

## Smart Talk No. 23

### Presenter

Rory Medcalf

### Moderator

Chaesung Chun

### Discussants

Jihwan Hwang  
Young Ho Kim  
Sang Hyun Lee  
Seongho Sheen

This product presents a policy-oriented summary of the Smart Talk.

The East Asia Institute  
909 Sampoong B/D  
158 Eulji-ro  
Jung-gu  
Seoul 100-786  
Republic of Korea

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## Future of Extended Nuclear Deterrence in East Asia

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On April 26, 2012, the East Asia Institute invited Rory Medcalf, Lowy Institute, to discuss on the future of extended nuclear deterrence in the East Asian region. The following are some of the main points of his presentation and the subsequent discussion with South Korean experts and scholars.

### Summary of the Seminar

Following President Barack Obama's Prague speech in 2009 in which outlined a "world without nuclear weapons," his administration has pursued an ambitious disarmament agenda. Since that speech there have been a number of successes on this front; the launch of the Nuclear Security Summit, the New START treaty with Russia, and a successful outcome at the 2010 Non-Proliferation Treaty Review Conference. Of greater significance, the Obama administration almost came close to declaring a no-first use policy in its 2010 Nuclear Posture Review (NPR). While not going so far, the NPR did state that nuclear weapons would have a reduced role in U.S. policy. The effect though of such a disarmament initiative has been to create a degree of uncertainty and misjudgment with regard to extended deterrence in East Asia. As such, a number of countries in the region have expressed some differences and mistrust toward extended deterrence. The key question then is how to pursue disarmament without weakening the credibility of extended deterrence.

Rory Medcalf began his presentation by highlighting the main challenge for countries

in the region that support efforts for disarmament yet live under the protection of extended deterrence. Due to this contradiction, it is important to understand clearly the policies, interests, and understandings of each country in the East Asia region. A further challenge to understanding the perceptions of these countries toward nuclear deterrence has been the changing strategic environment in the region. Since 2010, a more "assertive" China has emerged which has raised a number of concerns among its neighbors. North Korea's nuclear program also continues to pose a greater threat following the nuclear test in 2009 and its continued provocations against South Korea. Considering these security challenges, the pressure for the credibility of extended deterrence is greater now than it was at any other time since the end of the Cold War.

Elaborating further, Mr. Medcalf put forward four concluding points from his research that could help to develop a clearer picture of extended deterrence in the region. The first one is that despite all the positive progress in the pursuit of disarmament by the Obama administration, this agenda has reached a plateau in East Asia and more difficult work remains. The second point is that U.S. allies in region will continue to expect the United States to provide extended deterrence in the region. The third point is that there is no expectation that conventional weapons could be a substitute for nuclear weapons as the ultimate tool for deterrence. The final point is that it should not be expected that extended deterrence will remain the same.

The strategic environment in the region will likely change over time meaning that extended deterrence will face new and more complex challenges.

The discussion focused on the diverging views on extended deterrence in South Korea and how to enhance U.S. credibility. In particular, one discussant noted the challenge presented by China's Anti-Access/Area-Denial strategy. In response to this strategy, the United States has been considering more dispersed troop deployments so that they would be more difficult to target. The concern though is that this might signal a weakened extended deterrence as U.S. forces will have a limited presence in the region. Mr. Medcalf challenged this notion that there is an "all or nothing" form of extended deterrence. Furthermore, he believed that close consultations with allies can help to alleviate such fears over the credibility of extended deterrence.■

## **About the Speaker**

### **Rory Medcalf**

Rory Medcalf is Director of the International Security Program at the Lowy Institute. His professional background spans intelligence analysis, journalism and diplomacy. He has worked as a senior strategic analyst specializing in Asian great-power relations with the Office of National Assessments, Canberra's peak intelligence agency. His experience as an Australian diplomat included a posting to New Delhi, a secondment to Japan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and truce monitoring on the Pacific island of Bougainville. He has also contributed substantially to three landmark reports on nuclear arms control: the Canberra Commission, Tokyo Forum, and International Commission on Nuclear Non-Proliferation and Disarmament.

## **Discussants**

Jihwan Hwang, University of Seoul

Young Ho Kim, Korea National Defense University

Sang Hyun Lee, Director-General for Policy Planning, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade

Seongho Sheen, Seoul National University