

**10<sup>th</sup> Berlin Conference on Asian Security (BCAS)**

***Nuclear Stability in Asia  
Strengthening Order in Times of Crises***

Berlin, June 19-21, 2016

A conference jointly organized by Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik (SWP), Berlin  
and Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (KAS), Berlin

Discussion Paper  
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***Session I:  
Implications of nuclear weapons for regional stability***

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## Implications of nuclear weapons for regional stability

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What are the national perspectives of nuclear weapon states and non-nuclear weapon states, NPT members and states outside of the role of nuclear weapons in regional stability?

The foremost threat to regional security in most parts of the world comes not from whether states of the region concerned have nuclear weapons or not, but from social deprivation and feeble economic progress. Unshackling entrepreneurship, accelerating infrastructure and connectivity projects, and regenerating growth will make the regions safer, especially in the developing regions of the world.

Even when nuclear weapon states embrace a declaratory policy of defensive deterrence, restricted to protecting their sovereignty or interests, they must equally demonstrate their nuclear war fighting capacity — the resilience to take the pain of a first or second strike, and both the ability and resolve to inflict unacceptable damage on the attacker. Such capacity must have certitude, otherwise will fail to deter.

At the same time, nuclear weapons are weapons of the last resort, fundamentally different from conventional weapons, which are continuously being used by all states to protect and promote their foreign and security policy interests. War is, thus, a traditional tool of statecraft, but the weapon to end all wars cannot be a standard instrument of an ordinary war — it can only be the ultimate recourse for dissuasion.

Although India is building and maintaining a credible minimum deterrent, it continues to remain committed to a nuclear weapon-free world through global, verifiable and non-discriminatory nuclear disarmament. India's nuclear doctrine enunciates no-first use, with assured nuclear retaliation to a first strike, and non-use of nuclear weapons against non-nuclear weapon states. It reaffirms India's readiness to join multilateral negotiations for the reduction and elimination of nuclear weapons.

India has continued to observe a moratorium on nuclear explosive tests, and expressed its readiness to negotiate, within the UN Conference on Disarmament, on a non-discriminatory, multilateral, and internationally and effectively verifiable treaty banning the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons or other explosive devices.

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## How important is the nuclear component in extended deterrence?

The construct of extended deterrence that developed after the Second World to cover the U.S. allies within the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) in Europe, and South Korea and Japan in Asia, was exclusively predicated on nuclear weapons. Increasingly, this now comprises of three elements: nuclear weapons, missile defence, and conventional superiority.

From the time extended deterrence was extended to U.S. allies in Europe and Asia, it suffered from a deep psychological vulnerability. Henry Kissinger, in his masterly book, *Nuclear Age*, wrote that prior to the development of nuclear weapons, “the consequences of abandoning an ally were deemed to be more risky than fulfilling one’s obligations.” According to him, post deployment of nuclear weapons, “this rule no longer necessarily held true; abandoning an ally risked eventual disaster, but resorting to war at the side of an ally guaranteed immediate catastrophe.” The United States was forced to answer the question whether it would bear the loss of Philadelphia for Hamburg, or New York for West Berlin.

As a result, to buttress its security assurance to Europe, the United States placed nuclear weapons on the territory of a few of the NATO members and shared dual controls with them. Thus, extended deterrence never had a standard template that applied equally to Europe and Asia, for similar arrangements were not devised for South Korea and Japan. Even so, the nuclear re-arming of Russia and the growing uncertainty globally, there are signs that Germany might be revisiting its options on the nuclear sharing arrangement with the United States, as underlined in a paper published on January 2, 2016 by Oliver Meier of the German Institute for International and Security Affairs, entitled “Germany and the role of nuclear weapons: between prohibition and revival.”

The diminishing importance of nuclear weapons in extended deterrence has caused complications, affecting both U.S. adversaries and allies. Its adversaries, China, Russia, and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK), are taking countermeasures against missile defence by augmenting their nuclear forces, including delivery vehicles. Much more troublesome is that, with China’s inevitable military modernisation, in consonance with its extraordinary rise, and its growing capacity to deny the United States access to the Western Pacific and neutralise the current conventional superiority of Japanese naval and air force over the next decade.

In future, South Korea and Japan might not be “content to shelter under the U.S. nuclear umbrella,” writes Evan Braden Montgomery in a Wall Street Journal op-ed on June 8, 2016. The result could be that East Asia could soon have five nuclear weapons – China, DPRK, Russia, South Korea, and the United States (very much an Asian

power in terms of its presence and military commitments). If West Asia and South Asia were to be added – counting India, Israel, and Pakistan, and excluding the threshold or potential break-out states – Asia could have eight nuclear weapon states.

The resulting multiplicity of crisis triggers and actors, the unevenness of capabilities, and differences in doctrines related to nuclear weapons, might result in a diversity of responses, including a temptation to adopt inventive ways of conceiving deterrence.

In the past, deterrence was based on what Thomas C. Schelling described in *The Strategy of Conflict* as “the threat of massive destruction,” which deters “it there is a corresponding implicit promise of non-destruction” in the event the adversary complies. With deterrence-related decision making in the hands of militaries or narrowly-based, unrepresentative leaderships, certitude about rational behaviour has suffered, weakening further the nuclear component of extended deterrence. This has been further compromised by the use or threat of sub-conventional and below-the-nuclear-threshold measures by certain nuclear weapon states, including intimidatory statements, and sanctuary, sustenance, and support of terrorist groups, to compensate for their perceived conventional inferiority, even while they reinforce their nuclear deterrent.

### What instruments are needed to contain or limit nuclear armament?

Nuclear armament can be contained or limited only through international legal and political commitment to an agreed multilateral framework to work out the specific steps designed to reducing and, eventually, eliminating nuclear weapons. This must bring together all the states that have acquired nuclear weapons or are standing at the threshold of such acquisition. At present there is no convergence among them on any such framework, nor on issues of strategic stability, either amongst themselves or regionally. They have serious differences even on issues of nuclear governance, including nuclear security and non-proliferation. The Cold War might have ended, but Cold War thinking has not.

There is, nevertheless, no other option than to energetically pursue international dialogue to build a consensus on nuclear armaments, embracing the following short, medium, and long-term goals:

- Get the nuclear weapon states to unequivocally commit to the goal of the complete elimination of nuclear weapons, and reduce the salience of nuclear weapons in their security doctrines.

- An agreement among the nuclear weapons on the ‘No First Use’ of nuclear weapons.
- An agreement on the non-use of nuclear weapons against non-nuclear weapon states.
- A convention on the complete prohibition of the use or threat of use of nuclear weapons.
- Finally, a convention prohibiting the development, production, stockpiling, and use of nuclear weapons and on their destruction, leading to a global, non-discriminatory and verifiable elimination of nuclear weapons with a specified timeframe.

Even before working for the above-mentioned goals, as an immediate measure, the nuclear weapon states must agree upon a couple of critical steps to reduce nuclear danger, especially the risks of unintentional and accidental use of nuclear weapons, by de-alerting and de-targeting nuclear weapons. These two steps would contribute to building confidence, as also a climate conducive for commencing negotiations for the eventual elimination of nuclear weapons.

### What trends are expected in the future?

While the dominant current of world opinion embraces the idea that nuclear disarmament is the core issue on the global disarmament agenda, whose central objective must be the complete elimination of nuclear weapons, in reality, the nuclear weapon states appear to have resiled from such a commitment, judged by their actual behaviour over the past few years, reversing the promising trends in the initial post-Cold War period.

The declining salience of nuclear weapons in the national security strategies of the great powers was demonstrably evident by the non-use of nuclear weapons for over seven decades after their use in Hiroshima and Nagasaki. President Obama’s April 2009 speech in Prague, promising that the United States would “seek the security of a world without nuclear weapons,” was a marker of this positive trend. Since then, however, there has been a continuous reverse momentum. Although the nuclear weapon states are not formally revisiting their nuclear doctrines, they are committing to massive weapons modernisation programmes, upgraded and new weapon delivery platforms, and improvements in their information, surveillance, target acquisition, and reconnaissance capabilities.

The U.S. Air Force is developing a highly accurate, long-range standoff air-launched cruise missile (AGM-86B), which could potentially defeat adversary air defences, deliver up to 150 kilotons more accurately on a target, thereby augmenting U.S. counter-force capabilities. Together with other upgradation and modernisation projects, such as the B-61 gravity bomb, this might cost a trillion dollars over the next 30 years, according to the U.S. Arms Control Association.

While cost estimates are not available for Russian or Chinese modernisation plans for their nuclear weapons and delivery systems, Russia is building a new Severodvinsk-class nuclear powered submarine, developing new intercontinental ballistic missiles, and ground-launched cruise missiles. China, meanwhile, is investing in growing its missile inventory, expanding its fleet of ballistic missile submarines, and developing MARVing and MIRVing technologies and hypersonic glide vehicles.

Such behaviour on the part of the three most important nuclear weapon states undermines the long-standing trend of the reducing salience of nuclear weapons. It might become an incentive for removal of restraint on the part of other states, and for greater proliferation. The quest for a nuclear weapon-free and non-violent world order still seems distant, but that is not a good reason to stop working towards that objective.