



Alliances, Proliferation, and Escalation Risks in Northeast Asia

2021 Carnegie International Nuclear Policy Conference

Thursday June 24, 2021

Toby Dalton: Hello and welcome back to day three of the Carnegie International Nuclear Policy Conference. We have another excellent lineup this morning. First up is a panel to address alliances, proliferation and escalation risks in Northeast Asia. Immediately following that, we will have a remembrance for experts in our community who have passed away since our last conference in March of 2019. And then we'll close the conference with a panel on new technologies and the future of arms control.

Now turning to Northeast Asia, we have multiple actors with nuclear weapons, two alliances that incorporate extended nuclear deterrence, increasingly complicated and tense relations between United States and China, and growing North Korean nuclear capabilities. So the situation places considerable pressure on the ROK-US and Japan-US alliances to evolve to manage these threats, a topic which Under Secretary of Defense for Policy Colin Kahl alluded to in his remarks yesterday. Now part of that evolution is the acquisition by both Japan and South Korea of precision and conventional strike capabilities, which raises interesting questions about escalation risks and also about what these capabilities might signal, or not, about the potential that either Seoul or Tokyo might desire to acquire their own nuclear weapons in the future.

To explore these issues, we've got a great panel of experts deeply experienced with alliance management. We have Ambassador Harry Harris, former US Ambassador to South Korea and also a serving admiral in the US Navy and a head of US Pacific Command, Dr. Bo Ram Kwon, associate research fellow at the Korea Institute for Defense Analyses, Professor Hideshi Tokuchi, visiting professor at the National Graduate Institute for Policy Studies in Tokyo. And steering this conversation as moderator is Shaun Kim who most recently was senior advisor to the

ambassador at the US Embassy in Seoul, and has been working on non-proliferation issues in East Asia for many years. Welcome to all of you. Shaun, over to you.

Shaun Kim: Toby, thank you so much. Good morning and good evening to some of our panelists who are in Asia right now. We'll just jump in. I'll ask the first question to Dr. Kwon. Dr. Kwon, how would you characterize the bigger threats to the security environment in the region? Are US-ROK alliance deterrence measures sufficient to counter these threats?

Bo Ram Kwon: Well, thank you for giving me opportunity to go first. Well, I think last year was a very unusual year where we talked more about nontraditional security threats that then the ones that we're used to, the hard security threats. But it doesn't mean that they have gone away. They still exist. Actually, they're more severe and more difficult to work with. I think South Korea threat perceptions are composed of two parts, one is physical, and one is psychological. I think the physical sense, the North Korean missile and nuclear weapons program is the biggest threat. And then also we have China's military ambition and economic coercion, which is also a threat.

Psychologically, I think we talk a lot about it but I want to be upfront about it, is there is a threat of being dragged into great power competition. Our European allies signaled that at the G7 where they know that China is a big threat, but they're not comfortable with making this an ideological competition. Also, there's always also a threat for being abandoned by either the US, China or both because our government is being strategically ambiguous on many issues, so that's another threat there. I'm in Singapore right now and the rumor is that whatever vaccine you choose affects your foreign policy alignment, so that's what the state of the world is right now. It's sad on that point.

On the second part of your question whether our alliance is fit to deal with these threats, I think it is, but there is always room for improvement. When we think about the ROK-US alliance, I think there is the mechanics of this, and then the trust part of it. I think the trust part of it, we have to build back the trust but I think there is a big sense of relief that after President Biden took office that he's really mending ties with allies, so there is a big sense of relief there. More than 90% of Koreans argue that the alliance is necessary and it's importance and there is a high level of trust in the Biden administration.

But to point out that, not just Koreans but all US allies are not naively optimistic. Recent polls showed a couple of months ago that 16 allies of the US, they agree that relations with US will improve, but not drastically. So they are quite realistic about the challenges ahead. Then, speaking simply about the mechanics of the alliance, mechanics of the alliance included our

sufficient military deterrence capabilities on the ROK military side and also the extended deterrence part of the alliance. And I think in terms of our own capabilities, there has been a lot of focus on advanced intelligence surveillance, ballistic and cruise missiles lately, and think we'll get a large chance to talk about the implications of that later. I think I'll stop there.

Shaun Kim: Thank you so much. We'll be able to circle back to a lot of the items that you mentioned. We've had some technical difficulties and so unfortunately Ambassador Harris had to drop off. But fortunately we have Ankit Panda who can join. He is a Stanton Senior Fellow at Carnegie, and so we'll have him join. Actually, there he is. Hi, good morning, Ankit. Thank you so much for joining.

Ankit Panda: My pleasure. Thanks for having me.

Shaun Kim: So we've just discussed from the ROK's perspective the threat perception of the region and whether or not US-ROK deterrence measures are sufficient to counter those threats. We'll switch back to the US threat perception of the region, what we view as the biggest threats, and how that should inform US defense and deterrence priorities here on.

Ankit Panda: Sure, absolutely. So obviously, I think one of the major areas of continuity between the Trump and Biden administrations is treating the Indo-Pacific region and Northeast Asia being subsumed into the Indo-Pacific as the United States priority theater in the Asian-Pacific. And what we're seeing right now with the FY 2022 budget request and the Biden administration's broader strategic guidance, including the Interim National Security Guidance earlier this year is a lot of continuity in placing China at the center of things and really placing an emphasis on alliances. Of course, we've seen a lot of prominence been given to the alliances with Japan and South Korea with both in-person visits by the head of state and head of government of both countries to the United States with excellent, detailed long statements outlining a range of issues.

When it comes to capabilities though, we are of course, seeing the United States, we are foreseeing, with the acquisition of new capabilities that were prohibited for 32 years under the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty between the United States and Russia. Now with that treaty having been ended in August, 2019, the United States is building a range of capabilities, all conventional, primarily intended for deployment in Asia. Of course, difficult conversations within the alliances likely will begin soon. Although I think the administration is probably aware that deploying these capabilities on allied soil is probably going to be a bridge too far in the interim. So the capabilities then may be deployed in a rotational capacity. I also hope that we'll see a greater degree of coordination between our two alliances on the role that allied precision strike capabilities might play in managing escalation. And of course, for

our allies, given the last four years and the concerns that have persisted about extended nuclear deterrence alliance cohesion, I'm sure that there that those conversations will be an important feature of what the Biden administration chooses to focus on in Asia in the near term as well.

Shaun Kim:

Great, thank you. And Professor Tokuchi, so Ankit and Dr. Kwon have highlighted some of the key threats in the region that are confronting you as allies, is there anything else that you would add from Japan's perspective? And then secondarily, do you think that conventional means of deterrence are sufficient to counter these threats?

Hideshi Tokuchi: Well, first of all, thank you very much Dr. Kim. I thank you very much for having me in this very important event. And actually, Japan is geographically surrounded by two nuclear powers and one defacto nuclear player. As a matter of the threat perception of Japan, of course, the priority is on China and then North Korea, and then Russia, as shown in several national security documents of the Japanese government. And Japan is an island country and maritime state dependent much on free flow of materials and resources and commercial goods through maritime trading routes and free flow of Japanese and American forces for the national and regional security in this seascape. In the age of the great power rivalry, Japan is frontline state directly exposed to China's military threat.

As the Japanese Kuril is part of the First Island Chain, and the military balance is in the West side of the First Island Chain is being tilted towards China, Japan's own national security is also relevant throughout maritime expansion of China. The length of the Japanese Southwest Island chain stretching from Southern Kyushu Island toward the direction of Taiwan is around 1,200 kilometers while it is almost the same as the length of the main island of Japan, that long Southwest Island chain has been a kind of a power vacuum. And the major presence of considerable amount of Japanese and American forces over there are only on the main island of Okinawa. Protection of the Southwest island chain is critically important not to deteriorate the military balance in the region.

In addition, Chinese quiet invasion to the East and South China seas is continuing. And the Taiwan Strait is also a hotspot. Japan couldn't be indifferent to possible Taiwan contingencies, so it will affect Japan's own security. And the American military bases in Japan, such as Kadena, Misawa and Yokosuka which are necessary to generate US offensive combat power are said to be likely targets over China's precision strike. China could paralyze US power projection and put the US and Japan at grave risk. So reconstruction of strategic stability and alliance deterrent is critically important for both of us.

North Korea, of course, is another serious and immediate concern. And if I may borrow the Japanese government expression, "North Korea is assessed to have already Miniaturized Nuclear Weapons to fit ballistic missiles warheads. These military trends in North Korea pose grave and imminent threats to Japan's security and significantly undermine the peace and the security of the region and the international community."

We are not sure if the nuclear weapon is a stigmatized weapon for the north Koreans or not, but at least we cannot pretend that North Korea is not a nuclear power. It's not a matter of proliferation, but rather a matter of deterrence. And both North Korea and Russia are variables in the security environment surrounding Japan. But the biggest military pressure comes from China. Many Japanese people are concerned about the situation involving the Japanese Senkaku Island in East China Sea, but from the viewpoint of overall military balance in the region, the missile gap is also posing a serious question for all of us. China has one of the most powerful land-based conventional missile arsenals in the world. US doesn't possess comparable land-based conventional military forces.

If China had been a signatory to INF Treaty, roughly 95% of China missiles would be non-compliant. It's a very famous story right now. The importance of a number of naval and air bases in Japan, and also in Guam, could not be overstated for offensive combat capability of the United States in the region. So the Japanese alliance efforts to fill the missile gap is very much urgent and I don't think that conventional means will be able to replace the necessity for nuclear weapons, even if such conventional capabilities are so powerful. So simply, having more ladders will be better for escalation control in enhancing the credibility of deterrence.

Shaun Kim:

Great. Thank you so much, professor. So there was a point that Ankit mentioned earlier, and just in terms of the difficulty that our alliances in the region have endured, have gone through over the last four years. And we do see both Japan and the Republic of Korea developing more capable, conventional strike systems. So I guess the question is, why? Recognizing that, of course, conventional means are not sufficient on their own to deter the PRC or DPRK or the identified threats so far. So I'll start with Dr. Kwon. But Dr. Kwon, if you could explain from your perspective why Korea has decided to invest in more conventional strike capabilities. I'll bring up RMG right now. I'll just leave that out there if you want to touch upon that this early on in the conversation, but we'll start with you and go to Professor Tokuchi.

Bo Ram Kwon:

Okay. I think when you asked the question, you want to ask, are we hedging, right? And I think part of it is yes, there is some alliance anxiety there. We have experienced a rough four years. And I'd say, it's not all. I think there are two important things we need to think about. The first thing is there is a lot of independent strategic thinking involved where our

case being very realistic about structural changes as well as the evolving threat of North Korea. In this year already in January and March, North Korea has had nuclear missile tests. They say that they've completed making short range missiles that can directly threaten Seoul and the metropolitan area. And in March, they tested a solid fuel ballistic missile, which is also a threatening act. And also the second part is I think ROK wants to be more of an autonomous power, more sovereign power in terms of defense.

And so not as a build on to the Alliance, but also as a standalone. Again, I'm here in Singapore, and the two things I hear a lot is that South Korea is too preoccupied with North Korea, and that it's too preoccupied with the US alliance. We are all in the Indo Pacific area, but these kinds of perception, I think, move us and incentivize us to become more independent. And because we can't develop nuclear weapons on our own, conventional weapons is the rational choice. I'll put it at that. I might get back to RMG later.

Shaun Kim: Okay. Professor Tokuchi, would you like to add anything to that?

Hideshi Tokuchi: Yes. I'd like to talk a little bit about the Japanese efforts. There are two points here. First, probably you have the extension of the range of Japanese ground forces so-called SSM-1 missile in mind. So in terms of the SSM-1 missile, it's a part of Japanese efforts for Island defense in the Southwest region. And when the new development is done in five years or so, the Japanese ground force will acquire standoff attack capability against invading ships. It is an effort to offset China's advantage in the First Island Chain. However, it will not be able to offset China's ground missile force and its air force from the mainland. Enhanced missile defense system wouldn't be enough to counter these capabilities.

Also in order to counter North Korea satellite missile attacks, Japan's capability to counter attack North Korea's hard targets such as missile launch sites would be necessary. This is my second point, so-called the contest strike capability study. Actually, it was former Prime Minister, Shinzo Abe's personal agenda item. I'm not sure how serious right now the Japanese government is on this subject. It doesn't seem to be prioritized at all as the resources, particularly, financial resources are increasingly limited, its opportunity cost will be very expensive. And personally, just personally though, I would speculate that the government will make a certain decision in two years when the current five-year defense build program is over and is replaced by a new one.

I can't predict the outcome of the study, but the study and the potential extension... I'm sorry. Potential intention behind the study shouldn't be construed as a deviation or drift from the alliance relationship with the United States. It shouldn't be called independent capability, actually. It

wouldn't be a misleading label. There are two reasons. First, Japan couldn't acquire and operate such capabilities without a closer cooperation and the coordination with the United States, technology-wise and intelligence-wise. Presumably, both governments have been working together for some years to define a new set of roles, missions and capabilities for the regional security post INF age. It's an effort to strengthen the US deterrence. That's my impression.

Shaun Kim:

Thank you, professor Tokuchi. And you make a very important point. These aren't necessarily independent capability. Some of them are, and obviously the ROK's the Kill Chain KMD and Massive Punishment those are independent capabilities within the alliance framework, within the alliance deterrence rubric. So Ankit as our allies develop both independent and also combined conventional capabilities, what are the implications for future US capabilities on the conventional side? How do we nest our capabilities with increasingly advanced capabilities on the ROK and Japan side?

Ankit Panda:

Right. So I think that's absolutely a key question. Particularly, one of the themes on this panel today is talking about how escalation might be managed in the future context in Northeast Asia. I'll also just need to remind viewers that we heard yesterday from Dr. Colin Kahl that the Biden administration is well aware of the multipolar nature of nuclear challenges in particular. And I think we've already heard from my co-panelists today about some of these multilateral challenges in Northeast Asia, where you have China, Russia, North Korea. Just one example I'll give is that a lot of these conventional precision strike capabilities that might be developed either with China or North Korea in mind, of course, the ability of these capabilities to target the other country need to be considered.

So certain capabilities, for instance, the long range hypersonic weapon, if that is pursued and deployed ultimately to whole targets in China at risk, it also, I think has contingencies from North Korea where we need to be very clear about our combined alliance concept for how these weapons will actually contribute to deterrence and potentially war fighting in various scenarios. I think the question you raised is, I think, an area where we're going to need to have a lot of coordination, not only bilaterally within our two alliances, but increasingly trilaterally, just to broaden the scope a little bit. It's not only Japan's 2018 National Defense Program Guidelines, it's not only South Korea's 2021- 2025 Intermediate-Term National Defense Plans. The Australians last year also conducted a defense strategic update in which they saw a much greater role for conventional missile strike capabilities.

So particularly in terms of discussions about future contingencies on the Korean Peninsula and especially the Taiwan Strait, I think these

capabilities need to be considered in a holistic sense in the context of our alliances. And of course, as we all know, the Alliance structure that we have in Asia is nowhere near what we have in Europe in the transatlantic context in terms of NATO and integrated planning. So there is a greater need, I think, for especially Alliance managers in Washington to take this big picture and consider how these capabilities are really going to come together to contribute to what is, I think, also a fundamental shifting nature of our conventional deterrence goals in the Indo-Pacific region.

One of the things, I think, both the Trump administration and the Biden administration have contended with is that just given the military buildup that we're seeing in China, the United States is beginning to figure out that it is in many ways cheaper to practice deterrence by denial in the Indo-Pacific, particularly within the First Island Chain than it is to pursue the older goals that we had primarily during the Obama administration of using our conventional capabilities to assure access for our own military forces, the US Navy, the US Air Force into the First Island Chain. Just given the buildup that we're seeing in China, that might not be feasible, so then not only do these longer range capabilities and allied capabilities come into play in a much greater way, but I think those holistic conversations really will need to happen to make sure that these concepts are aware of the unintended escalatory potential that underlies them.

Shaun Kim:

And in an effort to manage escalation, obviously, trilateral coordination will be vital to that. Given where we are currently in terms of the political landscape... I'm switching to Dr. Kwon and Professor Tokuchi's views on whether we can coordinate trilaterally, and how you assess current state of play and what we can do to improve that. Dr. Kwon, I'll start with you.

Bo Ram Kwon:

Okay. So let me think. I think trilateral cooperation has had its challenges, but I think the sentiment is changing a little bit. I've asked some of my Japanese colleagues what they feel, and they tell me the opinion they read, they have softened a little bit in the last couple of months. I think if we focus on deterring against North Korean threat, I think we can make more concrete, the trilateral cooperation that we haven't been able to do in the past several years. I think there have been some ideas about how to alleviate the risks of conventional capability building and how to rebuild a trust for extended deterrence. And I think from the US side, there have been some suggestions about building a nuclear planning group, such groups like that, that have both Korea and Japan as members.

Some have suggested bringing Australia in because we're all US allies and because we have bilateral mechanisms to deal with nuclear issues, grouping them together is natural. And I think this is pretty new idea. I think people have come to Seoul to introduce that idea to some of the experts. Maybe professor Tokuchi has heard of that too, or maybe Japan has a view on that, I'm curious to know.

Hideshi Tokuchi: May I?

Shaun Kim: Yes, please.

Hideshi Tokuchi: Okay. Well, two points. First, Japan and South Korea are the only two countries in the entire Indo-Pacific to have buttress robust to US military presence. In the case of, for example, Korea contingencies, US military combat operations will be undertaken from Japan and the Japanese logistical assistance to the US military operations will be indispensable. And also Japan's own national security would be at stake at that time. So the triangular security cooperation would be very, very variable. The weakest link is obviously Japan and South Korea relation. The security relation between the two countries is always a dependent variable of all the overall bilateral relations. Decoupling of security relations from other bilateral issues between the two countries became almost impossible. Actually, although I worked many years to improve the bilateral security relationships in my previous life, I'm very much pessimistic right now.

The Japanese side is profoundly Korea fatigue. It's an very unfortunate situation. It would be difficult to find any leverages for the time being. And recently, I read Dr. Bo Ram Kwon's excellent article on the trilateral cooperation with much interest. As Dr. Kwon argued in that article, if I understood it correctly actually, the three countries should keep expectations low and maintain diplomatic engagement on multiple levels, and functional and practical cooperation agenda should be pursued. I agree with Dr. Kwon that low profile diplomacy should be given priority to restore lines of communication between Japan and South Korea. And actually, it is also an important task for think tanks and academics like us. And in terms of the nuclear sharing or nuclear planning, some American experts and also regional experts, including from Japan and South Korea and Australia, recently published a policy recommendation, probably all of us know about it.

According to that recommendation by CCGA, the US government should establish nuclear planning group similar to NATO's nuclear planning group. And this is a very interesting recommendation. And when this recommendation was rolled out, some Japanese media publicized it in Japan, however, as far as I know, I don't see any big public debate on this issue. So this issue does not seem to be high on agenda right now. That's my impression right now.

Shaun Kim: Understood. And relatedly, Dr. Kwon in Korea, is there an appetite for a NATO-like model? And this was discussed as far back as five, 10 years ago. It's been an on and off debate, but is there a demand signal or appetite for that in Seoul from your perspective, whether it's for deployment of tactical nuclear weapons, or a nuclear planning group, NATO style arrangement?

Bo Ram Kwon: I think those kind of demands have ebbs and flow from the conservative part of the population. And I think if you ask the average Korean, "Would you agree to having tactical nuclear weapons in Korea?" And you explained the different situations, a lot of them would say yes. But the thing is they don't actually understand what that means. And if you change the conditions, if you explain more about US alliance credibility, they might change their response. If you talk more about the costs and the risks, and then they will change the response. So I don't think there's an entrenched opinion about this, at least in a general sense, and I know there is certain pockets who have talked about it more in recent months. I think it gives us homework, I think, US homework and also Korea homework in why we face these kinds of questions.

I think at the heart of it is, well, extended deterrence, which is the heart of this question wasn't very credible to begin with because the Pacific Ocean is so vast. It would take time for US nuclear assets to get to Korea. Starting from the beginning, there was that problem. I think the Trump administration wasn't very good at reassuring allies about extended deterrence. He talked about the possibility of preemptive strike against North Korea at one point, and even said that he would accept allies developing their own nuclear weapons, so that really didn't help. And so building trust is an issue there. And so I think the first thing on the list to do is to build that trust and reduce the threat perception gap.

And I think perhaps what we could do is talk more about how to make this extended deterrence more of a clear doctrine, make it more detailed, like what does it entail? I think people have a lot of questions about... Even among the experts, there is no consensus, I think. That's something we can work on. Maybe reviving some of the consultation mechanisms, the EDSCG, it's a long-term Extended Deterrence Strategy and Consultation Group. Those kinds of mechanisms, if they're revived, I think they will assure a lot of those people with those kinds of demands. But I want to say that there are also voices against redeploying nuclear weapons or nuclear sharing. And they say, because it just increases regional instability, and then arms race and all of that instability arguments there. Of course, the homework for the ROK, I think, is we need better public diplomacy and more communication with public, both experts and their general public.

And I think even me, if I asked myself how capable is the US, how willing is the US to deploy nuclear weapons in this kind of environment to the Korean Peninsula, I don't know quite, but I think with the Biden administration talking about non-proliferation, talking about making institutions matter again, I don't think he will cross the lines of the NPT or US law to redeploy nuclear weapons on foreign soil. So I think we need better quality information, and maybe Ankit can add to that too.

Shaun Kim: Ankit, would you like to add something before I switch over to some of the questions from our audience?

Ankit Panda: Yeah, absolutely. So the nuclear planning group proposals... Look, I'll just be frank. I'm a little skeptical that the full range of problems that have been fraying at our alliances over the last four years can be solved necessarily by applying the nuclear hammer. And so there are problems within the alliance that I think are more fundamental issues of just the software. We've been talking a lot about hardware capabilities and I put nuclear weapons and even nuclear planning at an operational level as part of the hardware suite that makes for a healthy Alliance, either in the US-Korea or US-Japan contexts. But really, I think, there are other software issues, and even when it comes to nuclear weapons, I think, one of the fundamental concerns that really prevailed in South Korea, for instance, in 2017 during the days of fire and fury was concerns that the United States might actually use nuclear weapons or carry out significant military action without sufficient consultation.

We have effectively a nuclear monarchy in the United States, and that not only means that the president has sole authority within the American political system, but that really extends to our alliances as we don't actually have to consult our allies before the president authorizes nuclear use. And I think even if that's not formally changed in any real way, communicating to the heads of state and heads of government of our allies, particularly in Northeast Asia, that those kinds of consultations would be something that we would offer would I think be a very positive signal from the Biden administration. Our allies don't want us starting a nuclear war in their neighborhoods without their consent and knowledge. And so that I think can in many ways offer the political buttressing to the alliance.

And then, we can talk about the set of capabilities, particularly the fate of the new Sea-Launched Cruise Missile that the Biden administration did include in its fiscal year 2022 budget request and what role that might or might not play in reassuring allies. But when I sort of look at the experience with the last four years, I don't see a deficiency in US nuclear assurance for our allies. It was really more a question of the extent to which our political leadership was committed to the defense of Japan and South Korea and under what conditions. And I think doing that hard work, which I actually do think the Biden administration's been doing a good job of is going to get us to a better place in terms of keeping these lines as healthy and contributing to Northeast Asian security in a way that stabilizing.

Shaun Kim: I would agree with that. I'll switch over to some of the questions that we're getting from the audience. Gary Sampson asks next month the PRC-DPRK alliance is up for renewal, what are your views on how that alliance

portends for the issues being discussed here today? I'm happy to open this up to all of our panelists. Ankit, if you want to take the first stab at this, and then we can go around.

Ankit Panda: Yeah. What a great question. I definitely didn't expect that to come up during this panel, but I'm really delighted to did. Yeah, so I believe it's July 12th. And during the Kim Jong-un era, the only times I've really seen this celebrated or mentioned in North Korean state media has been during significant anniversaries at the five-year intervals. So this July will be interesting to see if this is remembered, particularly given that my analysis of the situation since the collapse of the Hanoi Summit has been that Kim Jong-un is putting more eggs in the China basket than he was necessarily before Hanoi. So if that alliance is celebrated and recalled, and just in case the viewers aren't aware, article two of this agreement did include a mutual defense clause. There has been a lot of debate, and I would say the consensus among most analysts now is that article two of that treaty no longer really applies to circumstances in which North Korea would initiate nuclear use.

That in that case, the PRC would no longer honor that component, but it would potentially play a role if North Korea does face attack from the United States or South Korea. So obviously, if you're North Korea and you have this kind of an arrangement with China, a major benefactor and military power, for it to have any kind of deterrence effects against South Korea, the United States and Japan, there would to be a degree of clarity under what circumstances this treaty would or would not take effect. So that's my overview of what I'm looking for, but absolutely, it will be interesting to see if this 60th anniversary is actually commemorated by both sides.

Shaun Kim: Absolutely. Dr. Kwon.

Bo Ram Kwon: Let me add, I think it signals that China wants to play more of a mediating role or become more part of any de-nuclearization dialogue that happens between the US and North Korea. I think on North Korea side, aside from all the security benefits of having a good relationship with China, I think because they recently said they were going to complete tactical nuclear weapons, they need the materials, and because they are sanctioned so hard, I think they want to use China to get some of those strategic materials. And we've learned in the past couple months that securing supply chains is a really big issue right now, and I think for North Korea, China is the place to go under extreme sanctions, so I think we're going to see a lot of exchanges there. That's what I see there.

Shaun Kim: Great. Professor Tokuchi, would you like to add anything?

Hideshi Tokuchi: Yes. Only a little bit though. Right now, North Korea has been suffering triple difficulties, COVID-19, natural disasters since last year, and also, sanctions, international sanctions, so I suppose that North Korea expects China in a certain degree, but I'm not sure the Chinese response will be because China always says to the Japanese like myself that the alliance relationship is a legacy of the Cold War. Today's world should be out of alliance relationships, but China has alliance relationship with North Korea. Some years ago I asked them why do you have alliance relationship with North Korea? And some of them said that the North Korea-China alliance relationship is completely different from the robust alliance relationship between Japan and the United States. No joint command structure, no joint exercise, no joint planning, those kinds of things, so completely different from the US alliance relationship. Very interesting. I'm sorry, I couldn't answer the very important question, but I'm just curious to know how the Chinese view their alliance relationship with North Korea.

Shaun Kim: It's an excellent question and one that we'll have to see unfold especially as the PRC-DPRK alliance meeting renewal happens in the next couple of days. We talked a lot about the US and ROK and Japan alliances and how we're all reacting to and adjusting to the enhancements on conventional capability side. I'll bring RMG back into this now, Dr. Kwon and Ankit and Professor Tokuchi as well. So as the PRC and DPRK look at the RMG being terminated, what are some of the regional reactions and perceptions that you think will emanate from the recent termination? Dr. Kwon.

Bo Ram Kwon: Okay. I was actually curious to know the regional reactions and I sort of searched, and I think on the Japan side, there were just some formal language on just the facts. I think there weren't a lot of emotions there. I think China, they're probably not that happy, but then on the other side, I think they would be less threatened to have South Korea having more control of our military capabilities than the US having more control of our military capabilities. I think that's sort of the flip two side issue there. From Europe, I think I hear some voices saying, well, that might create an asymmetry. Maybe North Korea are less likely to come to the table, maybe even try to provoke, and trying to ruin whatever we have already. But I think having strong capabilities may actually help with negotiations. I don't think at this point, if we start restraining ourselves that North Korea will suddenly come to the table, they might be more emboldened to do other things. I think it's a very multi-dimensional issue. I'm really curious what other people think. And also, I'm curious what the US response is too.

Shaun Kim: Ankit, do you want to provide the US response first or should we go to-

Ankit Panda: Yeah. Well, sure. Obviously, I just speak for myself in many ways, but one of the things I will point out on the US view of this issue, and the issue of

hedging has come up a lot, if you read the Moon-Biden joint statement, and particularly the paragraph where the language on the termination of the RMG appears, it appears in a paragraph about South Korea non-proliferation credential. So implicitly the message is the Biden administration recognizes that South Korea is a member of the NPT in good standing committed to never acquire nuclear weapons in perpetuity and meets its nonproliferation obligations. And then the next sentence of course notes that the two leaders agreed to terminate the RMG.

I will also say on the technical side of things, my view of the RMG, particularly it's actually worth pointing out that the contents of the full RMG, at least for those of us on the outside are classified, so a lot of the context of what specific technologies were included... For instance, a lot of folks were surprised when the 2020 decision to lift the component of the RMG is affecting South Korea use of solid-propellant for space launch vehicles was sort of announced.

It was sort of assumed to have just been something that governed the range and capabilities of South Korean missiles. In 2017 when the payload limit was scrapped, effectively in my sense, that terminated a lot of the value of the RMG, because you can't really reason about a missile's capabilities independent of payload. So if you have no payload limit, you can go ahead and build a missile that's designed to carry a very heavy payload, and in the future that missile could then become a longer range missile with a lighter payload, and this is sort of exactly what happened with the [inaudible 00:44:52] before, a 2000 kilogram payload, conventional, and now with the termination of the RMG, I'm sure South Korea's agency for defense development can very easily move forward technology and convert it pretty much overnight into a medium range ballistic missile if they chose to do that.

So in many ways, the RMG has been sort of slowing. And when we sort of go back to the origins of the RMG in the classified MOU in 1979, that of course comes just a few years after South Korea terminates its own pursuit of an independent nuclear deterrent under Park Chung-hee when the United States did have strong concerns about south Korea's potential pursuit of a nuclear capability. So obviously, I think the parsimonious approach to understanding south Korea's defense posture under conservatives and progressives alike, is when we just look at the threat environment around South Korea, primarily the one in North Korea, especially since 2016, 2017. The reaction that we've seen in Seoul and particularly, the array of procurement goals that were laid out in the 2020, 2025 Intermediate-Term National Defense Plan really seemed like the sort of reaction you would expect to see.

That's my view of the RMG issue that again, unfortunately like the INF Treaty, it is one of those features of missile restraints in Northeast Asia

that has unfortunately now apparently according to political leaders, outlived its usefulness.

Shaun Kim: Right. Professor Tokuchi, in terms of reactions-

Hideshi Tokuchi: Yes. By the way, I do correctly understand that RMG stands for Revised Missile Guidelines, right?

Shaun Kim: Yes. That's correct.

Hideshi Tokuchi: Okay. I'm very sorry that I'm not accustomed to such an acronym. So this is my first time to hear that expression. So I'm very sorry. But well, as far as the Revised Missile Guidelines is concerned, it's important to keep pressuring North Korea harder than ever before, at least multilateral efforts including military efforts of like-minded countries are indispensable. And at this moment, I'm not sure if it is welcomed in Japan or not, but in a book published around the nine months ago in Japan, one of the authors who is a well-known security experts in Japan says in that book that the US-ROK alliance cooperation is more advanced than the Japan-US alliance cooperation as far as intermediate range missiles are concerned. And according to him, South Korea can develop ground based anti-surface missiles, which US was banned to develop under the INF Treaty restriction.

So it was considered as division of labor between the two countries to prepare for Korea contingencies and deep strike against the North Korean territory before the US establishes air superiority will be possible by the new North... Sorry, South Korean efforts. The expert views that the Korean effort as an advanced example of alliance cooperation on the immediate range missile. As far as I know, that's one expert view in Japan. I just want to introduce it to you.

Shaun Kim: Great. Thank you. Dr. Kwon.

Bo Ram Kwon: I just wanted to add, I think what I see as our government's response to this, I think there's a lot of enthusiasm, not just for the security aspects of it, but the non-security aspects of it. So now finally, we can make Korean GPS, UAVs, and launch our own satellites. And so it's more of a sovereignty issue and autonomy issue that's very dear to the administration right now. And I think in a true sense now, the ROK-US Alliance is becoming a comprehensive strategic alliance. As Professor Tokuchi mentioned in his citing the expert, I think it shows that it's concrete now, it's not just words, but it really shows you an action that's meaningful.

Shaun Kim: Right. Thank you. I'm going to switch back to a question from the audience, Brice, and this is related to some of this, obviously, discussions

that we've been having. But Brice Fincher asks what differences exist between the French experience during the '60s and '70s and the foreseeable South Korean and Japanese experiences during the next decade or so? As a conventional defense against the PLA becomes unlikely to succeed, or if the US rethinks its security commitments, should we expect the south Koreans or Japanese to follow the example of Gaullist France in developing an independent nuclear force? That was a very long question, I'm happy to repeat. But Ankit, did you want to take the first stab?

Ankit Panda:

Yeah. Absolutely. Just going back to the theme of this panel on hedging, I think the fundamental... So right now, I am less concerned about direct short term nuclear hedging by Japan and South Korea, even with all the discussions we've had about capabilities. What would change my view on that, and I think what would significantly shift the debate in both countries would be as the question hints, if the United States rethought its security commitments. If the United States fundamentally got out of the extended deterrence business in Northeast Asia in any kind of formal way, I think that is what changes to debate, quite fundamentally, I think in both countries if those assurances do completely evaporate. I don't see that happening in the short term. But of course, a lot of folks didn't expect the 2016 election to go the way that it did, and we're going to have another election in this country in 2024, and so fundamentally I can recognize if security planners and long-term strategists in Tokyo and Seoul are now paying more attention to American domestic politics and how that might feed into some of these decisions in Northeast Asia.

That older assumption about American presidents fundamentally sharing a long running view on the value of alliances and extended deterrence is something that our friends and allies in Europe and Asia alike can no longer take for granted. That said, it is worth talking about the Gaullist experience, because the fundamental concern for Charles de Gaulle was one about credibility, the issue of decoupling that the United States would not allow Portland to suffer a nuclear attack to save Paris. And so today we've got the same conversations around Seattle for Seoul, Toledo for Tokyo so to speak.

And again, just to go back to that software hardware analogy, I fundamentally see these again, as problems of software, ensuring that the United States offers our allies the kinds of credible assurances in peace time that prevent those decoupling problem from becoming too acute. And of course, decoupling is not something that is static. This was something that North Korea introduced in 2017 by first demonstrating a rudimentary minimal capability to hold the US homeland at risk with thermonuclear weapons, and as the north Korean threat continues to grow in quantitative and qualitative ways, I think it's going to take a lot of active, hard alliance management work to make sure that this decoupling problem doesn't seep

into longer term concerns in Tokyo and Seoul that might then prompt a more serious consideration of hedging and ultimately pursuing nuclear weapons.

Shaun Kim: Dr. Kwon, just go ahead.

Bo Ram Kwon: Very briefly. I think that question reminds me of Jennifer Lind's article I read a few days ago about what would bring Japan and South Korea closer. I think she talked about two things. One is a common threat, a really big one. And then US commitment being weakened. I think as Ankit mentioned, if US changed its commitment and decided to pack and leave, then probably we would start to work with each other before we decided to have nukes on our own. I think we could see that in stages, that's more likely, so we would see a reversing of decoupling. That's just something that came up to my mind.

Shaun Kim: Thank you. Professor Tokuchi, go ahead.

Hideshi Tokuchi: Yes, just in brief. Japan hosts more than 50,000 US troops in Japan including one carrier battle group. And Yokosuka is the only home port abroad of the US carrier battle group. If Japan doesn't host the US Navy and Air Force, then the US national interest in this region will not be secured. So the US presence on the soil of Japan is a clear sign of US commitment to the region and also to Japan. Of course, Japan is surrounded by three nuclear players, nuclear extended deterrence, and US nuclear umbrella is very much important to Japan. However, one thing is that the US stationing in Japan, permanent stationing in such a big number, that's one thing. And the secondary, look at Japan's geography. It lacks strategic depth, so it is not a good option for Japan to acquire nuclear weapons.

Shaun Kim: Great. Thank you.

Hideshi Tokuchi: The enhancement of the credibility of the nuclear umbrella is more important than Japan's own nuclear capability.

Shaun Kim: Excellent. Thank you. And on that note, I'd like to thank all of our panelists today for a very fulsome discussion, we covered a lot of ground. So thank you very much, and thank you to the audience for moving with us as we welcomed Ankit and weren't able to hear from Ambassador Harris today, but we'll certainly hopefully have an opportunity in the future. I'm going to hand things back over to Toby and he'll wrap up for us today.

Toby Dalton: Thanks Shaun. Thanks to all of you for a great conversation. Clearly these issues are really dynamic and we'll have a lot of focus in the next year on the context of the US Nuclear Posture Review and also the upcoming presidential election in Seoul next spring. Obviously, and I agree with

Shaun, sorry, that some technical issues prevented Ambassador Harris from connecting with us, but really thanks to my colleague Ankit Panda for stepping in at the last minute there, it's a tall order and he was great. So we'll now have a short break returning at 10:15 Eastern Time at which time we'll have a memoriam session. Please join us then. In order to connect then, you'll need to go back to the reception to refresh the stage and then come back to the stage at 10:15. Thanks very much.