



What the Commission Report says on:

EXTENDED DETERRENCE

[This issue arises in the context of] the nuclear umbrella offered by Russia to its allies in the Commonwealth of Independent States Collective Security Treaty of 1992, but [is most debated in relation to] the U.S. network of alliances put together in Europe, the Asia Pacific and Middle East in the 1950s. This was constructed, and has continued to this day, on the assumption that the allies in question – including Japan and Australia – were protected by the U.S. nuclear umbrella, not least as a means of ensuring that none of the countries in question were tempted to acquire nuclear weapons themselves. In Europe, Germany, Italy and Sweden all foreswore nuclear weapons capability for this reason among others.

There seems no doubt but that, for the foreseeable future, Washington's own nuclear deterrent will continue to be extended to its allies to protect them against any nuclear attack or threat they might experience. This should be well understood by other international actors and not seen as either destabilizing, or as in itself inhibiting further movement down the disarmament path. But clearly Washington will need to continue to closely consult with its allies as it moves in that direction, reassuring them that they will not be exposed to any greater risk of nuclear attack as a result of its own arsenal being reduced.

The question more immediately engaging policymakers is whether that "extended deterrence" should involve the nuclear component of America's deterrent posture being available for *non-nuclear* threats, be they chemical, biological or conventional in character, or whether rather such threats should be met wholly by non-nuclear means. As discussed later in this report, the issue has yet to be resolved for the U.S. itself, quite apart from its allies. It is currently being addressed in the current Nuclear Posture Review, due for presidential decision early in 2010. A critical

question for that Review is whether the U.S. will continue with its current posture of strategic ambiguity, leaving open the possibility of nuclear weapons being used to respond to any class of security threat to itself or its allies, or rather will move toward a declaratory policy that the sole purpose for nuclear weapons, so long as they exist, should be to deter the use by others of nuclear weapons against the U.S. or its allies.

The issue is a complex and sensitive one. On the one hand there is an overwhelming attraction for all those supporting a nuclear weapon free world, in seeing the U.S. – along with all the other nuclear-armed states – making an unequivocal "sole purpose" declaration, sooner rather than later. This would be a major step forward down the disarmament path, and help to put at rest the perception – so damaging to the cause of non-proliferation – that the nuclear-armed states regard nuclear weapons as an indispensable, legitimate and open-ended guarantor of their own and their allies' security, which they are born to have but others have no right to acquire.

On the other hand, some U.S. allies argue that their national survival could be put just as much at risk by the use of biological, chemical or conventional weapons as by nuclear ones, and that so long as any such risk is conceivable they should remain fully protected by the U.S. nuclear umbrella. If the premises of this argument are well-founded, the conclusion is a compelling one. Clearly, again, such allies will need to be very strongly reassured that they will not be exposed to unacceptable risk if the U.S. changes its posture in the way described. The concern for the U.S., and the wider international community, will be that if they are not so reassured some at least will be tempted to build a nuclear deterrent of their own.

The full text of *Eliminating Nuclear Threats: A Practical Agenda for Global Policymakers*, Report of the International Commission on Nuclear Non-proliferation and Disarmament, Co-chairs Gareth Evans and Yoriko Kawaguchi (November 2009), is available at www.icnnd.org

It ought to be possible for that reassurance to be given. Three lines of response suggest themselves. The first is that “extended deterrence” does not have to mean “extended *nuclear* deterrence”. United States conventional capability, when combined with that of each of the allies in question, constitutes a deterrent to any conceivable aggressor at least as credible as that posed by its nuclear weapons. Allies will certainly need to be totally confident that anything in the nature of an existential threat to them will be met by the full weight of that capability, but given the intensity of shared values and interests that underlie present alliance commitments they should be readily persuadable. Of course the real need over time is to create so stable and cooperative a security environment in every potentially volatile region, including East Asia, that reliance does not have to be placed by anyone on disproportionate conventional capability (with all the disincentives to nuclear disarmament by others that this tends to bring in its wake, as noted earlier in this section).

The second response is that nuclear weapons are simply not as useable as those who focus on their ultimate deterrent utility would like to believe they are. Presidents Truman, Eisenhower and Kennedy rejected military advice to use nuclear weapons in the Korean War, the Taiwan Straits crisis, and the Cuban Missile crisis, and the force of the taboo has if anything since grown. As Henry Kissinger wrote recently, “The basic dilemma of the nuclear age has been with us since Hiroshima: how to bring the destructiveness of modern weapons into some moral or political relationship with the objectives that are being pursued. Any use of nuclear weapons is certain to involve a level of

casualties and devastation out of proportion to foreseeable foreign-policy objectives. Efforts to develop a more nuanced application have never succeeded, from the doctrine of a geographically limited nuclear war in the 1950s and 1960s to the ‘mutual assured destruction’ theory of general nuclear war in the 1970s.” This does not mean that the need to help allies deter adversaries has disappeared. It merely means that the real role of nuclear weapons in extended deterrence has shrunk much more radically than many people assume.

A third line of response is that the U.S. and all of the allies to whom it extends nuclear deterrence have obligations under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty to support the total elimination of all nuclear arsenals. At a time when major efforts are being made to reinvigorate the NPT in all its dimensions, when so much depends on reducing the salience of nuclear weapons – or, in the language we have adopted in this report, continuing to delegitimize them – great care must be taken not to allow debate over extended nuclear deterrence to *raise* their salience in national security policies. There is no plausible security threat to NATO or East Asian allies today that would require a nuclear weapons response; To suggest otherwise is to miss opportunities to improve security relationships in Europe and East Asia. Such improvements are not only desirable in their own right but will be crucial in creating conditions for progress toward a world without nuclear weapons.

[Section 6, Paras 6.20–27]