

Beyond Arms Control: Australia, Britain, and America Need Ambassadors for Strategic Deterrence

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For more than three decades, the diplomatic priorities of Australia, the United Kingdom and the United States have reflected the optimism of the post-Cold War era. Arms control, nuclear non-proliferation and, ultimately, disarmament became the pillars of Western nuclear diplomacy. Dedicated ambassadors and diplomatic offices were established to negotiate treaties, strengthen the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and reduce nuclear risks.

Those objectives remain important, but the strategic assumptions underpinning them no longer hold. The international [security environment](#) has fundamentally changed. Russia continues to modernize its nuclear arsenal while employing nuclear coercion throughout its war against Ukraine. China is undertaking the fastest and largest nuclear expansion in its history, constructing hundreds of new missile silos, and rapidly increasing the size and sophistication of its strategic forces. North Korea continues to improve both the quality and quantity of its nuclear capabilities, while Iran continues to pursue a nuclear weapon. IN the end, no major nuclear power is reducing its arsenal. Instead, every nuclear state is either modernizing or expanding its strategic forces.

Against this backdrop, meaningful progress on [nuclear disarmament is unlikely](#) in the foreseeable future. Arms control negotiations have stalled, strategic trust between the major powers has disappeared, and the security incentives that once enabled reductions in nuclear stockpiles have been replaced by intensifying geopolitical rivalry. This does not diminish the importance of arms control or non-proliferation. Both remain essential long-term objectives. But diplomacy must also adapt to strategic reality. At present, Western governments devote considerable diplomatic resources to managing arms control while comparatively little institutional attention is given to strengthening deterrence itself.

This imbalance should be corrected. For example, Australia, Britain, and the United States should establish dedicated Ambassadors for Strategic Deterrence who work alongside and not instead of their ambassadors responsible for arms control, non-proliferation, and disarmament.

Also, deterrence has evolved far beyond military capability. It now [depends on diplomacy, alliance management, strategic communications, defense industrial cooperation, technological integration](#) and political credibility. Maintaining deterrence requires continuous engagement with allies and partners before crises emerge, not simply military planning once they do. A dedicated ambassador would provide strategic leadership across these issues. Rather than negotiating arms reduction agreements, their role would be to strengthen allied deterrence through diplomatic engagement, coordinate strategic messaging, deepen cooperation on emerging technologies, facilitate extended deterrence consultations, and develop stronger crisis-management mechanisms among partners.

The Indo-Pacific illustrates why such a role has become necessary. Unlike Europe, where NATO has spent decades institutionalizing nuclear consultation, planning, and deterrence, [the](#)

Indo-Pacific possesses no equivalent strategic architecture despite facing a more complex nuclear environment. China, Russia and North Korea collectively present multiple nuclear challenges, yet America's regional alliances remain bilateral rather than integrated. Australia, Japan, and South Korea each rely on extended United States for nuclear deterrence, yet there is no permanent regional mechanism for coordinated nuclear consultations, shared deterrence planning, or collective strategic decision-making during a crisis.

This institutional gap is becoming increasingly difficult to ignore. A conflict over Taiwan, a major crisis on the Korean Peninsula, or military escalation in the East China Sea would almost certainly involve multiple United States allies simultaneously. Decisions regarding escalation management, strategic communications and deterrence signaling could not realistically remain confined to separate bilateral relationships.

The Indo-Pacific therefore requires more than enhanced military cooperation. It requires stronger institutional arrangements for strategic deterrence. Initially, this should take the form of formalized regional consultation mechanisms. Regular strategic deterrence dialogues, coordinated crisis planning, integrated intelligence assessments, shared escalation frameworks and agreed protocols for strategic communications would significantly improve allied preparedness.

Over time, policymakers should also consider whether the Indo-Pacific requires its own form of a nuclear alliance. Such an alliance need not replicate NATO, nor would it necessarily require the forward deployment of nuclear weapons throughout the region. However, NATO's experience demonstrates the value of institutionalized consultation, integrated planning, and political burden-sharing in maintaining credible deterrence.

The region should therefore begin a serious discussion about whether elements of NATO's nuclear architecture, which includes structured consultation, coordinated planning and, potentially, future nuclear-sharing arrangements, may become necessary as China's strategic capabilities continue to expand. This debate will undoubtedly be controversial. Nuclear sharing remains politically sensitive, particularly for countries with longstanding commitments to non-proliferation. Yet strategic realities cannot be ignored simply because they are politically uncomfortable.

Indeed, credible deterrence and non-proliferation have historically reinforced one another rather than existed in opposition. During the Cold War, NATO's nuclear-sharing arrangements strengthened alliance cohesion while helping discourage independent nuclear weapons programs among member states. Countries that possess confidence in extended deterrence are less likely to pursue their own nuclear arsenals. A stronger Indo-Pacific deterrence architecture could achieve a similar outcome by reinforcing confidence in allied security guarantees while reducing incentives for further nuclear proliferation across the region. This is precisely why diplomacy must evolve alongside military strategy. Dedicated Ambassadors for Strategic Deterrence could lead these conversations internationally. They would engage regional partners, coordinate policy across allied governments, strengthen strategic messaging, develop crisis consultation mechanisms and help shape an emerging deterrence architecture appropriate for twenty-first century security challenges.

Dedicated Ambassadors would also complement—not replace—existing ambassadors responsible for arms control and non-proliferation. Their missions would be different but

mutually reinforcing. One would continue pursuing the long-term objective of reducing nuclear dangers through diplomacy. The other would ensure that deterrence remains credible while those long-term conditions remain absent.

The strategic environment no longer resembles that of the 1990s. It more closely resembles an era of prolonged competition among multiple nuclear powers, where deterrence has once again become the principal mechanism for preserving peace.

Diplomatic institutions should reflect the current conditions. Creating Ambassadors for Strategic Deterrence would be a modest reform, but it would acknowledge an increasingly important reality. In today's strategic environment, deterrence is no longer solely a military function. It is a diplomatic responsibility. If Australia, Britain, and the United States intend to preserve strategic stability in the Indo-Pacific, they will need diplomats whose primary mission is not simply reducing nuclear weapons, but preventing their use through credible, coordinated, and enduring deterrence.

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