

## **Bolstering Extended Deterrence**

**By**

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As the nuclear deterrence landscape continues to change, the United States must reinvigorate its alliances and partnerships to project power effectively and effectively hold adversaries at risk. The 2022 *National Defense Strategy* outwardly identified the People's Republic of China (PRC) as a pacing threat. Russia's almost three-year war on Ukraine has also made the North Atlantic Treaty Organization's (NATO) long-standing success in fostering multilateral coordination with European allies even more important and a valuable model that could be leveraged in other regions.

Such an alliance is needed most in the Indo-Pacific region where China is attempting, with some success, to challenge the American-led rules-based international order. Growing American alliances and partnerships beyond current bilateral relationships is the solution.

A more tailored and comprehensive approach involving Australia, Japan, and South Korea should serve as the beginning of an alliance that could expand and counter Chinese efforts in more than just the military realm. Such an alliance could bolster American nuclear deterrence and assurance in the region and directly support regional stability. A need for increased security cooperation in the Indo-Pacific is a clear and obtainable objective.

### **Formalizing a Multilateral Treaty Organization**

Creating a regional multilateral treaty-bound organization with Australia, Japan, and South Korea will institutionalize defense cooperation and bolster collective security. This organization could formally facilitate regular interoperability consultations, increase joint coalition exercises, and more effectively coordinate responses to regional threats. By formalizing these relationships, the US and its allies can ensure a cohesive and effective deterrence strategy with more eloquence throughout the Indo-Pacific.

Establishing a new treaty organization will be challenging, but the cost-benefit will be worthwhile in the long term. This formality directly supports the diplomatic leg of the diplomatic, information, military, and economic (DIME) model.

### **Equipping Allies with Nuclear-Capable F-35s**

Expanding the sale of nuclear-capable F-35As to Australia, Japan, and South Korea represents a significant advancement in regional coverage of the US nuclear umbrella. These next-generation fighters provide a capable and credible nuclear capability to prepare allies for future conflict, allows increased power projection against potential adversaries, and bolsters the operational compatibility between American forces and allies.

By integrating these aircraft into their respective air forces, allies can contribute to a more dynamic and responsive deterrence posture if a need arises as the geopolitical environment changes. And, if the alliance expands as expected, F-35s can compensate for their range limitations by "island hopping" their way to the fight or allies can build their own aerial refueling capability.

The presence of highly mobile nuclear-capable platforms increases regional solidarity in a strategically tailored way that messages adversaries that aggression will not be tolerated. Given

growing Chinese aggression, this is an important task.

## **Developing Supporting Infrastructure**

To maximize the efficacy of these new capabilities, it is crucial to establish a robust infrastructure that supports the deployment and maintenance of nuclear-capable assets for forward-based power projection. This includes upgrading the host nations' airfields, maintenance facilities, and command-and-control systems.

Such infrastructure will allow seamless integration of allied forces into joint operations and ensure sustained operational readiness. The host nations will need to take charge of the economic development required to maintain the increase in capability and its continued sustainment in the long term—relieving some of the costs that would otherwise be borne by the American taxpayer.

## **Increasing SSBN Port Calls and Coalition Heavy Bomber Task Force Exercises**

Boosting the frequency of American ballistic missile submarine (SSBN) port calls and conducting more coalition heavy bomber task force exercises will further strengthen the deterrence posture within the region. American SSBN presence provides a method to showcase a strategic, survivable deterrent, while heavy bombers enable power projection. Conducting joint operations further solidifies a multinational force's allied resolve and compatibility.

Additionally, the United States could showcase the ability to provide a safe haven for the required heavy bomber task forces if the need arises. These activities would demonstrate an increase in enhancing regional security ties and reassuring allies of the continuation of American commitment. The United States could also sell the B1 and B2 bombers it plans to retire to its allies.

## **Conclusion**

Strengthening American nuclear deterrence in the Indo-Pacific requires a multifaceted approach that continues to foster positive alliances and partnerships that advance capabilities. Honoring these commitments showcases allied resolve to hold adversaries at risk with well-calculated multilateral decision-making processes and regional cooperation. By equipping Australia, Japan, and South Korea with nuclear-capable F-35As, establishing the necessary infrastructure, formalizing multilateral agreements, and increasing strategic exercises with ballistic missile submarines and heavy bombers, the US and its allies can enhance deterrence.

These measures will solidify regional defense cooperation, amplify the efficacy of the nuclear umbrella, and ensure a regional multilateral response to potential nuclear threats, thereby reinforcing the American commitment to maintaining stability and countering China's growing influence across the region.

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