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Pick Your Poison

Comparing the Deterrence Problem in Asia and Europe

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Contents

Deterrence problems in both Europe and Asia are knotty, but in very different ways. The balance of power, geographic and political circumstances, escalation risks, revisionist aims, and the operational concepts of the main protagonists contrast dramatically in the two regions. In the East Asian case, the most difficult challenges involve China's material advantages when facing US allies and partners. On the other hand China is confronted with a relatively unambiguous US commitment to regional security. That commitment is bolstered by the relatively low risk, at present, which China could or would escalate to the nuclear level (although recent developments in China's nuclear force structure may signal important changes in this dimension).

In the European case, the overall balance of power is more favorable, but the geographical separation between the centers of Western power and potential contingencies works strongly against the NATO allies. Moreover, Russia's forward-leaning nuclear doctrine and the potential for nuclear escalation converge to induce a higher degree of uncertainty into the planning of all relevant states. This paper limits the regional comparison to problems presented by Russia and China, but the authors are aware that the continuing evolution of North Korea's nuclear capabilities further complicates the deterrence problem in East Asia.

Russia's dissatisfaction constitutes an enduring challenge to all of its neighbors, though the most pressing threats are to those with historically large ethnic Russian populations, contested governance, or weak militaries.

Politics – Deterring What?

Russia and China are each dissatisfied with aspects of the current world order, or, if one objects to the notion that a world order exists, important features of the international status quo. While it is impossible to stipulate with full confidence the scenarios or possibilities to which deterrence might pertain, understanding potential objectives of each is nevertheless important.

Russian dissatisfaction is almost certainly deeper, with much of the leadership—and certainly Vladimir Putin—bitter about Russia's loss of territory and status and the sharp decline of its relative power after the collapse of the Soviet Union.[1] Moscow is committed to returning to a position of greatness. Depending on how the scope of Russia's historical reach is interpreted and how the revisionist mission is to be accomplished, Russia's dissatisfaction constitutes an enduring challenge to all of its neighbors, though the most pressing threats are to those with historically large ethnic Russian populations, contested governance, or weak militaries. As the Ukraine example suggests, the type of coercion that might employ against targeted states could include a wide range of actions, from economic or cyber warfare, to support (including the employment of non-uniformed Russian military personnel) for insurgent or dissident groups, to military strikes on key targets, the occupation of border areas or, in some cases, complete conquest and incorporation of the state. By extension, a degree of threat exists to those states with an interest in and commitment to protecting the independence of those states—most notably, the members of the NATO alliance. Beyond its immediate neighborhood, Russia also seeks to make itself an independent power center in global affairs.

1 See, for example, Julia Gurganus and Eugene Rumer, "Russia's Global Ambitions in Perspective," Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, February 20, 2019.

China's dissatisfaction is, for the most part, subtler and mixed with a more affirmative view of its ability to advance many or most of goals without the outright use of lethal force.[2] Dissatisfaction certainly exists, and is largely a result of what Chinese leaders view as the unfinished business righting China's "hundred years of humiliation," starting with the Opium Wars and running through the CCP accession to power. That era left some territorial claims unfulfilled, and its current leaders seek to cement longstanding claims to sovereignty over Taiwan, effective ownership of island groups in the South and East China Seas, and a resolution of remaining border disputes elsewhere (most notably along its border with India).[3] But unlike Russia, Beijing has recovered its lost imperial territory, and China's economic heft and influence give it a wider range of tools than those available to Russia.

But unlike Russia, Beijing has recovered its lost imperial territory, and China's economic heft and influence give it a wider range of tools than those available to Russia.

To be sure, Beijing has other, non-territorial, foreign policy goals that could lead to conflict. To achieve both defensive and revisionist goals, Beijing looks to weaken or mitigate US regional influence and undermine its alliances, particularly with Japan.[4] Chinese leaders may or may not ultimately seek something resembling regional hegemony. However, Chinese behavior and the (un)diplomatic language its officials sometimes direct at the weaker states of Asia already indicate that it expects to see its wishes and interests respected, even at the expense of the interests of other states, and even when no territorial issues are involved.[5] Its employment of prolonged economic coercion against the Republic of Korea (ROK) over the deployment of US THAAD missiles in response to the growing missile and nuclear threat from North Korea is perhaps the best example, though it is not a unique case.[6]

Under some circumstances, China might be motivated to secure territorial claims by force. The candidate cases are (at least at present) fewer and better defined than those at play in the case of Russia and include Taiwan, offshore islands in the South China and East China Seas, and areas along China's border with India. However, the deterrence problem also extends to preventing coercive military attacks, blockades, or other economic and social disruptions designed to achieve non-territorial political objectives, particularly as Beijing's confidence grows and its estimate of US commitment evolves. As in the case of the disputed islands in the East China Sea, Beijing has already evinced a disturbing tendency towards the use of non-lethal force – so called gray zone activities – employing both military and civilian agencies to advance goals.[7]

2 See, for example, David Shambaugh, ed., *China and the World* (Oxford University Press, 2020); Marc Lanteigne, *Chinese Foreign Policy: An Introduction*, Fourth Edition (Routledge, 2020); Ren Xiao, "A Reform-Minded Status Quo Power? China, the G20, and Reform of the International Financial System," *Third World Quarterly*, December 2015.

3 On the resolution of other disputes, particularly with the states of the former Soviet Union, see M. Taylor Fravel. *Strong Borders, Secure Nation: Cooperation and Conflict in China's Territorial Disputes*, (Princeton University Press, 2008).

4 Paul van Hooft, "All-In or All-Out: Why Insularity Pushes and Pulls American Grand Strategy to Extremes," *Security Studies*, October 2020.

5 On China's more assertive language, see Peter Martin, *China's Civilian Army: The Making of Wolf Warrior Diplomacy* (Oxford University Press, 2021); on its diplomacy with smaller states, see Joshua Eisenman and Eric Heginbotham, *China Steps Out: Beijing's Major Power Engagement with the Developing World* (Routledge, 2018).

6 Darren J. Lim, "Chinese Economic Coercion During the THAAD Dispute," The Asan Forum, December 28, 2019.

7 For an overview of the problem and possible solutions, see Michael J. Green and John Schaus, *Countering Coercion in Maritime Asia: The Theory and Practice of Gray Zone Deterrence*, CSIS, May 9, 2017.

Balance of Economic Resources and Conventional Military Potential

Overall, economic resources and military potential are far more evenly distributed in Europe than in Asia, though asymmetries exist between individual dyads or pairs of states within each region.

The European balance of economic power is positive even when US GDP is excluded from the calculation. The combined GDP of Germany, the UK, France, and Italy is more than seven times that of Russia, and adding other European NATO economies into the mix would skew the ratio further. In Asia, on the other hand, China's GDP is 30 percent larger than the combined economies of the next four powers (Japan, India, the ROK, and Australia). Moreover, whereas the major Western European states are joined in a single, longstanding multilateral alliance and are geographically contiguous with one another, those of Asia are not. Some enjoy bilateral alliances with the US, but there are disparate goals even among the bilateral alliance partners. Several other important states, the most important being India, Singapore, and Indonesia, are not formally partnered with the US.

Russian conventional military capabilities collapsed after the disintegration of the Soviet Union and, after years of subsequent atrophy, are now recovering. The Russian military budget is estimated at $60 billion in 2020, when calculated according to the NATO definition. Russia's navy includes 38 tactical submarines (including 17 nuclear powered boats and 21 diesel electric ones) and 31 principal surface combatants, including one aircraft carrier, 15 cruisers and destroyers, and 15 frigates. Its air force and naval aviation combined operate 130 bombers, 710 fighters and fighter ground-attack aircraft, and another 264 attack aircraft. The Russian army is 280,000 strong and boasts 21 armored and mechanized divisions or independent brigades, and an additional 16 motorized divisions or brigades.[8]

China's official 2020 military budget was roughly $178 billion, though SIPRI estimates that it amounts to $252 billion according to NATO accounting standards, more than four times the full Russian budget number. China's navy is significantly larger than Russia's, comprising of53 submarines, 80 major surface combatants (including two carriers, 32 cruisers and destroyers), and 46 frigates, as well as a large number of smaller combatants. The PLA air force and naval aviation combined operate more than 200 bombers, 1,100 fighters and fighter ground-attack aircraft and another 260 dedicated strike aircraft. China's ground forces are more than three times the size of Russia's and include more than 50 armored and mechanized brigades and 35 motorized or amphibious brigades, as well as airborne elements belonging to the air force.

8 Figures from this paragraph and the next are taken from IISS, *The Military Balance*, 2021.

Geographic Considerations

Geography works to shape very different deterrence problems in Europe and Asia. Russia is located at the fringes of both Europe and Asia, as are the countries to which it represents the most immediate threat. China is located at the heart of Asia and is a close neighbor of many of the most powerful states of the region, including Japan and the ROK which host the lion's share of US forward deployed forces in the region.

Russian gains along its immediate periphery would not shift the fundamental balance of power in the short-term. Indeed, Russian conquests in areas with large populations and strong non-Russian or pro-independence identities, could also saddle Moscow with costly civil wars.

Russia's borders have receded and Russia poses virtually no invasion threat to the core Western European states that constituted NATO's Cold War membership—a set of countries that also includes most of Europe's largest economies. On the other hand, Russia constitutes a clear and present danger to the states immediately surrounding it, including non-NATO members, particularly Ukraine, as well as several of the newer members of NATO, including the Baltic States and Poland. When viewed in bilateral terms, Russia holds significant military advantages over even the largest of its immediate neighbors.

The most threatened states are geographically remote from the center of NATO power. Some lack robust infrastructure to support and sustain reinforcement from the West, and the paucity of NATO power projection forces based in Western Europe (whether US or non-US) would significantly delay any response. To be sure, much has been done in recent years to improve NATO's prospects. The EU Action Plan on Military Mobility, in place since 2017, has removed legal and regulatory barriers to military movement and directed investment in new infrastructure.[9] On the force structure side, NATO's Readiness Initiative established the capabilities goal of being able to deploy 30 ground battalions, 30 squadrons of aircraft, and 30 warships within 30 days of mobilization – a so-called "Four 30s" plan.[10] NATO's Enhanced Forward Presence (EFP) forces include four multinational battalions stationed, one each, in the three Baltic states and Poland.

Nevertheless, forward deployed forces remain thin at best, and reinforcements depend on lines of communication that remain vulnerable to interdiction. Threats to some of these peripheral areas could, therefore, potentially bring NATO into a war with Russia on disadvantageous terms.[11] At the same time, however, not reacting might encourage further expansion and could allow Russia to reassemble its empire, posing a greater long-term threat. Nevertheless, Russian gains along its immediate periphery would not shift the fundamental balance of power in the short-term. Indeed, Russian conquests in areas with large populations and strong non-Russian or pro-independence identities, could also saddle Moscow with costly civil wars, though Russia's repressive capability should not be underestimated.

In contrast, China presents potential threats to areas that would be of immediate consequence to the balance of power in the larger region. Taiwan is not a middle power in its own right, but it is home to the world's largest semiconductor industry and feeds the global supply chain with other critical products, particularly in the information and communications

9 See "Joint Report to the European Parliament and the Council on the Implementation of the Action Plan on Military Mobility from October 2020 to September 2021," European Commission, High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, September 24, 2021. https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52021JC0026&from=EN.

10 NATO Agrees to 'Four 30s' Plan to Counter Russia, Radio Free Europe, June 6, 2018.

11 Issues related to defensive adequacy and the prospects for NATO response are highlighted in the debate over whether NATO could provide for its own defenses. See Douglas Barrie, Ben Barry, Lucie Beraud-Sudreau, Henry Boyd, Nick Childs, Dr. Bastian Giegerich, *Defending Europe: Scenario-Based Capability Requirements for NATO's European Members*, IISS, April 2019; and Barry Posen, "Europe Can Defend Itself," *Survival*, December 2020-January 2021.

domains.[12] Its geography is also critical to the balance of military capabilities in a number of other scenarios. If it were occupied and PLA forces stationed on the island, submarines could launch directly into the Philippine Sea and transit to the western Pacific without passing through SOSUS-like anti-submarine barriers, and its own fighter aircraft could extend China's aviation reach and protect other assets, such as ASW aircraft or surface fleets, operating from greater distances from the mainland. As it sits along the first island chain at a strategic choke-point for naval forces in the western Pacific, and is critical to securing Japan's Southern flank, the loss of Taiwan would pose the largest and most immediate threat to Japan, which, in turn, anchors the US position in Asia.

Any conflict that did draw in the US would have far greater consequences than the immediate territorial stakes might suggest; it would affect the respective regional futures of both Beijing and Washington.

The close juxtaposition of China, US allies, and military elements of different countries brings clarity to the deterrence problem. Beijing is, for the most part, clear that the US will defend allies and almost certainly perceives a very high degree of risk that, despite its long stated insistence on "strategic ambiguity," Washington would involve itself in any PLA attempt to employ force against Taiwan. To be sure, not all potential Asian contingencies involve high material stakes; indeed, some of the more likely concern uninhabited islands. But many of the island disputes involve US allies, and those allies have sought – generally successfully – to secure US explicit assurances that administered areas offshore are covered under treaty agreements.[13] Any conflict that did draw in the US would have far greater consequences than the immediate territorial stakes might suggest; it would affect the respective regional futures of both Beijing and Washington.

Any contingency that drew in the US would likely escalate rapidly, both in magnitude of conflict and in terms of geographic scope. The US would likely operate from bases in the most affected countries, and, regardless of location, Japan would likely allow US forces to use bases on its territory—though hedging or indecisiveness on Tokyo's part could also delay or inhibit US access. Chinese incentives to strike those bases with its large array of conventionally armed ballistic and cruise missiles in order to nullify America's significant advantages in air-to-air combat would be high.[14]

Such attacks, in turn, would produce incentives for the US to strike targets in China, at least along coastal areas, to deny Chinese combat aircraft (which lack large numbers of supporting tankers) easy access to battle areas and to deny naval ships safe ports within which to load either munitions or (in the case of invasion scenarios) soldiers. The US will buy up to 10,000 air-launched JASSM-ER missiles, largely with this purpose in mind.[15] Large numbers of air and naval systems might be destroyed, and the outcome could have important implications for the post-conflict future of US alliances, and the political future of China.[16]

There is a greater degree of ambiguity in deterrence against Chinese attack on countries that do not enjoy treaty alliances with the US. But barring conquest of major portions of their territory, conflicts involving non-allies would likely be limited and would have less of an impact on the regional balance of power.

12 Syaru Shirley Lin, "Taiwan's Continued Success Requires Economic Diversification of Products and Markets," *Taiwan-US Quarterly Analysis Series*, Brookings Institution, March 15, 2021.

13 See, for example, "US Warns China it Stands Behind South China Sea Ruling and is Committed to Philippine Defense," CNN, July 12, 2021; and "US-Japan Joint Leaders' Statement: 'US-Japan Global Partnership for a New Era,'" White House statement, April 16, 2021, https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2021/04/16/u-s-japan-joint-leaders-statement-u-s-japan-global-partnership-for-a-new-era/.

14 John Stillion, "Fighting Under Missile Attack," Air Force Magazine, August 2009; "Chinese missile Attacks on US Air Bases in Asia," RAND Corporation, 2015.

15 Congress Suggests JASSM-ER Bulk Buy, *Air Force Magazine*, December 18, 2019.

16 David C. Gompert, Astrid Stuth Cevallos, Cristina L. Garafola, *War with China: Thinking Through the Unthinkable*, RAND Corporation, 2016.

Nuclear Forces, Doctrine, and Escalation Potential

Russia and China differ markedly in the functions they assign to nuclear weapons and the salience of nuclear weapons in their respective security policies. These differences could have a profound impact on the thinking of all parties on questions related to the use of force and deterrence. However, recent dramatic changes to China's nuclear arsenal, together with statements made by China's Sha Zukang, suggest that policy changes may occur that would bring Chinese policy more closely into line with Russia's.[17]

There remains great uncertainty about whether Russia would employ nuclear threats for coercive purposes during limited conventional operations around its periphery. Certainly, when compared to China, nuclear weapons, particularly tactical nuclear weapons, loom far larger in Russian security thinking.

In 1993, Russia rejected the no-first-use pledge—which was itself of questionable credibility—made by the Soviet Union. It has since revised its military doctrine several times, each time adjusting its statements with regard to justifiable nuclear use. Broadly speaking, shifts in the relative emphasis on nuclear weapons in security policy have tracked with the state of Russian conventional capabilities. In 2000, for example, when Russian conventional capabilities were near their nadir, Russian military doctrine suggested that the state might use nuclear weapons in response to "large-scale aggression utilizing conventional weapons in situations critical to national security of the Russian Federation." The most recent Russian document treating nuclear policy, "On Basic Principles of State Policy of the Russian Federation on Nuclear Deterrence" [2020], is less explicitly forward leaning, but nevertheless contains vague language about when the state might employ nuclear weapons.

One passage in the 2020 document—suggesting that "this Policy provides for the prevention of an escalation of military actions and their termination on conditions that are acceptable for the Russian Federation"—raises new concerns about an "escalate to deescalate" strategy.[18] There remains great uncertainty about whether Russia would employ nuclear threats for coercive purposes during limited conventional operations around its periphery.[19] Certainly, when compared to China, nuclear weapons, particularly tactical nuclear weapons, loom far larger in Russian security thinking.

Moreover, despite the modest size of Russia's economy, Russia has moved farther and more thoroughly to recapitalize its strategic nuclear forces than has the US. Vladimir Putin claims that 82 percent of Russia's nuclear triad has been modernized, and Russia is looking to replace all of its Soviet-era equipment. In the ICBM force, SS-27s are replacing SS-18s and other outdated systems, and it is reportedly developing a 'SS-29' heavy missile that might carry as many as 15 warheads. It is deploying a new Borei-class of SSBN, equipped with new missiles. It maintains almost 2,000 tactical nuclear weapons that are not subject to New START limitations, and those too are being modernized with new classes of cruise and ballistic missiles.[20] Nuclear weapons are routinely incorporated in large exercises in what

17 "China Should 'Fine Tune' Nuclear Weapons Policy Amid US Pressure, Ex-Diplomat Says," *South China Morning Post*, September 22, 2021.

18 "Russia's Nuclear Weapons: Doctrine, Forces, and Modernization," Congressional Research Service, updated September 13, 2021.

19 Kristin Ven Bruusgaard, for example, observes that Russian discussions of first use tend to focus on existential defensive combat. At the same time, however, Ven Bruusgaard writes that Russian strategists see nuclear and conventional capabilities as complimenting and augmenting one another. Kristin Ven Bruugaard, "Russian Nuclear Strategy and Conventional Inferiority," *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 44:1, 2021.

20 On Russian nuclear modernization, see Hans M. Kristensen and Matt Korda, Russian Nuclear Forces, 2020, *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, 76:2, March 2020.

can be interpreted as an unsubtle message that NATO intervention in Russian activities may provoke nuclear use.

China adopted a no-first-use policy when it conducted its first atomic bomb test in 1964 and limited the function of nuclear weapons to deterring nuclear attack or coercion. More importantly, and in contrast to the Soviet Union, its no-first-use was credible; for most of the intervening decades between 1964 and today, China's nuclear arsenal was not well designed to do anything other than conduct retaliatory strikes. It maintained a low number of large, inaccurate nuclear weapons, and combined that with a low readiness state, keeping most of its warheads widely separated from delivery systems and unsupported by space-based early warning. It has never deployed tactical (short-range or low-yield) weapons, despite the technical capacity to do so, and although it developed a neutron weapon, it never deployed the system.

The motivations behind Chinese nuclear developments remain opaque, but they seem to signal a breakout that would make PLA warhead numbers comparable to those of deployed Russian and US systems.

Modernization of China's nuclear inventory during the 2000s and 2010s, however, gave the PLA new nuclear capabilities, and change has accelerated further in 2020s.[21] During the 2000 and 2010s, China deployed a range of new strategic systems, including more accurate warheads, mobile IRBMs and ICBMs, a new generation of submarine-launched ballistic missiles (SLBMs), and MIRVed warheads. At the same time, China promoted the 2nd Artillery to full service status when it created the Rocket Force in 2016. Between 2006 and 2016, the number of warheads deployed on strategic systems (including ICBMs and SLBMs) roughly doubled, to about 135, with perhaps another 100 on theater systems.[22] During the 2020s, new ICBM silo fields and the testing of new hypersonic weapons (including most recently, a system capable of fractional orbital bombardment) signal the acceleration of Chinese nuclear developments.

The construction of large ICBM missile silo fields, taken in the context of other changes, may, despite uncertainties about how they will be filled, signal a more decisive end to the sort of minimum deterrent practiced by China in the past. The grid patterns at two fields contain space for 229 silos, and a third suspected field has been identified. If the silos in the first two fields are constructed and filled with DF-41s armed with three warheads each, China could add 687 strategic warheads to its inventory.[23] It is, however, possible that China could play a "shell game" with these fields, much as the US considered doing with the MX missile during the late 1970s, by filling only a portion with actual missiles and moving them periodically, perhaps in conjunction with "dummy" missiles.[24]

Either way, though, China is set to accelerate the speed at which it is adding to its strategic nuclear forces. Indeed, with fissile material as one key factor limiting future growth, China is constructing two breeder reactors capable of producing enough weapons grade fissile material for roughly 1,270 warheads by 2030, and it terminated its reporting of civil plutonium holdings and production activity in 2017.[25] The motivations behind Chinese nuclear developments remain opaque, but they seem to signal a breakout that would make PLA warhead numbers

21 On the evolution of Chinese nuclear thinking and force structure into the 2000s, see "Taylor M. Fravel and Evan S. Medeiros, "China's Search for Assured Retaliation: The Evolution of Chinese Nuclear Strategy and Force Structure," *International Security*, 35:2, fall 2010.

22 On the growing external and domestic pressures on Chinese nuclear policy, see Eric Heginbotham et al., *China's Evolving Nuclear Deterrent: Main Drivers and Issues for the US* (RAND, 2017).

23 Matt Korda and Hans Kristensen, "China is Building a Second Nuclear Missile Silo Field," Federation of American Scientists, July 26, 2021.

24 Thomas Newdick, "Is China Reviving America's Cold War-Era 'Shell Game' ICBM Deployment Strategy," *The War Zone*, July 1, 2021.

25 Henry D. Sokolski, ed., China's Civil Nuclear Sector: Plowshares to Swords?" Nonproliferation Policy Education Center Occasion Paper, 2021.

comparable to those of deployed Russian and US systems (though not to the total number of warheads maintained by those two powers in reserve stockpiles). Although part of the motivation might be to escape potential vulnerability created by US first strike and the interception of Chinese counterattack, the potential scale of current deployments goes far beyond those requirements.

While part of China's motivation is almost certainly to guarantee retaliatory capability in the face of US missile defenses that might intercept missiles surviving a US first strike, China's discourse on nuclear weapons reflects a widening understanding of the functions of nuclear weapons.[26] More robust nuclear forces allow China to respond more flexibly to coercive threats or limited nuclear use against it. Significantly, China has pointedly refrained from deploying low yield or tactical nuclear weapons, and there is no suggestion that it would employ nuclear weapons first unless its own nuclear forces were threatened. But Beijing nevertheless understands that the US will be less inclined to intervene in a Taiwan dispute when it faces a Chinese military equipped with more powerful and flexible nuclear forces. In that sense, then, Beijing appears to be taking a page from Russia's playbook, even if it has not committed to all aspects of Russian strategy.

China has pointedly refrained from deploying low yield or tactical nuclear weapons, and there is no suggestion that it would employ nuclear weapons first unless its own nuclear forces were threatened.

26 Christopher P. Twomey, "Assessing Chinese Nuclear Posture and Doctrine in 2021," Issues Brief, Atlantic Council, November 2021.

Conclusions: US Roles in Europe and Asia

Deterrence problems in both Europe and Asia are difficult, but differ significantly in kind. We summarize these problems below, indicating areas of serious challenge to deterrence in red, significant areas of concern in yellow, and areas that either favor deterrence or are likely manageable in green.

	Europe		Asia
Interests and objectives of the challenger	Russia's revanchist goals are ambitious and derive from status loss and perceived threat of encroachment by NATO		China's revisionist goals are more limited
Overall balance of regional power	NATO's European states have far greater economic resources than Russia and Belarus	But these countries have only harnessed a small portion of their resources for military purposes	China has a much larger economy than that of any single rival in Asia, and a larger economy than the next four combined
	US capabilities remain robust against both Russia and China, though the margin has narrowed		
Location of contingencies within the region, access	The military contingencies that might engage NATO are geographically remote and difficult to access		The most important military contingencies lie around the immediate coastal periphery of China and close to (or with) US allies and partners
	Contingencies in both regions are distant from the US and the bulk of US forces		
Nuclear policy and escalation risk	Russian nuclear thinking and its large arsenal of tactical nuclear weapons makes the risks of nuclear escalation significant		China's more limited view of the function of nuclear weapons and lack of tactical systems makes the risks of nuclear escalation modest, though not zero
Non-nuclear cross-domain threat	Russia employs proxy and non-uniformed forces in sustained lethal operations, aggressive (including lethal) cyber means, economic coercion, and foreign electoral and political intervention		China conducts "gray zone" operations using constabulary forces to advance its territorial and other aims, economic coercion, and more limited cyber operations

Figure 1: Comparative Summary of Deterrence Problems

In Europe, problems are geographic and political, with logistical challenges complicating potential responses, but the aggregate level of forces required in most cases more modest than requirements in Asia. If sufficiently motivated and organized, the European NATO states—even absent US deployments—have the financial resources necessary to field the conventional forces necessary to engage and either stop or reverse Russian gains, though they have shown few signs that they are moving to do so.

Russia's implicit threat to use tactical nuclear weapons would likely complicate NATO decision-making and induce caution on NATO's part. The European states could, in theory, also field nuclear forces comparable to Russia's, though that would introduce a wide range of complications within and between many of the NATO states. With support for a strategy of restraint growing in the US, the best NATO course might include a far larger (or more focused) European conventional effort, combined with a continued US commitment that would offset Russia's nuclear threat without prompting or requiring the deployment of large numbers of such weapons by the states of Western Europe.

Given the asymmetry of economic resources with East Asia and the scale of China's economy and military, Asian deterrence requires the maintenance of far more US forces at far greater cost. Geography poses challenges in terms of US ability to project forces across the world's

largest ocean in a timely manner, but most of the relevant contingencies involve US allies or partners, all with a well-developed infrastructure. Japan, the central ally in America's Asian position, hosts bases upon which US forces could rely, and—presuming Japanese acceptance of greater risks than it has heretofore assumed—the contingencies are thus not "remote" in the same way that European contingencies in the Baltic States or Ukraine are.

The US maintains a position of "strategic ambiguity" with respect to Taiwan, but even in that case, leaders in Beijing would have to assume that there is a high probability that Washington would intervene. In the case of other allies, involvement is more certain. In the past, nuclear concerns have weighed relatively lightly in decisions about war or peace in East Asia, but changes to China's nuclear inventory and thinking may, finally, be producing change on that front.

The material US role in Asia will, of necessity, remain larger than that in Europe, but an appropriate division of labor will be equally important. In Northeast Asia, regional states will provide the bulk of forces within the theater at the outset of conflict, and optimizing them for resilience, along the lines outlined in the paper by Paul Van Hooft, Nora Nijboer, and Tim Sweijs, will be critical. These forces should be designed to deny China a rapid *fait accompli* and to avoid unsustainable friendly losses through dispersion, mobility, hardening, camouflage, concealment and deception. Emphasis should be placed on anti-ship and, especially, anti-air capabilities. US forward deployed forces should be similarly conceived, while those flowing from the US may be more traditionally organized.[27]

The nature of the deterrence problems found in Europe and Asia differ substantially, and those in both regions pose daunting challenges to policymakers and militaries in Europe, Asia, and the US. While acknowledging the perilous nature of generalization in this case, we believe that the deterrence problems are, in net, somewhat greater in Europe. At the same time, however, the stakes in many relevant European cases are somewhat lower than in the major Asian candidate cases, though all would carry important implications for future political dynamics in both regions. Some European cases may therefore offer greater room for maneuver in responding, should deterrence fail.

27 Our preferred term for the concept of operations that might be pursued, especially by forward deployed forces and first stages of the conflict would be "active denial." On the division of labor, see Eric Heginbotham and Richard J. Samuels, Active Denial: Redesigning Japan's Response to China's Military Challenge, *International Security*, Spring 2018. For the same concept applied to US force structure and strategy, see Eric Heginbotham and Jacob L. Heim, "Deterring without Dominance: Discouraging Chinese Adventurism under Austerity," *Washington Quarterly*, Spring 2015.

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