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EXTENDING THE UNITED STATES NUCLEAR DETERRENCE UMBRELLA TO THE MIDDLE EAST

by

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Abstract

The United States' nuclear umbrella is a foreign policy tool to deter nuclear attacks against our allies or deter coercive behavior backed by the threat of nuclear attack. It is offered as part of a multi-lateral security treaty in Europe, and offered bilaterally to key partners in the Asia-Pacific theater. In the Middle East, Iran's nuclear ambitions compel US policymakers to debate the merits of extending our nuclear umbrella to regional partners, even after passage of the Iranian Nuclear Deal.

This research paper examines historic cases in which the US provided, or did not provide, extended deterrence around the world. It offers a qualitative analysis of the factors which drove previous US decisions, the most important of which were national interest and the existence of a primary threat. Furthermore, this paper dissects the cases where US assurance was deemed insufficient or incompatible, e.g., with France and New Zealand, respectively. Applied to the Middle East strategic context, extending the US' nuclear deterrence umbrella to our partners would provide negligible benefits and carry potentially negative political implications in the region.

Contents

Introduction

Background

Since 1949, the United States (US) has offered an extended nuclear deterrence policy to reassure North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) members against existential threats like the Soviet Union.[1] The US provides similar assurances to key Asian partners via bilateral agreements in order to deter Chinese and/or North Korean nuclear aggression.[2] Joint Publication 1-02 defines deterrence as "the prevention of action by the existence of a credible threat of unacceptable counteraction and/or belief that the cost of action outweighs the perceived benefits."[3] This research focuses specifically on US foreign policy in which the objective is to deter nuclear attacks against our allies or deter coercive behavior backed by the threat of nuclear attack; this research excludes standard aggressive behavior by non-nuclear states.

Strategic directives for extended nuclear deterrence and the associated role of nuclear weapons are outlined in the 2010 Nuclear Posture Review (NPR), [4] which also highlights the secondary objective to halt the spread of nuclear proliferation. Over the past several years many high-level officials, including then-Secretary of State Clinton, contemplated the idea of extending the US' nuclear deterrence umbrella to our Middle Eastern partner nations.[5] This idea stems from advancements and interest in nuclear capability by many Middle Eastern nations, to include: Israel's unacknowledged nuclear strike capabilities, Iran's controversial nuclear ambitions, Saudi Arabia's anticipated response to a nuclear-armed Iran,[6] and Iraq and Libya's previous attempts to obtain nuclear weapons.

Hypothesis/Research Questions

Extending the United States' nuclear deterrence umbrella to our Middle Eastern partner nations would provide negligible benefits and could introduce negative political implications in

the region. In line with Air Force Global Strike Command (AFGSC) Reference # 2014-LAS-27, this research effort seeks solutions to the following key questions: 1) Is the US currently able to credibly extend nuclear deterrence to our Middle Eastern partner nations? 2) If so, what are the potential impacts to regional stability and the global strategic landscape, and should such a course of action be taken? 3) If not, what factors would have to change in order for the US to credibly extend deterrence, and how likely are those changes?

Significance

The 2015 National Security Strategy (NSS) directs, "In the Middle East, we will dismantle terrorist networks that threaten our people, confront external aggression against our allies and partners… and prevent the development, proliferation, or use of weapons of mass destruction."[7] The 2015 National Military Strategy (NMS) lists several state and non-state threats to our national objectives. It calls out Iran for posing "strategic challenges to the international community. It is pursuing nuclear and missile delivery technologies despite repeated United Nations Security Council resolutions demanding that it cease such efforts."[8] These challenges must be weighed against other directives such as the "rebalance to the Asia-Pacific region, placing our most advanced capabilities and greater capacity in that vital theater."[9] Future US extended nuclear deterrence decisions will carry implications for all the aforementioned issues. Extending this policy to the Middle East may demonstrate heightened US resolve and commitments to our regional partners. Others may perceive it as continued US meddling in the region or causing further divisions in an already volatile environment. US decision-makers must carefully assess the potential impacts of extending our nuclear umbrella in terms of regional and global stability.

Methodology

The research methodology for this topic uses a qualitative approach due to the low number of available case studies. US extended nuclear deterrence agreements currently exist for NATO members and only a few nations in the Asia-Pacific region. An experimental design framework is inappropriate for this topic because of the complexities of international politics (e.g., the researcher cannot toggle on/off extended deterrence agreements as an independent variable and observe the corresponding impacts between the affected nations). The approach to this research follows: a review of case studies and pertinent data, establishment of theories and definitions, analysis of three courses of action (COAs), and final recommendations. Each section is explained in further detail below, beginning with a historical review of relevant US foreign policies.

Literature Review

The US currently provides assurance to NATO members multilaterally, and to some Asia-Pacific nations (i.e., South Korea, Japan, Taiwan, and Australia)[10] on a bilateral basis. These agreements are not permanent, as proven by the termination of assurance between the US and New Zealand,[11] as well as certain Middle East nations after the Cold War.[12] An examination of these case studies sheds insight into when and where US extended nuclear deterrence is best applied.

Policy in Europe

According to the 2010 NPR, US nuclear weapons "contribute to Alliance cohesion and provide reassurance to allies and partners who feel exposed to regional threats."[13] This assurance applies to all NATO members regardless of the member's actual possession of such

weapons. The 2010 NPR does not call out European regional threats by name, but history shows that a nuclear-capable Soviet Union provided the original catalyst for extended deterrence policy. The Cold War's bi-polar strategic environment pitted the US and NATO against the Soviet Union and Warsaw Pact. David Yost mentions that NATO's collective agreement continues "to hedge against the risk of backsliding in Moscow, given Russia's long-term power potential, particularly its nuclear forces."[14]

Among NATO members, only the US, United Kingdom (UK), and France are nuclear-capable nations. The UK and France provide independent nuclear forces; some non-nuclear members provide basing and possess dual-capable aircraft which can deliver US tactical nuclear weapons; many NATO members participate in nuclear planning or contribute to the Strategic Concept. The most recent version of the Strategic Concept declared, "The greatest responsibility of the Alliance is to protect and defend our territory and our populations against attack" and "Deterrence, based on an appropriate mix of nuclear and conventional capabilities, remains a core element of our overall strategy."[15]

The US extended deterrence policy bolsters NATO's collective security and simultaneously constrains nuclear proliferation. When allies perceive a credible and reliable US deterrence against a mutual threat, they are less likely to seek their own nuclear weapons. This balance between security and non-proliferation requires extensive dialog and cooperation between all involved actors. As the NATO Strategic Concept states, "We will seek to create the conditions for further reductions in the future."[16] Former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs Mullen reassured that the New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty mandate "leaves us with more than enough nuclear deterrent capability for the world we live in."[17]

Policy in Asia

No multilateral alliance structure exists in Asia on par with NATO, and the US "has mainly extended deterrence through bilateral security relationships and through its forward military presence and security guarantees."[18] China's explosion of a nuclear device in 1964 troubled many US allies in the Pacific region.[19] Taiwan, South Korea, Japan, and Australia all sought independent nuclear weapons programs to counter this threat. Only through US diplomacy and expanded deterrence agreements did these nations forego their nuclear weapons pursuits. North Korea first tested a nuclear device in 2006 which again raised concerns for South Korea and Japan, both of whom continue to rely on US-provided deterrence.

Unlike our strategic posture in Europe, no US tactical nuclear weapons are based in Asia. The US withdrew its intra-theater nuclear assets during the 1990s, and currently provides extended deterrence via conventional capabilities (e.g., troops stationed in South Korea and Japan) and the US' strategic nuclear force. Intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs), strategic bombers, and submarine-launched ballistic missiles (SLBMs) have so far proven adequate to reassure our allies in the region. A Naval Postgraduate School thesis concluded, "the nuclear umbrella has been a small but important reason for Japan not obtaining its own strategic deterrent… [preventing] a nuclear arms race between Tokyo and Beijing akin to the Cold War competition between Washington and Moscow."[20] An Australian defense white paper explained, "we are able to rely on the nuclear forces of the United States to deter nuclear attack on Australia… [which] removed the need for Australia to consider more significant and expensive defence options."[21] These examples illustrate how deterrence policies in Asia have reassured US allies, deterred nuclear aggression, and minimized nuclear arms races between adversaries.

The US extended deterrence agreements in Asia will likely remain relevant well into the future. China continues to exert pressure against its neighbors over disputed territory in the South China Sea, which may eventually result in open military conflict.[22] A lack of transparency regarding their nuclear modernization efforts "raises questions about China's future strategic intensions."[23] Smaller nations may seek their own capabilities to rebalance the Asia security environment, or may look towards the US to play a bigger role.

Policy Limitations, Terminations, and Non-Considerations

Extended deterrence agreements certainly are not permanent, and require significant consideration and planning to be effective. The perceived necessity of these agreements have occasionally given way to shifts in national policy, changes to the strategic landscape, or re-prioritized interests. France, New Zealand, and Iran provide examples of the dissolution of extended deterrence. In addition, the calculus of strategic interests often results in our deterrence policies never being established, as is the case in Africa and South America.

In the case of France, US Cold War policies were sufficient to deter a threat, but not sufficient to reassure a close ally. Following the Soviet's first successful atomic test in 1949, many European countries found themselves precariously wedged between two nuclear superpowers with little capacity to compete with either side. Several years of political debate ensued to address the issue of effective deterrence: conventional versus atomic. Conventional capabilities were difficult to support, given the war-weary populations and tremendous costs of World War II. Atomic capabilities offered a less expensive, but more terrifying, option to the growing nuclear Soviet threat. Trachtenberg recounts a US proposition for a shared NATO nuclear stockpile: "allies would control the delivery systems, but the warheads themselves would normally be in American custody."[24] Furthermore, the US was reluctant to share

technical information necessary to develop these weapons. France relied on this arrangement for several years, as did other NATO nations, but eventually lost confidence and developed its own nuclear capabilities. As Premier De Gaulle proclaimed, "the view of a war and even of a battle in which France would no longer act on her own behalf, and in accordance with her own wishes, such a view is unacceptable."[25] Nuclear weapons grant nations a certain prestige and status in the world, but are often viewed through a negative lens as demonstrated by the case of New Zealand.

New Zealand signed a three-nation common defense pact with Australia and the United States known as ANZUS in 1951. Each nation cooperated on security matters which included the US' nuclear umbrella coverage for the South Pacific region. In 1984, New Zealand's newly elected Labour government pledged a "nuclear free" national posture. Under this policy, US vessels were denied access to New Zealand ports unless first declaring if they carried nuclear weapons. However, this requirement conflicted with US security policy to neither confirm nor deny the presence of nuclear weapons on each vessel, which applied to all US allies under its nuclear umbrella. The reluctance by both nations to cede their respective policies "led the Reagan administration to state in 1985 that New Zealand had failed to meet its alliance obligations and US defense and deterrence guarantees no longer applied to the country."[26] The US and New Zealand have since mended diplomatic relationships, but extended nuclear deterrence was never reinstated. The next example shows more complex dynamics of applying foreign policy to a region of blurred alliances and adversaries.

The US nuclear umbrella extended into the Middle East for a brief period during the Cold War. As Pifer et al. explain, "following the Iranian revolution and Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, the Carter administration announced its 'Carter Doctrine,' which stated that

the [US] would use force to prevent any power from conquering the oil fields of the Persian Gulf."[27] This policy supported a larger US strategic objective to contain Soviet expansion, and was applied to Saudi Arabia, Israel, and Iran. At the time, Iran "not only did not want American guarantees but sought to rid the region of a US military presence."[28] This example of extended deterrence is very unique and illustrates the complexities that can arise within multi-nation conflicts. US leaders removed this assurance once the Soviet threat diminished, and redirected their focus to preserve regional stability against the ambitious goals of Iraq and Iran.

Far more countries were never offered extended deterrence than those who received it. Within a review of global case studies, it should be noted that no nation on the continents of Africa or South America were invited under the US nuclear umbrella. Primary reasons for these situations may include the perceived lack of a nuclear aggressor, limited US national interest, and a lower level of US commitment to those nations. Evidence for this claim follows that the overall US military presence on these two continents is historically low – compared to the military presence in Europe, Asia-Pacific, and the Middle East – which is indicative of our strategic priorities. No African or South American nations possess nuclear weapons, which correlates to a minimal fear of nuclear attack. US Africa Command Headquarters did not exist prior to 2007 because it was not viewed with the same strategic importance as other geographic commands. General Kelly repeatedly referenced US Southern Command as "the lowest priority Geographic Combatant Command" in his 2015 Posture Statement to Congress.[29] However, the US maintains a collective defense arrangement via the Rio Treaty of 1947 "which provides that an armed attack against any American State shall be considered as an attack against all the American States and each one undertakes to assist in meeting the attack."[30] This treaty originally addressed overseas threats but now encompasses intra-Hemispheric aggression between states.

The decision to withhold its nuclear umbrella from African and South American countries reflects the US' strategic priorities as well as the considerations that drive nuclear foreign policy.

Derived Pertinent Data from the Case Studies

US rationale to extend nuclear deterrence is complex, and has manifested in different agreements to our partners across Europe, Asia-Pacific, and the Middle East. From the aforementioned case studies, several factors appear to heavily influence US decisions to establish these policies. Some primary factors are: US national interest, primary threat, partner's economic status, partner's form of government, and cultural compatibility. The Analysis section, below, contains more in-depth evaluations of these factors and helps construct a recommendation for the primary research questions: 1) Is the US currently able to credibly extend nuclear deterrence to our Middle Eastern partner nations? 2) If so, what are the potential impacts to regional stability and the global strategic landscape, and should such a course of action be taken? 3) If not, what factors would have to change in order for the US to credibly extend deterrence, and how likely are those changes?

Theory/Argument

The primary theories governing this research are deterrence and international relations. Bernard Brodie stated that "by deterrence we mean obliging the opponent to consider, in an environment of great uncertainty, the probably high cost of attacking us against the expected gain thereof."[31] This evaluation requires one side to 1) understand their own capabilities and limitations, 2) understand the adversary's values and motivations, and 3) properly convey a strategic message such that the adversary believes the deterrent threat. Successful deterrence occurs when the adversary believes that the cost of a decision outweighs any potential gains by

that decision, and thus does not act. States are assumed to be rational entities that can be incentivized or coerced based on what they value,[32] and make decisions that advance their self-interests. Between multiple actors, deterrence is a psychological interaction rather than a strict comparison of military capabilities. Given the inherent strategic and political nature of nuclear weapons, leaders must always consider the potential international impacts of their employment. The deterrent and the one being deterred are not alone within this calculus.

The important international relations concepts are balance of power and strategic culture.[33] Balance of power defines the natural struggle between states due to their individual interests in the absence of a world government;[34] strategic culture refers to how a state views itself and its place on the international stage.[35] Along with deterrence theory, the realist perspective of international relations theory assumes states to be rational actors, whether governed by a democracy or dictatorship. US leaders, while deliberating a nuclear umbrella policy for our Middle Eastern partners, must focus on exactly who must be deterred.

As mentioned in the Background section, this research effort defines 'extended nuclear deterrence' as deterring nuclear attacks against our allies or deterring coercive behavior backed by the threat of nuclear attack. In the Middle East, no nation has acknowledged a nuclear strike capability. Israel's unacknowledged military capabilities are addressed through direct US-Israel diplomacy, just as they were during Operation Desert Storm. As General Horner recounts, "Israeli retaliation would have been a terrible political mistake."[36] The US feared an Israeli overreaction to Iraq's missile attacks would expand the conflict and break up the coalition. Tensions were high, but the US' desire to minimize potentially negative impacts of its ally does not fit the definition of deterrence used in this research. However, Iran's continued pursuit of nuclear weapons capabilities raises security concerns for which deterrence could apply.

The 2015 National Military Strategy identifies Iran as "a state-sponsor of terrorism that has undermined stability in many nations, including Israel, Lebanon, Iraq, Syria, and Yemen."[37] Iran views itself as a regional hegemon and has actively sought the removal of US and Western influences from Middle Eastern affairs. A School of Advanced Air and Space Studies thesis argued that most Arab governments do not fear nuclear attack from Iran, but nuclear weapons would dramatically tip the balance of power. The author states that Iran "may become more flagrant in its support to bad actors… and could attempt to leverage its nuclear clout to limit Persian Gulf access."[38] In addition, Iran may act more coercively toward its neighbors while challenging regional stability.

To curb further weapons development, the P5+1, European Union, and Iran negotiated the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA).[39] This agreement went into effect 16 January 2016 and established commitments for increased transparency into Iran's nuclear programs and lifted several sanctions against Iran. The JCPOA includes "a long-term [International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA)] presence in Iran; IAEA monitoring of uranium ore concentrate produced by Iran… containment and surveillance of centrifuge rotors and bellows… use of IAEA-approved and certified modern [measurement] technologies."[40] So long as Iran fulfills their commitments, the JCPOA "terminate[s] all provisions of previous UN Security Council resolutions on the Iranian nuclear issue" and the European Union (EU) "terminate[s] all provisions of the EU Regulation… implementing all nuclear-related economic and financial sanctions."[41] The long-term implications of this deal are uncertain. Secretary of State Kerry lauded, "the US, our friends and allies in the Middle East, and the entire world are safer because the threat of a nuclear weapon has been reduced… each of the pathways that Iran had toward… a nuclear weapon has been verifiably closed down."[42] Critics like Israel's Prime Minister

Netanyahu argued that the deal would "fuel Iran's aggressions with billions of dollars in sanctions relief [and] makes war more likely"[43] before citing several Iranian-sponsored terrorist activities and threats during the months of JCPOA negotiations. The concepts contained in deterrence theory and international relations theory set the stage upon which analysis of extended nuclear deterrence policy may occur.

Analysis

Proposed COAs

This research investigates three COAs for the Middle Eastern scenario: 1) extend nuclear deterrence via bilateral agreements, 2) do not extend any amount of assurance to any Middle Eastern partner, and 3) offer a conventional-only form of assurance. COA 1 – Extend Nuclear Deterrence – mimics the US' approach for key Asian-partner nations. In the absence of a strong multilateral framework (such as NATO) in the Middle East, a bi-lateral approach can provide significant assurance. This COA requires individual consideration for each potential partner because US interests and compatibility vary from one nation to the next. Extended deterrence of this fashion includes a range of options, including forward-basing tactical nuclear weapons, employing dual-capable host aircraft, or deploying SLBMs and US strategic bombers in closer proximity to the threat.

COA 2 – No Deterrence – requires no additional US assets in the region. No additional security commitments occur, nor does the US further involve itself in Middle Eastern affairs. Diplomacy would still exist, although this COA may face credibility issues from the lack of tangible actions. This COA would potentially free up US resources to serve national interests in other geographic regions such as the Asia-Pacific.

COA 3 – Conventional-Only Deterrence – offers some level of reassurance via missile defense, power-projection, and coordinated diplomacy. US conventional capabilities currently provide varying degrees of assurance to Middle Eastern partner nations. For example, multi-nation military exercises, forward-based US operations, and foreign military sales may strengthen our partners' overall capacity for self-defense in the face of current and future threats. This approach does not lock the US into deeper involvement in the Middle East, and may be flexible enough to meet a wider range of security concerns. It is heavily reliant on strategic messaging, as different regional partners may perceive US favoritism by our different actions.

Evaluation Criteria

From the case studies in the Literature Review section, several key factors stand out which may influence the US decision to extend or not extend nuclear deterrence to different nations. The factors used for this qualitative analysis are: US national interest, primary threat, partner's global economic ranking, partner's form of government, and cultural compatibility. The dependent variable in each case is the type of deterrence offered, and each factor contains values as they exist today. The decision to extend deterrence is ongoing, and subject to change with shifts in strategic interests and priorities.

1. US national interest: why is the US primarily concerned with the partner or region?
2. Primary threat: who is the key adversary?
3. Economic rank: what is the nation's world ranking in terms of gross domestic product (GDP) purchasing power?
4. Partner's form of government: what is the predominant form of governance in the nation?
5. Cultural compatibility: what are the dominant religions, languages, and rule of law?

6. Type of deterrence offered: nuclear (tactical weapons deployed in theater), nuclear (via strategic weapons only), conventional only, or none.

Sample of Global Data

Table 1 contains summary regional data for the countries examined in this research. Appendix A contains data for individual countries, and represents a sample of nations for which the US may or may not have extended nuclear deterrence. The values provided in each cell are derived from the Central Intelligence Agency's "The World Factbook"[44] and from the Literature Review above. Additional nations were included as a control for the familiar case studies and to illustrate regional trends.

Country	Europe	Asia	Middle East	Africa
US national interests	Contain communism / preserve NATO	Contain communism	Regional stability / strategic resources	Regional stability / Terrorism
Primary threats	Russia	China	Russia / Iran	None
Economic ranks	6th (Germany) to 167th (Monaco)	1st (China) to 227th (Tuvalu)	15th (S. Arabia) to 98th (Bahrain)	23rd (Nigeria) to 201st (Comoros)
Government	Monarchs/ Republics/ Democracies	Republics/ Democracies/	Monarchs/ Emirates/ Republics	Monarchs/ Republics
Cultures (religion, language, law)	Christianity, various, Common & Civil law	Buddhism/ Hinduism/ Christianity/ Islam, various, Common & Civil law	Islam/ Orthodox/ Judaism, various, Mixed Sharia / Civil law	Christianity/ Islam, various, Common & Civil law
Deterrence offered	Nuclear (tactical & strategic)	Nuclear (strategic); conventional; none	Conventional; none	None

Table 1: Summary Regional Data

Appendix A, Tables 2 through 7, provide some noteworthy insights regarding historical US decisions to extend or not extend nuclear deterrence around the world. Arguably, the most

significant factors are US national interest and the existence of a primary threat. The national imperative to contain communism led US decision-makers to develop deterrence policies in Europe, the Middle East, and Asia. Specifically, nuclear-capable Russia and China posed the greatest threats for our global partners. Communism versus capitalism existed within Africa and South America as well, but no state actors directly threatened a nuclear attack against US partners. Conventional deterrence was often provided to mitigate non-nuclear aggression and promote regional stability. In the Middle East, Iran's nuclear aspirations and subversive actions causes the greatest concern against US interests.

A partner's economic ranking, form of government, and culture were less significant factors. Smaller nations like Estonia and New Zealand had less global economic influence than many US allies, but held strategic geographic locations from which the US could encircle a primary threat. Most nations that received extended nuclear deterrence have democratic or republic forms of government. However, there is no direct correlation between the world's democratic societies and the list of nations under the US nuclear umbrella. A nation's religion, language, and legal system were shown to have no bearing on their receipt of US assurance. Cultural factors varied widely across the sample data with no obvious correlation to US deterrence policy. Given these insights from previous policy decisions, the next section evaluates how well each proposed COA meets US strategic interests in the Middle East.

Evaluation of COAs

In addition to the country data within Appendix A, two additional criteria are useful to evaluate the COAs: US Central Command (USCENTCOM)'s strategic guidance and global perceptions based on Iran's relationships. USCENTCOM is involved with all US actions in the Middle East and has a heavy military and civilian footprint in the theater. The complex

relationships between Middle Eastern countries require US policymakers to always consider the perceptions of our allies and adversaries.

COA 1 – Extend Nuclear Deterrence – would provide negligible benefits for the US' Middle Eastern partners due to lack of a significant nuclear threat. The world's nuclear nations have shown little aggression against the Middle East in recent decades, so US forces have no clear entity to deter. The top five priorities listed in the 2015 USCENTCOM Posture Statement involve violent extremist organizations, dangerous ideologies by Islamists, and/or government instability.[45] An extended nuclear deterrence policy does little to address any of these root issues. Iran's nuclear program causes some concerns for regional stability, but US leaders currently look to the JPCOA to address these concerns.

Complex international relations pose another major barrier for COA 1. The US and its Middle Eastern partners have a mixed history of cooperation, which often require a delicate balance between strategic necessity and ideological sensitivities. Cultural compatibility is not a prerequisite for extended deterrence, but the US has frequently shown its ineffectiveness in navigating Middle Eastern affairs (e.g., calming religious tension in Iraq or establishing a central government in Afghanistan). COA 1 would potentially lock the US into an alliance that it is not prepared to fully support. For example, such a policy towards Shia-led Iraq would demonstrate much deeper commitments, but may be seen as a slight against Sunni-governed neighbors. Offering extended nuclear deterrence to a predominantly Sunni partner may fuel Iran's rhetoric and exacerbate sectarian tensions within other countries such as Bahrain or Lebanon.

COA 2 – No Deterrence – runs counter to the first but does not meet US strategic interests. A policy in which US forces withdrew from the region would likely result in increased destabilization for our partners. Furthermore, this approach would embolden those who already

seek domination and desire to create a single Islamic Caliphate over the populations, i.e., Iran, Islamic State, and Al Qaeda. The 2015 NSS states "we remain committed to a vision of the Middle East that is peaceful and prosperous."[46]

General Austin's USCENTCOM Posture Statement considers Iran "the most significant threat to the Central Region"[47] and expressly lists a command priority to "maintain credible general and specific deterrent capability and capacity to counter Iran."[48] Given the perceived inability of some Middle Eastern partners to provide for their own defense against an increasingly capable Iran, future US involvement appears necessary. Several Gulf States (Saudi Arabia, Jordan, United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, and Qatar) contribute to the containment of Iran's hegemonic aspirations, but rely heavily on US resources and capabilities. Similarly, these nations work alongside US forces to combat extremist organizations. COA 2 would degrade these partnerships and weaken the US' influence and credibility in the region. In response, many nations may look towards Russia, China, and other world powers for support. Therefore, COA 2 does not promote US interests and may generate long-term negative impacts for the Middle East.

COA 3 – Conventional-Only Deterrence – supports US national interests without over-committing to a historically volatile region. USCENTCOM actively builds partner capacity through foreign military sales, training, and education with a goal to "enable them to assume a greater share of the responsibility and do what is required to bring about improved stability in the region."[49] The use of conventional capabilities and coordinated diplomacy should be sufficient to deter non-nuclear regional aggressors. "Rotational joint forces that include fighter and airlift assets, surveillance platforms, ballistic missile defenses, naval vessels, ground forces, and cyber teams… are indispensable to protecting our core interests and supporting and reassuring our partners in the region."[50]

By fostering better relationships between and within Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Kuwait, and others, the US can help preserve a healthy balance of power without a significant US military presence. These activities rely on concurrent diplomacy with third-party states to mitigate unintended consequences and prevent escalation. The US should be aware of misperceived favoritism towards particular religious or ethnic groups, and intentionally address these concerns.

Conclusion/Recommendation

In conclusion, this research provides the following recommendations to the key questions from AFGSC Ref # 2014-LAS-27.

1) Is the US currently able to credibly extend nuclear deterrence to our Middle Eastern partner nations? The US certainly has the physical capacity to extend nuclear deterrence, as seen by forward deployments of nuclear weapon systems and the US-based global strike assets. However, US decision-makers lack the justification and political will to do so. Without a significant regional threat, extending the nuclear umbrella does not provide tangible benefits to our Middle Eastern partners, but would significantly increase US commitments. President Obama's directive for a "strategic pivot" to the Asia-Pacific theater, combined with the desire to reduce US presence in current Middle Eastern conflicts, conveys unwillingness for additional commitments in the region.

2) If so, what are the potential impacts to regional stability and the global strategic landscape, and should such a course of action be taken? This research does not recommend extending our nuclear umbrella to the Middle East. Non-nuclear solutions already exist which can bolster regional stability against potential aggressors like Iran. A whole of government approach is necessary to avoid misperceptions of favoritism, to contain proliferation, and to ease

the concerns of our partners. The US should maintain its conventional deterrence capabilities while continuing to build partner capacity for self-defense.

3) If not, what factors would have to change in order for the US to credibly extend deterrence, and how likely are those changes? To credibly extend nuclear deterrence, the primary change needed is the existence of a regional nuclear threat. This change is likely in the near future as many of the Iran JCPOA requirements expire after 10 or 15 years. If Iran violates the JCPOA stipulations or openly pursues a nuclear weapon, the US may be compelled to extend our nuclear umbrella to key Middle Eastern partners. Without doing so, Saudi Arabia will likely acquire their own nuclear capability, as France did in 1960, with help from their partner Pakistan. When asked about the Saudi response to a nuclear-armed Iran, foreign minister Jubeir told CNN that they "will do whatever it takes to protect the nation and people from any harm and I will leave it at that."[51]

Additional Research

This topic must be revisited to address strategic changes to the Middle Eastern landscape, such as Iran's acquisition/development of a functional nuclear weapon, dramatic shifts in Middle Eastern alliances, or significant changes to US foreign policy during future administrations.

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Appendix A

Country	**United Kingdom**	**France**	**Estonia**	**Turkey**
US national interest	Contain communism / preserve NATO	Contain communism / preserve NATO	Contain communism / preserve NATO	Contain communism / preserve NATO
Primary threat	Russia	Russia	Russia	Russia
Economic rank	10	11	115	18
Government	Constitutional monarchy	Republic	Parliamentary republic	Republican parliamentary democracy
Culture (religion, language, law)	Christianity, English, Common law	Christianity, French, Civil law	None/Christianity, Estonian, Civil law	Islam (Sunni), Turkish, Civil law based on Swiss model
Deterrence offered	Nuclear (tactical & strategic)	Nuclear (tactical & strategic)	Nuclear (tactical & strategic)	Nuclear (tactical & strategic)

Table 2: Europe Sample Data

Country	**Japan**	**South Korea**	**Philippines**	**Taiwan**
US national interest	Contain communism	Contain communism	Contain communism	Contain communism
Primary threat	China	China	China	China
Economic rank	5	14	30	21
Government	Parliamentary government w/ constitutional monarchy	Republic	Republic	Democracy
Culture (religion, language, law)	Shintoism/ Buddhism, Japanese, Civil law	Christianity/ Buddhism, Korean/English, Civil/American law	Christianity, Tagalog, Civil/common/ Islamic law	Buddhist/ Taoist, Mandarin, Civil law
Deterrence offered	Nuclear (strategic assets)	Nuclear (strategic assets)	Conventional	Nuclear (strategic assets)

Table 3: Asia Sample Data

Country	Australia	New Zealand	Malaysia
US national interest	Contain communism	Contain communism	Regional stability
Primary threat	China	China	China
Economic rank	19	71	29
Government	Federal parliamentary democracy	Parliamentary democracy	Constitutional monarchy
Culture (religion, language, law)	Christianity, English, Common law	Christianity, English, Common law	Islam, Bahasa Malaysia/English, Common/Islam/customary law
Deterrence offered	Nuclear (strategic assets)	Conventional (nuclear during Cold War)	None

Table 4: Pacific Sample Data

Country	South Africa	Nigeria	Congo
US national interest	Regional stability / terrorism	Regional stability / terrorism	Regional stability / terrorism
Primary threat	None	None	None
Economic rank	31	23	101
Government	Republic	Federal Republic	Republic
Culture (religion, language, law)	Christianity, IsiZulu/IsiXhosa/Afrikaans, Civil/common law	Islam/Christianity, English, English common & Islamic law	Christianity, French, civil law based on Belgian law
Deterrence offered	None	None	None

Table 5: Africa Sample Data

Country	Brazil	Colombia	Guatemala
US national interest	Regional stability / drugs / organized crime	Regional stability / drugs / organized crime	Regional stability / drugs / organized crime
Primary threat	None	None	None
Economic rank	8	32	80
Government	Federal republic	Republic	Constitutional democratic republic
Culture (religion, language, law)	Christianity, Portuguese, Civil law	Christianity, Spanish, Civil law based on Spanish/French codes	Christianity, Spanish, Civil law
Deterrence offered	Conventional	Conventional	Conventional

Table 6: South America Sample Data

Country	Saudi Arabia	Jordan	Qatar	Iran
US national interest	Regional stability / strategic resources	Regional stability / strategic resources	Regional stability / strategic resources	Regional stability / contain communism
Primary threat	Iran	Iran	Iran	Russia (during Cold War), Israel
Economic rank	15	87	52	20
Government	Monarchy	Constitutional monarchy	Emirate	Theocratic republic
Culture (religion, language, law)	Islam (Sunni), Arabic, Sharia w/ customary law	Islam (Sunni), Arabic, Mixed civil/Islamic law	Islam, Arabic, Mixed civil/Islamic law	Islam, Persian, Sharia law
Deterrence offered	Conventional	Conventional	Conventional	None (nuclear during Cold War)

Table 7: Middle East Sample Data

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