

# North Korea Should Forgo Nuclear Deterrence

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## North Korea's nuclear deterrence policy ...

Deterrence is North Korea's security rationale for possessing nuclear weapons! The Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) justifies its nuclear-weapons program with the claim that it is threatened by a nuclear or conventional aggression by the US and its allies, South Korea and Japan.

"Increasing nuclear threat from outside will only compel the DPRK to bolster up its nuclear deterrent to cope with this," a DPRK Foreign Ministry spokesman said in October 2013. Domestic reason and international prestige are other important motives.

Deterrence is not simply the threat with mutual destruction. It is the capability to retaliate if attacked or threatened with attack by a nuclear weapon power. Nuclear weapons have to be small enough to cause limited damage. The purpose of nuclear weapons is not only to deter, but also to fight wars. Nuclear deterrence is only credible if the adversaries permanently demonstrate that they are serious about using nuclear weapons. In the case of North Korea, this means that it will continue to try to miniaturize their warheads and missiles, unless they renounce nuclear deterrence. That might be one reason why North Korea appeared to restart its electric plutonium production reactor. Plutonium is a more desirable bomb fuel for miniaturization. North Korea is probably developing long-range ballistic missiles and has progressed in producing a warhead small enough to mount on an ICBM. Pyongyang threatened repeatedly to carry out nuclear strikes on South Korea and the United States and deployed missile launchers on its coast.

## ... is dangerous ...

North Korea pretends to fear a large-scale conventional attack by the USA. Therefore, North Korea is preparing for a preemptive nuclear strike. This leads necessarily to a nuclear first use doctrine. North Korea considers its nuclear forces not only as a means to deter a nuclear attack, but also as a means to fight a war. This strategy would use nuclear weapons in a first strike to prevent a conventional aggression. Consequently, if there were an imminent danger of the DPRK using nuclear weapons, South Korea and its allies would have to launch a pre-preemptive strike. First, South Korea might use the “Korea Air and Missile Defense” to counter a nuclear threat and buster-bunker long range missiles( “Taurus” ) to hit underground installations but an escalation involving allies with nuclear weapons is possible.

Deterrence requires specific targeting. Push and pull factors determine nuclear planning. Targeting in this type of nuclear planning is a driving force for the modernization of nuclear weapons. It goes without saying that for all these weapons to be effective, targets have to be identified. Strike options must be multiplied. Nuclear infrastructure, the political and military leadership and all kinds of forces have to be targeted. It goes without saying that North Korea will continue down this road if it keeps relying on its notion of nuclear deterrence.

The concept of deterrence only works with rational actors. It requires all nuclear powers involved (North Korea but also the US) to rely on each other to respect deterrence and adhere to its principles. Furthermore, they have to communicate with each other and understand each other’ s signals, which is very difficult to do with the DPRK.

Deterrence creates hostility and mistrust when North Korea permanently threatens the South and maybe in the future other neighbors and the US.

The reliance on deterrence by nuclear weapons states causes nuclear proliferation and arms races. This was evident during the Cold War, but it is also true for regional conflicts, such as with India-Pakistan. Deterrence is North Korea’ s rationale for possessing nuclear weapons, and it could lead to an arms race in Northeast Asia. Indeed, mutual deterrence and disarmament are two opposing concepts.

Deterrence and the reliance on nuclear weapons can instability and dangerous situations through miscalculations, miscommunication, and technical accidents. North Korea’ s nuclear weapons may also be subject to poor safety standards. Since inspectors of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) are not allowed to enter the DPRK, there is no way to determine the conditions of North Korean

nuclear facilities. Without the IAEA inspectors and its verification mechanisms, the knowledge of nuclear programs in North Korea will remain extremely limited. At the very least, IAEA inspections can sufficiently slow down the process of acquiring nuclear bombs.

### ... and a failed concept

Deterrence does not prevent conventional wars. Nuclear powers were involved in conventional wars. In Korea the Chinese, in Vietnam the Vietcong, and the insurgents in Afghanistan and Iraq were not deterred from fighting a non-nuclear war with the United States. In the Falklands War, Argentina was not afraid to challenge the United Kingdom. Arab states attacked Israel in 1973, even though Israel already had nuclear weapons. Two nuclear powers, India and Pakistan, went to war in 1999 and Pakistan probably was behind the terrorist attacks on the Indian Parliament in 2001. Moreover, possession of nuclear weapons could encourage conventional military brinkmanship. North Korea cannot rely on nuclear weapons to deter a conventional threat.

### Denuclearization and negative security assurances

A first step would be a freeze of North Korea's nuclear program. The suspension of the production of nuclear weapons material has to be verified by special inspections by the IAEA, which would strengthen the NPT provisions. This should be accompanied by a moratorium on testing nuclear weapons. The end of missile tests, including space launch vehicles, should follow this.

Pyongyang should go back to its promise during the six party talks of 2005 involving the US, China, Russia, Japan, South Korea and the DPRK - to denuclearize. The spokesman of the DPRK Foreign Ministry does not exclude the "denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula, the invariable aim of the policy of the DPRK government" as long as it "does not mean unilateral nuclear dismantlement on the part of the DPRK side." A conference on "Nuclear Weapon Free Zone North-East Asia" similar to the efforts in the Middle East could be considered. A combination of "negative security assurances" could be a confidence-building measure. "Negative security assurances" would remove all non-nuclear weapon states (NWS) from the target list. Nuclear weapon states should commit themselves to "negative security assurances." This is the guarantee not to use nuclear weapons against non-nuclear weapon states. Eventually a denuclearized Korean peninsula in the framework of a "Nuclear Weapon Free Zone" (NWFZ) would also be more stable than an extended deterrence of the US or an autonomous South Korean deterrence against the North Korean nuclear

threat. “Negative security assurances” include the promise by NWS not to threaten or use nuclear weapons against members of the zone. Extended deterrence means a commitment not to threaten or to use such weapons against a state that possesses nuclear weapons.

## Critical engagement

In its policy approach to the DPRK, the EU uses various instruments at its disposal, but its general approach can be described as a form of critical engagement: regular political dialogue, development assistance programs (e.g. European Commission food security programs as well as a small number of other operations) on one hand, and diplomatic pressure and sanctions on the other. In the context of its policy of critical engagement with the DPRK, the EU remains open to political dialogue with the DPRK, timing being contingent upon political and security circumstances. However, the USA and the EU should keep this dual-track combination of diplomacy and sanctions. The US and the EU should not give up on the effort of nuclear disarmament of the peninsula, which is an indispensable part of the NPT. It is the only way to convince states to support non-proliferation initiatives although North Korea will not give up its nuclear program immediately. Finally, there is no quick fix. Patience is an essential prerequisite for engagement.

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