



The United States, Extended Deterrence, and Security Guarantees in the Gulf Region

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Outline

- Presenter opinions
- Conceptual Confusion?
- Regional context
- Policy dilemmas
- Regional dilemmas
- Conclusions



The idea of security assurances extended by outside powers is nothing new in the Gulf. Britain first draped a naval umbrella of sorts over the region in the early 19th century.

Some Were Surprised...

"We want Iran to calculate what I think is a fair assessment that if the United States extends a defense umbrella over the region, if we do even more to support the military capacity of those in the Gulf, it's unlikely that Iran will be any stronger or safer because they won't be able to intimidate and dominate as they apparently believe they can once they have a nuclear weapon." Secretary of State Hilary Clinton speaking to reporters on July 21, 2009 in Bangkok.



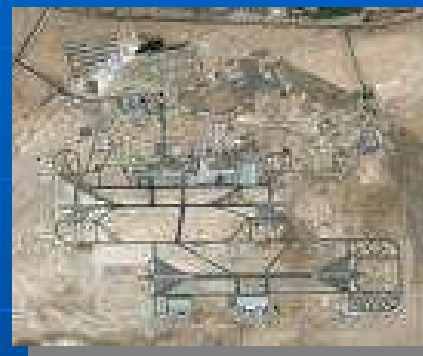
"I was not thrilled to hear the American statement from yesterday that they will protect their allies with a nuclear umbrella, as if they have already come to terms with a nuclear Iran. I think that's a mistake." Dan Meridor, Israel's Minister of Intelligence and Atomic Energy on July 21.

Why is This Interesting?

- Role of nuclear weapons in US strategy is unclear – NPR is being drafted.
- Obama Administration embraces disarmament on the one hand but finds the Cold War template of extended deterrence and security assurance still useful.
- NPR must square a bunch of circles.
 - Preserving threat of escalation as conflict management tool in conventional wars – maybe w/nuclear armed states.
 - Assigning conventional weapons to “strategic” targets, but HDBT problem remains, i.e., there’s some stuff that may need to be held at risk by nukes.
 - Hedging against a world of more nuclear armed states seems prudent, right?
 - Role of the strategic deterrent as tool of non-proliferation conveyed via security assurances.
 - US is slowly but surely disarming itself as stockpile erodes, human capital goes away – “wasting asset”

In The Gulf...

- Hasn't the US already draped a security umbrella over the region via extended deterrence and security assurances?
- Post Gulf War I: Presence, prepositioning, exercises, FMS, Defense Cooperation Agreements; ongoing operations.
- What about the two wars; intervention in the 1980s in EARNEST WILL and siding w/Saddam in the Iran-Iraq War to stop Iran from winning?
- Isn't Israel already under the US conventional and nuclear umbrella?
- Aren't the Gulf States as well?
 - US has clearly stated circumstances under which it would forgo negative security assurances – protect its troops; Iran's conventional weakness an issue here.



Al Dhafra Air Base (left), along with Al-Udied, have emerged as important USAF operational hubs in the Gulf.



The United States Navy is a familiar sight on Gulf skylines and has been for the last two decades.

The Chicken and Egg Problem: US Gulf Strategy

- What are US strategic objectives and what is role of nuclear weapons, extended deterrence, and/or conventional forces in achieving them?
 - Balance of power; defend the region; nonproliferation; market stabilization and global flows; expand democracy vs. preserve autocracies; counter Sunni millennial extremists; protect Israel???
- Should these objectives get prioritized or not?
- US strategy today is largely a product of institutional and bureaucratic momentum of its forward-deployed military.
 - Drift of the 1990s; failure of dual containment
 - Not all bad necessarily; keeps political leadership from having to make choices; trains run on time, sort of...
- Strategic and intellectual fog surrounding US objectives in the Gulf – fed by Iraq invasion; WOT.
 - How can NPR drafters assign roles for nukes and role of extended deterrence without a clear articulation of objectives?

Recent History

- Clear that US meant what it said when Carter decided to “defend the region in 1980.”
- Conventional forces used in Desert Storm, '03 Iraq invasion and numerous other smaller deployments.
- Extended nuclear deterrence treated sparingly by policy makers:
 - June 1950 verbiage
 - Oct. 1973 War
 - Carter’s veiled threat in '80
 - '96 statements on Tarhuna
 - Veiled threats in '91, '03 Iraq wars.
 - More recent veiled threats against Iran.



Eight MX missile warheads re-entering the atmosphere in a 1984 test.

Current Environment

- Complex, cross-cutting system with guarantees to regional antagonists with different objectives.
 - Credibility of guarantees underpins the “system.”
- SecState clearly signaling Iran that nuclear program will not lead to increased influence/coercive leverage.
- Convince Gulf States to forgo corresponding steps if Iran continues its program – stay aligned with the US.
 - Keep nuclear renaissance peaceful....
- Convince Israelis not to strike. Good luck on that one.
- Have we sorted out concepts of conventional and nuclear deterrence with ourselves and our allies?
 - Gulf is tilted towards conventional deterrence; more than a simple “tripwire” force deployed today.
- There is a framing political context to the system.
 - Regional elites like the idea of being protected but what about their publics in places like KSA? Does it matter what “publics” think/want?

Conclusions

- Nature and purpose of security guarantees remain at the front/center of calculus for all regional/global actors.
- Clearly the case in the Gulf, as noted by SecState.
- Conceptual clarity useful or not for US and its regional partners?
- NPR may or may not address all these issues, or, it may go way of most DoD reports....

Questions?

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