

CDS Working Paper

## Deter and Assure

*Charting a Course for America's  
Asian Alliances in a New Nuclear Age*

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## INTRODUCTION

As home to a number of the world's most dynamic economies, two rising powers, and six nuclear states, Asia is a region of enormous strategic importance to the United States. For over six decades, America has functioned as the preeminent power in Asia, playing a vital role in providing security and ensuring a stable balance of power that has allowed the region's states to flourish politically and economically. The U.S. security framework in the region has rested historically upon a series of bilateral alliances and strategic partnerships. The arrangement has impressively stood the test of time despite concerns that the lack of an overarching, multilateral security architecture would lead to inefficiencies in the United States' pursuit of regional stability.<sup>1</sup>

What has allowed the existing arrangement to be so effective? Undoubtedly it has been the United States' preponderance of military power, the ultimate manifestation of which is its nuclear weapons capabilities. An essential element in the durability of the United States' key Asian alliances—with Japan, South Korea, and Australia—has been the U.S. commitment to provide extended nuclear deterrence. It would not be too much of an exaggeration to suggest the United States' nuclear assurance to its Asian allies is the *sine qua non* of the alliances themselves. Any dramatic revision of the United States' current deterrence policy or posture would likely result in steps on the part of U.S. allies to pursue comparable security guarantees through a variety of other mechanisms (regional diplomatic realignments, for example, or the pursuit of indigenous nuclear deterrents) that would seriously undermine, if not render strategically null, their relationship with the United States.

The United States' alliances and security partnerships in Asia are now, however, entering

a period of unprecedented challenge and uncertainty. The rise of China, with its accumulation of substantial wealth and military power—as well as its pursuit of defense strategies intended to limit American military access to and presence in the region—has naturally raised questions about the United States' future role in Asia. Despite a growing recognition within American defense policy circles of the inadequacy of America's force structure in the Asia-Pacific, the increasing likelihood of reduced defense budgets and the cancellation of U.S. defense programs optimized for East Asian operating environments cast doubt on the United States' long-term reliability as a security partner in the region. Finally, as the United States has prosecuted two wars in the greater Middle East, its allies have been reminded that America's security commitments are managed on a global scale, and that its strategic attention and resources are therefore focused at times more intently on regions apart from the Asia-Pacific.

Beyond the conventional threats posed by China's expanding military capabilities and increasing regional assertiveness, U.S. allies in Asia also will be forced to contend with a dynamic multipolar nuclear environment—that is, a condition in which the region's nuclear actors move slowly toward greater parity in terms of weapons capabilities, either by way of arsenal reductions (in the case of the United States and Russia), or through expansion and modernization efforts (as seen in China, India, and Pakistan). Instability is inherent in such a system, and it is exacerbated by the fact that the “rising” nuclear powers attribute a greater value—politically and militarily—to the possession of nuclear weapons than the “falling” powers (or, at the least, the United States). The condition of nuclear multipolarity in Asia may be further complicated by the presence of smaller states in the process of pursuing civil nuclear

capabilities;<sup>2</sup> competition for their cooperation and allegiance by more mature nuclear powers may at some point contribute to the development of nuclear micro-blocs within the region.

Current U.S. nuclear policy fails to seriously consider the role nuclear weapons play in the political and war-fighting strategies of its adversaries and competitors; it presumes that by pursuing force reductions in the form of the New START Treaty and minimizing the role of nuclear weapons in U.S. national security strategy, the United States will “lead by example,” taking the first steps toward establishing a norm by which the strategic currency of nuclear weapons is universally devalued.<sup>3</sup> In the near-term, this seems a particularly wrong-headed approach in Asia, where, as noted above, current nuclear actors attribute significant value to their nuclear forces and U.S. non-nuclear allies place great importance on the credibility of U.S. assurances.

This essay will begin with an overview of U.S. alliances in Asia, assessing in particular allied perceptions of, and responses to, recent adjustments in U.S. nuclear policy and doctrine. It will then review the emerging nuclear multipolarity in Asia, address the shifting nuclear balances in the region, and evaluate their implications for the United States’ continued ability to provide credible assurances to its allies. And, in the end, it will compare a variety of long-range, alternative U.S. nuclear strategies for the region.

## **A FRAGILE ARCHITECTURE, A SHRINKING REACH**

The U.S. nuclear posture in Asia today exists as a function of the United States’ overriding strategic objectives in the region—a set of widely acknowledged goals that reflect the United States’ role in Asia over the past half-century—and the

security imperatives that flow from them. The United States’ essential strategic goal for the region involves the preservation of a balance of power favorable to American and allied interests. Put differently, and in broad terms, the United States seeks to prevent the emergence of hostile regional hegemon or coalition of states that could subject its allies to coercion and undermine the stability, prosperity, and freedom of the region. In the context of the current security environment, the pursuit of this objective creates two narrower security imperatives. The first requires the United States to continue to engage China diplomatically and economically so as to encourage that nation’s peaceful rise as a great power, while at the same time hedging militarily against less desirable outcomes. The second involves steps to deter and prevent North Korean aggression, within the nuclear threshold or otherwise.

Both imperatives require the United States to maintain or enhance its current military presence and posture in the region, while at the same time reinforcing its network of allies and security partners. In practical terms, a critical element in the United States’ ability to project power in Asia is the willingness of its allies and partners to provide continued access to bases and other regional facilities, and to contribute forces in the case of a crisis. More broadly, though, the United States’ successful pursuit of its security objectives in Asia depends upon a common understanding among its allies and partners of the threats in the region and the necessary means of addressing them. Allied confidence is essential to U.S. strategy in Asia.

The United States’ core bilateral alliances in Asia, however, are increasingly strained, subject not only those tensions that can intermittently afflict longstanding relationships between allies, but also to the growing perception that U.S. commitment to the region is waning. Uncertainties are developing in the United States’ relationships with Japan, South Korea, Australia, and others as a result of what has been perceived as the early

stages of U.S. strategic retrenchment in the region, as well as concerns that the United States is preoccupied with challenges elsewhere—namely in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Australia's 2009 Defence White Paper received significant attention for its warning about the potential ill effects of an American withdrawal from Asia: "A transformation of major power relations in the Asia-Pacific region would have a profound effect on our strategic circumstances. Of particular concern would be any diminution in the willingness or capacity of the United States to act as a stabilizing force."

Although the White Paper went on to conclude "no other power will have the military, economic or strategic capacity to challenge U.S. global primacy" in the next two decades, it raised the possibility that "the United States might find itself preoccupied and stretched in some parts of the world such that its ability to shift attention and project power into other regions, when it needs to, is constrained."<sup>4</sup> Coming from one of the United States' most committed allies in the region, this was a shot across the bow.

Defense analysts from the region were quick to call attention to the minimal treatment of Asian security concerns in the U.S. Defense Department's 2010 Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR) report.<sup>5</sup> The QDR cited a range of new capabilities that China is seeking to acquire in the course of its "long-term, comprehensive military modernization" campaign, and it noted that the PRC "has shared only limited information about the pace, scope, and ultimate aims of its military modernization programs, raising a number of legitimate questions regarding its long-term intentions."<sup>6</sup> The report stopped short, however, of addressing whether and how the United States should enhance its existing force structure, diversify its current basing arrangements, or modernize its aging naval and air force fleets so as to respond effectively to emerging challenges in Asia.

American allies in Asia are also no doubt aware of the defense resource debate growing within the United States, which portends flat-lining—if not shrinking—its defense budgets in the years ahead and confirms that any modernization efforts could be long delayed.<sup>7</sup> In mid-2010, the Pentagon began tightening its belt: Defense Secretary Robert Gates called upon each of the armed services to find and eliminate billions of dollars of overhead costs, with the understanding that the savings would then be rolled back into modernization accounts. But as a bipartisan, blue-ribbon panel formed by Congress to review the QDR noted in July, the United States "cannot reverse the decline of shipbuilding, buy enough naval aircraft, recapitalize Army equipment, purchase a new aerial tanker, increase deep strike capability, and recapitalize the bomber fleet just by saving" \$10 billion to \$15 billion in efficiencies and acquisition reforms.<sup>8</sup> The panel made clear there is a "growing gap between our interests and our military capability to protect those interests in the face of a complex and challenging security environment"—a problem most readily apparent in Asia.<sup>9</sup>

The future outlook for the U.S. nuclear presence in Asia is even less assuring. To be fair, the Obama administration's much-anticipated 2010 Nuclear Posture Review (NPR)—which administration officials have made clear was designed to "influence the perceptions of different foreign audiences"—appears to have been well received in allied capitals.<sup>10</sup> By and large, official statements suggested Japan, South Korea, Australia and others within the U.S. nuclear umbrella can live with the NPR's revisions to the United States' historic policy of strategic ambiguity, its pledge to eventually create the conditions in which a "sole purpose" policy would be practicable, and beyond that, the president's goal of global zero—so long as the United States can continue to guarantee a "safe, secure, and effective" deterrent in the meantime, as the document suggests.<sup>11</sup>

Much like the 2010 QDR, however, the problems with the NPR, particularly when considered in light of the arsenal reductions called for in the New START treaty, may only become manifest in the out-years, when it will be more clear whether the funds and technologies necessary to execute the promised modernization of the aging U.S. nuclear complex and shrinking arsenal can be brought to bear. It may thus be too early to tell exactly what impact the NPR, New START, and the imperiled U.S. defense budget will have on the health of U.S. alliances in Asia. But subtle and telling differences in the responses of the United States' Asian allies and partners to each of these developments can provide insight about steps the United States can take to reinforce its critical alliances in the region.

## Japan

For over 50 years, Japan has been the keystone in the United States' alliance network in Asia. Recently, however, the strength and utility of the alliance has been increasingly called into question. In the years following 9/11, the Bush administration took steps to expand the historic partnership, capitalizing on the eagerness of Japanese Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi to commit elements of Japan's Self-Defense Forces to the U.S. missions in Iraq and Afghanistan. This period of productivity peaked in 2005 with a U.S.-Japan joint statement that set the stage for greater cooperation in ballistic missile defense, joint military exercises, and maritime patrolling. Yet since the departure of Prime Minister Koizumi, whose close personal relationship with President George W. Bush is credited with the surge in alliance relations in the early 2000s, Japan has struggled through a procession of leaders who were unable to match their predecessors' vision for the alliance or dedicate similar attention to maintaining it. Shifts in the United States' approach to North Korea, Washington's refusal to allow for the export of F-22 fighters, and the Obama administration's disinvestment in missile

defense initiatives left Tokyo feeling further isolated.

As a result, the U.S.-Japan strategic alliance has languished. Not long after becoming prime minister in September 2009, longtime opposition leader Yukio Hatoyama proposed a new regional multilateral mechanism known as the East Asian Community, the details of which were vague, but clear enough to imply that U.S. (and Australian) membership in the arrangement were of second-order importance. Hatoyama ultimately resigned in June 2010 as a result, it was widely interpreted, of his inability to manage the relocation of the U.S. Marine Corps air station on Okinawa. This was an issue on which he had campaigned, and one that served as a continuous source of friction with the United States in the course of this nine-month tenure.<sup>12</sup>

Echoing previous Japanese leaders of recent years, Hatoyama had sought a more "normal" international role for Japan, as defined primarily by more equal partnership with the United States in defense matters. It was a reasonable goal and one that the United States should continue to encourage, to the degree that it would result in a more forward-leaning force posture, broader array of capabilities, and more permissive Japanese defense policy. But it should not come at the expense of a sustained, close partnership with the United States.

In August 2010, an expert panel informing a forthcoming review in Japan's Defense Program Guidelines released a report recommending several forward-leaning changes in the country's military posture and defense policy, including the accelerated concentration of Japanese Self-Defense Forces in its southwestern territories—those most accessible to Chinese naval forces—as well as an increase in the size of Japan's submarine fleet, and participation in joint, international weapons research and development efforts (such as the F-35 program). The government-mandated Council on Security and Defense Capabilities in

the New Era called for Japan's defense forces to maintain a higher level of operational readiness, acting as a "dynamic deterrent," and to pursue greater cooperation with South Korea, India, and Australia.<sup>13</sup> Even as the United States continues to support the normalization of Japan's defense policy, it should be understood in Washington that growing Japanese capabilities will be a supplement, not a substitute, for the continued presence of U.S. forces in the region.

Extended nuclear deterrence, meanwhile, is central to the U.S.-Japan alliance. The Japanese place a premium on the credibility of U.S. security guarantees, perhaps more so than any of the other states in Asia under the U.S. umbrella. And with good reason, as Japan has to contend with many potential threats in its immediate neighborhood: an aggressive and unpredictable North Korea, a rising and revisionist China, and a resurgent Russia. It is not surprising, then, that Japanese officials also have taken an increasing interest in the technical and operational details of the U.S. deterrent. They want more than verbal assurances; they want to know how deterrence *works*.<sup>14</sup> More specifically, officials want to see that U.S. guided missile submarines are forward-deployed in the region so as to provide an immediate response in the case of a contingency, signaling the readiness of U.S. forces.

Japanese officials pay close attention to U.S. and Russian arms reduction initiatives, concerned that as the two powers continue to downsize their arsenals, China continues to modernize its own, encouraged, perhaps, by the opportunity to create deterrent effects on par with them.<sup>15</sup> This is a dynamic that Washington would be wise to watch.

## Australia

Australia is another longtime, stalwart U.S. ally which, in recent years, has demonstrated its continuing commitment to partnership with the United States in Asia and beyond, with

contributions in Iraq and Afghanistan, trilateral maritime security exercises with Japan, and ballistic missile defense cooperation. Both Australia and the United States share a similar perception of the threat from international jihadist groups. The U.S. and Australian approaches to China are similar as well: a combination of economic engagement and strategic hedging. But Canberra also appears to be hedging against the eventual wane of U.S. military power in the region, as illustrated dramatically by the much-discussed 2009 Defence White Paper referenced earlier, which calls for a naval and air power buildup to accommodate U.S. retrenchment, gird against China's continued rise, and, in light of the two preceding trends, project power beyond the region if necessary.<sup>16</sup>

According to the White Paper, such a buildup would require a surge in defense spending:

*The more Australia aspires to have greater strategic influence beyond our immediate neighbourhood—that is to say the ability to exert policy influence that is underpinned by military power—the greater the level of spending on defence we need to be prepared to undertake. If we want to back up strategic influence with military power, we have to be prepared to invest the resources required, and to be confident that the security benefits outweigh those costs.*<sup>17</sup>

There is debate about whether the country has the resources at its disposal and whether its political leaders can summon the political will to enact a defense budget increase of the scope envisioned by Australia's Department of Defense in the 2009 White Paper. But the Australian DOD's recommendation stands as an important recognition of the shifting balances of power in the region and the seriousness of their implications for Australia's security.

Australia's strategic alliance with the United States hinges in part on the understanding that "for so long as nuclear weapons exist, we are able to rely on the nuclear forces of the United States to deter nuclear attack on Australia;"<sup>18</sup> the United



States historic assurances, Australia's DOD acknowledges, have eliminated the need for the country to seek a deterrent of its own.<sup>19</sup> At the same time, however, Australia appears to perceive the threat of a missile-borne nuclear weapon to be rather remote.<sup>20</sup> The country will thus maintain a limited missile defense capacity in the form of Aegis-equipped destroyers. Canberra has opted out of involvement of a wider regional missile defense architecture on the premise that it would antagonize the major nuclear powers, noting it will instead "explore the development of capabilities for in-theatre defence of [Australian Defense Force] elements and the defence of other strategic interests—including our population centres and key infrastructure."<sup>21</sup>

Australian Foreign Affairs Minister Stephen Smith provided a thorough and ringing endorsement of the U.S. NPR upon its release, noting with approval its revised declaratory policy, its objective of reducing the role of nuclear weapons in the United States' security strategy, and its contribution to the eventual goal of reaching "global zero." At the same time, Smith was realistic about the likely continued presence of nuclear weapons on the international scene. He thus reiterated Australia's intention to remain for the foreseeable future a beneficiary of U.S. extended deterrence. Like other leaders in the region, Smith cited his confidence in the administration's assurances that the United States would maintain a safe, secure and effective nuclear capability, even as it sought to reduce the size of its arsenal and minimize the relevance of nuclear weapons in international security affairs.<sup>22</sup>

Some people within Australia's strategic studies community have noted that as the nuclear threat environment in Asia continues to evolve and the United States remains stretched thin in meeting its global security commitments, there may eventually come a point at which Washington "chooses to defend a narrower set of interests" in Asia.<sup>23</sup> This line of argument reflects the logic of the White Paper in highlighting the requirement for

increased independent defense capabilities, but extends it to the nuclear realm, suggesting Australia may need to assume a greater degree of self-reliance in asserting deterrence and developing missile defense capabilities as well.

Even those within the Australian policy community who most ardently share President Obama's goal of a world without nuclear weapons place a great deal of importance on the United States' ability to provide continued credible assurances, even as the Obama administration pursues "global zero," to ensure that allies are not forced to accept increased risk in the process. This was the view outlined in the December 2009 conclusions of the International Commission on Nuclear Non-proliferation and Disarmament (ICNND), a joint initiative of the Australian and Japanese governments proposed by former Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd in 2008 and co-chaired by former Australian Foreign Minister Gareth Evans. The ICNND conclusions were believed to run parallel with the Australian government's own positions on nuclear security at the time. The commission's report suggested that enhanced conventional deterrence could reasonably suffice for nuclear deterrence on the way to global zero.<sup>24</sup> But as previously discussed, there is increasing concern within the United States that the U.S. conventional reach in the region is (or soon will be) insufficient; at the same time, reliable Prompt Global Strike technologies, a capability frequently cited as a potential conventional extended deterrent, have not yet been fully brought to bear.

In sum, of the states in Asia currently within the U.S. nuclear security umbrella, Australia—by virtue, in part, of its geography—is perhaps the least sensitive of the emerging nuclear challenges in the region and thus the least likely to perceive shifts in U.S. nuclear policy and strategy as threatening. But the warning call in its 2009 Defence White Paper remains one of the clearest and most alarming articulations of the growing



regional concerns about the relative wane of U.S. power.

## Republic of Korea

Having largely overcome the “fear of abandonment / fear of entrapment” concerns that had long characterized their relationship, the United States and South Korea are slowly pursuing a more globalized alliance—evidenced most recently by Seoul’s contributions of security forces and reconstruction assistance in Iraq and Afghanistan. Questions remain about core bilateral issues, most notably the ratification of the Korea-U.S. free trade agreement, which has consistently encountered roadblocks in Congress. Questions about the future status of the U.S.-ROK Combined Forces Command were only recently resolved, with the prudent decision to delay the transfer of wartime operation control of South Korean forces until 2015.<sup>25</sup>

Most critically, the two allies have not always appeared to prosecute a fully unified strategy for dealing with North Korea, as Seoul has toggled alternatively between its impulse to engage the North and its demand for reaffirmations of the U.S. commitment to the denuclearization of the peninsula. The rapidly assembled joint U.S.-ROK naval exercises held in response to the March 2010 sinking of the South Korean ship *Cheonan* should go some ways in demonstrating the continued effectiveness of the alliance; it may be China, however, not North Korea, that is most sensitive to signals of alliance strength from Washington and Seoul.

South Korea’s demand for U.S. security assurances appears to be a function solely of its insecurity vis-à-vis the North; it perceives little nuclear threat from China. Unlike the Japanese, therefore, South Korea seems to have little concern about either the technical characteristics or operational plans associated with U.S. nuclear forces in the region, given the presumption in

Seoul that the U.S. arsenal, and the missile defense capabilities it has established on the peninsula, undoubtedly will be sufficient to deter and defend against threats from the North. South Korean confidence in U.S. extended deterrence seems to hinge upon perceptions of U.S. resolve; that is, U.S. willingness to use a nuclear weapon in the case of a nuclear crisis rather than on the number, quality, or character of U.S. nuclear forces in the region.<sup>26</sup>

In its response to the release of the NPR, the South Korean Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade cited close consultation between U.S. and ROK governments in the course of the document’s drafting. It otherwise offered unqualified support for the review, noting, of course, the United States’ continued “provision of nuclear and other elements of extended deterrence.”<sup>27</sup> Those “other elements,” presumably, refer primarily to the U.S. forces currently stationed in the ROK, along with the U.S. ability to surge additional forces to the region in the case of a crisis, as with the July 2010 exercises in the wake of the Cheonan incident.

## India

With its vibrant democracy, booming economy, and increasing concerns about China’s regional military ambitions, India is a seemingly natural partner for the United States. New Delhi already has set in motion its own robust hedging strategy against China, and, unlike the United States’ other allies in the Asia-Pacific, India is not so cautious in articulating its strategic aims.

In its most recent White Paper, the Indian Ministry of Defence noted China’s development of strategic missile, space, and blue-water naval capabilities “will have an effect on the overall military environment in the neighborhood of India,” and it made clear that India would thus “engage China to seek greater transparency and openness in its defense policy and posture, while

taking all necessary measures to protect the national security, territorial integrity, and sovereignty of India.”<sup>28</sup>

Manifestations of India’s hedging strategy have included former Chief of the Army Gen. Deepak Kapoor’s brief descriptions in late 2009 of the country’s new two-front war strategy, designed to allow India to engage in conflict with Pakistan and China simultaneously. India has recently upgraded its air bases in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, presumably to offset China’s growing presence in the Indian Ocean; it is acquiring a range of platforms that will allow it to project power within the region and beyond: C-130J aircraft, submarines, a new naval fighter, and a refurbished Russian aircraft carrier.<sup>29</sup> India’s successful tests of the Agni III long-range nuclear-capable missile, the planned test of the Agni V (India’s first true ICBM) in late 2010, and the deployment of nuclear capable fighter squadrons near the Sino-Indian border are further indication that New Delhi perceives a growing threat from its northeastern neighbor.<sup>30</sup>

Early in President Obama’s administration, there were concerns about whether the United States would fully capitalize on its new relationship with India, which had seen increasing progress under presidents Bill Clinton and George W. Bush, given the attention it appeared intent to lavish on China, in the name of its “strategic reassurance” policy.<sup>31</sup> India has likewise been unsettled by the United States’ closeness with Pakistan, New Delhi’s archrival, in the prosecution of the war in Afghanistan, while at the same time feeling like its own significant reconstruction efforts in the country have gone underappreciated.

American national security officials, however, have since made numerous trips to New Delhi, however, each time praising the robustness of the U.S.-Indian partnership and promising greater security cooperation in the future, both within the region and further afield. During a January 2010 trip, Defense Secretary Gates called the U.S.-India

partnership “indispensible” and advocated greater space, cyber, and maritime cooperation. In July 2010, Afghanistan-Pakistan Special Representative Richard Holbrooke and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs Adm. Mike Mullen were each in the Indian capital within the period of a week, during which time the two countries signed on to a new, joint counterterrorism initiative.<sup>32</sup>

India is outside the U.S. nuclear umbrella, of course, with an arsenal of its own. But, as one of the United States’ close strategic partners, New Delhi closely monitors and calibrates its nuclear modernization efforts to those of the United States.

## MANAGING NUCLEAR MULTIPOLARITY

Apart from the uncertainties emerging within the historic network of U.S. alliances in Asia, the United States is seeking to come to terms with another strategic challenge, manifested globally yet in many ways centered in Asia: an emerging multipolar nuclear environment, characterized by a growth in the number of nuclear actors and an incremental shift toward parity in the capabilities of nuclear weapons states. Nowhere do the effects of this new global multipolarity stand to be more dramatic than in Asia, where the regional balance of power is in flux. The United States, Russia, China, India, and Pakistan represent Asia’s competing poles.

### Historic Rivals: Russia and the United States

As the nuclear environment in Asia is becoming more dynamic, Russia and the United States are on the way to additional force reductions as called for in New START. As noted earlier, the prospect of a shrinking U.S. arsenal is a source of anxiety among U.S. allies in the region—particularly

Japan, which fears that as China watches the two former nuclear superpowers disarm, it will continue its own modernization program apace, tempted to seek capabilities on par with Moscow and Washington. As China develops a range of capabilities that place it perceptibly closer to parity, it is reasoned, it will grow more risk-acceptant in its regional behavior.

As the process of U.S.-Russian reductions moves forward, many questions remain. First and foremost, it is unclear whether reductions goals outlined in New START have been set according to the projected operational demands of a nuclear conflict. Have U.S. defense planners calculated “how much is enough” in terms of the capabilities necessary to address the range of nuclear threats the country now faces, or how much it is likely to face in the years ahead? Simply put, has New START been a strategically sound exercise? Even the most staunch arms control advocates acknowledge that beyond the immediate projected cuts, further reductions would first require a broader set of strategic considerations; that is, an acknowledgement that other nuclear actors will have to bring down their force levels.

Even as Russia pursues reductions in the size of its strategic arsenal, it still maintains a substantial force of tactical nuclear weapons. And whereas the United States has made recent adjustments its nuclear doctrine to minimize the circumstances in which it would employ its nuclear forces, Russian doctrine since 2000 has made clear that its nuclear weapons may be used to prevent the escalation of large-scale conventional wars—while noting the prevention of a nuclear conflict “is the Russian Federation’s main task.”<sup>33</sup> Taken together with Moscow’s vehement protests of plans to install elements of a U.S. ballistic missile defense system in Poland and the Czech Republic, it is clear that Russia still perceives a significant political and strategic value in its nuclear forces.

## China

Chief among those nuclear actors ripe for inclusion in a multilateral arms control regime is China. Because of its growing power in the region and beyond, the country represents Asia’s most significant new nuclear “pole.” The PRC is arguably moving beyond its long-held policy of minimum deterrence, toward what is now a diverse and qualitatively potent nuclear force composed of an estimated 450 warheads, with delivery systems designed for a wide range of missions.<sup>34</sup> As the 2010 NPR explained: “The lack of transparency surrounding its nuclear programs—their pace and scope, as well as the strategy and doctrine that guides them—raises questions about China’s future strategic intentions.”

In recent years, China has worked on a more mobile and survivable Chinese deterrent, featuring solid-propellant, road-mobile intercontinental ballistic missiles (the DF-31 and DF-31A) capable of reaching targets throughout the United States as well as two classes of submarine-launched ballistic missiles (the JL-1 and JL-2) to be deployed aboard two classes of SSBNs (*Xia* and *Jin*-class SSBNs). China is developing a variety of missile defense countermeasures, including maneuvering reentry vehicles, multiple independently targeted reentry vehicles, and anti-satellite capabilities.<sup>35</sup>

As the Defense Department’s 2009 report to Congress on China’s military power suggested, although China’s “no first use” doctrine remains officially in place, the missions attributed to that country’s nuclear force raise questions about the policy’s true applicability. According to the DOD’s evaluation of Chinese military writings, the PRC’s nuclear weapons are intended for use in responding to a nuclear attack, deterring a conventional attack against nuclear assets, providing the PRC freedom from nuclear coercion, and otherwise “reinforcing China’s great power status.”<sup>36</sup> This would seem to indicate that nuclear weapons represent a critical strategic asset in the security strategies of

“rising” nuclear powers—an asset they are unlikely to abandon or to deemphasize simply to comply with the example set by United States.

## India

India, meanwhile, is thriving in its dangerous neighborhood with what can still be accurately characterized as a “minimum reasonable deterrent”: an estimated 100 warheads.<sup>37</sup> That said, the nation’s force is qualitatively robust. It has a growing ballistic missile and submarine fleet, with potential for expansion on both fronts. India’s missile forces are becoming particularly potent, repeatedly testing the Agni-II, a medium-range nuclear capable missile, as well as its intermediate-range successor, the Agni-III.<sup>38</sup> Indian officials from the Defense Research Development Organization announced in February their intention to test the Agni-V, which will have a range between 5,000 and 6,000 kilometers, within a year.<sup>39</sup> India is testing the first of its *Arihant* class of ballistic missile submarines, and building a new submarine base on its eastern coast.<sup>40</sup>

India has sought to bolster its ballistic missile defense capabilities in recent years, keenly aware of the missile threat from Pakistan and China. The first layer of the two-tiered indigenous BMD shield, designed to defend against threats at a range of 2000 kilometers, is scheduled to be in place by 2012.<sup>41</sup> Indian military officials have hinted at the need for an anti-satellite capability, alluding to China’s ability to hold Indian assets in space at risk.<sup>42</sup>

Given the disparities in the current size and capabilities of the countries’ nuclear forces, India remains strategically insecure vis-à-vis China. This condition only adds to concerns in New Delhi about China’s conventional power projection capabilities, its apparent designs to establish a naval presence in the Indian Ocean, and its

intentions in re-igniting disputes over portions of their shared border.

## Pakistan

Despite the presence of pressing internal security challenges, Pakistan has until recently remained singularly focused on developing military capabilities intended to deter, defend against, and strike, if necessary, the state from which it perceives a persistent existential threat: India. Given that the conventional military balance between the two tilts significantly in India’s favor, Pakistan remains very much strategically dependent upon its nuclear deterrent; the country’s nuclear weapons play a central role in its national security strategy.

Pakistan’s nuclear weapons program has long been a source of international concern. It is marred by a history of proliferation, and it is situated in a state plagued by an extremist threat, the severity of which the government has long been loath to acknowledge, provoking persistent uneasiness about the state’s stability and thus the arsenal’s security – despite continuing Pakistani reassurances, and the implementation of significant command, control, and security reforms in its nuclear facilities since 9/11.<sup>43</sup>

Pakistan’s nuclear modernization efforts, meanwhile, appear to be continuing apace, with the development of additional reactors and reprocessing facilities for a new generation of plutonium weapons.<sup>44</sup> The country’s early cooperation with China in the development of its nuclear program and its missile fleet—seen again more recently in China’s controversial proposal to sell Pakistan two nuclear reactors—remains a source of anxiety for India.<sup>45</sup>

## The Rogues

Rounding out the emerging multipolar nuclear environment are the “rogue” states: North Korea and Iran. They have proven consistently unresponsive to efforts on the part of the international community to encourage and coerce the cessation of their nuclear programs. They perceive an enormous strategic value in the possession of nuclear capabilities, recognizing that they have the potential to provide an otherwise unattainable degree of leverage vis-à-vis their enemies and competitors.

It is reasonable to expect that, as these states become more confident in their nuclear capabilities (or in Iran’s case, should it develop a weapon), decision makers in Pyongyang and Tehran will become less risk-averse in pursuit of other national objectives. North Korea and Iran have long been prone to erratic and aggressive behavior, but their possession of nuclear weapons no doubt stands to exacerbate their worst tendencies in this regard.

## THE WAY FORWARD: ASIA IN THE BALANCE

The emerging nuclear multipolarity in Asia places at risk the United States’ strategic objectives in the region, and at the same time stands to further undermine the United States’ network of Asian alliances.

In the face of Asia’s increasingly uncertain nuclear balance, the United States has a few broad strategic alternatives at its disposal. Some are better than others.

The first, and optimal, strategy calls for the U.S. reassertion of regional nuclear dominance and the reinforcement of extended deterrence assurances, tailored verbally and operationally to address the

most pressing and idiosyncratic concerns of its individual allies. In many ways, this would entail sustaining, or more likely, expanding the traditional U.S. role in the region. To make that happen, the United States would maintain its current strategic capabilities and regional posture, while stepping up its nuclear bomber rotations and submarine patrols, expanding regional missile defenses, continuing to pursue long-range conventional strike capabilities, and increasing surveillance and information sharing among allies.

What regional consequences and responses would a reinforced U.S. nuclear strategy induce? U.S. allies would be doubly mollified: South Korea and Japan would maintain their current nuclear status, and with U.S. encouragement and coordination, continue to seek improvements in missile defense and conventional strike capabilities. China, on the other hand, could be expected to pursue its nuclear modernization campaign with greater vigor and modify its strategic posture to gird against what it would undoubtedly perceive as increasing encirclement. The competition between India and Pakistan would not likely be affected appreciably, although India would gain some measure of confidence from what amounted to an additional U.S. check on Chinese regional ambition.

One might argue that the NPR, interpreted broadly, calls for a course of action very much along these lines or, at the least, doesn’t preclude it, because the strategy was designed to retain the confidence of American allies with pledges of effective, extended deterrence. But additional analysis suggests otherwise. A growing segment of the U.S. defense community has assessed the U.S. force structure in the Pacific as inadequate. U.S. defense spending appears headed for a crisis, threatening future force modernization efforts. China continues to field potent new technologies in support of a sophisticated anti-access/area denial strategy, and the long-range conventional precision strike capabilities believed necessary for defeating access challenges are far from

operational.<sup>46</sup> None of this bodes well for future U.S. power projection in the Pacific.

A second broad and less-optimal strategy would involve accepting or “making peace with” multipolarity. This would be a significant departure from the status quo, and would necessitate an acknowledgement within Washington that the United States’ power in Asia was on the wane. The policy would involve pursuing the stated New START reductions goals, endeavoring to expand the disarmament dialogue to include China (by appealing, perhaps, to Beijing’s desire to be associated with a joint initiative of the nuclear superpowers) and continuing, as with the previous approach, to cooperate with allies in developing conventional strike, missile defense, and surveillance capabilities.

Verbal assurances of extended nuclear deterrence still would be offered, but they would increasingly be paired with calls for America’s Asian allies to take greater security responsibilities within the structure of the alliance. Under these circumstances, it would not be unreasonable to expect Japan, and perhaps South Korea, to seek deterrents of their own. The overall health of U.S. alliances in the region would suffer, as the United States shed its traditional role as security guarantor and presented China a clear path to primacy.

The United States’ approach to Asia today represents something of a middle ground between these two. The United States operates from a position of preponderant power within the region. But for reasons both within and outside U.S. control, that position may become untenable in the years ahead. And it would be difficult to imagine that the United States could achieve its desired security outcomes—preventing the rise of a hostile hegemon and deterring North Korean aggression—at a level of relative power less than that which it enjoys today.

Given the trajectory of U.S. power in Asia, the United States will likely find itself leaning more heavily on its alliances in the years ahead.

Washington needs to bolster its relationships in the region. It can do so, in part, by focusing on allies’ core concerns in areas beyond security. Given that access to markets is of vital interest among all American allies in Asia, the United States can seek to expand its free-trade policies in the region, starting first with the long-delayed Korea-United States Free Trade Agreement. There is also a demand for more aggressive technology-transfer policies focused on high-end conventional capabilities, an area that Defense Secretary Robert Gates has acknowledged is a priority and one in which he has made some initial steps toward reform.<sup>47</sup>

The United States must pay close attention to its allies’ evolving perceptions of their security interests and efforts to contend with domestic political pressures, while identifying continuing overlaps and consistencies. This can be done, and has been done, on a bilateral basis—by encouraging, for example, Japan’s continued financial contributions to Afghanistan’s reconstruction even after the Maritime Self-Defense Forces curtailed their Indian Ocean refueling operation. There is also ample space for more effective multilateral security arrangements within the region. The United States could attempt to resuscitate a strategic dialogue in support of trilateral (with Japan and Australia) or quadrilateral (with the United States, Japan, Australia, and South Korea) arrangements.

As required by its hedging strategy, the United States will be compelled to engage China on matters of security. As the 2010 QDR pointed out, China’s growing military power should allow it to play “a more substantial and constructive role in international affairs.”<sup>48</sup> Yet China’s record for leadership or international cooperation, on security issues or otherwise, is not a strong one. Rarely has the PRC readily adopted a constructive

role or set aside its narrow interests to address an issue of global import: take, for example, Chinese intransigence on the issue of climate change, or Beijing's foot dragging on the question of United Nations' sanctions on Iran.

As Pyongyang's most important treaty ally and economic partner, China is considered key to shaping North Korean behavior and achieving denuclearization on the peninsula. And yet Beijing has repeatedly failed to perform in his regard, resisting punitive sanctions against North Korea and otherwise coddling Pyongyang, as seen in its anodyne response to the sinking of the *Cheonan*.

The United States, finally, should heed the concerns of its allies in recognizing that as China moves perceptibly toward parity with the United States in terms of nuclear and conventional capabilities in the region, Beijing's assertiveness will only grow. China already is testing U.S. and allied commitment to maintaining the regional status quo, declaring, for example, the South China Sea a "core national interest" in which it holds "indisputable sovereignty," and bristling at U.S. efforts to suggest otherwise.<sup>49</sup>

The shape of the future international security environment in Asia, therefore, depends upon steps taken by the United States today. The security, prosperity, and freedom enjoyed in recent decades throughout Asia have depended in large part upon the preservation of American power in the region. Likewise, the United States' Asian alliances, which have been so critical in maintaining regional stability, have remained healthy and effective thanks to confidence in American security guarantees. Should the uncertainties emerging within the United States' historic alliances be allowed to metastasize, power dynamics within the region will undoubtedly begin to shift in ways that compromise U.S. strategic objectives in Asia.



## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>For recent discussions about the efficiency of the U.S.-led security architecture in Asia, see, for example, Emma Chanlett-Avery and Bruce Vaughn, “Emerging Trends in the Security Architecture in Asia: Bilateral and Multilateral Ties Among the United States, Japan, Australia, and India,” Congressional Research Service, January 7, 2008, RL34312; Dick K. Nanto, “East Asian Regional Architecture: New Economic and Security Arrangements and U.S. Policy,” Congressional Research Service, April 15, 2010, RL33653; Nick Bisley, “Asian Security Architectures” in Ashley J. Tellis and Michael Wills, eds., *Strategic Asia 2007-08: Domestic Political Change and Grand Strategy* (Washington, D.C.: National Bureau of Asian Research, 2007).

<sup>2</sup> As in the case in Indonesia, Thailand, and Vietnam.

<sup>3</sup> David E. Sanger and Peter Baker, “Obama Limits When U.S. Would Use Nuclear Arms,” *New York Times*, April 5, 2010.

<sup>4</sup> “Defending Australia in the Asia Pacific Century: Force 2030,” Australian Government, Department of Defence, p. 28, 32-33; available at [http://www.defence.gov.au/whitepaper/docs/defence\\_white\\_paper\\_2009.pdf](http://www.defence.gov.au/whitepaper/docs/defence_white_paper_2009.pdf).

<sup>5</sup> Andrew Shearer, “Will America Defend Its Asian Allies?” *Wall Street Journal*, February 5, 2010.

<sup>6</sup> U.S. Department of Defense, Quadrennial Defense Review Report, February 2010, p. 31; available at [http://www.defense.gov/qdr/images/QDR\\_as\\_of\\_12\\_Feb10\\_1000.pdf](http://www.defense.gov/qdr/images/QDR_as_of_12_Feb10_1000.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> Thom Shanker and Christopher Drew, “Pentagon Faces Growing Pressure to Trim Budget,” *New York Times*, July 22, 2010.

<sup>8</sup> “The QDR in Perspective: Meeting America’s National Security Needs in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century,” the final report of the Quadrennial Defense Review Independent Panel, co-chaired by Stephen Hadley and William Perry, July 2010, p. 61; available at <http://www.usip.org/files/qdr/qdrreport.pdf>.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, 52.

<sup>10</sup> “International Perspectives on the Nuclear Posture Review,” remarks by Gary Samore, White House Coordinator for Arms Control and Weapons of Mass Destruction, Proliferation, and Terrorism, at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, April 22, 2010; available at <http://www.carnegieendowment.org/files/0422carnegie-samore.pdf>.

<sup>11</sup> U.S. Department of Defense, Nuclear Posture Review Report, April 2010, p. iii.

<sup>12</sup> Blaine Harden, “Japanese Prime Minister Yukio Hatoyama Resigns,” *Washington Post*, June 2, 2010

<sup>13</sup> “Japan Must Prepare for ‘Contingencies’: Panel,” *Agence France-Presse*, July 26, 2010. Available at:

<http://defensenews.com/story.php?i=4724246&c=AS&I&s=TOP>; “Japan to Beef Up Submarines to Counter Chinese Power,” *Chosun Ilbo*, July 28, 2010, available at [http://english.chosun.com/site/data/html\\_dir/2010/07/26/2010072601021.html](http://english.chosun.com/site/data/html_dir/2010/07/26/2010072601021.html); Wendell Minnick, “Panel Recommends Japan Abandon Cold War Defense Policies,” *Defense News*, August 3, 2010; Michael Auslin, “Japan Needs a Defense Plan,” *The Wall Street Journal Asia*, October 27, 2010, available at: <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052702303341904575577021971573604.html>

<sup>14</sup> See Keith Payne et al, *U.S. Extended Deterrence and Assurance for Allies in Northeast Asia* (National Institute Press, March 2010), and James L. Schoff, “Realigning Priorities: The U.S.-Japan Alliance and the Future of Extended Deterrence,” *The Institute for Foreign Policy Analysis*, March 2009.

<sup>15</sup> See “The Japan-U.S. Alliance Toward 2020,” Institute for International Policy Studies, September 2009, p. 10; available at <http://www.iips.org/jussec/J-US-SEC2009e.pdf>. Also, Barry Blechman, “Extended Deterrence: Cutting Edge of the Nuclear Deterrence Debate,” *Stimson Center*, May 28, 2009; available at <http://www.stimson.org/pub.cfm?id=811>.

<sup>16</sup> “Defending Australia in the Asia Pacific Century: Force 2030,” Australian Department of Defense, Defense White Paper 2009, p. 28, 31; available at [http://www.defence.gov.au/whitepaper/docs/defence\\_white\\_paper\\_2009.pdf](http://www.defence.gov.au/whitepaper/docs/defence_white_paper_2009.pdf).

<sup>17</sup> Ibid, 11.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid, 50.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid, 16.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid, 86.

<sup>22</sup> Statement of the Hon. Stephen Smith, MP, Australian Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade, upon the release of the U.S. Nuclear Posture Review, April 7, 2010; available at [www.foreignminister.gov.au/releases/2010/fa-s100407.html](http://www.foreignminister.gov.au/releases/2010/fa-s100407.html).

<sup>23</sup> Raoul E. Heinrichs, “Australia’s Nuclear Dilemma: Dependence, Deterrence or Denial?” *Security Challenges*, vol. 4 (Autumn 2008), pp. 55-67.

<sup>24</sup> “Eliminating Nuclear Threats: A Practical Agenda for Global Policymakers,” Report of the International Commission on Nuclear Non-Proliferation and Disarmament, December 2009, p.65-66; available at [http://www.icnnd.org/reference/reports/ent/pdf/ICNND\\_Report-EliminatingNuclearThreats.pdf](http://www.icnnd.org/reference/reports/ent/pdf/ICNND_Report-EliminatingNuclearThreats.pdf).

<sup>25</sup> Jim Garamone, “U.S., South Korea to Delay Transfer of Wartime Control,” *American Forces Press Service*, June 28, 2010; available at [www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=59809](http://www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=59809).

<sup>26</sup> Keith Payne et al, *U.S. Extended Deterrence and Assurance for Allies in Northeast Asia* (Washington, D.C.: National Institute Press, March 2010), p. 40.

<sup>27</sup> Spokesperson's Commentary on the US Government's 2010 Nuclear Posture Review, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Government of Korea, April 8, 2010; available at <http://news.mofat.go.kr/enewspaper/articleview.php?master=&aid=2754&ssid=24&mvid=788>

<sup>28</sup> Annual Report 2008-2009, Ministry of Defence, Government of India, p. 6; available at <http://mod.nic.in/reports/AR-eng-2009.pdf>

<sup>29</sup> Daniel Blumenthal, "India Prepares for a Two-Front War," *Wall Street Journal*, March 1, 2010.

<sup>30</sup> Tim Sullivan and Michael Mazza, "The Next Nuclear Arms Race," *Wall Street Journal Asia*, September 27, 2010, available at <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052748703384204575509163717438530.html>; Rajat Pandit, "Nuclear-tipped Agni V can hit all of China, Pakistan," *Times of India*, February 11, 2010, available at <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/N-tipped-Agni-V-can-hit-all-of-China-Pak/articleshow/5558520.cms>.

<sup>31</sup> Deputy Secretary of State James Steinberg provided the first articulation of "strategic reassurance" in remarks at the Center for a New American Security, September 29, 2009.

<sup>32</sup> Jim Garamone, "Mullen: U.S.-India Ties Make Region, Globe More Secure," *American Forces Press Service*, July 23, 2010; available at [www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=60141](http://www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=60141).

<sup>33</sup> Text of Russia's Military Doctrine 2000 is available at [http://www.armscontrol.org/act/2000\\_05/dc3ma00?print](http://www.armscontrol.org/act/2000_05/dc3ma00?print); text of RMD 2010 is available at [http://merln.ndu.edu/whitepapers/Russia2010\\_English.pdf](http://merln.ndu.edu/whitepapers/Russia2010_English.pdf).

<sup>34</sup> Mark Stokes, *China's Nuclear Warhead Storage and Handling System*, Project 2049 Institute, Washington D.C., March 12, 2010, p. 13.

<sup>35</sup> U.S. Department of Defense, Annual Report to Congress on the Military Power of the People's Republic of China, 2009, p. 24.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> "Nuclear Weapons: Who Has What at a Glance," The Arms Control Association, Washington D.C.; available at <http://www.armscontrol.org/factsheets/Nuclearweaponswhohaswhat>.

<sup>38</sup> "India Tests Nuclear-Capable Missile: Defense Official," *Agence France-Presse*, November 23, 2009; available at <http://www.defensenews.com/story.php?i=4389380>.

<sup>39</sup> "Nuclear-tipped Agni-V can hit all of China, Pakistan," *The Times of India*, February 11, 2010; available at <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/N-tipped-Agni-V-can-hit-all-of-China-Pak/articleshow/5558520.cms>.

<sup>40</sup> Indian Ministry of Defence, Year-End Review, 2009, available at <http://pib.nic.in/release/release.asp?reid=56489>. Also, see Frank O'Donnell, "Managing Asia's Nuclear Rivalry," ISN Security Watch, June 16, 2010; available at <http://www.isn.ethz.ch/isn/Current-Affairs/Security-Watch/Detail/?lng=en&id=117570>.

<sup>41</sup> Y. Mallikarjun, "Interceptor Missile Hits the Bullseye," *The Hindu*, July 26, 2010; available at <http://www.thehindu.com/news/article535042.ece>.

<sup>42</sup> Bharath Gopaldaswamy and Harsh V Pant, "Does India Need Anti-Satellite Capability?," Rediff News, February 9, 2010; available at <http://news.rediff.com/column/2010/feb/09/does-india-need-anti-satellite-capability.htm>.

<sup>43</sup> David Sanger, "Pakistan Strife Raises U.S. Doubt on Nuclear Arms," *New York Times*, May 3, 2009. See also, Paul K. Kerr and Mary Beth Nitikin, "Pakistan's Nuclear Weapons: Proliferation and Security Issues," Congressional Research Service, February 23, 2010, RL34248.

<sup>44</sup> Kerr and Nitikin, "Pakistan's Nuclear Weapons: Proliferation and Security Issues," p. 4.

<sup>45</sup> Glenn Kessler, "Washington Objects to China-Pakistan Nuclear Deal," *Washington Post*, June 14, 2010.

<sup>46</sup> On force structure and defense resources, see "The QDR in Perspective: Meeting America's National Security Needs in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century," the final report of the Quadrennial Defense Review Independent Panel, co-chaired by Stephen Hadley and William Perry, July 2010; available at <http://www.usip.org/files/qdr/qdrreport.pdf>. On anti-access strategies in Asia, see Jan Van Tol et al, *AirSea Battle: A Point-of-Departure Operational Concept* (Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments, 2010), available at [www.csbaonline.org/4Publications/PubLibrary/R.20100518.Air\\_Sea\\_Battle\\_\\_A\\_/R.20100518.Air\\_Sea\\_Battle\\_\\_A\\_.pdf](http://www.csbaonline.org/4Publications/PubLibrary/R.20100518.Air_Sea_Battle__A_/R.20100518.Air_Sea_Battle__A_.pdf)

<sup>47</sup> In a speech before a meeting of the Business Executives for National Security, Defense Secretary Robert Gates explained "the current export-control regime impedes the effectiveness of our closest military allies, tests their patience and goodwill, and hinders their ability to cooperate with U.S. forces." Remarks at the Ronald Reagan Building and International Trade Center, Washington D.C., April 20, 2010.

<sup>48</sup> Quadrennial Defense Review Report 2010, p. 60.

<sup>49</sup> John Pomfret, "Beijing claims 'indisputable sovereignty' over South China Sea," *Washington Post*, July 31, 2010.

## COVER PHOTO

*U.S. Navy Photo: The ballistic submarine USS Maryland (SSBN 738)(G) during its 55th strategic deterrent patrol.*