

The Impossibility of Strategic Stability in a Multipolar Era: From Brittle Walls to Dynamic Resilience

By

Dr Jean-Claude Meledj and Natalie Treloar, Fellow

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For over a century, the primary objective of global diplomacy has been the pursuit of “stability.” From the [Concert of Europe](#) through the bipolar rigidity of the Cold War, stability was defined as a predictable baseline; a state of equilibrium characterized by established rules, clearly defined poles, and static “red lines.” Within this framework, the goal of the strategist was to maintain the balance of power and prevent the system from tipping into overt conflict. However, in the contemporary era, the pursuit of stability ceased to be a safeguard; it has become a strategic liability.

The fundamental error of current strategic thinking is due to *Stability Illusion*, which is the belief that the world is a linear system where shocks are anomalies and a return to a “normal” baseline is possible. This logic assumes that the international order is a series of walls designed to keep the storm at bay. But the world is no longer operating on such a predictable script.

In a multipolar system, friction is not accidental; it is a structural feature. Power is no longer distributed along a single axis of competition and instead across a web of overlapping and often contradictory interests. This creates a *Friction Engine* where a strategic adjustment in one domain (e.g., a trade tariff in the Pacific) produces cascading, non-linear effects in another (e.g., a security realignment in the Arctic). The danger arises when states apply linear solutions to these non-linear frictions. When policymakers treat geopolitical risk as though it was compliance oriented or as a set of isolated events to be mitigated, they ignore the systemic architecture. They are attempting to fix the symptoms of volatility while remaining trapped in a paradigm that denies the volatility itself.

Australia illustrates the constraints of strategic thinking in a multipolar environment. As a medium power tied to both Western security structures and Asian economic networks, it has long attempted to balance U.S. strategic protection with Chinese economic integration.

This was the logic of the [stable centre](#) concept; the assumption that Australia could maintain equilibrium between two major poles without choosing between them. That assumption depended on a stable international environment in which economic and security domains remained separable. That environment no longer exists.

China’s rise as both a conventional and nuclear-armed power fundamentally alters the regional structure. Conventional modernization, which includes advanced naval capabilities, long-range precision strike systems, and anti-access architectures, is now integrated with a credible and expanding nuclear deterrent posture. This compresses escalation thresholds and erodes the distinction between peacetime competition and wartime signaling.

At the same time, Australia’s security posture is anchored in U.S. extended nuclear deterrence. This is not a secondary feature of its defense policy. Instead, it is the core guarantee underpinning deterrence against nuclear-armed adversaries. Australia does not possess an independent nuclear capability. Its strategic confidence rests on the credibility of

U.S. nuclear commitments and their willingness to extend them into a contested Indo-Pacific theater. This creates a structurally integrated but fragile position. Economic dependence on China generates exposure to coercion, while security dependence on the U.S. demands alignment in defense planning, intelligence integration, and regional deterrence signaling. The result is not balance, but strategic compression and a narrowing of maneuver space in which hedging increases rather than reduces vulnerability.

The breaking point is not a single crisis but the erosion of foundational assumptions. Economic and security domains are no longer separable. Military modernization carries nuclear implications. Trade interdependence becomes strategic leverage, and alliance credibility becomes a systemic variable shaping all other domains. Australia's dilemma, therefore, is not a diplomatic failure. It is a paradigmatic one. It assumed a system capable of equilibrium. It operates within a nonlinear environment where every adjustment produces cascading effects.

A question emerging from this condition is whether bilateral extended nuclear deterrence is sufficient in a multipolar nuclear environment. The Indo-Pacific is no longer structured around a single guarantor-recipient axis. It is a distributed deterrence environment in which credibility is continuously tested across multiple theaters and domains. From this perspective, a purely bilateral model may be structurally underpowered. The alternative is the emergence of a more explicit Indo-Pacific nuclear alliance architecture that is not necessarily through proliferation, but through formalized integration of deterrence signaling, strategic coordination, and shared escalation management. Such a framework would reinforce extended deterrence by embedding it within a networked structure of allied commitments, increasing credibility through collective signaling rather than bilateral assurance alone.

Australia's position thus reveals a broader systemic reality that medium powers are no longer operating in stable equilibrium spaces. They are embedded in integrated pressure systems where deterrence, economics, and information are inseparable. If stability is a mirage, what is the alternative? The answer is *Dynamic Resilience*. We must move from a model of deterrence that acts as a wall to a model that acts like a shock absorber. While stability seeks to prevent the storm, Dynamic Resilience seeks to navigate it. Dynamic Resilience is not about managing risk in the traditional sense, which is often a defensive, reactive posture. Instead, it is an offensive strategic architecture. It requires three core shifts: from equilibrium to agility, from separation to synthesis, and from bilateralism to networked deterrence.

The pursuit of strategic stability is a relic of a bygone era. To cling to it is to invite fragility. The global architect must now abandon the illusion of the "stable centre" and embrace the volatility of the multipolar era. By replacing brittle walls with a framework of Dynamic Resilience, organizations, and states can move beyond mere survival. They can transition from a state of vulnerability to a state of strength, turning global friction into a systemic competitive advantage.

Dr Jean-Claude Meledje is a Founder and Director at Kexscl Consultancy. He is also an independent geopolitics analyst specializing in regional proxy dynamics and cross-border insurgencies. His work focuses on contemporary geopolitical risks across the Middle East, Indo-Pacific, Africa and beyond. **Natalie Treloar** is the Australian Company Director of Alpha-India Consultancy, a Senior Fellow at the Indo-Pacific Studies Center (IPSC), a Fellow at the National Institute for Deterrence Studies (NIDS), and a member of the Open

Nuclear Network (ONN). Her work is geopolitics, defense, and deterrence within the Indo-Pacific region. The views of the authors are their own.