public Statements

There have been numerous public statements made by U.S. presidents, secretaries, and high-ranking generals expressing strong and unwavering U.S. commitment to extended deterrence on the Korean Peninsula. For concise analysis, this section would rather focus on a few examples of public statements recently made from late 2020 to 2021.

As noted above, U.S. president Biden expressed the U.S. commitment to provide extended deterrence using its full range of capabilities, along with strengthening alliance deterrence posture, sharing the importance of maintaining joint military readiness, and so on in the Joint Statement from the ROK-U.S. summit on May 21, 2021.  

Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin underscored the U.S. commitment to defend the ROK through both the U.S.-ROK combined defense posture and the U.S. extended deterrent in his first phone call with his counterpart on January 23. He also reaffirmed U.S. commitment to the defense of Korea and extended deterrence and committed using the full range of U.S. capabilities including U.S. extended deterrence after the ROK-U.S. foreign and defense ministerial meeting on March 18, 2021.  

U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) Chairman General Mark Milley made a remark that the United States reaffirmed its commitment to the ROK’s security including extended deterrence during the 45th Military Committee meeting on October 14, 2020. Also, USFK commander General Paul LaCamera mentioned during his confirmation hearing on May 14, 2021, that a strong Korea-U.S. alliance, demonstrated resolve, and the strength of the U.S. extended deterrent are crucial.

88 Bennet et al., Countering the Risks of North Korean Nuclear Weapons, 67-68.
89 The White House, “U.S.-ROK Leaders’ Joint Statement.”
Overall, U.S. presidents and high-ranking officials have constantly expressed their strong commitments in official statements throughout past high-level bilateral meetings to show robust U.S. willingness to provide its extended deterrence on the Korean peninsula.

**Strategic Guidance Documents**

In the Interim National Security Strategic Guidance in 2021, President Biden stressed the importance of working with allies to meet future challenges. He further mentioned that “we will take steps to reduce the role of nuclear weapons in our national security strategy while ensuring our strategic deterrent remains safe, secure, and effective and that our extended deterrence commitments to our allies remain strong and credible.” In the guidance, North Korea is identified as an actor which “continue[s] to pursue game-changing capabilities and technologies, threatening U.S. allies and partners and challenging regional stability.” And it reaffirmed that the United States would expand diplomatic power to reduce North Korea’s growing nuclear and missile programs.94

In the National Defense Strategy (NDS) 2018, although the phrase “extended deterrence” is absent, it clarified that the United States “will strengthen and evolve our alliance and partnerships into an extended network capable of deterring or decisively acting to meet the shared challenge of our time.” North Korea’s threatening and provocative WMD development and its intention to coerce influence over its neighboring countries including the ROK are also recognized.95

While the new Nuclear Posture Review (NPR) is underway, the recent NPR 2018 clearly acknowledged that “effectively assuring allies and partners depends on their confidence in the credibility of U.S. extended nuclear deterrence, which enables most to eschew possession of nuclear weapons, thereby contributing to U.S. non-proliferation goals.” It also indicated that conventional forces alone are not enough assurance to many allies and partners. Not only is extended deterrence to allies and partners threatened by adversaries important, but it is also critical to provide assurance to them, according to the NPR 2018.96

As seen in both high-level official statements and U.S. official national security documents, the U.S. approach has been straightforward in recognizing North Korean nuclear and other elements of its WMD threats and constantly stressing the importance of providing extended deterrence to the ROK. Also, those messages are clear and unambiguous in calling out specific North Korean threats to be deterred, and the United States has shown timely response of warning and assurance whenever there have been North Korean provocations on the Korean Peninsula.97

### 4. Deterrer’s Credibility

**Mutual Defense Treaty**

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The ROK-U.S. Mutual Defense treaty, which was signed on October 1, 1953, serves as the legal basis for the commitment to the mutual defense as written in Article II and Article III.98

Article II: The Parties will consult together whenever, in the opinion of either of them, the political independence or security of either of the Parties is threatened by external armed attack. Separately and jointly, by self-help and mutual aid, the Parties will maintain and develop appropriate means to deter armed attack and will take suitable measures in consultation and agreement to implement this Treaty and to further its purposes.

Article III: Each Party recognizes that an armed attack in the Pacific area on either of the Parties in territories now under their respective administrative control, or hereafter recognized by one of the Parties as lawfully brought under administrative control of the other, would be dangerous to its own peace and safety and declares that it would act to meet the common danger in accordance with its constitutional processes.

Article II delineates each party’s obligations to consult with each other against the threat of an external armed attack by an adversary and to take suitable measures to deter an armed attack. And Article III further stipulates process and action in case of an actual armed attack in the Pacific area on each party’s territory.

Although this mutual defense treaty itself does not guarantee automatic involvement since it needs to go through a “constitutional process” to provide aid to its counterpart under attack by its adversary, the treaty has served as a fundamental basis to further strengthen the alliance and unwavering U.S. extended deterrence commitment to the ROK.

High-Level Security Consultative Mechanisms

The ROK-U.S. alliance has a few high-level security consultative organizations to discuss major security issues and bilateral issues around the Korean Peninsula.

The Security Consultative Meeting (SCM) is the highest level of ROK-U.S. bilateral security consultative meetings that includes the ROK minister of national defense, U.S. secretary of defense, and key high-level defense and foreign affairs officials.99 The SCM originated in 1968 as the “Annual ROK-U.S. Defense Official Meeting” due to heightened tension on the Korean Peninsula caused by North Korea’s seizure of USS Pueblo and an attempt to infiltrate the Blue House. Since the 4th meeting in 1971, foreign officials participated to consult major security issues and the name of the meeting was changed to the “Security Consultative Meeting.”100 During the 8th SCM in 1978, the U.S. commitment to provide a nuclear umbrella to Korean Peninsula was formally included in the joint communiqué. And the U.S. commitment to provide extended deterrence using the nuclear umbrella, conventional strike, and missile defense capabilities was first mentioned during the 41st SCM in 2009. And the “U.S. commitment to extended deterrence” clause has been included in the joint communiqué since then.101

From the 45th Security Consultative Meeting in 2013, the ROK and the United States developed the joint Tailored Deterrence Strategy (TDS) to effectively counter North Korea’s nuclear and missile threats. TDS is a joint deterrence and response strategy tailored for the Korean Peninsula that considers features of North Korean leadership and its nuclear and missile programs. The focus of the strategy is not only on the military but other means of national instruments such as economy, information, and diplomacy. While access to the strategy is limited, the strategy entails military and nonmilitary counter options to carry out against North Korea from the moment it starts to threaten use of its nuclear weapons.

The Military Committee Meeting (MCM) is the highest level of the ROK-U.S. bilateral military consultative meeting between the chairman of the JCS from both countries. The meeting was established in 1978, and the MCM is the part of the annual bilateral consultation process, which takes place before the SCM, to discuss joint efforts to strengthen the defense posture and enhance cooperation for stability in the region.

The bilateral alliance also had consultative groups such as the Security Policy Initiative (SPI), Extended Deterrence Policy Committee (EDPC), and Strategic Alliance Working Group (SAWG), which were established in the early 2000s. These consultative bodies were consolidated into the Korea-U.S. Integrated Defense Dialogue (KIDD) to provide guidance to higher security consultative meetings, as mutually agreed in the 43rd SCM in 2011. The first KIDD was held in 2013 and now it is held semiannually. The subcommittee meetings of KIDD are the SPI, Deterrence Strategy Committee (DSC), Condition-based OPCON Transition Working Group (COTWG), and KIDD ad hoc Consultation Mechanism (KCM). Among these groups, DSC is the new deputy ministerial-level consultative meeting to discuss deterrence against North Korean WMD and missile threats. It consolidated the preexisting EDPC and CMCC (counter-missile capabilities committee) in 2015. Also, DSC has conducted the ROK-U.S. Extended Deterrence Joint Study from both sides to explore measures to strengthen the capabilities to deter against North Korean threats from 2018 to 2019, which was assessed to contribute to the strengthening of U.S. extended deterrence. As part of KIDD, the ROK and the United States conduct an annual tabletop exercise (TTX) regarding the use of extended deterrence measures to strengthen the execution capabilities. Lastly, the Extended Deterrence Strategic Coordination Group (EDSCG), which was established in 2016, is the biennial meeting led by vice-ministerial-level defense and foreign affairs officials from the ROK and the United States. The plenary session for the EDSCG involving the director-general level is held annually. These regularly held bilateral meetings are contributing to the enhancement of extended deterrence posture on the Korean Peninsula.

**Combined Exercises**

The ROK and United States are conducting a semi-annual combined exercise to enhance combined defense posture on the Korean Peninsula and increase joint operability and warfighting

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103 Ibid., 202-203.
105 Ibid.
107 Ibid., 73-74.
capabilities to deter North Korean threats. Key Resolve (KR) is the ROK-US joint military exercise, held normally in March and April, to prepare for U.S. augmented force to integrate into the Korean Peninsula. Foal Eagle (FE) is the bilateral field training exercise to prepare for defending against North Korea’s hostilities such as infiltration by its irregular forces in the ROK’s rear area of operations, which halted in 2018. The Ulchi-Freedom Guardian (UFG) exercise is the command post exercise to train simulated combined command and control exercise during contingency, normally held in August. However, these exercises were canceled and scaled back in 2017. And since 2019, they were replaced by CCPT (Combined Command Post Training) held twice a year, which is a theater-level CPX (Command Post Exercise) designed to assess combined defense posture through computerized battlefield scenarios.\footnote{Ibid., 113.}

Each component of the armed forces is conducting combined exercises to enhance interoperability and combined execution capabilities. The army is conducting various combined exercises such as ROK-U.S. special operations, irregular warfare, air assault training, and high-altitude low opening training. Also, the U.S. 2nd Infantry Division is the only bilateral ROK-U.S. combined division that regularly conducts combined exercises to optimize interoperability. Combined navy exercises include ROK-U.S. passing exercises (PASSEX), combined theater antisubmarine warfare training, mine warfare training, rescue warfare training, and special warfare training. Combined air force exercises include Korea Flying Training, Combined Flying Training Event (CFTE) and Combined Special Operations Training (Teak knife), and Combat Search and Rescue Training Event (CSAR-TE). The Marine Corps conducts the Korea Maritime Exercise Program (KMEP). Each force is also participating in multilateral joint exercises along with the United States.\footnote{Ibid., 106-111.}

**Basing of USFK**

As noted above, there are about 28,500 U.S. soldiers, sailors, airmen, and Marines stationed in the ROK. The presence of USFK in ROK’s territory does help deter North Korean threats and assure the ROK. Because the credibility of the deterrence is influenced by perceptions on political will and ability to counter adversary’s threats, the presence of USFK, straightforward demonstration of U.S. commitment, and its interest in the security in the region are some of the most important contributing factors to enhance the credibility of U.S. extended deterrence on the Korean Peninsula. USFK and also U.S. citizens on the Korean Peninsula share a “community of destiny” with South Koreans because any attack or nuclear attack on ROK territory would wind up killing Americans.\footnote{John J. Hamre, Joseph S. Nye Jr., and Victor D. Cha, *CSIS Commission on the Korean Peninsula: Recommendations for the U.S.-Korea Alliance* (Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2021), 9, https://www.csis.org/analysis/csis-commission-korean-peninsula-recommendations-us-korea-alliance.} Over time, there have been discussions to make an adjustment to the U.S. troops deployed on the Korean Peninsula as part of its Global Posture Review (GPR) that considers strategic flexibility of its overseas troops’ deployment to meet with future challenges globally.\footnote{Nathan P. Freier, John Schaus, and William G. Braun III, *An Army Transformed: USINDOPACOM Hypercompetition and US Army Theater Design* (Carlisle, PA: United States Army War College), 83-84, https://press.armywarcollege.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1905&context=monographs.} However, unless the United States decides to withdraw all of the USFK from the Korean Peninsula,
its presence will continuously help maintain a robust U.S. extended deterrence posture on the Korean Peninsula.

The Special Measures Agreement (SMA) is the agreement between the ROK and United States since 1991 that contributes to the expenditure associated with the stationing of USFK in the ROK. The contribution of the ROK in the SMA establishes the framework to offset cost including labor cost-sharing, logistics cost-sharing, and ROK-funded construction. Thus, past SMAs have served as a pillar of the shared commitment of the defense of the Korean Peninsula by combined U.S. and ROK armed forces. In March 2021, both governments reached an agreement on a new five-year SMA, in which the ROK will provide $1.059 billion, a 13.9 percent increase from 2019, and the ROK agreed to increase payments proportionate to the increase in its annual defense expenditure until 2025. The conclusion of the SMA, which strained the alliance for almost two years, is expected to make headway to further deepen cooperation between the ROK and the United States, enhancing the reliability of the U.S. extended deterrence.

5. Assurance to Allies

Assurance Strategy

The concept of U.S. extended deterrence cannot be divorced from considering assurance to its allies. If a third party such as an ally or partner does not know how committed the United States is willing to provide extended deterrence against its adversary, it may act in an opposite way which the United States would not want. It is critically important for the United States to convince its ally or partner that it will protect them. In other words, if the ally or partner does not feel that U.S. extended deterrence is enough against its adversary, it is uncertain to ensure peace and stability from the U.S. ally or partner perspective, which may run against U.S. objectives.

Four Challenges to Extended Deterrence

According to a policy paper by the U.S. Air Force Institute for National Security Studies in 2013, there are four types of challenges in U.S. extended deterrence. The first challenge is “De Gaulle’s doubt.” This is doubt from allies or adversaries who ask questions about the political willingness of the United States. The French president decided to withdraw from NATO out of his concern for U.S. commitment to its allies with the fundamental question of “will the United States save New York for Hamburg?” The second challenge is “A Leaky U.S. Umbrella.” It is a question of whether the United States fields sufficient types and numbers of force or the “right mix of force” to deter “potential adversary” threat to allies. This challenge is about the United States having to make a delicate balance between nuclear arms control policy and commitment to allies from a nuclear-armed adversary. The third challenge is the “Healy Theorem.” It describes challenges

114 Anderson, Larsen, and Holdorf, Extended Deterrence and Allied Assurance, 73.
115 Ibid., 73-76.
that the United States has in meeting differing demands of extended deterrence and assurance at the same time. Defense Secretary Lord Denis Healy concluded, “[i]t takes only 5 percent credibility of American retaliation to deter the Russians, but 95 percent to reassure the Europeans” after witnessing NATO allies demanding more U.S. commitments than U.S. officials considered enough for necessary deterrence for the Soviet Union.116 The last challenge is “defending the Status Quo Ante.” Allies are sometimes deeply concerned that any change or move in U.S. strategies would mean less U.S. commitment, which may give negative perceptions to the allies.117

All the four challenges above indicate that U.S. extended deterrence strategy cannot be separated from allied assurance strategy. While U.S. extended deterrence is oriented toward an adversary threatening an ally or partner, the goal of assurance is oriented toward an ally or partner. At the same time, a strong extended deterrence strategy does not necessarily mean that the assurance strategy is well received by the ally and vice versa. Therefore, the United States is in a position in which it must pursue both strategies at the same time. Some can argue that deterring an adversary which is threatening to an ally is more important than assuring an ally because preventing an adversary from taking any action against an ally is the ultimate goal. But lack of assurance might complicate the U.S. strategy because allies might act in a way which causes instability, such as deciding to develop nuclear weapons or giving in to an adversary’s intimidation and coercion without consultation with the United States, when their trust and confidence in the United States are absent. So, it is important and imperative for the United States, whose allies are dependent on their security upon U.S. nuclear deterrence, to constantly provide enough assurance in concert with strong extended deterrence.

Challenges of U.S. Assurance to the ROK

In this regard, again according to the Asan Institute’s recent polling, when Koreans were asked if the United States would use nuclear weapons to defend South Korea if North Korea attacked South Korea with nuclear weapons, 51 percent of the respondents were positive but 49 percent were negative and doubtful about U.S. use of nuclear weapons against North Korea nuclear attacks. Also, considering the polling result of 61.2 percent of Koreans favoring deployment of U.S. strategic nuclear weapons and 70 percent favoring developing indigenous nuclear weapons, many Koreans are inclined to feel that the current U.S. nuclear umbrella is not sufficient to deter North Korea’s nuclear and missile threats.118 Applying the aforementioned four challenges of U.S. extended deterrence with the previous analysis from the ally’s perspective might be helpful.

De Gaulle’s concern arises when North Korea’s nuclear and missile threats are credible enough to challenge the ability of U.S. extended deterrence to the ROK. As analyzed by RAND’s policy report, if North Korea acquired a significant number of nuclear warheads (100–200+) and advanced ICBM missiles (20–40+) in the foreseeable future (by 2027), the U.S. extended deterrence posture will be questioned. This may be the worst-case scenario but North Korea, capable of credibly launching dozens of ICBMs (or possibly SLBMs) into the continental United States, will have greatly increased confidence in challenging ROK-U.S. combined posture and will likely change its nuclear doctrine to more proactively seek a forceful unification on the Korean Peninsula and eventually pursue becoming a regional nuclear power.119

116 Anderson, Larsen, and Holdorf, Extended Deterrence and Allied Assurance, 77.
117 Ibid., 76-81.
119 Bennet et al., Countering the Risks of North Korean Nuclear Weapons, 39-57.
A leaky umbrella dilemma occurs because the United States has coinciding interests in both reducing the role of nuclear weapons and strengthening the extended deterrence commitment to its allies. President Biden mentioned that the role of U.S. nuclear weapons should be reduced, alluding to placing its priority in enhancing the conventional deterrent in his initial interim security strategic guidance. There hasn’t been any specific U.S. declaratory policy regarding its use of nuclear weapons against North Korea’s nuclear coercions or attacks yet, other than reiterating commitments to U.S. extended deterrence on the Korean Peninsula using a full range of capabilities, including nuclear weapons. While the new NPR has not been announced yet, allies are concerned it will declare “no first use” or “sole purpose” in nuclear arms, which will significantly reduce the role of U.S. nuclear weapons. Most of the U.S. allies are nonnuclear weapons states (NNWS) facing nuclear weapons states (NWS) in their vicinity, and the ROK is clearly one of them, facing an ever-growing nuclear-armed North Korea. Therefore, the U.S. declaratory policy change in deemphasizing its use of nuclear weapons would have a negative impact on the perceptions among its allies and partners regarding the credibility of the U.S. extended deterrence.

Healy’s theorem dilemma refers to a situation when there is a discrepancy in the level of commitment or threat a country feels. The United States has clearly shown political willingness to provide U.S. extended deterrence to the ROK whenever there are high-level bilateral meetings. And it stressed the importance to work with allies to meet the challenges together. However, the ROK is facing imminent nuclear threats from North Korea with its various platforms of missile delivery systems, and compared to the ROK, the North Korean threats are not credible to the continental United States yet. But observing North Korea’s pushing the pedal for achieving credible nuclear threats to the U.S. mainland with its numerous nuclear warheads and dozens of ICBMs and the fact that North Korea is not deterred from developing its programs despite diplomatic and economic pressure makes the ROK feel anxious and worried about future credibility of U.S. extended deterrence. While this dilemma is not likely to go away completely even if the United States decides to make significant changes to its current extended deterrence policy to its allies’ favor and deploy more of its assets in allies’ territory to show more political resolve and capabilities of U.S. extended deterrence to meet with allies’ increased demands, it is still important for the United States to manage allies’ concerns and endeavor to have candid communications.

The last dilemma is about allies having concerns about the change in U.S. policy. As seen in past cases such as scaling down the size of the troops on the Korean Peninsula or reducing the scale of the combined military exercise, these changes might aggravate allies’ concerns. Because the presence of USFK is critical to U.S. extended deterrence, reducing the size of its troops would be directly linked to increased ROK concerns on U.S. extended deterrence posture on the Korean Peninsula. While the latter measure was taken in 2017 out of hope for making significant progress in the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula through diplomatic means with North Korea, it certainly could have a negative impact on maintaining robust combined defense posture from North Korea’s nuclear and missile threats by sending wrong signals that combined exercises can be traded for future negotiations. There’s no doubt that such a decision would have been made in close consultation between the two governments, with enough time for considering various repercussions that those changes may bring to the combined defense posture, because such a change might increase an ally’s concerns about the credibility of the U.S. extended deterrence.

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Conclusion

Summary

This paper explored the reliability of the U.S. extended deterrence on the Korean Peninsula against North Korea’s nuclear and missile threats, analyzing through five main factors derived from 3Cs models of the traditional deterrence theory and two prominent policy papers regarding U.S. extended deterrence. The fundamental situation for the ROK is that it is facing increasingly formidable threats from nuclear-armed North Korea, which is advancing its asymmetric nuclear and missile capabilities despite the strong international pressure against it. While the ROK is working with the United States to enhance the combined defense posture and concurrently strengthen its own conventional deterrent against North Korea, the ROK has no other option but to especially rely on the nuclear aspect of U.S. extended deterrence. The U.S. commitment to provide extended deterrence hasn’t changed, but a growing number of Koreans are questioning the future reliability of the U.S. extended deterrence posture on the Korean Peninsula as North Korean nuclear and missile capabilities are gradually reaching the threshold where the United States might have to take more risks to protect its ally against North Korea’s nuclear coercion or attacks. The brief summary of analysis on the U.S. extended deterrence in this paper will be as follows.

There are three North Korean national security objectives. First and foremost is to secure Mr. Kim’s long-term regime. The second objective is to dominate the entire Korean Peninsula. And its final goal is arguably to become an independent regional nuclear power. And all these objectives cannot be achieved without credible nuclear and missile capabilities. Therefore, it’s hard to believe that North Korea will easily give up its nuclear weapons; rather, it will continue to push to develop its nuclear and missile capabilities. In the meantime, North Korea has a superior size of conventional military forces, and it has deployed the majority of its assets along the south of the Pyongyang-Wonsan line. Its chemical and biological weapons capabilities are threatening as well, which North Korea might use during contingency. While North Korea’s use of its nuclear weapons may be limited to coercion or intimidation, when its number of nuclear warheads and ICBMs (possibly SLBMs) and level of completion of related technologies are assessed to be credible enough to seriously challenge continental U.S. territory, then North Korea might change its strategy to become more aggressive in the use of its nuclear weapons, undercutting the reliability of the U.S. extended deterrence on the Korean Peninsula.

Deterre’s Capability takes conventional forces, nuclear forces, and missile defense capabilities from both USFK and ROK armed forces into account for the military aspect but other elements such as diplomacy, information, and economy are also considered. The ROK and United States have qualitatively superior robust conventional forces. And the mutual defense treaty enables augmented U.S. forces integrated into the Korean Peninsula during contingency in accordance with TPFDD. The U.S. extended nuclear deterrent assets for the Korean Peninsula are based on U.S. strategic nuclear warheads from the triad. And each part of the U.S. triad is modernizing its nuclear warheads and platforms to enhance accuracy and flexibility, thereby maintaining a robust nuclear strategic deterrent against any nuclear threats to the United States and its allies. In the meantime, the ROK is developing its own WMD response system consisting of the strategic strike system and KAMD to deter North Korea’s nuclear and missile threats. And this multilayered KAMD will be expected to enhance interoperability with USFK’s missile defense assets. Lastly, not only military means to deal with North Korean nuclear threats but also other
means such as diplomatic engagement, economic sanctions, and information operations are essential elements for deterring North Korean nuclear coercion.

Deterrer’s Communication took the recent U.S. high-level public statements and strategic guidance documents into account. The United States has shown both clarity and persistence in its willingness to provide extended deterrence to the ROK. Considering the recent statements and remarks made by the U.S. president, secretary of defense, and U.S. generals, they all have clearly mentioned an unwavering U.S. commitment to provide U.S. extended deterrence to the ROK whenever they have bilateral meetings. Also, U.S. strategic guidance such as recent interim national security guidance, NDS, and NPR clearly stressed and reiterated the importance of U.S. commitment to extended deterrence to its allies and partners. And North Korea’s nuclear and missile programs threatening the stability in the region was explicitly recognized in all the recent U.S. strategic documents.

Deterrer’s Credibility was analyzed with several key factors related to it. First of all, the ROK-US mutual defense treaty serves as the basis to enable credible U.S. extended deterrence to the ROK. And the ROK-US alliance has important bilateral high-level security consultative mechanisms to discuss major security and bilateral alliance issues on a regular basis such as the SCM, MCM, and KIDD. The SCM is the highest bilateral security consultative body attended by the ROK minister of national defense, U.S. secretary of defense, and U.S. secretary of state since 1968. The U.S. commitment to provide extended deterrence to the ROK has been reaffirmed through a joint communique after the meeting annually since 2009. As part of the semiannual KIDD, DSC meetings are held to discuss ways to strengthen current U.S. extended deterrence through the joint study and TTX participated by high-level defense and foreign officials from both governments, which is assessed to significantly enhance U.S. extended deterrence posture on the Korean Peninsula. Also, the ROK-U.S. alliance is conducting annual bilateral combined exercises. Currently, CCPT is held biannually to assess combined defense posture through computerized battlefield scenarios and each service of the military is conducting both bilateral and multilateral exercises on a regular basis. Lastly, the credibility of U.S. extended deterrence is buttressed by the presence of the USFK in the ROK’s territory. A recent deal in the new SMA caused the bilateral alliance to strengthen even further.

In the Assurance to ROK analysis, four challenges to the reliability of the U.S. extended deterrence were considered. De Gaulle’s doubt intensifies when North Korea’s nuclear and missile capabilities are developed to the extent that it can credibly challenge the U.S. mainland with its nuclear weapons. A leaky umbrella is the allied perception on conflicting U.S. foreign policy of reducing the role of its weapon and strengthening U.S. extended deterrence commitment. The conflicting interests of U.S. nuclear policy may drive the ROK to feel anxious about the future reliability of U.S. extended deterrence. Healy’s theorem portrays the challenges for the United States to alleviate its allies and partners’ concerns for the credibility of U.S. extended deterrence. The U.S. efforts to enhance the credibility of U.S. extended deterrence may not be enough for its allies and partners because the level of threat each country perceives from North Korea’s nuclear and missile programs might be different. Despite the challenges, the United States needs to manage allied concerns about the reliability of providing its extended deterrence. Lastly, allies prefer status quo ante. Any change in U.S. extended deterrence policy might be seen as weakening signs of its commitments and interests in the region. Scaling down the size of USFK or the regularly held combined exercise might have a negative impact on the credibility of the U.S. commitment.

Overall, this paper analyzed five aspects with brief explanations, which means that not all the relevant factors might be considered. Collecting the analysis from each factor, both the United
States and ROK are working hard to enhance deterrence against North Korea’s unabated nuclear and missile threats. The United States has obviously shown both political willingness and capabilities to provide its unwavering commitment to extended deterrence to the ROK by seemingly checking most of the boxes in terms of its communication, capability, and credibility through this analysis. During a recent webinar attended by former U.S. generals including USFK commanders, most of them were confident with the fact that they have zero doubt of a robust U.S. extended deterrence posture against North Korean threats. However, the scenario of North Korea acquiring 200+ nuclear warheads and dozens of ICBMs plus SLBMs may become reality in the foreseeable future if the stalemate in denuclearization negotiation continues. North Korea’s changed calculation due to its increased confidence to challenge the ROK-US alliance with its nuclear and missile capabilities will make it become more aggressive in the use of its nuclear weapons. And the anxiety of Koreans questioning the reliability of U.S. extended deterrence will not be attenuated anymore, in which credible U.S. assurance to the ROK would be much more challenging. Then what are the options for both the ROK and United States to further strengthen the credibility of the current U.S. extended deterrence posture on the Korean Peninsula?

Recommendations

In the previous section, this paper discussed the ROK’s option to develop indigenous nuclear weapons vis-à-vis North Korea’s nuclear and missile capabilities. There are too many inherent risks for the ROK to take that option because it might break down the bilateral alliance and cause a catalyst for a serious nuclear arms race, doubly destabilizing security in the region. Unless the U.S. government agrees (at least tacitly) with the ROK’s nuclear armament, the ROK will have to get through severe opposition from other countries, including China, for taking that option. Therefore, it’s a less plausible option for the ROK to take that risky independent nuclear development path. Furthermore, 95 percent of the U.S. respondents from Congress were opposed to the ROK’s indigenous nuclear development. With this in mind, the ROK will have to find ways to further strengthen the combined deterrence posture and the U.S. extended deterrence commitment against North Korea in close consultation with its ally, the United States.

First, the ROK and the United States need to strengthen the current bilateral consultative meetings. The ROK-U.S. alliance has held regular bilateral security consultative meetings to enhance deterrence against North Korean threats. And especially starting in the early 2010s, the alliance increased the effort to have various bilateral consultative bodies to strengthen U.S. extended deterrence posture on the Korean Peninsula. More frequent, higher-level meetings would enhance both the clarity of message (communication) and assurance to the ROK. While these efforts are assessed to strengthen the actual planning and implementation of the U.S. extended deterrence, both governments also need to maintain the level of commitments to the bilateral meetings that they showed during the initial phase of the meetings. For example, the EDSCG was established in 2016 as a regular vice-ministerial level meeting by the ROK-U.S. Foreign and Defense Minister (2+2) meetings to discuss comprehensive and in-depth discussion on strategic

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122 Davenport and Masterson, Congressional Perspectives on U.S. Policy, 19.

123 Hamre, Nye Jr., and Cha, CSIS Commission on the Korean Peninsula: Recommendations for the U.S.-Korea Alliance.
issues regarding extended deterrence against North Korea. The joint statement from the inaugural meetings even highlighted that the United States demonstrated its commitment and resolve by inviting ROK officials to observe and board its strategic triad assets such as B-52 strategic bombers, the launch of a Minuteman III ICBM, and SSBNs. However, the meeting hasn’t resumed since its second meeting in January 2018. Therefore, along with the current higher-level security consultative meetings, the EDSCG should continue to be held to further strengthen the U.S. extended deterrence. Furthermore, people’s perception of the U.S. extended deterrence commitment will significantly improve if discussions on extended deterrence would be held in more public platforms such as organizing conference events by inviting experts in a variety of fields through the government or thinktanks.

Second, the United States needs to consider establishing a multilateral U.S. extended deterrence consultative group in Asia that includes the United States’ like-minded allies in the region which have a common interest in maintaining a strong deterrence posture against North Korea. While those bilateral meetings help to strengthen U.S. extended deterrence on the Korean Peninsula, establishing a multilateral security consultative meeting regarding U.S. extended deterrence will enhance an even stronger allied deterrence posture in the region. The recent task force report from the Chicago Council on Global Affairs published in February 2021, which was cochaired by U.S. experts and policymakers including a former U.S. secretary of defense, suggested that multilateral deterrence in Asia is critical for U.S. security in the region and the United States should create the Asian Nuclear Planning Group, bringing the ROK, Japan, and Australia into U.S. nuclear planning processes and providing platforms for allies to discuss policies regarding its nuclear forces. This multilateral platform is expected to serve as solid ground to maintain a much more effective U.S. extended deterrence posture by bringing more parties into the planning process against North Korean threats. In the current tailored deterrence strategy against North Korea, the ROK is not involved in its nuclear planning, targeting, or execution processes. Allowing U.S. allies to get involved in the nuclear planning and targeting process in regard to the use of U.S. nuclear forces against North Korea’s nuclear attacks or coercion would definitely increase allied trust and confidence in robust U.S. extended deterrence commitment in the region. Furthermore, the United States is facing not only nuclear-armed North Korea but also its powerful neighboring U.S. adversaries who are conducting massive nuclear modernization in the region. And this multilateral approach will enable the United States, in close coordination with its allies, to have powerful incentives to deal with growing threats from China and Russia as well.

In the meantime, redeployment of U.S. tactical nuclear weapons on the Korean Peninsula to counter North Korea’s nuclear weapons is one of the options frequently raised by primarily ROK domestics. However, this option has never been endorsed by U.S. officials. And the redeployment of tactical nuclear weapons is against the spirit of the declaration of the denuclearization on the Korean Peninsula, which would further complicate current diplomatic

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125 Ibid.
127 Daalder, Hagel, Rifkind, and Rudd, Preventing Nuclear Proliferation and Reassuring America’s Allies, 14-15.
efforts to pursue denuclearization negotiations with North Korea. None of the U.S. participants from the recent polling conducted in the U.S. Congress expressed the need to redeploy U.S. tactical nuclear weapons on the Korean Peninsula. However, if the United States deems this option as necessary for enhancing the security on the Korean Peninsula at any point in the future, then it would be less risky for the ROK to raise this option through a multilateral security consultative mechanism backed by not only the United States but also from other participants rather than a bilateral one. Therefore, establishing multilateral U.S. extended deterrence consultative meetings would likely greatly improve both U.S. extended deterrence and its assurance to allies on the Korean Peninsula.

Third, ROK Armed Forces should enhance credible conventional deterrent capabilities against North Korea. ROK’s ongoing development for a “counter WMD system,” consisting of the strategic strike system and Korea Air Missile Defense (KAMD) should be completed before North Korea further accelerates its development for credible nuclear and missile capabilities to achieve its goals. It would be hard to deter North Korea’s entire nuclear threat with only the ROK’s conventional forces. However, the ROK’s ability to enhance both “deterrence by denial” and “deterrence by punishment” capabilities through advanced conventional military means against North Korea’s nuclear and missile threats would significantly contribute to a robust ROK-U.S. combined defense posture, thereby further strengthening the credibility of the U.S. extended deterrence on the Korean Peninsula. The ROK’s robust conventional military will boost confidence in both governments in dealing with omnidirectional threats, including North Korea.

Fourth, the ROK and U.S. combined exercise should be strengthened. Combined exercise is one of the important elements for both ROK and U.S. forces to enhance interoperability and warfighting capabilities during contingencies. The purpose of the combined exercise is defensive in nature. And reducing the level and scope of the combined exercise will directly have a negative impact on overall military readiness and combined defense posture on the Korean Peninsula. North Korea’s claims that the ROK-U.S. combined exercise is destabilizing the security in the region and is threatening to its regime are widely misguided, and combined exercise should not be traded for making progress in denuclearization negotiations with North Korea in the future. Rather, strengthening the combined exercise is expected to alleviate the ROK’s concern for future credibility of U.S. extended deterrence against North Korea as it is one of the outright visual representations of allied willingness to deter any North Korean attacks or provocations.

Lastly, the ROK and United States need to pursue all the nonmilitary means of national power such as diplomacy, economy, and information to deter North Korean nuclear and missile threats. It is evident that a robust ROK-U.S. combined defense posture and strong U.S. extended deterrence commitment on the Korean Peninsula should remain a central pillar to deter North Korea’s increasingly provocative nuclear and missile threats. But the deterrence should not be reliant only on the military aspect. Diplomatic efforts by both the ROK and United States to constantly engage with North Korea to get it back to the negotiation table are very important. Resolving security concerns through emphasizing diplomatic means is more cost-effective and less risky for the alliance. As seen from almost three decades of diplomatic failures in achieving denuclearization on the Korean Peninsula from past negotiations in both bilateral and multilateral platforms, it is becoming challenging to deal with a North Korea with more advanced capabilities through diplomacy, but it is still important for both the ROK and United States to remain open to diplomacy with North Korea. In the meantime, current economic sanctions against North Korea, both U.S.-led unilateral and UN-led multilateral, should be rigorously implemented further. These

129 Davenport and Masterson, Congressional Perspectives on U.S. Policy, 19.
economic sanctions couldn’t stop North Korea’s ongoing nuclear and missile development, but they still are expected to make North Korea face gradually narrowing options for itself in the future. Unless North Korea is showing genuine progress in denuclearization, making concessions such as the lifting of partial economic sanctions will make past efforts to pressure North Korea to stop its programs obsolete. Finally, both the ROK and United States can consider information operations against North Korea. Exposing outside information to North Korean people would be a hypersensitive matter to North Korean regimes. Information operations (IOs) can be conducted as a way of countering North Korean nuclear coercion or intimidation, especially when North Korea heightens the tension on the Korean Peninsula by threatening the ROK with measures including the use of its nuclear weapons against the ROK. Also, IOs can be carried out in North Korea’s neighboring states that its increasing nuclear and missile capabilities are directly posing a serious threat to their security as well, eliciting a sincere level of cooperation in the diplomatic and economic realm.

Last Words

The ROK-U.S. alliance has strengthened the combined defense posture for nearly seven decades against North Korea’s aggressions, and the United States has sent unwavering signals to provide extended deterrence for its ally on the Korean Peninsula. During the 53rd SCM held on December 2, 2021, the bilateral alliance further demonstrated its ironclad resolve to strengthen the combined deterrence posture. Not only did it reiterate firm commitment to provide U.S. extended deterrence to the ROK, but it also committed in the joint communique to maintaining the current level of USFK, updating the operational plan (OPLAN) guided by new strategic planning guidance (SPG) and enhancing combined defense posture through TDS to effectively deal with advanced North Korean WMD and missile threats. In the face of growing North Korean nuclear and missile capabilities, its threats are increasingly challenging to current combined deterrence posture and calls into question the credibility of the U.S. extended deterrence to the ROK in the future. And the current bilateral alliance is clearly signaling its robust willingness to deter more North Korean threats than ever in close consultation with each other. This paper explored a few recommendations that both the ROK and United States might consider for further enhancing U.S. extended deterrence on the Korean Peninsula to meet with growing North Korean nuclear and missile challenges directly posing to the alliance. It is imperative that both the ROK and United States continuously work closely to develop and upgrade current TDS to effectively counter growing North Korean threats in the years ahead. It should not end with words but actions. If not, both the ROK-U.S. combined deterrence posture and the credibility of the U.S. extended deterrence posture will be continuously challenged by North Korea.

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<td>CCPT</td>
<td>Combined Command Post Training</td>
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<td>DOD</td>
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<td>Operational Plan</td>
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<td>ROK</td>
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