

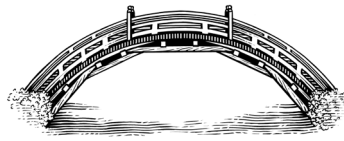
BOOK REVIEW ROUNDTABLE

Terence Roehrig's

*Japan, South Korea, and the United States Nuclear Umbrella:
Deterrence After the Cold War*

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Daniel Sneider

Zack Cooper

Se Young Jang

Terence Roehrig

The Dangers of Decoupling in Northeast Asia

Daniel Sneider

The U.S. security alliances with Japan and the Republic of Korea (ROK) remain two of the most enduring legacies of the postwar global system. Despite dramatic changes in the global security environment, those alliances have continued to offer stability and peace in Northeast Asia and allowed the region to prosper, to the benefit of the United States as well as its allies.

The success of those security alliances was hardly assured. The alliances have been, from their inception, inherently unbalanced. The United States provides a security guarantee that is effectively one-sided, not only when it comes to Japan, with its constitutional restrictions on the use of force, but also with respect to the ROK, which necessarily is largely focused on the Korean Peninsula itself. Of course, our allies have at times contributed to the global security interests of the United States, and the U.S. base structure, particularly in Japan, has a broader regional, if not global, purpose.

But fundamentally, the alliances are seen as a defense of our allies against external threats. And in that regard, the U.S. resolve to provide security has been questioned almost from the inception of the treaties that bind us. There is a persistent fear of abandonment, of a “decoupling” of the United States’ security from that of its allies and a U.S. retreat from responsibility. Such fears arose in Europe during the Cold War and were manifest in Japan in the mid-1960s when China began to test nuclear weapons.

Fear of abandonment increased dramatically in both Japan and the ROK amid the disaster and defeat of the Vietnam War, the Guam Doctrine and the withdrawal of U.S. forces from the region, and the shocking opening to China without notice to our allies. In Japan, there was talk of going nuclear, while the ROK undertook a clandestine program to build a nuclear bomb. The end of the Cold War with the Soviet Union, followed by the withdrawal of tactical nuclear weapons deployed onshore in the ROK and onboard vessels in the Pacific, again revived those concerns.

This fear of decoupling is most powerfully triggered by the threat from nuclear-armed states. The security guarantee rests on the extension of the so-called nuclear umbrella—a public, and private, pledge to use nuclear weapons to deter and, if needed, respond to an attack on U.S. allies.

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For extended deterrence to be credible, both our allies and our foes must believe that the United States is willing to use nuclear weapons in defense of our allies even if it puts U.S. territory at risk. In popular parlance, the United States must be willing to trade Los Angeles to defend Tokyo or Seoul.

Terence Roehrig's new book, *Japan, South Korea, and the United States Nuclear Umbrella: Deterrence After the Cold War*, is far and away the most complete, authoritative, and analytically provocative account of the complex history of these issues written to date. Roehrig, who directs the Asia-Pacific Studies Group at the U.S. Naval War College, begins with an incisive discussion of the doctrines of extended deterrence, explaining that the extension of a nuclear umbrella is a subset of that broader goal and that deterrence can also be provided by conventional means (chap. 1). It is a distinction essential to the policy conclusions he reaches later in the book. Deterrence, as Roehrig explains, rests on two essential assumptions—that the actors are rational decision-makers and that the threats to use force, including nuclear weapons, are credible.

The book goes on to provide a concise account of the history of the nuclear umbrella and extended deterrence during the Cold War in chapter 2, beginning as it should with an account of the legacy of the first use of those weapons against Japan. It moves on in chapter 3 to examine the threats that have reinvigorated the need for extended deterrence, namely China and North Korea. Here, Roehrig makes an essential distinction between the long-term threat posed by China and the near-term threat posed by North Korea. Although China seeks to match the strength of the United States in the region and has a major nuclear weapons capability, the likelihood of military conflict in the short term is minimal. Importantly, Roehrig notes that China is a far more compelling threat for Japan than for the ROK. North Korea's rapidly growing nuclear program, by contrast, is unsettling for both countries.

The two chapters that delve into the detailed history of the nuclear umbrella in relation to Japan and the ROK are the most authoritative accounts that I have read on this subject. Roehrig's command of the archival history and of the development of weapons systems and doctrine is impressive. He explains the importance of the formal dialogues with both countries on extended deterrence, launched in 2009 with Japan along the lines of the Nuclear Planning Group of NATO and then with the ROK the following year. Roehrig provides invaluable insights into the concerns that both countries have raised about the decisions made to reduce, or even end, the use of weapons systems, such as cruise missiles, which are viewed as

providing credibility to U.S. commitments. He also illuminates the role of tactical nuclear weapons, discussing the impact of the decision to remove them from the theater and the demand in certain quarters to reintroduce them. He argues that such weapons, which have lower yields and can be used with much greater targeting precision, might encourage the use of nuclear weapons to attack targets in North Korea.

This sets the stage for what will be, for many, the most controversial aspects of this book—the discussion of U.S. nuclear weapons capabilities and policy in chapter 6 and the policy implications offered in chapter 7. Roehrig contends that though the United States retains a sufficient arsenal of nuclear weapons and delivery systems, including a diminished number of tactical weapons that can be mounted on bombers or cruise missiles, Washington is highly unlikely to use them to respond to an attack on its allies. The opprobrium that would accompany their use is so great that an American president would be under immense pressure not to employ them. The use of nuclear weapons “is unlikely and unwise for a number of strategic, operational/military, and moral reasons,” Roehrig writes (p. 9). Instead, he argues that extended deterrence can be maintained through the ability to use precision conventional weapons to carry out a massive and highly destructive attack on potential foes, both China and North Korea.

At the same time, Roehrig agrees that retaining the capability to retaliate with nuclear weapons is still necessary to create some calculated ambiguity about their possible use. The problem with this approach, which he anticipates, is that neither the enemy nor U.S. allies may find it credible. Already there is a growing perception of the United States decoupling its security from that of its allies. President Donald Trump and prominent Republican politicians have clearly separated the threat posed to the continental United States from a North Korean intercontinental ballistic missile from that of an attack on our allies. This suggests that the United States would be more likely to use nuclear weapons in response to an attack on the homeland than on allies, even one targeted at U.S. bases or forces in the region.

The result of such decoupling would be to send both Japan and the ROK in several possible directions. One is toward development of their own nuclear weapons capability, which they have both contemplated in the past and for which both have a latent technical capacity. Another is to bandwagon with China, in the hopes of gaining security from that emergent hegemonic power. And the last is to provoke conflict in an attempt to force U.S. engagement.

Finally, there is the issue of North Korea's goals. North Korea may be encouraged by U.S. decoupling and by its own nuclear capability to be even more provocative about carrying out lower-level attacks, confident that it will not trigger an escalatory response. Roehrig shares the consensual view that the North Korean leadership is a rational actor, motivated almost entirely by the goal of self-preservation and perceiving the use of nuclear weapons as a means of guaranteeing regime survival. But, as he acknowledges, there is a danger of escalation that would cause the North Korean leadership to conclude that it faces an existential threat, sufficient to warrant use of its nuclear weapons.

Regime survival is certainly the dominant motivation for acquiring nuclear weapons and missile delivery systems. But the North Korean regime also has never abandoned its long-term goal of undermining the ROK and achieving unification on its own terms. That requires effectively ousting U.S. forces from the peninsula and driving a wedge between the United States and its allies. The constant demands for the United States and ROK to end joint exercises, the refusal to discuss security issues with the ROK, and the use of nuclear weapons to put U.S. forces and bases in the western Pacific that are essential to the defense of South Korea at risk—all these actions suggest that the Kim regime's long-term goal of unification remains in force. In that context, any diminishing of the credibility of the U.S. nuclear umbrella, as an essential component of extended deterrence, could serve North Korean ends.

Despite the downplaying of a more aggressive goal on the part of North Korea, Roehrig's book is the starting point for any intelligent discussion of an issue that is now at the forefront of U.S. policy concerns in Northeast Asia. ♦

Are Current U.S. Extended Deterrence Approaches Sustainable?

Zack Cooper

Terence Roehrig's *Japan, South Korea, and the United States Nuclear Umbrella: Deterrence After the Cold War* is a timely addition to the literature on extended deterrence in Northeast Asia. This book is particularly relevant today given that rapidly advancing Chinese and North Korean military capabilities are raising concerns about the viability of U.S. security commitments to Japan and South Korea. *Japan, South Korea, and the United States Nuclear Umbrella* provides a valuable historical and theoretical primer for scholars and policymakers reassessing U.S. extended deterrence commitments.

Roehrig begins by examining the basics of deterrence theory and discussing the challenges of extending deterrence—nuclear or otherwise—to one's allies. This summary is clear and concise, differentiating primary deterrence from extended deterrence, immediate deterrence from general deterrence, and symmetric deterrence from asymmetric deterrence. Roehrig also unpacks some of the foundational assumptions of deterrence theory, including rationality and credibility. He then explains how the United States attempted to apply extended deterrence in East Asia during the Cold War. After reviewing the historical record, Roehrig pivots to the modern day and assesses evolving Chinese and North Korean military capabilities, which represent the primary deterrence concerns for the United States and its allies in East Asia. He effectively highlights the fact that the two U.S. allies in Northeast Asia prioritize these threats differently, with Japanese leaders tending to focus primarily on China and South Korean leaders emphasizing North Korea.

Perhaps Roehrig's most valuable contributions are the book's fourth and fifth chapters, which concisely summarize the extended deterrence relationships between the United States and Japan and South Korea, respectively. With mounting threats from China and North Korea, extended deterrence dilemmas are drawing greater attention from leaders in all three countries. These chapters provide tidy histories of the evolution of these extended deterrence relationships from the perspectives of Washington,

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Tokyo, and Seoul and should be required reading for policymakers considering changes to extended deterrence arrangements.

The final two chapters evaluate U.S. extended deterrence and then draw implications for today. These chapters make several core arguments. First, “the nuclear umbrella likely does little to deter anything other than nuclear war” (p. 187). Roehrig does not believe that U.S. extended deterrence threats to use nuclear weapons in response to non-nuclear attacks are credible. As a result, he favors the use of “precise, lethal conventional options” rather than nuclear weapons to “achieve similar strategic effects against North Korea as well as China” (p. 189). Nevertheless, “given the overwhelming power of nuclear weapons, an uncertain umbrella retains value as a deterrent” (p. 193). As a result, Roehrig concludes that “despite these concerns, the nuclear umbrella will be ‘good enough’ when it is part of a strong, credible alliance” (p. 197). Supporters of current U.S. extended deterrence policies will find themselves reassured by this conclusion.

There is much to commend in Roehrig’s appraisal of the choices facing leaders in Washington, Tokyo, and Seoul. Yet three limitations remain. First, the book would benefit from an original theoretical construct that could weave together its various elements. Second, Roehrig may be overly optimistic about the sustainability of current U.S. extended deterrence arrangements. Third, as a result of the first two limitations, the book may leave readers searching for tangible suggestions about how to enhance extended deterrence. Each of these issues is addressed in turn below.

First, although Roehrig’s synthesis of theory and history is detailed and insightful, *Japan, South Korea, and the United States Nuclear Umbrella* lacks a central puzzle or novel theoretical argument, which limits its contribution to the existing literature. Not all books require a new puzzle or theoretical construct, but treatments without these elements risk restating conventional views. At the outset, Roehrig notes that “the central argument of this book is that the United States does indeed possess a nuclear umbrella that has the capability to protect its allies with nuclear weapons should deterrence fail” (p. 9). This assertion is largely in line with conventional views. Thus, the book may be more appealing as a theoretical and historical primer than for more novel contributions.

Second, Roehrig may be overconfident about the sustainability of U.S. conventional deterrence. The United States does retain a substantial military edge over North Korea and will continue to do so for the foreseeable future. Yet China is another story. Roehrig asserts that “even with increasing Chinese conventional capabilities, the United States would not need to

escalate to nuclear weapons but would have credible conventional options to respond to Chinese aggression” (p. 191). This may be true today, but the conventional military balance is shifting rapidly against the United States, particularly in contingencies involving Taiwan. A cross-strait scenario would be challenging given China’s rapid military modernization and Taiwan’s relatively limited defense spending. Such a scenario could easily escalate to include U.S. bases in Japan, which would force Washington to consider nuclear deterrence options. Yet Roehrig does not address potential contingencies involving Taiwan in detail, leading to overconfidence about U.S. conventional deterrence capabilities vis-à-vis China.

Third, this confidence in existing U.S. capabilities reinforces the book’s embrace of prevailing views on the viability of U.S. extended deterrence and avoids the need for new policy proposals. It is not clear, however, that existing U.S. commitments are sufficient from the perspectives of Japan and South Korea. Leading scholars and policymakers have openly questioned whether Japanese and South Korean reliance on the U.S. nuclear umbrella is realistic in the face of North Korea’s nuclear and missile development. For example, Henry Kissinger has argued that if North Korean leaders “continue to have nuclear weapons, nuclear weapons must spread in the rest of Asia.”¹ It may therefore be necessary to consider some fundamental changes to long-standing U.S. deterrence approaches to reassure Japan and South Korea that they need not develop their own nuclear weapons.

What changes in the U.S. nuclear umbrella might convince Japan and South Korea that the United States will continue to be a reliable provider of extended deterrence? Potential options include forward deployment of U.S. tactical nuclear weapons or development of nuclear-sharing arrangements. Yet Roehrig argues that “the return of tactical nuclear weapons would do little to improve strategic deterrence while actually making crisis stability more fragile” (p. 190). This stance also eliminates the most likely options for nuclear sharing. What then is to be done if U.S. allies in Asia continue to openly discuss acquiring nuclear weapons to guard against rising threats from China and North Korea, as well as the U.S. president’s embrace of an “America first” strategy?

In the final assessment, Roehrig has written a valuable review of the theory and history of extended deterrence in East Asia. Yet, in so doing, he also highlights the fact that new thinking may be required to maintain U.S. extended deterrence commitments in the 21st century. ♦

¹ David E. Sanger, Choe Sang-hun, and Motoko Rich, “North Korea Rouses Neighbors to Reconsider Nuclear Weapons,” *New York Times*, October 28, 2017 ~ <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/10/28/world/asia/north-korea-nuclear-weapons-japan-south-korea.html>.

The Limited Roles of U.S. Nuclear Deterrence in Northeast Asia

Se Young Jang

In the era of North Korea's incessant, and almost successful, attempts to become a nuclear weapons state and the rise of China's power, Terence Roehrig's book *Japan, South Korea, and the United States Nuclear Umbrella: Deterrence After the Cold War* is a very timely and interesting academic work. Bridging theory, history, and contemporary debates, Roehrig delves into the effectiveness of the United States' security commitment to its two main allies in Asia, Japan and the Republic of Korea (ROK), particularly in the form of nuclear deterrence. The Cold War came to an end almost three decades ago at a global level, but military tensions still remain in Northeast Asia. North Korea's decision to arm with nuclear weapons and intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs) further destabilizes the region's geopolitical situation, continuously requiring the deep involvement of U.S. leadership in managing and resolving this new nuclear crisis after the Cold War. Against this backdrop, *Japan, South Korea, and the United States Nuclear Umbrella* offers readers detailed explanations and invaluable insights on how to view the U.S. role in dealing with the current and future nuclear confrontations in Northeast Asia.

Roehrig provides a well-structured analysis of the U.S. nuclear umbrella for Japan and South Korea by introducing theory, overviewing history, moving to threat analysis and case studies, and then assessing overall U.S. nuclear capability and resolve. Yet missing from the book is a chapter on the comparative analysis of these two alliances in terms of nuclear deterrence. Despite a number of similarities shared by the alliances in dealing with U.S. extended deterrence, there are some clear discrepancies that make Tokyo and Seoul respond differently to Pyongyang's increasing threats and U.S. reassurances. Roehrig mentions these comparative aspects here and there in various chapters. For instance, he observes that "the U.S. nuclear umbrella had to remain quiet for many years" in Japan and "provided reassurance only for its leaders," mainly due to "domestic political sensitivities" and the "nuclear allergy" in Japanese society (p. 63). In comparison, U.S. tactical nuclear weapons in South Korea "were viewed more as an actual warfighting tool than a deterrent"

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in the early years (p. 63). The withdrawal of those tactical nuclear weapons from the Korean Peninsula in 1991 and the end of the Cold War do not appear to have significantly changed South Korea's views on nuclear weapons, though. Roehrig notes that "a majority of South Koreans believe developing their own nuclear weapons is a necessary response to North Korea's nuclear weapons" (p. 152). A single independent chapter or section that more systematically compares the U.S.-Japan and U.S.-ROK nuclear umbrellas and thoroughly reflects on the implications suggested by the similar or different aspects would have been useful.

One of the sticking points in debates about the U.S. nuclear umbrella, which is also the main question of this book, is the issue of credibility: "Would the United States truly be willing to use nuclear weapons in defense of an ally?" (p. 2). Roehrig concludes that the United States is highly unlikely to use nuclear weapons to defend its allies because this is "not in the [U.S.] strategic interest and should be avoided at all costs" (p. 189). Rather, "the nuclear umbrella vis-à-vis North Korea is more important as a message of reassurance for U.S. allies than a tool that adds further to an already stable strategic situation" (p. 186) and has a significant "function for U.S. efforts to stem the proliferation of nuclear weapons" both regionally and globally (p. 196). As Roehrig states a number of times in the book, the U.S. nuclear umbrella offered to South Korea and Japan has been successful in persuading these two allies to remain non-nuclear thus far, which means that U.S. extended deterrence is still regarded as credible by Tokyo and Seoul. However, it is also true that the rapidly changing security environment in Northeast Asia, which was further exacerbated by North Korea's November 2017 test of an ICBM with the possible capability to reach the U.S. mainland, complicates any scholarly conjecture about the future of extended nuclear deterrence in Northeast Asia.

The Trump administration's undecided and unpredictable position on a nuclear North Korea has been making its own policy less credible as well. One of Roehrig's major conclusions is that "the United States would respond to an attack on Japan or South Korea with conventional weapons in the context of a credible alliance" (p. 190), while "an uncertain umbrella retains value as a deterrent" (p. 193). The overwhelming conventional capability of the United States no doubt poses a grave threat to North Korea, but it is still questionable how much longer conventional military assets can effectively deter Pyongyang. The more advanced North Korea's nuclear program becomes, the harder it will be to deter the country through the traditional means of deterrence policy unless other tools, such as diplomacy, are

simultaneously applied. Furthermore, any small sparks, either intentionally or inadvertently lit, could escalate into a nuclear war in the worst-case scenario, no matter how effectively the United States' conventional or nuclear capability is supposed to deter a nuclear North Korea. Indeed, in an age of uncertainty led by Donald Trump and Kim Jong-un, it is increasingly hard to expect that the status quo in this region will be maintained only through traditional deterrence policy.

Some minor points in the book could be further discussed or updated. First, Roehrig notes that "U.S. nuclear restraint during the Korean War appeared to add little more to the worry ROK leaders were already feeling" (p. 56), arguing that "in the early days of the alliance, the credibility of the U.S. nuclear umbrella was superseded by larger concerns for the overall alliance" (p. 55). According to Il-kwon Chung, chief of staff of the ROK Army during the Korean War, President Syngman Rhee wanted the U.S. government to expand the war by keeping a nuclear option open when Chinese forces crossed the Yalu River (the Amnok River in Korean) on the Sino-Korean border in October and November 1950. As Rhee regarded a clash with China as an inevitable course of action leading to the reunification of the Korean Peninsula, he welcomed the U.S. government's consideration of using nuclear weapons to defeat China.¹

At that time, China's massive offensives led U.S.-ROK forces to promptly retreat southward, shocking both U.S. leaders in Washington and U.S. field officers and opening up a full-scale review of using nuclear weapons. However, President Harry Truman decided not to use nuclear weapons, despite the commander of the UN forces General Douglas MacArthur's strong urge to do so. This episode was obviously not the only reason for Rhee's worsening relationship with the Truman and Eisenhower administrations in the later stages of the Korean War, but it possibly contributed to his growing suspicion about the credibility of the U.S. security commitment to South Korea. At the very least, Rhee would have realized at this early point of the war that Washington's principal objective was significantly different from and less ambitious than his own—reunifying the peninsula under his control. In this sense, U.S. nuclear restraint in the Korean War, underscored by Truman's dismissal of General MacArthur, could have partly shaped South Korea's larger concerns about its alliance relationship with the United States.

¹ Il-kwon Chung, *Chung Il-kwon hoegorok* [Chung Il-kwon's Memoirs] (Seoul: Koryo Sojok, 1999), 323.


Next, Roehrig reasonably argues that “returning U.S. nuclear weapons to the peninsula would be a bad idea” for four reasons: first, “forward deployed nuclear weapons” could create “possible North Korean preemption or a dangerous ‘use or lose’ situation”; second, the return of U.S. tactical nuclear weapons “would do little to improve strategic stability” and instead would “stir a contentious debate in South Korea”; third, “the cost and political fallout” of returning them would exceed the benefits; and last, it would not be in the United States’ interest to signal to others a policy “encouraging the spread of tactical nuclear weapons” (p. 147). These reasons are important and should not be disregarded. Yet Roehrig appears to only focus on the potential aftermath of a decision by the United States to redeploy its tactical nuclear weapons to the Korean Peninsula, while paying little attention to Washington’s actual capability for the redeployment. Notably, some analysts are skeptical of U.S. capability in this regard, arguing that “there is no ready U.S. stockpile of nuclear weapons that could be redeployed in South Korea.”²

Last, Roehrig notes that U.S. pressure truly resulted in South Korea’s decision to ratify the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), and accordingly abandon its nuclear ambitions (p. 148). As I have argued elsewhere, however, extensive archival research in South Korea, Canada, and the United States suggests that Canada, not the United States, played the decisive role in pressing the ROK leadership to ratify the NPT.³ The influence of the United States over South Korea’s foreign or security policy often tends to be overemphasized. Although “the U.S. nuclear umbrella is essential in keeping South Korea from pursuing its own nuclear weapons” (p. 153), U.S. extended nuclear deterrence historically has been a necessary rather than a sufficient condition for South Korea to remain non-nuclear. Despite U.S. tactical nuclear weapons continuously being deployed on the Korean Peninsula, other aspects of the alliance relationship made South Korea less secure and more willing to go nuclear in the 1970s. Moreover, non-U.S. factors such as nuclear reactor deals with Canada would sometimes exert a stronger influence on South Korea’s decision to take a step forward to support nuclear nonproliferation.

Despite such minor reservations, *Japan, South Korea, and the United States Nuclear Umbrella* is an extremely timely and useful scholarly work

² See Jon Wolfsthal and Toby Dalton, “Seven Reasons Why Putting U.S. Nukes Back in South Korea Is a Terrible Idea,” *Foreign Policy*, October 11, 2017 ~ <http://foreignpolicy.com/2017/10/11/putting-u-s-nukes-back-in-south-korea-is-a-terrible-idea>.

³ Se Young Jang, “Bringing Seoul into the Non-proliferation Regime: The Effect of ROK-Canada Reactor Deals on Korea’s Ratification of the NPT,” Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, Nuclear Proliferation International History Project, Working Paper, no. 10, September 2017.

that deepens our understanding of the U.S. security commitment to Japan and South Korea amid North Korea's growing nuclear threat to the United States and its allies. It is one of the few book-length studies that cover both Japan and South Korea in U.S. deterrence policy and thus marks a major contribution to the field. As a valuable resource bridging academic and policy-relevant research, Roehrig's book will benefit not only scholars and advanced students but also general readers interested in this issue. 

Author's Response:
The Paradox of the U.S. Nuclear Umbrella—
Reassurance, Credibility, and an Unusable Military Option

Terence Roehrig

Over the last year the possibility of war on the Korean Peninsula has risen to new heights, making a discussion of the U.S. nuclear umbrella even more critical. Though the rhetoric from the Trump administration has raised some potential challenges for my argument that the United States is highly unlikely to ever use nuclear weapons to defend Japan and South Korea, I believe this argument will hold. I am grateful that the reviewers have found my book *Japan, South Korea, and the United States Nuclear Umbrella: Deterrence After the Cold War* to be useful in understanding the role of the nuclear umbrella in Northeast Asian security. Nonetheless, they have raised some important questions regarding nuclear weapons and extended deterrence.

Daniel Sneider asks two very important questions about North Korean goals concerning the possession of nuclear weapons. First, are nuclear weapons likely to make North Korea more willing to undertake provocative actions in the belief that it has a nuclear shield to protect against retaliation? Many analysts have resurrected the Cold War concept of a stability-instability paradox whereby Moscow and Washington conducted lower-level actions believing that neither side would escalate to a broader conflict, given that nuclear weapons could be involved. Will nuclear weapons make North Korea more tolerant of risk and likely to pursue increasingly provocative behavior? Though a definitive answer remains uncertain, I would argue that North Korea has been relatively cautious and has not undertaken the kinds of actions predicted by the paradox to alter the political or territorial status quo. Its nuclear weapon and ballistic missile tests are necessary to build these capabilities and ensure they work. Moreover, although North Korean rhetoric reached new heights in 2017, official statements, including Kim Jong-un's 2018 New Year's speech,

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NOTE ~ The views expressed here are the author's alone and do not represent the official position of the Department of the Navy, the Department of Defense, or the U.S. government.

should be read largely through the lens of deterrence.¹ Indeed, North Korean bluster is largely a signal of weakness. While analysis often focuses on how the United States will be more cautious in confronting a nuclear North Korea, including the possibility of decoupling from its East Asian allies, North Korea also faces great risks as a nuclear weapon state should a conflict begin and escalate.

Sneider's second question raises the possibility of North Korea using nuclear weapons to pursue the goal of reunification, an objective that would fit a classic case of the stability-instability paradox. North Korean leaders continue to tout reunification, and the goal is embedded in the country's ideology and constitution. Though North Korean leaders maintain this façade, the reality of reunification under Pyongyang's leadership would be a fool's errand and likely lead to the downfall of the Kim regime. Let me outline one example among many to show the foolhardiness of such ambitions. For many years, North Korean officials have been trying to revive their decrepit economy and at times have implemented small reforms and restructuring efforts to jump-start it. In addition, they have turned a blind eye to the "marketization from below" that resulted from the collapse of the public distribution system in the wake of the famine years of the mid-1990s. However, large-scale economic reform has been viewed with trepidation for fear of unleashing forces within society that the regime could no longer control. Rather than emulating China's success, the leaders fear that the result could lead to a collapse similar to that of the Soviet Union. If North Korea is reluctant to implement even minimal reforms to its own economy, how would it go about integrating South Korea, a country with twice its population and the twelfth-largest economy in the world? Reunification would be a disaster for the ruling elites in North Korea and would surely start a process they would be unable to control. Despite the continued rhetorical goal of reunification, North Korean leaders must realize that it is not realistic and will not use nuclear weapons to coerce this outcome.

One of the central arguments of the book is that conventional strikes from the United States and Republic of Korea (ROK), particularly precision-guided munitions, can impose similar strategic effects on North Korea as nuclear weapons. In fact, because conventional power does not involve the same usage problems, it can be a far more credible option to deter Pyongyang. Related to the two questions raised by Sneider,

¹ See Kim Jong-un, "New Year's Address," available in English translation at NK Leadership Watch
~ <http://www.nkleadershipwatch.org/2018/01/01/new-years-address/>.

Se Young Jang asks how much longer conventional military assets will be able to deter North Korea. Pyongyang's conventional capabilities are large and dangerous, but they are also aging and increasingly unable to sustain combat operations for any length of time. The U.S. ability to punish North Korea with advanced conventional weapons will endure. Moreover, South Korean military capabilities are also growing so that the combined conventional strength of the U.S.-ROK alliance will be more than sufficient to deter North Korea for many years to come.

An important distinction in security relations in Northeast Asia outlined in the book is the differing threat perceptions of Japan and South Korea. While North Korea is a serious and immediate concern for both allies, they have differing assessments of China. Japan views China as an ominous, long-term strategic challenge, whereas South Korea, though wary of Beijing's power and intentions, has extensive economic ties with China and a more benign appraisal of its rise. The book attempts to determine some of the likely conflict scenarios that could lead to a nuclear war in the region. For North Korea, particularly given the current climate, it is possible to see how a nuclear exchange might occur, but these scenarios are more difficult to envision for China. What would it take for a conflict to escalate to the point where the United States would consider using nuclear weapons against China? Some potential flashpoints exist, particularly the South China Sea and the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands. But would the United States be willing to start a nuclear war over these disputes? I am highly doubtful.

Zack Cooper raises an important question in this context about U.S. conventional forces in a China contingency over Taiwan. When Chinese conventional forces surpass those of the United States, as they almost certainly will sometime in the future, will U.S. conventional options no longer be sufficient for Washington to respond should war break out over Taiwan? Deterrence is certainly easier if the United States has conventional superiority than if it does not. Yet the U.S. military need not be able to defeat the People's Liberation Army with conventional weapons to be able to deter Beijing. The United States need only have the capability to raise the costs sufficiently high with conventional strikes, and it will continue to have this option for many years. Moreover, though I argue that the United States is highly unlikely to ever use nuclear weapons to defend its allies, as long as these weapons and the nuclear umbrella remain, an adversary will never be able to completely dismiss possible nuclear use, which generates some degree of deterrence effect. Finally, using nuclear weapons in a Taiwan

contingency carries the same problems and risks as it does in a defense of Japan or South Korea scenario and is not in any state's interest. As Cooper notes, these extended deterrence commitments require careful attention and adjustment to a changing security environment, and both alliances have made considerable progress in revitalizing their defense arrangements.

Though the U.S. alliances with Japan and South Korea are separate, bilateral relationships, they have always been linked. Thus, the U.S. nuclear umbrella was never two separate commitments but is part of a regional security architecture. Se Young Jang suggests that a separate chapter comparing the nuclear umbrella for Japan and for South Korea would have been useful. This suggestion points to the importance of examining the nuclear umbrella together for these two allies; these commitments cannot be considered in isolation. Because of the linkages between these two alliances, I chose to integrate many of these assessments throughout the book where appropriate rather than address them in a separate chapter. Jang also notes some important points about the role played by Canada in South Korea's signing of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and the difficulties the United States would have in redeploying tactical nuclear weapons to South Korea.

Finally, Jang points to the link between deterrence and diplomacy, arguing that a nuclear North Korea will be increasingly more difficult to deter and will require other tools such as diplomacy. Traditional diplomacy is not typically thought of as a tool of deterrence other than in communicating red lines, issuing retaliation threats, and providing statements of resolve. However, her comment raises a crucial issue: Deterrence is a strategy that seeks to prevent an action and, in many ways, locks in the status quo. Deterrence is not very good at solving problems between states; for that, we are going to need diplomacy. While strengthening deterrence has been an important objective for both alliances, diplomacy will remain central for managing and possibly solving regional problems in the future.

For years, the United States has maintained an extended deterrence commitment to defend Japan and South Korea. The nuclear umbrella is only one part of that commitment. There is a paradox here. The United States is highly unlikely to ever use nuclear weapons to defend its allies, and yet despite these doubts, allied leaders continue to place high value on the nuclear commitment. The answer is that the nuclear umbrella is far more important as a sign of political assurance than a usable military option. The use of nuclear weapons in Northeast Asia is not in anyone's interests. As I note in the last line of the book, "No one knows what would happen once a nuclear exchange began, and we must never find out." 