

## **CHAPTER IV**

### **CONCLUSION**

In analyzing the case study of the US-ROK alliance against the DPRK, this thesis discovered three main findings by utilizing the concept of capability and credibility in deterrence theory. First, the US-ROK alliance shares a large range of interests and a massive accumulated power both in the military and economy which indicates its capabilities against the rising threat of DPRK. The pursuit of denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula is shared within the alliance to prevent DPRK's nuclear proliferation. Followed by the strong accumulated capability, the US-ROK alliance has much larger capabilities in facing the DPRK, albeit the DPRK is supported by China and/or Russia. Despite the alliance's capabilities, the US-ROK alliance remains unwilling to risk the status quo in achieving its shared interests to maintain regional peace and stability.

Second, the US-ROK alliance might undermine their threat credibility in encountering the DPRK due to both parties' fluctuating commitment to the alliance which can be seen through rising skepticism, unequal burden-sharing mechanism, and lack of consultation within the alliance. The aforementioned indicators have caused debates and one-sided decisions within the alliance that diminish its deterrence credibility against the DPRK. Other than undermining the alliance's deterrence credibility, lack of consultations and skepticism can lead to a divided response to the DPRK that might trigger the DPRK and escalate tensions in the region with its

retaliation. While focusing on advancing the military posture in the Korean Peninsula, the US-ROK alliance lacks consultation to realign their thinking and assessment of the DPRK. Reflecting on the previous DPRK's response to the US-ROK alliance deterrence strategy, the DPRK might retaliate with a much more progressive nuclear and ballistic missile development without any possibility of denuclearization.

Third, the US-ROK might have failed to deter the DPRK with the weakening deterrence, as indicated by the recent nuclear and military developments of the DPRK that are gruesome to the world. As the cornerstone of the alliance, the US-ROK alliance's deterrence strategy should be hindering the nuclear-powered DPRK rather than triggering its development. Despite sanctions and condemnation by the international community, the DPRK has launched the most missiles in 2022 with 69 missile launches in the year. The DPRK attempted to halt the nuclear development program in 2018 while committing to achieve peaceful denuclearization, yet the DPRK currently is not opening any chance of discussion regarding denuclearization due to the inconsistency of the US-ROK alliance in separate dialogues with the DPRK. Knowing that the US-ROK alliance might not escalate to war, the DPRK adopted the 2022 Nuclear Use Law along with boosting its development of WMDs while upholding its *Juche* and *Byungjin* ideologies.

Answering the research question as the fundamental of this thesis, the US-ROK's deterrence is weakening due to the low level of willingness to encounter threats which contributes as one of the main reasons for the low-level US-ROK's deterrence credibility. This condition has led to the DPRK's current nuclear weapons

and ballistic missile development. Dominantly focusing on advancing its military and economic capability, the alliance lacks deterrence credibility by not realigning its perceptions on the DPRK which caused multiple debates and controversies in the conduct of the US-ROK's foreign policies. The US-ROK alliance surely has enough capabilities to defeat the DPRK, but the question relies on its willingness and readiness to encounter war at any cost. Although the DPRK has much smaller capabilities, the country is eager to develop nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles to guarantee its survival at any cost. In conclusion, the US-ROK alliance is capable of deterring the DPRK, yet its commitment to deter the DPRK at any cost is lower than the DPRK's eagerness to pursue its WMDs.

Reflecting on the research, the author believes that the US-ROK alliance has not failed in deterring the DPRK, but the alliance shall reiterate its commitment through concrete evidence to maintain clarity of communication within the alliance rather than only publishing joint statements. Pursuing a harder stance to the DPRK might not be the answer to striving for denuclearization which can be seen from DPRK's responses to the current administration and the previous administration. The perfect outcome of the US-ROK deterrence would be the cessation of DPRK's nuclear weapons. This thesis is viewed from the US-ROK's perspective and how the DPRK responded to the deterrence strategy. As it still lacks perspectives from the DPRK, this thesis is opening possibilities for further research regarding the DPRK's side in perceiving threats from the US-ROK alliance, or the relationship between US-DPRK which might be the prominent reason for DPRK's military development.

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