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In America We Trust:

**Regional Responses to
US Extended Deterrence from
Obama to Trump**

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Introduction

US extended deterrence guarantees to its allies in Europe, the Middle East, and East Asia can best be described as a mixed bag. Over the years, different US administrations have adopted varying policies to protect allies from nuclear attack as part of the country's extended nuclear guarantees. However, these policies do not follow in a linear fashion. Measures taken by the Obama and Trump administrations have had differing impacts on different sets of allies, often with the same move eliciting trust from one set while contributing to diminishing trust in another.

This paper looks at what constitutes the 'trust' of allies under the US nuclear umbrella, and what parameters are considered pre-requisites for continued US extended nuclear deterrence guarantees.

Trust in extended nuclear deterrence guarantees is contingent on two important factors:

1. Continuing shared interests and a common threat perception between the country extending the nuclear security guarantees and the country(s) receiving them
2. Policy continuity over different US administrations in extended deterrence guarantees.

An absence of either of these factors can lead to a faltering of trust in extended deterrence. Against this background, this paper analyses the changes that have come about in US extended deterrence, especially in the nuclear umbrella, from the Obama years to the current Trump dispensation.

Under President Obama, the positive status quo in the European Union's (EU) trust in US deterrence guarantees was maintained owing to the US administration's active push for the ballistic missile defence system which then made possible not only the ability to attack enemies but also defend US allies effectively. Additionally, Obama's successful efforts at forging a nuclear deal with Iran, also known as Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), secured the EU's trust in the US' ability to establish a stable nuclear



architecture by diminishing the threat of a nuclear Iran. However, there was a decline in trust for its Middle Eastern allies because of a widely unpopular JCPOA, as well as for East Asian allies because of an imbalance in US policies towards countering the Chinese and North Korean threats.

Under President Trump, EU allies' trust in the US nuclear umbrella declined because of an increased threat from Russia, and the US withdrawal from the JCPOA, which, according to the EU, gives a fillip to Iranian nuclear ambitions. There was a simultaneous increase in trust for Middle Eastern allies on account of what is seen as Trump's tougher stance on Iran. As far as East Asia is concerned, any change remains inconclusive since evidence suggests that there are signs of both an increase and a simultaneous decrease in trust in US extended deterrence.

This paper concludes that EU priorities and interests do not resemble those of states in the Middle East and East Asia, and therefore, the overarching narrative of a loss of trust in US extended deterrence from the Obama to the Trump administrations is misguided. For that reason, the three regions merit analyses of their own in determining the 'trust' that allies place in the US nuclear umbrella.

Background

The concept of US extended deterrence is a product of the Cold War that emerged at a time when Europe was divided into western (US allies) and eastern blocs (Soviet republics and satellite states). The policy of US extended deterrence entailed both conventional military aspects as well as maintaining a credible and effective nuclear deterrent that would ensure the safety and security of not only the US but also its allies in times of confrontation with the Soviet Union. The underlying notion of US extended deterrence is stated clearly in Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) on collective defence, which states, “The Parties agree that an armed attack against one or more of them in Europe or North America shall be considered an attack against them all and consequently they agree that, if such an armed attack occurs, each of them, in exercise of the right of individual or collective self-defence recognised by Article 51 of the Charter of the United Nations, will assist the Party or Parties so attacked by taking forthwith, individually and in concert with the other Parties, such action as it deems necessary, including the use of armed force, to restore and maintain the security of the North Atlantic area.”

Nuclear deterrence formed a very important aspect of US extended deterrence strategy during the Cold War in the form of the ‘nuclear umbrella’ as an effort to contain the USSR’s growing conventional military and nuclear prowess. It essentially meant extending military guarantees by way of nuclear weapons to allies without nuclear weapons, if a situation were to occur whereby the existence of a non-nuclear weapons states (NNWS) was under threat. A nuclear umbrella provided solely by the US also allowed it to contain allies’ aspirations to build their own nuclear weapons, hence helping to maintain a global strategic order led by the US.

The Legal Premise of the US Nuclear Umbrella

The US commitment to a nuclear umbrella is not enshrined in any legally binding document. Although US nuclear weapons have been deployed in various parts of its

allies' territories since the 1950s, the idea of extending a nuclear umbrella to NATO allies was first officially pronounced in the 2010 NATO Strategic Concept,¹ laying out a mix of conventional and nuclear capabilities to ensure deterrence, and terming the NATO alliance a nuclear alliance as long as nuclear weapons remained in existence. Despite the UK and France having nuclear capabilities, the responsibility of maintaining this nuclear umbrella lies overwhelmingly with the US.² The US also has both formal (US-NATO; US-South Korea) and informal (US-Saudi Arabia; US-Japan; US-Australia) umbrellas in the form of bilateral political commitments.

The structure and composition of the nuclear umbrella has undergone several changes over the years, responding to the changing needs of the strategic security environment. For example, initially the US nuclear umbrella included only NATO members, which was then later extended to its other allies in East Asia and the Middle East, like Japan, Saudi Arabia, and New Zealand (until the 1980s when New Zealand opted out of the nuclear umbrella). Moreover, in the 1970s, at the peak of the Cold War, the US had deployed around 10,000 strategic and non-strategic nuclear weapons in response to the Soviet threat.³ Later, as a result of reduction in tensions between the US and the USSR in the post-Cold War period and a number of arms control measures undertaken by administrations on both sides, the number of nuclear weapons deployed in Europe were reduced drastically. Today, the US deploys its nuclear weapons, almost all of which are B-61 bombs, in five countries: Belgium, the Netherlands, Germany, Italy, and Turkey. The current number of US non-strategic nuclear weapons deployed in Europe is approximately 180.

¹ Trachtenberg, David J. (2012), "US Extended Deterrence: How Much Strategic Force is too Little?", *Strategic Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 6, No. 2:p.68
http://www.airuniversity.af.mil/Portals/10/SSQ/documents/Volume-06_Issue-2/05-Trachtenberg.pdf

² (2011), "Nuclear Umbrella States: A Brief Introduction to the Concept of Nuclear Umbrella States", *International Law and Policy Institute*
<http://nwp.ilpi.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/NP04-11-UmbrellaStates.pdf>

³ See Trachtenberg, 'How Much Strategic Force is too Little?'

Trust: The Consequences of Evolving Nuclear Rhetoric

An alliance, be it conventional or nuclear, is only as strong as the trust that allies place in that alliance. In the case of the US nuclear umbrella, the success and utility of the umbrella relies on its ability to keep members from pursuing their own nuclear capabilities, and resting their faith in the security guarantees provided by their guarantor – in this case, the US. To that effect, allies' 'trust' is enhanced by official US policy commitments as well as the governing administration's public rhetoric.

From the 1950s, different US administrations have adopted varying nuclear postures that have played a crucial role in shaping the nuclear umbrella states' confidence in US security guarantees. In 1954, US President Dwight D. Eisenhower adopted the 'massive retaliation' approach to deter an attack against the US and its allies. The policy was later shifted from 'massive retaliation' to 'Mutually Assured Destruction' under President John F. Kennedy in 1964. Kennedy wanted to reduce the role of nuclear weapons as a means of ensuring security, and this stance was met with opposition by NATO allies. However, Ronald Reagan in 1980 did much to restore allies' trust in the nuclear umbrella by producing a strategic defence system capable of intercepting ballistic missile attacks on nuclear umbrella states. Finally, near the end of the Cold War, under President George W. Bush, all non-strategic nuclear weapons were removed from European and South Korean bases, which was considered a weakening of US extended deterrence, especially by European allies.⁴ The 2001 Nuclear Posture Review (NPR), which articulated an active role for nuclear weapons in "assurance, dissuasion and defeat," once again reassured US allies.

A major shift in US nuclear discourse occurred after Obama came to power in 2009. In his 2010 NPR, Obama envisioned a world free of nuclear weapons and proclaimed the need to reduce dependence on nuclear weapons in resolving conflicts. The text expressed this new shift in nuclear policy and at the same time promised to maintain effective

⁴ Pifer, Steven et al. (2010), "US Nuclear and Extended Deterrence: Considerations and Challenges", Arms Control Series, Brookings Institution.
https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/06_nuclear_deterrence.pdf



nuclear forces for the protection of the US and its allies. Therefore, although the NPR text itself and deliberations around the principle of ‘no first use’ (NFU) led to differences in opinion, Obama’s public rhetoric concerning the safety and security of US allies retained their trust in US extended nuclear deterrence guarantees.

In comparing Obama’s policies to Trump’s, one can clearly see changes – and to a large extent, discontinuity – in the kind of nuclear posturing that both administrations have tried to project. These policies have varied from one region to another, conditional upon changing geopolitical contexts.

Three broadly conceived regions – Europe, West Asia, and East Asia – can be studied to analyse how the confidence of countries in these regions in the US nuclear umbrella has undergone, or is undergoing, changes.



Europe

Obama and Status Quo Maintenance

This section looks at the impact of US nuclear umbrella-related policies towards EU allies, and finds that while under Obama, there was a positive status quo in allies' trust, under Trump, there has been a relative decline.

The US nuclear umbrella over NATO allies in Europe has always been the backbone of US extended deterrence strategy. After Obama was elected in 2008, he made his pro-disarmament stance quite clear, and the 2010 NPR reiterated the US nuclear declaratory policy of maintaining US commitments to decrease “the role of US nuclear weapons in its national and regional security strategies” and instead continue to develop “non-nuclear capabilities such as precision conventional strikes to take some of the burden away from nuclear deterrence.” Additionally, the Obama administration kicked off deliberations around an NFU nuclear policy.

Although the NFU policy remained only in the deliberation phase and did not find a place in the 2010 NPR, a shift towards a reduced role for nuclear weapons in US security strategy created a rift between the western and eastern NATO allies. The point of difference was in how different allies perceived the Russian threat at that time. Western European NATO states like Germany, France, Italy, and the Netherlands supported a benign role for US nuclear weapons in extended deterrence because of their belief that the US has far superior conventional military capabilities to deter any attack by Russia. They asserted that in an age of arms control and disarmament initiatives, the role of nuclear weapons in protecting the US and its allies was becoming increasingly redundant.

However, Central and Eastern European NATO allies like Poland, the Czech Republic, and Latvia, which are geographically closer to Russia, had reservations about this benign role. Most of these concerns emerged from an increased Russian emphasis on tactical nuclear weapons (TNW). Therefore, for NATO members in central Europe, hosting US nuclear

weapons on their soil served more of a strategic purpose, in addition to a political need to counter the Russian threat.

Seeing a shared interest with NATO allies in countering Russia, Obama successfully reassured NATO allies by aggressively pushing for a robust European Phased Adaptive Approach ballistic missile defence (BMD) system, with plans of deploying more than 500 interceptors in different locations across Europe. This move substantially helped to consolidate NATO trust.⁵

The effort to preserve NATO's trust in US security guarantees became more palpable after the 2014 Russian annexation of Crimea, which created paranoia amongst eastern NATO allies. To reassure them, Obama personally engaged in managing the crisis by increasing naval and ground forces training in Poland and the Baltic countries, and "increasing the capacity for a NATO quick response force." It was just the kind of posturing that was needed at that point to assuage unease.⁶

The Russian invasion of Crimea in 2014 was a turning point as it led the Obama administration to consider a 'reconstruction' and 'recapitalisation' of the US nuclear arsenal, and therefore despite a pro-disarmament stand, Obama, during his tenure, carried forward plans to build a robust nuclear triad amounting to a US\$ 534 million increase in nuclear spending in 2015.⁷

Another very important factor contributing to status quo maintenance were Obama's successful efforts at negotiating the JCPOA, also known as the Iran nuclear deal, in July 2015, with five other states: Germany, Russia, China, the UK, and France. The agreement

⁵ Kay, Sean. 2012. "Obama Is Getting Missile Defense Right in Europe". HUFFPOST. 8 July: <http://bit.ly/2mkFCyy>. Accessed on 15 June 2019

⁶ Shear, Michael and Baker, Peter. 2014. "Obama Renewing U.S. Commitment to NATO Alliance". *The New York Times*. 26 March <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/03/27/world/europe/obama-europe.html> Accessed on 20 October, 2018.

⁷ Thompson, Loren. 2015. "Obama Backs Biggest Nuclear Arms Buildup Since Cold War". *Forbes*. 15 December <https://www.forbes.com/sites/lorenthompson/2015/12/15/obama-backs-biggest-nuclear-arms-buildup-since-cold-war/#51746f082a0f> Accessed on 20 October, 2018; Birch, Douglas. 2014. "The Obama administration is spending billions of dollars on nuclear weapons". 30 July <https://www.pri.org/stories/2014-07-30/obama-administration-spending-billions-dollars-nuclear-weapons> Accessed on 21 October 2018

required Tehran to “eliminate its stockpile of medium-enriched uranium, cut its stockpile of low-enriched uranium by 98 per cent and reduce its gas centrifuges by two-thirds.”

Along with this, the stipulated limit to which Iran could enrich uranium was set at 3.67 per cent, an amount far below what is required to build a bomb. Additionally, Iran also had to put all its nuclear-related activities under International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) supervision. This agreement helped put to rest Europe's concerns over Iran's nuclear weapons programme, and assisted the resumption of trade between European states and Iran by lifting primary and secondary economic sanctions.

A point to note is that despite a rather reserved stance on the role of nuclear weapons in US extended security guarantees, Obama was able to prevent differences of opinion from overshadowing US deterrence commitments to NATO allies. Obama, in his public speeches, always placed emphasis on bolstering trust and confidence in US security commitments to NATO, mentioning the “utmost importance of the transatlantic relationship.”⁸

It is safe to say that although US-NATO ties under the Obama administration were not without its issues, as far as the US nuclear umbrella was concerned, there were no clear signs of diminishing trust in the umbrella, and the status quo was maintained.

Trump and an Erosion of Trust

Moving to the Trump administration, one can see a clear change in US nuclear posture towards its NATO allies. The 2018 NPR represented a sea change insofar as US extended deterrence commitments to its allies were concerned. The NPR text mentions the eminent need for a “tailored deterrence” approach to be adopted to defend the US and its allies. To that end, the NPR brought about some crucial changes in the country's nuclear policies, such as an enhanced focus on “non-strategic, low yield nuclear warheads” and “pursuing a modern, nuclear-armed, sea-launched cruise missile” as a

⁸ Sevastopulo, Demteri. 2016. “Obama reassures Nato on US commitment”. Financial Times. 15 November <https://www.ft.com/content/9ad44ae4-aabf-11e6-9cb3-bb8207902122> Accessed on 25 September 2018.



response to the international security environment. In many ways, the text could be seen as a fitting response to the Russian threat to the US' NATO allies, and hence, does much to restore NATO's faith in US security guarantees, especially on the nuclear front.

However, Trump's public rhetoric on US security commitments to NATO seems to be inconsistent with the promises otherwise made on paper. This is a symbolic shift that carries the potential of putting an increasing strain on European allies' trust in US extended deterrence. This can be ascertained from a decline in political trust with NATO allies, which is a function of a mix of continuities and discontinuities in US government policies. Under Trump, this is evident in two cases: his position on Russia, and the US withdrawal from the JCPOA.

In spite of the 2019 Missile Defence Review that robustly builds on previous missile defence policy and provides for a more comprehensive missile defence system, Trump's policy towards Russia has been ambivalent, giving mixed signals to European allies. Despite a common interest in blocking Russia's influence in Europe, Trump's acceptance of Russia's denial of tampering in the 2016 US presidential election; lukewarm response to Russia's disinformation campaign in Central and Eastern Europe; and withdrawal of US troops from Syria, thereby creating space for Russia to exert greater influence in the region, have constituted an equivocal response to the Russian threat.

Adding to tensions is the US decision to suspend Turkey, a key NATO ally, from its F-35 fighter jet programme in response to Russia's sale of the S-400 air defence system to Turkey. There are concerns that Turkey operating F-35s alongside the Russian-made defence system could expose the former's technical secrets. However, fracturing relations with a key NATO ally instead of finding a diplomatic solution could adversely impact the 70-year old transatlantic relationship.

A major irritant has also been Trump's seeming discomfort with NATO – he referred to the organisation as “obsolete and a relic of the Cold War” – due to what he regards as inadequate spending by NATO allies on collective NATO defence and security. Seen in

light of his inability to call out Russia in its activities in and beyond the North Atlantic region, a rather weak picture emerges of NATO allies' trust in US extended deterrence.

The second most important factor responsible for an erosion of trust in US extended deterrence was Trump's decision to withdraw from the JCPOA in May 2018 and the subsequent re-imposition by the US of primary and secondary sanctions. The decision left allies subject to economic losses on account of their trade deals with Iran. Private businesses in countries like France and Germany have suffered massively, with companies like Peugeot and Siemens being forced to fold their operations in Iran. Weak political trust in terms of discontinuity of policies can potentially reflect directly (or indirectly) on the strategic trust that allies place in US nuclear and conventional security guarantees. The US withdrawal from the JCPOA can be seen as a violation of political trust, thereby also weakening the credibility of the US nuclear umbrella for its allies.

At present, these issues may not be a direct indication of heavy raindrops on the US nuclear umbrella from the perspective of its NATO allies, since none of their leaders have officially expressed distrust. But these issues do carry the seeds of future discord between the US and its non-nuclear NATO allies as signs of misgivings have started to appear.

Permanent Structured Cooperation, also known as PESCO, is the EU security and defence policy. The framework for PESCO was first written in the EU constitution and then into the Treaty of Lisbon of 2009. It remained dormant from 2009 to 2013, after it failed to achieve ratification at the time. Deliberations around PESCO kicked back into motion partly because of the Russian annexation of Crimea in 2014. However, it is no coincidence that the number of EU Council meetings pertaining to PESCO accelerated significantly around the same time as President-Elect Donald Trump's scathing remarks on NATO's legitimacy as a military alliance surfaced in the public discourse. This amounted to an increase of a total of 12 back-to-back EU Council-NATO meetings in 2017 and 10 in 2018, from one Council meeting in 2013 and six in 2016⁹. Finally, in

⁹ European Council: Council of the European Union. *Timeline: EU Cooperation of Security and Defense*. <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/defence-security/defence-security-timeline/>. Accessed on 1 April 2019.

December 2017, PESCO was activated, with four-fifths of its members also part of NATO. A PESCO-like framework is likely to enhance the security of European partners without being dependent on the US for collective defence.

The functions of PESCO, which include defence equipment acquisition, research, deploying targeted combat units for missions, along with peacemaking and post-conflict stabilisation, can in many ways be seen as a substitute for NATO in the long-run. The fact that all its operations and funding are controlled by the EU gives it an edge over the US-led NATO.

As far as the US nuclear umbrella in Europe is concerned, the future strengthening of European defence through PESCO could very well involve some variant of a nuclear deterrent with France and/or the UK (as a third-state party in PESCO) being the nuclear guarantor and extending a pan-European nuclear umbrella. However, it might be premature to think of a UK or France-led nuclear umbrella over Europe, since combined Anglo-French nuclear warheads tally to no more than 515, of which only 400 are presently deployed, in comparison to 6,550 US warheads, of which 1,800 are currently deployed. Additionally, the UK and France each have four nuclear-armed ballistic missile submarines, with France also possessing three types of cruise missiles (including Apache AP and its variants, the Exocet missile series, and Air-Sol Moyenne Portée) in comparison to the US' 14 ballistic missile submarines and four cruise missile submarines. While the US has both land-based and submarine-launched intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) capabilities, most of the UK and France's ICBM capabilities are submarine-based.

With Brexit, the possibility of a future European nuclear umbrella might preclude UK. However, there are talks around Germany financing France in building a possible 'Euronuclear group'. The tensions between Trump and German Chancellor Angela Merkel have started to show visibly in the German public discourse – in June 2018, German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas was quoted as saying, "We as Europeans [need to] act as a conscious counterweight when the US oversteps red lines."¹⁰ In fact, in July 2017, a

¹⁰ "Germany might be considering a nuclear bomb". *We are the might*. 7 August 2018. <https://www.wearethemighty.com/is-germany-building-nukes>. Accessed on 2 November 2018.



review of the legality of Germany funding French or British nuclear weapons programmes in exchange for protection was released by the German Parliament, increasing the gravity of the option being considered. What gives this option more weight is the widespread opinion among experts in Germany, such as Christian Hacke, who said, “For the first time since 1949, Germany is not under the US nuclear umbrella.”

Therefore, although the Trump administration is keen on increasing investments in modernising the US nuclear arsenal and introducing new nuclear technology to achieve greater efficiency, as was evident in the 2018 NPR, ultimately, the most important question is the extent to which the US is ready to use these nuclear advancements to defend its allies against any attack at the cost of risking its own survival. The trust that sustains the nuclear umbrella seems to be weakening, and this could result in more NATO allies contemplating other alternatives.

Middle East

This section analyses the impact of Obama and Trump policies on Middle Eastern allies' trust in informal US nuclear umbrella guarantees. The findings suggest that while trust declined under the Obama administration owing to its approach to Iran, there was a relative increase in trust under Trump because of, among others, withdrawal from the JCPOA.

Iran has for decades been a sore point in relations between the US and many of its Middle Eastern allies. The US' Arab allies, especially Saudi Arabia and Egypt, as well as other states such as Israel, consider Shia-dominated Iran a regional aggressor due to the latter's ideological and, in several cases, material support to opposition parties and movements in the region, such as Hezbollah and Hamas. Iran and its adversaries has been involved in proxy wars in countries like Iraq and Syria, striving for regional dominance.

Tensions between Iran and the US' Arab allies intensified when Iran's covert nuclear weapons programme became public knowledge in 2002. Despite being a party to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), Iran, which is a NNWS, was found in violation of treaty obligations insofar as its clandestine uranium enrichment was concerned. Iran has consistently denied allegations of building nuclear weapons, clarifying that its sole purpose is and has always been to carry out scientific research and development to use nuclear energy for peaceful purposes. However, these statements have not done much to assuage Iran's nervous neighbours.

Israel, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt are considered major non-NATO US allies qualifying for US extended deterrence. However, due to the lack of a formal US nuclear umbrella or mutual defence treaties with these states, there has always been room for uncertainty and suspicion over US readiness in retaliating to an attack on behalf of any of these states.



Rising Fear under the Obama Administration

The Obama administration recognised the uneasiness that its Middle Eastern allies felt, and as a means of developing a regional security strategy to keep tensions at bay, the US participated in successful negotiations towards the JCPOA with Iran.

Although the Iran nuclear deal was intended, among other things, to address depleting trust among Middle Eastern allies in US extended deterrence commitments through the strengthening of regional stability, it yielded contrary results. Most allies in the region bitterly opposed the deal given what they perceived as weak commitments enshrined in an agreement aiming to contain Iran's nuclear aspirations. They also had concerns about the lifting of existing sanctions, and what they saw as enabling Iran to resume funding to armed groups like Hezbollah and the Houthi movement in Yemen.

The Saudi Arabian king at the time, Salman Bin Abdul aziz Al Saud, expressed both "caution and hope that this agreement would strengthen regional stability." The Egyptian foreign ministry expressed hope that the deal would work towards preventing an arms race in the region. Israel, fearing an existential threat from Iran, expressed its discontent with the agreement, with Prime Minister Netanyahu calling the deal a "capitulation and a bad mistake of historic proportions." In terms of domestic politics, the opposition at the time – the Republicans – also criticised the deal, with claims that the agreement was counterproductive on the basis of giving too many concessions to Iran with not enough checks and balances.

Two months prior to the finalisation of the JCPOA, Obama reassured Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) members at Camp David of the US' unequivocal commitment towards its Arab allies, and reiterated "strong US-GCC strategic partnership in all fields including defence and security cooperation." Obama underscored the need to "address the international and regional concerns regarding Iran's nuclear programme," and build a credible missile defence system.

Ultimately, the allies went along with the deal.¹¹ However, the Iran nuclear deal also created fissures in US-Gulf relations, as regional allies saw Obama as failing to adequately address their perception of Iranian nuclear threat.

Trust Consolidation under the Trump Administration

On 8 May 2018, Trump withdrew from the historic nuclear compromise reached with Iran, declaring the agreement redundant and defective. US withdrawal from the JCPOA was accompanied by the reimposition of primary and secondary nuclear and non-nuclear-related sanctions on Iran that is resulting in significant effects on the country's already struggling economy.

As stated by Trump and several Middle Eastern allies, their main issue with the deal revolved around the sunset clause, which put a limit of ten years on uranium enrichment-related regulations imposed on Iran from the day of the agreement's implementation. The agreement, which was intended to address the nuclear aspect only, also led to regional questions about Iran's ballistic missile development programme and the country's support for armed groups like Hezbollah and Hamas.

The December 2015 IAEA report on Iranian obligations under the JCPOA concluded that although Iran had not declared all of its nuclear material and related activities, as stipulated under the NPT, in 2003, "these activities did not advance beyond feasibility and scientific studies, and the acquisition of certain relevant technical competences and capabilities." It also asserted that it had no credible indication of activities in Iran relevant to the development of a nuclear explosive device after 2009."¹² Before the agreement came into effect in 2016, Iran had reduced the number of its centrifuges by 13,000, and placed all its enrichment facilities under the IAEA's Additional Protocol,

¹¹ Nephew, Richard and Einhorn, Robert, 2016, 'The Iran Nuclear Deal: Prelude to Proliferation in the Middle East', *Brookings Institute*, Arms Control and Non-Proliferation Series Paper 11, pp. 19-25, https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/acnpi_20160531_iran_deal_regional_proliferation.pdf. Accessed on 1 April, 2019

¹² Monje, Scott. 2016. 'Did Iran Ever Actually Violate The Nonproliferation Treaty? Does It Matter?'. *Foreign Policy Association*. 13 January. <https://foreignpolicyblogs.com/2016/01/13/did-iran-ever-actually-violate-the-nonproliferation-treaty-does-it-matter/>. Accessed on 1 November 2018.

which applies strict regulation and supervision procedures. In June 2017, the IAEA released a second edition of the report, clarifying that Iran was found to be in full compliance of its commitments under the JCPOA.¹³ The reasons therefore that were offered for the US withdrawal from the JCPOA derived from the perceived threat of Iran's nuclear programme, and not credible evidence of Iran's actual violation of the JCPOA, or even NPT.

However, Trump's decision to withdraw was met with widespread support from Arab allies, with countries such as Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, the UAE, and Egypt hailing the decision. Saudi Arabia, for example, released an official statement that "supported the announcement of re-instatement of economic sanctions on Iran" and "hoped that the international community will take a firm and uniform stand against Iran and its hostile activities."¹⁴ Similarly, other Gulf allies saw the move as a "political victory over Iran."¹⁵

As expected, Iran reacted to the US decision by announcing its intention of exceeding the JCPOA's stipulated cap on uranium enrichment beyond 3.67 per cent, as well as breaching the limit on stockpiling low-enriched uranium at 300 kg.

Without going into an assessment of Trump's decision in terms of actually addressing a threat from Iran, which is beyond the purview of this paper, it certainly led to a restoration of political trust amongst Middle East allies, which had depleted under the Obama administration.

A counter-argument to the restoration of trust among Middle Eastern allies can be found in the statements made by former Saudi Foreign Minister Adel Al-Jubeir, who said, "We

¹³ International Atomic Energy Agency. 2017. Verification and monitoring in the Islamic Republic of Iran in light of United Nations Security Council resolution 2231 (2015). GOV/2017/24, pp. 1-6.; International Atomic Energy Agency. 2015. Final Assessment on Past and Present Outstanding Issues regarding Iran's Nuclear Programme. GOV/2015/68, pp1-16.

¹⁴ The Middle East Media Research Institute. 2018. Saudi Arabia, UAE, Bahrain, Egypt Welcome President Trump's Withdrawal From JCPOA. Special Dispatch no.7462.

¹⁵ Kalin, Stephen and Dadouch, Sarah. 2018. "Gulf Arab allies hail triumph after U.S. quits Iran deal". Reuters. 9 May <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-iran-nuclear-gulf-reaction/gulf-arab-allies-hail-triumph-after-u-s-quits-iran-deal-idUSKBN1I93CU>

will do whatever it takes to protect our people. We have made it very clear that if Iran acquires a nuclear capability we will do everything we can to do the same.” Similarly, Israel, has clearly stated that it faces an existential threat from Iran. A nuclear Iran has the potential to end the geopolitical monopoly that Israel currently assumes in the region, and Israel may thus consider taking preemptive measures in the future to counter it.

However, these instances do not necessarily indicate a lack of trust in US deterrence. Instead, they highlight the willingness and intention of Middle Eastern allies to initiate or operationalise their own nuclear weapons programmes. A reflection of this is Saudi Arabia's sustained opposition to any limits on its enrichment and reprocessing capabilities as required by section 123 of the US Atomic Energy Act as applicable to US-Saudi civil nuclear cooperation.

Saudi Arabia signalling its intentions of acquiring nuclear weapons to the US can be traced back to 2009. Saudi Arabia's aspirations of acquiring nuclear weapons were quite evident even during the Obama administration, as suggested by 2010 and 2013 reports on Saudi investment in Pakistan's nuclear weapons programme as a means of readying warheads for its own deployment if and when needed.¹⁶

In most cases, interest in pursuing nuclear weapons by US allies in the Middle East have their own insular path and trajectory, and may have little to nothing to do with the JCPOA, or the restoration or depletion of trust in US extended deterrence. In fact, it may be logical to argue that US withdrawal from the agreement creates the circumstances – that of a potential nuclear Iran – for allies to justify the development of their own nuclear programmes.

¹⁶ Urban, Mark. 2013. "Saudi nuclear weapons 'on order' from Pakistan". BBC. 6 November <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-24823846>
Borgan, Julian. 2010. "Pakistan's Bomb and Saudi Arabia". The Guardian. 11 May <https://www.theguardian.com/world/julian-borger-global-security-blog/2010/may/11/pakistan-saudi-arabia>

East Asia

This section concludes that while under Obama, the trust of East Asian allies declined, under the Trump administration, trust in US extended deterrence guarantees remains inconclusive because of indeterminate policies towards North Korea and China. This has therefore maintained the trust status quo with occasional ups and downs.

Like Europe (via NATO) and the Middle East, the US has extended security guarantees to its allies in the extended East Asian neighbourhood: South Korea, Japan, Taiwan, and Australia. This section will examine the South Korean and Japanese cases.

The tensions characterising the Cold War created a security dilemma in the region that led the US to extend both conventional and nuclear security guarantees to it. However, even though the US has formally extended its nuclear umbrella to South Korea, and has established an informal extended nuclear security guarantee for Japan, the history of US extended nuclear guarantees in East Asia has been less smooth than in Europe. Trust in US security guarantees has always been rather thin in East Asia.

During the Korean War in 1950-53, US inhibitions in supplying South Korea with weapons and combat troops against North Korea created cracks in their relationship, leading South Korea to grow wary of its reliance on the US for its security.¹⁷ In order to balance the USSR's presence in the region, it became imperative for the US to regain its East Asian ally's trust.

As a show of its security assurance, the US carried out heavy nuclearisation of the Korean peninsula in two phases from 1958 onwards, thereby officially declaring South Korea a 'nuclear umbrella ally'. In the first phase (1958-61), the US deployed 4-5 nuclear weapon systems including surface-to-surface missiles, atomic demolition munition, nuclear landmines, and nuclear artillery weapons totalling 150 nuclear warheads. Following 1961, more surface-to-surface missile systems were deployed, bringing the

¹⁷ Kristensen, Hans and Norris, Robert. 2017. 'A history of US nuclear weapons in South Korea'. *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*. 73(6): pp. 349-357.

total nuclear warhead count to approximately 950 towards the end of the second phase in 1967.¹⁸

However, in the 1970s, the US carried out substantial reductions in the number of nuclear weapons deployed in the region, bringing it down to 150 tactical nuclear weapons by the 1980s, and instead deciding to strengthen defence through conventional military capabilities like deploying Lance surface-to-surface missiles with conventional warheads. As a consequence of these reductions, which were accompanied by the withdrawal of one division of US forces from South Korea in the 1970s and dwindling trust in the US nuclear umbrella, South Korea embarked on its own nuclear weapons programme. However, the nuclear programme was only at a premature stage when the US terminated it, followed by South Korea's ratification of the NPT in 1975. Finally, by 1991, all US nuclear weapons deployed in South Korea were withdrawn, with then South Korean President Roh Tae Woo declaring, "There do not exist any nuclear weapons whatsoever anywhere in Republic of Korea."

The history of the US nuclear umbrella towards Japan is more straightforward. As the only country to bear the brunt of nuclear use, Japan's aversion to nuclear weapons is rooted in its past. In 1968, Japan released its declaratory policy on nuclear weapons, which it said relied on "US nuclear deterrence for protection from external nuclear threat." However, with the Soviet threat during the Cold War, and now the threat of a nuclear-armed North Korea, the informal guarantee of a US nuclear umbrella is increasingly being perceived as flimsy by many within the Japanese policy commentariat. This feeds into Japan's struggle to reconcile the contradiction between its pro-nuclear and pro-disarmament lobbies, and gives a boost to the former's position and rationale.

Currently, the US does not have any nuclear weapons deployed in East Asia, and hence most of its extended deterrence assurances rely on US-based dual-fighter bombers with tactical bombs as well as strategic bombers and ballistic missile submarines placed in the Pacific.

¹⁸ see 16; "Seoul in Isolation: Explaining South Korean Nuclear Behavior, 1968-1980" <http://www.alexlanoszka.com/AlexanderLanoszkaROK.pdf> Accessed on 5 November 2018.

Threat Perceptions in East Asia

Two factors largely determine the nuclear security calculus in East Asia. One, the perceived interests and consequential actions of China and North Korea. With China's recent continuous advances in the South China Sea (SCS) and its growing nuclear arsenal, lack of transparency in providing clear details of its nuclear weapon capabilities, and organisational military reforms, it poses a formidable challenge regionally and even globally. During the Cold War, much of the US' need to maintain its strategic presence in Asia arose from the urge to counter the growing influence that China and the Soviet Union posed. Although China's recent growing military and nuclear prowess has been a cause for concern, at the same time, according to China, its adherence to a global NFU along with its longstanding commitment to global nuclear disarmament, non-proliferation, and efforts to maintain a lean nuclear arsenal defeat the arguments spun around China being a nuclear threat.

Today, the immediate threat that US allies in East Asia face is from the North Korean regime and the rapid build-up of its nuclear arsenal. The North Korean nuclear threat became serious when after threatening to withdraw from the NPT in 1993, and despite agreeing to "freeze and dismantle its nuclear programme" in 1994, North Korea finally left the NPT in 2003 and officially declared its possession of nuclear weapons. Since then, North Korea has conducted three major nuclear tests (in addition to various other alleged nuclear tests including Hydrogen bomb tests) and more than a dozen short-range ballistic missile launches in 2019 alone.

Some observers claim that North Korean nuclear activities could lead to a domino effect on Japan and South Korea in developing nuclear weapons capability. This in turn could lead to larger security dilemmas for India, China, and Pakistan, which possess nuclear weapons. Therefore, US-North Korea nuclear diplomacy accounts for a big chunk of US nuclear umbrella guarantees to its East Asian allies. How this diplomacy will play out will determine the credibility of US security assurances and the trust that South Korea and Japan place in the umbrella.

Obama and the Region's Threat Perception

In 2009, the US and the Republic of Korea signed the Joint Vision Alliance, which addressed the “21st century security environment” and emphasised the need for US extended deterrence, including the US nuclear umbrella, to reinforce security assurances to the Republic of Korea.¹⁹

However, the 2010 NPR released under Obama was a slight break from the proactive stance taken by previous administrations on North Korea. For example, the NPRs under Bill Clinton (1994) and George W. Bush (2001) explicitly identified states like North Korea and the nuclear threat it posed to South Korea and Japan, and focused significantly on extended nuclear deterrence to deter any attack on its East Asian allies.

Contrary to this, Obama's NPR legally enshrined his vision for a nuclear weapons-free world and put great emphasis on reducing the role of nuclear weapons in US security strategy. The NPR laid plans for increasing reliance on “non-nuclear means to accomplish objectives of....reassuring [our] allies and partners.”²⁰ This was coupled with a crucial decision by the US to retire the Tomahawk long-range sea-launched nuclear cruise missile (TLAM/N) which served as a tool for US extended deterrence in Europe and the Pacific. These new policy decisions fuelled anxiety in South Korea and Japan.

Even though Obama's public rhetoric on US commitments in maintaining formal and informal umbrellas towards South Korea and Japan was quite straightforward and unambiguous, a decline in East Asian allies' trust in US extended deterrence was evident on two counts: Obama's passive diplomacy in countering an increasingly assertive China, and his failure to effectively address the North Korean nuclear threat.

¹⁹ White House Archives. 2009. Joint vision for the alliance of the United States of America and the Republic of Korea. Office of the Press Secretary. 16 June. Washington D.C.

²⁰ Kristensen, Hans. 2010. 'The Nuclear Posture Review'. Federation of American Scientists. 8 April. <https://fas.org/blogs/security/2010/04/npr2010/>. Accessed on 15 November 2018.

As part of his ‘pivot to Asia’ strategy, Obama suggested the G2 idea – a proposed informal special relationship – to offer strategic security assurances to China and engage diplomatically at a deeper level. This move was not well received by East Asian allies, who saw this as a weakening of US influence in the region, and allowing China to exploit strategic space in East Asia. Shortly afterwards, in 2013, China declared a unilateral Air Defence Identification Zone (ADIZ) over the East China Sea (ECS). Japan complained of a lack of a strong US response and said that the US was losing its global role as world policeman. In response, the US said that it was “wary of being drawn into a military clash between China and Japan.”²¹

On the North Korean front, Obama moved from a policy of engagement to one of containment. However, none of Washington’s policies yielded major results, and North Korea conducted the largest number of tests (four nuclear weapons tests and 72 major kinetic and missile provocations)²² during Obama's tenure than any other US administration. Despite US assurances, both South Korea and Japan were unnerved by North Korea’s refusal to halt nuclear testing or surrender its nuclear arsenal. Obama’s vision of a reduced emphasis on nuclear weapons for defence only exacerbated these tensions.

Trump and Regional Trust Erosion

The 2018 NPR acknowledges the immediate threat that East Asian allies, especially Japan and South Korea, face from China’s growing nuclear capability and North Korea’s aggressive nuclear posture. To this effect, the US has reaffirmed its commitment to maintain an “integrated, flexible and adaptable US nuclear and non-nuclear capabilities.”

Most importantly, the 2018 NPR mentions the possible deployment of dual-capable aircraft (currently forward-deployed only in four NATO states – Germany, the Netherlands,

²¹ Sieg, Linda and Brunnstrom, David. 2014. ‘Obama, Abe to battle negative images at U.S.-Japan summit’. Reuters. 17 April <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-obama-japan/obama-abe-to-battle-negative-images-at-u-s-japan-summit-idUSBREA3G01420140417?feedType=RSS&feedName=worldNews>

²² Cha, Victor. 2016. ‘The Unfinished Legacy of Obama’s Pivot to Asia’. Foreign Policy. 6 September <https://foreignpolicy.com/2016/09/06/the-unfinished-legacy-of-obamas-pivot-to-asia/>

Italy, and Belgium – and used to deploy both conventional and nuclear bombs) to the Northeast Asia region. Additionally, the US could also be looking at bringing back a modified version of nuclear-armed sea-launched cruise missiles (SLCM).²³

As far as Trump's policies on China and North Korea are concerned, preliminary evidence suggests that an aggressive stance towards China and a more passive policy of engagement aimed at countering the North Korean nuclear threat has increased allies' trust in US extended deterrence.²⁴

Exerting pressure on China to take strict action against North Korea as well as criticising China for discriminatory trade policies and imposing tariffs on its imports to the US may engender a consolidation of trust in US security assurances by allies in the region. Trump has also adopted a policy of greater engagement with North Korea by becoming the first president to conduct three back-to-back meetings with a North Korean leader, while maintaining the pressure of economic sanctions on North Korea.

The Trump strategy has been to offer a mixed bag of carrots and sticks to address the North Korean nuclear issue. For instance, as a trust-building measure with North Korea, Trump swore to halt the 2018 Ulchi-Freedom Guardian joint military drill exercise with South Korea.²⁵ The Ulchi-Freedom Guardian, along with 'Resolve' and 'Fool Eagle', are routine exercises the US conducts with South Korea to prepare for security-based contingencies in the region. North Korean weapons testing provocations in the same period, perhaps as a reflection, have reduced substantially. In June 2018, these measures yielded Trump the highest approval rating for Trump in South Korea.²⁶

²³ United States of America, Department of Defense. 2018. Nuclear Posture Review. pp.8,47,50,54.

²⁴ King, Ariana. 2018. 'South Korea gives Trump's global confidence levels a boost'. *Nikkei Asian Review*. 2 October <https://asia.nikkei.com/Politics/International-relations/South-Korea-gives-Trump-s-global-confidence-levels-a-boost>

²⁵ Panda, Ankit. 2018. "US, South Korea Announce Suspension of 2018 Ulchi-Freedom Guardian Military Exercise". *The Diplomat*. 19 June. <https://thediplomat.com/2018/06/us-south-korea-announce-suspension-of-2018-ulchi-freedom-guardian-military-exercise/>. Accessed on 15 December 2018.

²⁶ 2018. "South Koreans are beginning to like Trump and Kim Jong-un more despite chaos and confusion, says poll". *South China Morning Post*. 2 June. <https://www.scmp.com/news/asia/diplomacy/article/2148933/south-koreans-are-beginning-trump-and-kim-jong-un-more-says-poll>.

However, there is no hard evidence to suggest that North Korea actually intends to act on the promises made during the unprecedented June 2018 Singapore summit between Trump and Kim Jong-un. Reports have emerged of North Korea expanding its Yeongjeodong missile base to deploy ICBMs closer to the Chinese border to avoid preemptive strikes by the US.²⁷ At the same time, North Korea has continued its clandestine shipping operations to evade UN- and US-imposed sanctions. North Korea is also suspected to be continuing its plans of developing a submarine-launched ballistic missile (SLBM) programme.²⁸

Although both South Korea and Japan allegedly consented to halt the Ulchi drills,²⁹ the decision raised concerns in Japan, which hosts approximately 50,000 US military personnel and has its own set of joint military drills with the US. Trump has also raised the possibility of withdrawing the 28,500 US personnel currently stationed in South Korea, which North Korea considers a necessary condition for denuclearisation.

It is important to note that US-South Korea and US-Japan military drills are considered a crucial component of US extended deterrence in East Asia, the absence of which could cast severe doubts on US security assurances in the region. This is compounded by Trump's recent demands of increasing South Korean payments by almost 50 per cent for the maintenance of US troop presence in the country.³⁰ The Trump administration's view of South Korea essentially 'free-riding' on the military protection provided by it risks

²⁷ Sang-Hun, Choe. 2018. "North Korea Is Expanding Missile Base With Eye Toward U.S., Experts Warn". The New York Times. 6 December. <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/12/06/world/asia/north-korea-missile-bases.html>. Accessed on 28 August 2019.

²⁸ Smith, Josh and Brunnstrom, David. 2019. 'North Korea's Kim inspects new submarine, signals possible ballistic missile development'. 23 July <https://ca.news.yahoo.com/north-koreas-kim-jong-un-233306150.html>

²⁹ See Paul, Pritha. 2018. 'US-South Korea Military Drills Suspension Announcement Surprised Seoul, Welcomed By Russia, China'. International Business Times. 13 June. <https://www.ibtimes.com/us-south-korea-military-drills-suspension-announcement-surprised-seoul-welcomed-2690323>. Accessed on 18 January 2019; See McCormick, Andrew and Jeong-ho Lee. 2018. 'Fears arise that suspension of US-South Korea military exercises may have dangerous repercussions'. 23 August. <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy-defence/article/2161039/fears-suspension-us-south-korea-military-exercises-may>. Accessed on 18 January 2019

³⁰ Cloud, David and Kim, Victoria. 2019. 'Trump's demand that South Korea pay more for U.S. troops leads to impasse'. 11 January. <https://www.latimes.com/nation/la-na-pol-trump-korea-troops-20190111-story.html> Accessed on 18 January 2019.

threatening the credibility of the alliance.³¹ This is in line with Trump encouraging South Korea and Japan to build their own nuclear weapons.³²

South Korea and Japan are increasingly opting for conventional means of ensuring deterrence.³³ The deterrence-by-denial strategy is an effort to look for substitutes for the US nuclear umbrella in East Asia, and includes investments in ballistic and cruise missiles as well as a formidable BMD in addition to the Terminal High-Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) that South Korea hosts near the city of Seongju. These measures are intended not only to counter immediate North Korean aggression but also the long-term Chinese threat. Crucial to remember is that the last time South Korea's trust in US extended deterrence security guarantees wavered in the 1970s, South Korea contemplated building its own nuclear arsenal. Therefore, the possibility of South Korea going nuclear is not as far-fetched as many might think given the precedent. As of now, there is no substantial increase or decline in trust from the Obama to Trump administrations among the US' East Asian allies, thus maintaining a somewhat steady status quo.

³¹ 'Those are literally the North Korean and Chinese talking points': why Trump's decision to halt military exercises with South Korea makes allies nervous'. South China Morning Post. 15 June 2018. <https://www.scmp.com/news/asia/diplomacy/article/2150900/those-are-literally-north-korean-and-chinese-talking-points>. Accessed on 25 December 2018.

³² Condon, Stephanie. 2016. 'Donald Trump: Japan, South Korea might need nuclear weapons'. CBS News. 29 March. <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/donald-trump-japan-south-korea-might-need-nuclear-weapons/>. Accessed on 15 February 2019.

³³ Gomez, Eric. 2018. 'Revisiting the Value of the U.S. Nuclear Umbrella in East Asia'. 6 March. War On The Rocks. <https://warontherocks.com/2018/03/revisiting-value-u-s-nuclear-umbrella-east-asia/>. Accessed on 15 October 2018.

Conclusion

Trust Calibration				
Region	Administrations			
	President Barack Obama		President Donald Trump	
	Status	Variables	Status	Variables
Europe	Status quo	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ballistic missile defence JCPOA 	↓	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Policies to counter Russia Withdrawal from JCPOA
Middle East	↓	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Policies towards Iran (primarily JCPOA) 	↑	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Withdrawal from JCPOA
East Asia	↓	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Policies towards China (G2 and 2013 ADIZ crisis) Policies towards North Korea 	Status quo	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Policies towards China Policies towards North Korea

Two factors determine the trust allies repose in the US nuclear umbrella:

- 1) Shared interests and a common threat perception
- 2) Political trust in the form of continuities and discontinuities, spanning the Obama and Trump administrations, in US policies towards its allies.

In that context, a blanket understanding of allies' 'trust' across three regions (Europe, Middle East, East Asia) cannot be applied. While under Obama, trust declined in the Middle East and East Asia owing to the Iran nuclear deal and approaches to the Chinese and North Korean threat, respectively; in Europe, on the other hand, the same Iran deal led to trust consolidation and status quo maintenance.

Under Trump, European trust in US extended deterrence has declined, while that of Middle Eastern allies has increased – both on account of withdrawal from the JCPOA. The measure of trust of East Asian allies under Trump remains inconclusive because it is



still a work in progress, but is so far a reflection of the Obama status quo. In conclusion, all three regions demonstrate a fluctuating set of responses in trust consolidation or deficit in response to US policies on its extended nuclear deterrence guarantees, with often the same policy leading to the strengthening of trust in one, while contributing to a decline in another.

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