



***WITH A LITTLE HELP FROM MY FRIENDS: THE NEED FOR A STRONG ALLIANCE NETWORK TO SHAPE GLOBAL AFFAIRS***

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The International Order seeks to manage the complex relationship of institutions, nations, and their conflicting goals. A recent workshop by the Center for Global Security Research sought to tie the dynamics of this order to the domain of nuclear weapons. This commentary comprises my own view of the issue at hand. It draws insight specifically from discussions on the importance of alliances in maintaining progress towards foreign policy goals.

### **The Old Order**

The current International order has three major descriptive components, each facing pressure to change. First is the fact that the order operates on a set of rules-based norms. The order is also liberal, meaning there is a set of Western values that guide decisions and rules. Relevant values include interstate compromise and concepts like consent of the governed. A major threat to these pillars is the increasing impunity for those who violate the rules. This, in turn, weakens the institutions at the backbone of the International Order. Finally, the order is American-led.

This last component is critical because it is currently the most contested. Shifting global power now allows middle-power nations to act as rule-setters and influence the establishment and enforcement of norms. Additionally, for any nation, even close American

allies, there is no downside to hedging relationships that maintain some connection with the adversaries of the current International Order. Already, the West no longer enjoys hegemonic influence. Some of this decline stems from ongoing conflicts and general instability. The ongoing military conflicts in Ukraine and the Middle East, for example, complicate the status quo and call into question the Western World's ability to exert definitive control on all fronts. The current stutter of American leadership in the global order partially manifested from within, as well. An increasing narrative of isolationism and disavowing of global institutions has only further reduced America's role. However, this is not an irreversible trend.

A key contributor to the decades of stability under this current International Order is America's vast network of alliances. Presently, many factors, both in and out of the nuclear domain, threaten to destabilize these relationships.

### **Alliance Anxiety**

Maintaining a convincing commitment to any Ally is a difficult task. This challenge is notably more daunting for America, specifically, as it continually seeks to appease a global network of allies, each with different security needs, domestic politics, and hedging options.

It is easy to itemize the common aspects of allies' anxiety but appeasing any specific one requires a tailored solution. The rise of external threats, for example, is common across the globe. In the Pacific, American Treaty Allies are facing an increasingly assertive DPRK (as a regional nuclear pariah) with a diverse nuclear arsenal and strengthened ties to Russia. In Europe, Allies are facing active Russian aggression and persistent violations of territorial integrity.

Domestic attitudes also heavily influence the transformations these alliances may experience in the future. South Korea, for example, has [vast support](#) for the development of its nuclear arsenal. Japan's recent election showed [increased support](#) for a more nationalistic party that may be indicative of changing attitudes in the long term. Recent American rhetoric has also increased popular interest for more

“locally-owned” European deterrent forces, [including in Germany](#).

The aforementioned rhetoric is, of course, another major contributor to the anxiety of a perceived decline in American commitment abroad. Much of the recent “America-first” commentary emphasizes the transactional nature of alliances. As this doctrine gains a foothold in the American public, there may be doubt cast on the long-term continuation of security guarantees. Europe is also noticing the spotlight move from its theater to the Indo-Pacific. Some may worry that a reduced American presence cannot fulfill NATO obligations or deter Russia.

After the first few months of the new administration, the worst-case fears of an immediate and total American withdrawal have subsided. Now, many are attempting to gauge the level to which their own increased defense spending appeases American demands for a “fair” deal in the long term. One commenter described European feelings as having recovered from a panic to anxiety. There is an understanding that European abandonment is not a consideration for this US administration. However, there are further assurances that European leaders seek as an indication of long-term commitment to the region. Listed actions call for consistency in signals and include continued support for Ukraine, an expansion of NATO nuclear sharing, and maintaining assets currently emplaced.

Unlike the Europeans, Pacific Allies require varied approaches. Korea, for example, has explicitly requested visits from American nuclear-armed submarines. Japan, conversely, seeks more diplomatic than material assurances. The Japanese find many parallels between themselves and the Ukrainians. They want to be confident of support in case of conflict with their “big nuclear neighbor.” For this same reason, not much credibility was provided by the recent American support of Israeli strikes on Iran. This involvement, some say, was too low-stakes to adequately display American resolve.

## The International Nuclear Order

The stability of the old nuclear order stems from dynamics at play during the Cold War that continued into the 1990s. A primary contributor was the continued bipolarity and resultant simplicity. Although other nations possessed nuclear weapons, the arsenals of significance would continue to be the ones belonging to the two Cold War superpowers. This helped resolve core issues quickly as crises occurred. The decades of work establishing infrastructure for arms control and diverse adversarial communication channels provided options for the only two relevant parties to de-escalate. The survival of this bipolar relationship relied on diplomacy and institutions, all in support of maintaining the status quo.

Today, however, the status quo itself is under attack. The multipolarity of both international relations and proliferation of significant arsenals complicates the process of mitigating nuclear crises. Ideally, the United States could establish a mature deterrence relationship with each of the present nuclear players. This would include all the features of our relationship with the Soviet Union, such as “red” telephones, treaties, and launch notifications. However, some powers do not see the utility in even starting these conversations. China and Pakistan, for example, maintain that they have established well-defined tripwires and the topic requires no further discussion. Many of the features of this relationship with Russia itself are going or gone.

Along with this, nuclear non-proliferation discussions can no longer occur in a vacuum. Problems arising outside of the security domain influence a nation’s decision to nuclearize. The technology, environmental, and energy sectors must now be addressed to effectively stem nuclear proliferation. Outside of militaristic domains, economics is the backbone of international influence. If the West loses its power to meaningfully apply sanctions, for example, it will lose as well the ability to control the global non-proliferation regime and nuclear domain overall. An existing single-domain example is the comparatively weaker sanctions regime on Russian energy exports, notably [including Rosatom](#).

## Conclusions

For my contribution, I ended the final panel with a possibly juvenile question: “What does success look like? What policy goals should we be working towards now so they can come to fruition in 2100?”

Answers addressed the essential goals. Success is the absence of major nuclear exchanges and the timely deployment of the American modernized nuclear triad. They also expressed the need to think further on the topic of nuclear conflict and surprisingly opined that deterrence is not a permanent solution despite its perfect track record.

Although not a clear goal to work towards, my takeaway is an appreciation for the immense level of effort for a so-called status quo power to maintain the world it has built. There is no cruise control for foreign relations. Keeping the world in a constant state of favor requires constant commitment. Beyond funding, institutions require those who back them to abide by and enforce their decisions. Alliances must be frequently proven, not just maintained on paper. It will be the strength of these alliances that determine the impacts of the current challenges facing the International Order.

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