

## **National Institute for Deterrence Studies & Peter Huessy Seminar**

*Deterrence Dynamics in the Asia-Pacific: An Australian Perspective*

August 15, 2025, 10:00-11:00 AM (Eastern)

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### **Webinar Transcript**

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#### **Abstract**

This Huessy Seminar, hosted by Peter Huessy and presented by the National Institute for Deterrence Studies (NIDS) and UCAN Power, featured Dr. Christine M. Leah, a distinguished scholar of nuclear strategy and Asia-Pacific security. Dr. Leah examined the evolution of Australia's strategic culture and its shifting reliance from British imperial defense to U.S.-led extended nuclear deterrence. She argued that Cold War deterrence frameworks were predominantly Eurocentric, leaving Asia-Pacific allies like Australia, Japan, and South Korea with underdeveloped deterrence doctrines.

The seminar explored the emergence of a new "nuclear disorder" driven by China's assertive posture, regional proliferation risks, and the trilateral deterrence challenge facing the United States. Dr. Leah highlighted Australia's historical nuclear ambitions, its uranium politics, and the enduring taboo surrounding nuclear discourse. She also addressed South Korea's concerns about the credibility of U.S. extended deterrence, the implications of the India-Pakistan rivalry, and the strategic objectives behind China's nuclear buildup.

A lively Q&A session followed, engaging participants on topics such as integrated deterrence, dual-capable aircraft, and alliance signaling to the PRC. Dr. Leah emphasized the need for clearer strategic messaging and deeper regional collaboration to strengthen deterrence in the Asia-Pacific.

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#### **Executive Summary**

##### **Overview**

This seminar explored the evolving dynamics of nuclear deterrence in the Asia-Pacific region, with a focus on Australia's strategic posture and historical trajectory. Dr. Leah provided a comprehensive

analysis of how Cold War-era deterrence frameworks—largely Eurocentric—have left Asia-Pacific allies grappling with a legacy of strategic ambiguity and underdeveloped deterrence doctrines.

### Key Themes & Insights

- **Cold War Legacy & Strategic Culture:** Australia’s early defense strategy was shaped by its colonial ties to Britain and the concept of “empire defense.” Post-WWII, Australia contributed to British nuclear testing but lacked sovereign deterrence guarantees.
- **Transition to U.S. Alliance:** As British forces withdrew from Southeast Asia, Australia turned to the U.S. for extended deterrence under ANZUS, while also exploring its own nuclear capabilities.
- **Nuclear Order vs. Disorder:** Dr. Leah contrasted the stable bipolar nuclear order of the Cold War with today’s emerging “nuclear disorder,” marked by China’s assertiveness, regional proliferation risks, and trilateral deterrence challenges involving the U.S., Russia, and China.
- **Australia’s Nuclear Debate:** Despite its uranium resources and early ambitions, nuclear policy remains taboo in Australia. Historical debates over warfighting vs. deterrence persist, and public discourse is cautious.
- **Extended Deterrence & Regional Reactions:** South Korea’s concerns about U.S. commitment were discussed, along with Australia’s view on regional nuclear dynamics, including India-Pakistan tensions and China’s strategic objectives.
- **Integrated Deterrence Confusion:** Dr. Leah critiqued the U.S. Department of Defense’s messaging around “integrated deterrence,” calling for clearer language and concepts to support allied understanding and cooperation.
- **Taiwan & Ukraine Lessons:** The seminar examined whether China interprets U.S. responses to Ukraine as indicative of future behavior regarding Taiwan and emphasized the importance of formal alliances in shaping strategic expectations.

### Audience Engagement

The session featured a robust Q&A, with questions from participants including experts from the U.S. Navy War College. Topics ranged from uranium politics to missile defense, alliance credibility, and strategic signaling to China.

### Closing Remarks

Dr. Leah emphasized the need for renewed strategic thinking in the Asia-Pacific, advocating for deeper collaboration, clearer deterrence frameworks, and honest debate about nuclear realities. Peter Huessy thanked all participants and expressed hope for future in-person engagements, including the annual triad event at LSU Shreveport.

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### Unabridged Transcript

*(Note: there will invariably be some word errors in the following transcript.)*

00:00:05:07 - 00:00:46:29

Kimberly Cherington

Good morning. I'm Kimberly Cherington on behalf of the National Institute for Deterrence Studies, or NIDS. I want to warmly welcome you to today's Huessy seminar, and especially welcome to our featured

guest today, Dr Christine Leah, coming to you from Australia during today's activation. We encourage you to submit your questions in the chat or the Q&A at the top of the screen at any time, which we will address at the Q&A portion of this talk, and stick around to the end to get insights on some of our upcoming speakers, or go to our website at Thinkdeterrence.com on the events page to learn more and register you and your colleagues.

00;00;47;02 - 00;01;04;07

Kimberly Cherington

Now, it is my pleasure to introduce our host for today's seminar, Mr. Peter Huessy, himself, President and Senior Director of Strategic Deterrence Studies at Geo Strategic Analysis and a senior fellow here at NIDS. Peter, over to you.

00;01;04;09 - 00;01;22;09

Peter Huessy

Thank you very much, Kimberly. I appreciate it and want to welcome Dr Christine. Leah, who is here, our speaker today. What we're trying to do with some of these events is to give an appreciation to our newer folks here in America, what to our allies think of either the Chinese or Russian or

00;01;22;09 - 00;01;29;18

Peter Huessy

both nuclear build up, and how do they look at nuclear deterrence in their part of the world?

00;01;29;20 - 00;02;15;16

Peter Huessy

Christine has an extraordinary background. She is a fellow with the National Institute of Deterrence Studies. As I am, her previous government experience was a visiting fellow at the center for International Strategic Studies in Pakistan, the Chauncey postdoctoral associate in Grand strategy at the Yale University, the Stanton Nuclear Security Postdoctoral Fellow at MIT, a visiting fellow at the Rashad at School of International Studies, a journalist at Karen News Thailand, a summer research associate at the Rand Corporation, and a research intern at the International Institute for Strategic Studies in Singapore, and a research fellow at the Australian Strategic Policy Institute, and a research intern at the Iiss in London.

00;02;15;18 - 00;02;44;09

Peter Huessy

She will review the perspectives of Germany, France, United Kingdom and NATO on China and its nuclear buildup and following a brief exploration of European debates about China, she will outline the implications of China's nuclear buildup for European security. So, with that, Christine, welcome to our seminar series. We are very happy to have you here from Australia. And so over to you.

00;02;44;11 - 00;03;07;20

Christine Leah

Giddy Peter, get everyone and thank you so much, everyone, for having, for having me. And I'm deeply honored to be a part of this series on Peter Huessy. He has been a great inspiration to me throughout my years as a student, a student, and then a postdoc. Throughout many years. I'm greatly wanted to be here today.

00;03;07;20 - 00;03;39;29

Christine Leah

Thank you. Peter. I'm actually going to be talking about the Asia Pacific dynamics of Asia Pacific. Security and what it means for eastern deterrence, and US extended nuclear deterrence in the region. So Giddy, as we say in Australia. So, I the kind of introduction here is like the Cold War construct of thinking about us, of thinking about nuclear deterrence.

00;03;42;03 - 00;04;25;18

Christine Leah

It was a unique development in international history. In many ways, this construct of two nuclear armed superpowers competing for global influence was the new dynamic of what international great power competition looks like will now look like in modern history. But what appeared to be a global competition was actually, in practice, a much more regional focused one, focused on Western Europe and NATO because we in the Asia Pacific, you know, sort of Australia specifically, specifically, and South Korea and Japan, more generally.

00;04;25;21 - 00;05;09;00

Christine Leah

We weren't at the front line of it all, and we really got the leftovers of deterrence thinking. And its application in terms of concepts, thinking about force readiness, force generation and declaratory policy. We really kind of got the leftovers of all that. As I argued in one of my first books, Australian of the bomb, the credibility of end extended nuclear deterrence, in the Asia Pacific from the late 1960s was to a large extent based on certain geopolitical circumstances that shaped what William Walker calls a nuclear Order.

00;05;10;27 - 00;05;51;18

Christine Leah

Where it was unlikely that any strategic attack on Australia, Japan and even South Korea would occur outside the context of a more general global war between the US and the USSR. That order was characterized by a relatively stable distribution of power I bipolar nuclear deterrence system, relatively limited nuclear proliferation, and the absence of an immediate and specific threat, to Australia.

00;05;51;20 - 00;06;26;13

Christine Leah

Then this order remained fairly stable for more than 30 years. However, we're now entering what I would argue a new nuclear disorder, both at the global level and a regional one in the Asia Pacific, with China's belligerence in the South China Sea and the Asia Pacific in the early 20 tens. Let's be honest, it's increasingly bellicose rhetoric and activities against Taiwan and its rapidly expanding nuclear arsenal.

00;06;26;13 - 00;06;57;23

Christine Leah

We now have a trilateral nuclear superpower situation where the US needs to deter Russia from aggression. Europe and China in the Asia Pacific. At the same time. And how do we think about concepts of nuclear strategy in this? You know, our region, the Asia-Pacific, is very different geographically in geopolitically, very different region to NATO and Western Europe.

00;06;57;26 - 00;07;39;24

Christine Leah

And I'd argue and many would argue, Washington is going to have to work much harder to reassure its allies in the Asia Pacific. Again, this, this vastly different year, theater to Western Europe, in terms of geopolitics, geography and political alliances. And as was my, as one of my, professors, Paul Brickman

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likes to say, it's easy to forget how much the Cold War was a European affair that spilled over to other regions, and how deeply Eurocentric nearly everything was about the first nuclear age.

00;07;39;26 - 00;08;00;23

Christine Leah

And they really hasn't been much, nearly as much thinking about, scholarship, about, deterrence dynamics in the Asia Pacific in, in the Asia Pacific as its own system, in its own right, if that makes sense. So, the concept of nuclear order.

00;08;01;22 - 00;08;36;09

Christine Leah

William Walker, he is the scholar on this. It's a system where not only the possession but also the use of nuclear weapons is controlled. The number of nuclear weapon states is relatively small. Nuclear weapons are no longer considered as merely bigger and better conventional weapons, the way they were until late 19, 1960s. Also, there are no direct, immediate military threats to U.S. allies in the Asia Pacific.

00;08;37;29 - 00;09;13;04

Christine Leah

Also, a major war between nuclear powers is considered relatively unlikely. And also, after the Second World War, at least for Australia. It was until the late 1960s that the world managed to establish a relatively stable nuclear order. Again, the absence, which pushed countries such as South Korea, Japan and even Australia to explore having their own, nuclear current.

00;09;13;07 - 00;09;39;06

Christine Leah

So specifically for Australia and Australia and the period of nuclear disorder that ensued after the second, the end of the Second World War. You know, it's interesting, it's important and interesting to understand Australia's strategic culture, which is, again, strategic culture is its own discipline. But it's really interesting to understand Australia's strategic culture.

00;09;40;19 - 00;10;11;27

Christine Leah

Imagine throwing a bunch of, 1788 imagine and throwing a bunch of convicts to the other side of the world. And this unknown con tenant, and establishing a quote unquote white colony, and trying to establish, sort of colonies in, a similar but not the same way to the United States, sort of thing states.

00;10;11;27 - 00;10;24;11

Christine Leah

So, for example, Washington state, Texas and so forth, in a similar vein, but not exactly the same at all.

00;10;28;07 - 00;11;07;21

Christine Leah

We try to establish states such as Queensland, New South Wales, Western Australia, and so forth. So initially Australia, monarchy as we know it today. It was established, understood as a system of federated states. And so forth. And it was only until 1901 that Australia became a federation, and became a nation state, relatively independent from Great Britain in 1901.

00;11;07;23 - 00;11;49;14

Christine Leah

But still it was for a for the longest time, Australia. Even when it became a federation in 1901, there was very much still this concept of empire defense that Australia, as a colony of Great Britain, was a part of the great British Empire. And so, there was still this mentality of empire defense. And so that is one of the reasons why Australia sent a lot of troops to Western Europe, to defend the empire in World War one and also in World War two.

00;11;49;14 - 00;12;11;18

Christine Leah

And again, this concept of empire defense, and that is also one of the reasons that Australia, after the Second World War, having been bombed by the Japanese, in World War two, there was still this concept of empire defense and. Oh, okay, well, it.

00;12;12;08 - 00;12;25;00

Christine Leah

Although we are an emerging nation, we are still part of the Empire, and we would still like to contribute to defending the empire. And the empire is,

00;12;29;02 - 00;12;53;09

Christine Leah

Wanting to develop nuclear deterrence as a concept. And so, Australia will contribute to this. And so, Australia contributed technology scientists and land to, testing, developing nuclear weapons for the defense of the great empire. Right.

00;12;57;20 - 00;13;24;23

Christine Leah

But at the same time, some things happened. And so, Australia was wanting to develop nuclear weapons. It won in parallel for the defense of the Empire to for the defense of its own emerging concept of mainland defense. Because again, the British at this same time were withdrawing its troops. Famously the concept east of Suez.

00;13;26;24 - 00;13;54;16

Christine Leah

And east of sort of Singapore, where it had traditionally stationed troops and so forth. Australia was kind of grappling. Australia as a nation was kind of grappling with this concept of existing outside the context of its great and powerful friends. And so whilst it was dealing with.

00;13;55;16 - 00;14;15;26

Christine Leah

The concept of existing outside the British Empire, it was also looking forward to oh, so who might we turn to next? Perhaps, the United States. So, there was this kind of this transition period.

00;14;15;28 - 00;14;30;09

Christine Leah

So long story short, it was a pretty turbulent time for Australia from the late 1940s to the early 1970s.

00;14;31;22 - 00;15;12;24

Christine Leah

Again, before World War two, the British Empire had been the strong, strong enough to dominate the

Asia Pacific. And now the region was no longer being dominated by this great Western maritime power. The Asian powers themselves, primarily China and Indonesia, were beginning to shape the system themselves. The situation that Australia was unfamiliar with, in the late 1950s and 1960s, there were fears that there would be invasion from Communist China and Indonesia.

00;15;12;26 - 00;15;51;25

Christine Leah

Again, the northern city of Darwin had been bombed by the Japanese in the Second World War. The Korean War was still going on. And again, the United Kingdom was withdrawing troops from Southeast Asia and focusing on the Soviet threat to Europe. And so, during this time, so from the late, The kind of the mid to late 50s to early 70s Australia didn't perceive that it had sufficient conventional forces to defend itself alone from any threat coming from the north.

00;15;51;28 - 00;16;26;23

Christine Leah

And so, in this very unfamiliar situation, it sought security through nuclear weapons. And now so part of the initial rationale for Australia really was for the country to be part of this responsible, contributing to the defense of the British Empire. Again, I bring this up, again, Australians still had this mentality of empire defense and nuclear weapons were seen as a way to contributing to that.

00;16;26;25 - 00;17;00;03

Christine Leah

So initially, the British nuclear weapons program source tried playing a key role, not least the testing of both atomic weaponry in the Australian desert, but also their delivery systems, like Bloodhound and its Blue Streak missiles, but without the British actually making any guarantees that Australia would receive its own sovereign nuclear deterrent. I see the questions coming up all.

00;17;00;05 - 00;17;05;23

Christine Leah

I love these questions. We'll get to all these questions there. Awesome, I love them. Thank you. Thank you everyone.

00;17;09;09 - 00;17;37;18

Christine Leah

Just going through the history very quickly. I'll try to be very quick. Eventually the British sees cooperation under pressure from the United States, which wanted to control nuclear sharing under the McMahon act. And at the same time, though the late 1960s, the UK was deterring more and more forces from Southeast Asia, making Australia even feel even more vulnerable.

00;17;37;20 - 00;18;12;13

Christine Leah

And at the same time, the perception was that nuclear weapons were becoming merely bigger and bigger, merely bigger and better. Conventional weapons, like the latest thing in modern war fighting. And also at the same time, even going back to William Walker's concept of nuclear order and sort of they weren't really norms around the possession, or use of nuclear weapons, let alone an actual treaty against nuclear weapons proliferation.

00;18;12;16 - 00;18;40;24

Christine Leah

There were concerns, the Chinese detonation in 1964 would spur other countries in the region to embark on their own programs. Indeed. Soon afterwards, the Indonesian government under President Sukarno announced its ambitions to acquire nuclear weapons. And so at this stage, this is the mid-sixties. The Australian government does two things. It one, it turns to the US for security assurances.

00;18;40;26 - 00;18;59;06

Christine Leah

And this that had been signed in 1951, that when, where and under what circumstances would the United States use nuclear weapons in the defense of Australia's interests? In other words, extended deterrence to the US.

00;19;00;26 - 00;19;12;26

Christine Leah

The Australian government ramps up efforts to develop its own equipment. Kimberley. Kimberley independently of the United States or the UK.

00;19;12;29 - 00;20;11;07

Christine Leah

So, in the vein of seeking assurances about extend life insurance, from the late 50s, the early 70s, senior officials from the Australian Atomic Energy Commission, the Department of External Affairs, which is today's DFAT, did these round about events, repeatedly sought assurances from the US on the circumstances in which the US would use nuclear arms in the defense of Australia and Australian troops operating alongside force US forces in Vietnam and US representatives from the US State Department were consistently evasive on the matter, vaguely stating that Australian forces should contribute to the overall stability of South-East Asia without discussing contingency planning or giving information on US military planners in the region.

00;20;11;09 - 00;20;45;28

Christine Leah

Discussion concerning Australia's need to know about aspects of US basing and planning policies. Continue back and forth over the span of several years, to no avail. So, given serious misgivings about America's wish, willingness to assist its southern ally, senior officials in Canberra made it clear that Australia would not sign or ratify the NPT without formal guarantees of protection against strategic attacks by the PRC and Indonesia on Australia.

00;20;45;28 - 00;21;17;03

Christine Leah

Now, this is fantastic Quote I like to bring it up because it's kind of cheeky. But it's, it's in the national Australia Archives. This is great quote by an official, an Australian official, I think, in Indonesia, talking about, Doctor Su Bandera, who is, President Sukarno, president of Indonesia at the time.

00;21;17;03 - 00;21;52;06

Christine Leah

His so his formal, foreign affairs adviser saying, talking about Indonesian independence and the, right of all nations to acquire nuclear weapons. So, he says this this is an Australian official saying, quote, I am cabling in clear C-band. Drew's comments on the desirability of all nations possessing nuclear weapons under the pressure of local power politics.

00;21;52;10 - 00;22;22;05

Christine Leah

I fear the wily doctor has gone a little mad. Dot dot dot. The Italian ambassador today referred to Sukarno as Elder Che Indonesia with a slight stinker of the French wireless. Comment. While this comment is a little naughty, it is rather close to home. And of course. It was quite entertaining.

00;22;23;14 - 00;23;02;01

Christine Leah

But it's rather interesting because by the late 1960s, things started to change for Australia. The third of major power conflict in Asia was reciting and intelligence assessments about Chinese and Indonesian military capabilities were becoming more accurate. Relations with both China and Indonesia were becoming beginning to stabilize. The new government under, Suharto didn't share the same nuclear nationalism as the previous dictatorship under, President Carter.

00;23;02;04 - 00;23;35;14

Christine Leah

On Australia. At the same time, there was kind of a growing norm against both the possession and the use of nuclear weapons. Both regionally and to actually, more and more countries were ratifying the NPT. So the nuclear nonproliferation Treaty and, and signaling, signaling their renunciation of their own nuclear weapons ambitions. And it's so interesting. Indeed, Australia was one of the last countries to ratify the NPT, believe it or not.

00;23;35;14 - 00;24;06;25

Christine Leah

And one of the reasons, the Australian government at the time decide to do so was the fact that West Germany and Japan had done so. And what I gather from the archives is that if these states were happy to rely, quote unquote, on US six and nuclear terms, who are in far graver, national security predicaments, then, then surely Australia could afford, to outsource.

00;24;10;26 - 00;24;55;03

Christine Leah

Nuclear deterrence as well, to its green, powerful ally, the United States. And, and so at the same time, we saw kind of the Cold War system of deterrence blocs, we might call them, between East and West, generated what, into escalations? Goals might be called a structural credibility for extended nuclear deterrence, where the US could not afford to abandon any of its Western allies without risking its global credibility as an ally committed to extend nuclear deterrence as a concept, and as a as a as a foundation for international security.

00;24;55;05 - 00;25;36;01

Christine Leah

And Australians, Australia's region during that time was such that there were no substantial threats to Australia that would not also threaten US interests. So I call this the indivisibility of a nuclear alliance. So in that context, since the 90s, senior officials in Canberra have assessed that, and any nuclear attack on Australia was unlikely, would be unlikely to occur outside the context of a general nuclear war between the superpowers.

00;25;36;04 - 00;25;39;16

Christine Leah

And I've nearly finished here. And, if for the contemporary. So now these forces.

00;25;51;11 - 00;26;19;11

Christine Leah

I think what's really interesting now is this significant change in geopolitical context, that we've, at least historians have been seeing since the early 20 tens, at least since the late 1980s. A friend of mine who passed away recently, very sadly, Richard Bit singer, he was at Nanyang Technological University. He was one of my bosses.

00;26;19;13 - 00;27;00;10

Christine Leah

He's been watching he had been watching Chinese naval military modernizations in the 1980s saying, look, things are apace. But I think what's, what's really interesting is seeing, how quickly countries have, especially in the Asia Pacific, Japan, Australia, South Korea have been reacting to what has been coming historically. But it's been really obvious to people such as us historians, looking at Chinese military modernization for the last few decades is.

00;27;00;12 - 00;27;57;05

Christine Leah

Yes, this is this has been coming for some time. Why are we only reacting like we, the United States, Australia, Japan, South Korea? Why are we only reacting to it now? Quote unquote? And I think it's really interesting, because countries I presented a paper at a conference in Pakistan back in April about missile defense. And I think it's very interesting because most countries that have thought seriously about deterrence and extend deterrence have tended to be nuclear weapons states or direct and or immediate beneficiaries of extended nuclear deterrence.

00;27;57;07 - 00;28;19;27

Christine Leah

And, and have thus gone on the journey of thinking about fundamental deterrence concepts such as damage limitation, escalation dynamics, escalation, control. What are the parameters of nuclear command and control? What does that look like? I'll stop shortly.

00;28;21;25 - 00;28;52;18

Christine Leah

I think it's really interesting that countries like Australia and Japan and South Korea, who have not been historically direct beneficiaries of US extended nuclear deterrence in in the way that nature has, that they, going on that journey looking at deterrence from, mostly missile defense perspective. But but missile defense is but one component of deterrence.

00;28;52;18 - 00;29;26;17

Christine Leah

And we need to have the punishment aspect. So how do we think about, going back to the purpose of this talk, how do we think about deterrence and the concepts of deterrence like punishment, damage limitation, escalation, escalation, control? How do we think about this in a maritime theater where the allies certainly working together, but not in a formal alliance like the nature organization?

00;29;26;19 - 00;29;33;25

Christine Leah

I'll stop there. And thank you so much for putting up with me. And, please, throw me difficult questions, but.

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00;29;33;28 - 00;29;42;03

Peter Huessy

Christina, thank you so much. So much. I have five questions.

00;29;42;05 - 00;30;07;18

Peter Huessy

Number one, what role does uranium ore play in Australian politics insofar as nuclear matters? Because you do have a lot of deposits. And the question is. It's a question from one of our listeners today is would you address that?

00;30;07;20 - 00;30;37;28

Christine Leah

Oh, sure. Yeah. No. Great. Great question. And I'm happy to discuss with whoever brought the question up more. Look, it's very, very interesting because the Australian National University, in Canberra was set up, was established in order to explore, atomic weaponry and uranium enrichment. Yeah. Little known fact. Yeah.

00;30;42;21 - 00;31;19;23

Christine Leah

But unfortunately, over time and we Australia had an atomic energy. The we had the Australian Atomic Energy Commission set up, until the late 1960s, it's why the Australian National University was established to do that and research atomic weaponry. This why we have Lucas Heights in, which is essentially the Australian Capital Territory. Territory.

00;31;21;08 - 00;32;08;09

Christine Leah

But unfortunately, anything and select Silex is an Australian technology. So, enrichment through, I'm not sure how it works, but I think it's laser, laser fusion laser technology. But also, all that to say that Australia had great ambitions from the late 1940s. It was part of our national development plan as a nation under John Curtin, one of our very first prime ministers.

00;32;08;11 - 00;32;14;03

Christine Leah

Unfortunately, nuclear has become unfortunately because of in part because of, The French nuclear testing in the Pacific. Nuclear has become a very taboo topic in Australia. And going back to the 1980s again, about the extent to which there was a great debate in the 90 days about because one of my professor's, just more he, he quote unquote, uncovered the reasons why we had Pine Gap, the joint facilities and so forth, and that, generated a great debate about the extent to which Australia was contributed to nuclear war fighting versus nuclear deterrence.

00;32;57;29 - 00;33;17;12

Christine Leah

And so, there was a great debate in the 80s about, well, is Australia part of nuclear warfighting or deterrence and what's the difference? And so forth. And oh, I see who won. And Joseph Walsh, I'm... I have some great questions. But sorry, I'm battling, long story short.

00;33;18;14 - 00;33;51;04

Christine Leah

Nuclear has become very taboo in Austria, and not many people want to talk about it. And it's I think it's a very great shame because nuclear our history shows Australia's nuclear history shows that whether we like it or not, we've always relied on nuclear deterrence for our ultimate security, whether it's by our great and powerful friends, whether we do it ourselves or.

00:33;51;06 - 00:33;57;14

Christine Leah

Yeah, but it's just become a taboo topic, which I think is unfortunate.

00:33;57;17 - 00:34;11;10

Peter Huessy

Another question, Christine comes up, what impact is the Pakistani India rivalry in conflict play with respect to how Australia looks at the nuclear balance?

00:34;11;13 - 00:34;13;08

Christine Leah

Peter, that's such a great question.

00:34;16;04 - 00:34;41;18

Christine Leah

Talking about this and again, Hugh, here I see you're on line. I see you're, No, I remember asking my professor Hugh White, this question because I was wondering about, you know, like what how does how does Australia think about its regional security and, to what extent like what countries do, does Australia think about?

00:34;41;18 - 00:35;03;23

Christine Leah

I mean, certainly we think about it in Indonesia. In the immediate sense and certainly China in the immediate sense. But it's a great question. And I remember when I was an honest student, I was talking to different officials in the Australian government like, what about India and Pakistan? You know, like, oh, they went nuclear in 1998 and so forth.

00:35;03;25 - 00:35;24;03

Christine Leah

And, I remember the broad response was, well. It, it it's interesting in the sense of the regional balance of power, whatever that means. But it's not out of direct relevance to Australia like it's ... It's relevant to Asia in the sense of the regional balance of power in geopolitics and China and Russia and so forth. But it's not an immediate issue for Australia, which I thought was really interesting.

00:35;42;03 - 00:36;12;06

Peter Huessy

Another question, Christine, is from Australia. I would assume there are a variety of views in Australia about this, but it's a debate we have here in America too. What are the strategic objectives of China and to what extent is there a build buildup of nuclear weapons designed to get to let them achieve those objectives without which they might not be able to do that?

00:36;12;08 - 00:36;27;07

Peter Huessy

The most obvious thing is Taiwan. Okay. But my view is it's broader than that. But I'll turn it over. Back

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over to you is in terms of what you think the strategic objectives are of China and what role their nuclear buildup plays in this.

00;36;27;10 - 00;36;31;16

Christine Leah

I'd love your review, Peter. Please.

00;36;31;18 - 00;36;32;22

Peter Hussy

Pardon?

00;36;32;24 - 00;36;36;02

Christine Leah

I would love your broader view.

00;36;36;05 - 00;37;04;26

Peter Huessy

Well, China is engaging in what they call unrestricted warfare, and they want to replace us as the world's hegemon, though I don't think we're the world's hedging one right now. But China, when you look at the rhetoric, I mean, it goes far as saying that they on the moon and they want to put facilities on the moon, which will enable them to control space, which is true if you can attack the Earth from the moon.

00;37;04;28 - 00;37;32;21

Peter Huessy

So that's what I think their objective is. And I think Taiwan is one of a number of objectives that just taking Taiwan doesn't fulfill their global hegemonic. In fact, I think they want to become a global hegemon and then take Taiwan so they'll prevent us from coming to the defense of our allies, which is what their nuclear forces are for them to get us to stand down.

00;37;32;24 - 00;37;37;00

Peter Huessy

And so, I shouldn't go further because it's your show.

00;37;37;02 - 00;37;48;06

Christine Leah

No, Peter. And so, conversation. No, I, I, I really Ross backed and appreciate your views and I think the valid.

00;37;51;05 - 00;38;29;27

Christine Leah

I just answer from an Australian perspective and I mean, I come at it from a historical perspective. I, I, I think you're right. That being said, I'm not sure I'm not sure that China yet has global ambitions. I'm sure it has regional ambitions, but that has global implications, right? For the United States. That's what I would say.

00;38;29;29 - 00;39;04;14

Peter Huessy

Okay. The next two questions are related. The first one is what's the perspective in Australia of the concern the Republic of Korea has about the adequacy of extended deterrence, particularly nuclear

extended deterrence? Every month you see an American visiting and we shake hands and we have mutual talks and we emphasize we really are dedicated to the defense of this.

00;39;04;17 - 00;39;39;08

Peter Huessy

Yeah, the Republic of Korea. So, my questions are to one is what's your view of are the South Koreans worried about something that not to worry about. But number two is what would happen if the Republic of well, they want extended deterrence to be strengthened, but what do you what do folks in Australia think of Republic of we talking about getting their own nuclear deterrent or bringing in an American deterrent on the Peninsula?

00;39;42;21 - 00;39;45;09

Christine Leah

There's a terrific question.

00;39;48;02 - 00;40;26;11

Christine Leah

Okay. No, they they're genuinely really great questions. Sir, for the first one, I suspect, I think, and I can't speak. I don't speak for any South Koreans at all. I have South Korean, academic friends, who are very interesting people. I'm not surprised. And I rather expect that South Korea expects more from the United States in terms of extended truce assurances and quite frankly.

00;40;36;16 - 00;41;13;29

Christine Leah

Oh, everyone says that, quite frankly, you know, after the the United States withdrew, its forces from South Korea after the then Cold War, I was a bit surprised myself. But I would I'm not I'm not at all surprised or shocked by South Koreans asking for more extended U.S. action nuclear deterrence guarantees from. Yeah, from the United States, including deployed forces, including deployed bombers, dealer, so and so forth.

00;41;13;29 - 00;41;22;09

Christine Leah

That's entirely normal. I don't think that's taboo, given. I mean, again, it.

00;41;23;25 - 00;41;49;00

Christine Leah

It's a very strange situation coming up off from the end of the Cold War where nuclear weapons. Oh, it's taboo. Talk about nuclear weapons and strategy. It's like, no, it's not. This is just geopolitics as usual. Okay. So, I think that's healthy and that's a healthy debate, to be having in South Korea. I think it's a healthy debate to be having in Japan.

00;41;49;02 - 00;42;24;05

Christine Leah

I think it's a healthy debate to be having in Australia. However. Again, my views represent my own views and nobody else's. I am personally a huge fan of us nuclear weapons being deployed in theater to demonstrate credibility, tripwire, etc. all the concepts you want. I think the US should be having more deployed forces in theater to demonstrate credibility.

00;42;24;05 - 00;42;45;24

Christine Leah

Tripwires, escalation, escalation, dynamics, escalation, control, escalation, dominance and so forth. Unfortunately, that is not a popular view to have in Australia because of the taboo around nuclear weapons, and so forth but.

Again, I think, I think this is a debate, you know. This is a healthy debate. It's an it's an unfortunate debate because, you know, no one wants to be in this situation. But if we're going to be serious about geopolitics, strategy and deterring major power, these are the debates that we need to be having. And by golly, we had them during the Cold War in Western Europe.

00;43;17;02 - 00;43;26;02

Christine Leah

By golly, is it not our turn, our turn now in the Asia Pacific to be having such debates?

00;43;26;05 - 00;44;25;16

Peter Huessy

You know, another question comes up and that given the United States did not deter Russia from invading Ukraine in the first place, 2014 and 2022, in your view, and from the perspective, let's say, of Australia, though, there under the quid pro probably quite a different number of views. But how does that affect your thinking with respect to does China take from this that we will not come to the defense of Taiwan too much, but just a little or some, but not enough to change the outcome because I don't see American forces going to Taiwan and having battlefield, conflicts with the Chinese on the island.

00;44;25;19 - 00;44;49;03

Peter Huessy

My view is we either get there and prevent the Chinese from taking over or relate to the party, and then we have to expel the Chinese, which is different or so different color. So, one of the question was, if you assume we didn't deter Russia from invading Ukraine, but we've deterred them from using nuclear weapons.

00;44;49;06 - 00;45;00;28

Peter Huessy

What impact does that have with respect to the perspective? Australia has on China's threat to Taiwan?

00;45;01;01 - 00;45;03;19

Christine Leah

That's a really good question, Peter.

00;45;07;05 - 00;45;34;04

Christine Leah

It's, it's I'm not sure how to frame my answer, but I will bring up the point. One of the points is that one of our professors, Hugh White, who I think is on this call, he's brought up the point that, and I'll start off with this and I'll go into more detail. He brought up the great point.

00;45;34;06 - 00;46;02;18

Christine Leah

So, I was asking him and one of my other professors, Paul Bracken, about, you know, how does the US demonstrate, its willingness to defend its Asian allies? And pulled back and was saying sort of, well. How do we demonstrate resolve and capabilities? And my professor Hugh White was saying, well, that's all well and good. Can't really use a one thing, but like, what are the actual U.S. interests in the region?

15

00:46:02;18 - 00:46:23;14

Christine Leah

Like is the US willing to fight a nuclear war, on behalf of its allies? And like the US, can't just say, oh, will our allies, our interests? It's like, well, yeah, but allies are means to an end. So, what's your end? Like, we've.

00:46:26;04 - 00:46:46;09

Christine Leah

But no, no, you raised a great point. And I would just only I would point out that it. I guess unfortunately, it is a detail, but it's an important detail is that Ukraine was not a part of NATO. It wasn't an...

00:46:47;07 - 00:47:15;16

Christine Leah

A formal ally, and it won. It does raise the question of to what extent are formal alliances important in this day and age, like written in treaty documents, as opposed to allies like partners, but like. I guess I guess in the Asia Pacific, we understand that because we have very different alliance system. Right? Like we're not nature.

00:47:15;16 - 00:47:46;01

Christine Leah

We're not a land block that is very carefully delineated against the Soviet Union. Russia. Right. Like we've got the U.S over here, we've got the US-Japan alliance, the US, South Korea alliance, the US Austria alliance. It's a hub and spokes system. We are not a multilateral alliance. We are separate alliance systems. And we do stuff together.

00:47:46;04 - 00:48:18;17

Christine Leah

But we're not formally an alliance. But it's an interesting dynamic because we're doing so much more together in the Asia Pacific. Right. Like we've got trilateral arrangements around missile defense, logistics and so forth. But you raised a really great point, Peter. How do we see Ukraine? Well, I guess we try not. I think in the Asia Pacific, we try not to focus too much on Ukraine.

00:48:18;19 - 00:48:45;13

Christine Leah

Formally, I don't know if that makes sense. As in, like, we don't take too many lessons because Ukraine was never, never. A NATO member. And I guess we focus on the formal arrangements within alliance like formal alliances as opposed to, oh, we may or may not do this, but like, so I guess, what's the takeaway?

00:48:45;16 - 00:49:01;23

Christine Leah

In the Asia Pacific, we're really, keen to work together. And we are working together, like on missile defense between Japan, Australia, the United States. And again on logistics. But I guess And it's really interesting, I, I've been true when I was in government, I was, you know.

00:49:09;22 - 00:49:36;10

Christine Leah

Conference, which is classified, but it was really interesting. Because I was in the Asia Pacific group, and compared to the NATO group, it was like, and, us, us in the Asia Pacific group were like, oh, where's Great Britain? We need to talk to them about missile defense. And like all they're in NATO meetings, like, oh, okay.

00;49;36;11 - 00;49;49;07

Christine Leah

All right. Well, all right, well, we're just going to get on with our stuff. Like it was like, oh, they're doing their formal readings, but like, we're informal, so we're just going to get on with doing our stuff, if that makes sense. I'm not sure.

00;49;50;11 - 00;50;18;25

Peter Huessy

We have a question from Steve Schinkel from the War College, the Navy War College. Quite interesting. It's he's got two questions in relate. Haven't read them to you. The Department of Defense is concept of integrated deterrence using all elements of power across all domains as well. What recommendations do you have for the US to better integrate with its allies and partners with Australia's from Australia's perspective and which intervention?

00;50;18;25 - 00;50;44;24

Peter Huessy

He says, how would that be messaged to the PRC? And related to that is what about if Australia had a dual capable aircraft, but the nuclear weapons part of it would be under U.S. control until possibility of being used, which we have done with other countries. And then again, how would that be? How should you present that to the PRC?

00;50;44;26 - 00;50;58;25

Peter Huessy

So, the first part is integrating better with our allies. The second part is whether you have a nuclear capability, which is on dual use aircraft, which bifurcates who has the aircraft, who has control, and so forth.

00;50;58;28 - 00;51;17;20

No, thank you, Peter, and thank you. So, for that great question. On the first part, that's a great question. And I have to admit, I have been confused by US messaging on integrated deterrence and maybe I'm old school, but I always understood deterrence as being, you know, the sort of punishment. And so forth so.

00;51;35;24 - 00;51;44;02

Christine Leah

So, I've been quite confused by this concept of integrated deterrence. I mean, is it all aspects of national power and surface?

00;51;44;04 - 00;52;01;23

Peter Huessy

Yes. Yeah, I think that's what it means, is it use all elements of national power that are on the table as opposed to, oh no, we not going to use this, but not this in this like information warfare which is part of diplomacy. It's economics, it's politics, and it's also military.

00;52;01;25 - 00;52;02;08

Christine Leah

Yes.

00;52;02;08 - 00;52;05;09

Peter Huessy

That's what that's what it's meant to mean.

00;52;05;12 - 00;52;32;17

Christine Leah

Thank you. No thank you. Thank you very much. Peter. Yes. Yeah. That just so you know, that has been a confusing point for allies. And also on Austria, because, Australia has been relearning what deterrence means, and integrated deterrence is just being even that more confusing.

00;52;33;06 - 00;53;08;20

Christine Leah

But thank you. Thank you. Peter, it's a great question. Thank you. So, my answer to that piece would be I'm not sure genuinely. And there is confusion, in the allied space as to what integrated deterrence means, because deterrence as a concept, for so long has been so well understood. And this new concept is just very confusing.

00;53;08;20 - 00;53;12;24

Christine Leah

And it's mixing soft power with hard power and.

00;53;13;22 - 00;53;14;17

Peter Huessy

Very true.

00;53;14;20 - 00;53;43;09

Christine Leah

It's not helping at all. I'm not this is not a political comment at all. No, no, it's just please do not make the language more confusing for allies. Allies have enough time understanding, especially in the Asia Pacific, where we have not had to think about deterrence for such a long time. Please don't confuse it even more with language like integrated.

00;53;43;12 - 00;53;57;20

Christine Leah

Okay? Just like very simple Kimberly times will. Just keep it simple, please. Please.

00;53;57;23 - 00;54;23;29

Peter Huessy

That's going to be quite a task. You go rewrite all the policy papers in the Department of State and the Department of Defense. Well, Steve. No, she's going to have one heck of a project if that's what they tell him to do. But I hear you, I think, Christine, that your answer is quite interesting that, because it's considered fashionable to use the word integrated, it's also considered smart.

00;54;24;01 - 00;54;33;01

Peter Huessy

It's also designed to say, well, we're not just going to you bomb somebody, but we're going to use other instruments of power, and maybe that'll work.

00:54:33:04 - 00:54:35:07

Christine Leah

Okay, Peter, I hear you.

00:54:35:07 - 00:55:05:03

Peter Huessy

But I hear you, I hear you, we've got a few minutes left. We're 1055. But I hear you and understand what you're saying. I'm just laying you. Why? The word was there's some people who genuinely. Hey, it really does mean something stronger. And we call it integrated because they work with each other as opposed to, oh, it's a fancy word to make it look as if we're doing something that either we should have been doing anyway or already doing, but it really doesn't change anything.

00:55:05:05 - 00:55:10:23

Peter Huessy

It's it. It's you can choose one or the other.

00:55:10:25 - 00:55:19:24

Christine Leah

Now, I take your point. It's just that the allies are having enough hard time understanding what deterrence is. Please don't use the word integrated.

00:55:22:02 - 00:55:49:04

Peter Huessy

There we have we're at 1056. We're just there a couple other questions. One was that I don't think you can answer, but it was how quickly could. I'll show you again a nuclear bomb if they wanted one, which I'm asked. That's what was in the chat. Okay. On the other hand, there's another question. Is Australia had some reservations on the NPT and then they dropped them and went away and some years ago.

00:55:49:04 - 00:55:59:23

Peter Huessy

But can you recall what they were and was there any significance as to how those reservations being dropped?

00:55:59:25 - 00:56:38:08

Christine Leah

Yep. So, long story short, and I say this from, a public, you know, public open source, view, Australia does not have, I don't think has the means to develop, atomic bomb any time soon. Regarding the NPT, what I know is from the late 60s to the early 70s, Australia was happy to sign the Nonproliferation Treaty back in 1968 under Prime Minister John Gorton, who is quite pro-nuclear.

00:56:38:09 - 00:57:10:15

Christine Leah

Bomb, on the condition that Australia had the lead time to develop nuclear weapons, if necessary. Which is why he did not ratify the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty. But then again, there was a change in politics, change in intelligence, change in, economics. And then eventually there was a change in

government which was quite left leaning, which said, no, no, we're just going to ratify the NPT.

00:57:10:15 - 00:57:24:06

Christine Leah

We're not getting nuclear weapons, we're not doing anything nuclear. It was a radical change. So that was 1973 under Gough Whitlam, Labor prime minister at the time. But long story short for For a long time, Australia's, condition of signing and ratifying the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty was based on having a lead time to, to build, an atomic bomb, also some sort of atomic device. That was all. And that's in the National Archives. So this concept of lead time was very important. Yeah. But eventually, the left leaning,

00:57:56:06 - 00:58:12:02

Christine Leah

Yeah. I'm not being political here, but, like, the left leaning government at the time in 1974 ratified the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty, saying Australia will not become a nuclear weapon state, etcetera, etcetera.

00:58:12:04 - 00:58:35:09

Peter Huessy

Well, thank you. We have come to the end of our time, and we want to thank Kimberly for all our wonderful logistical help in putting out the invitations and so forth. It is wonderful. Christine, thank you. That was eloquent and enjoyable, and we learned a lot. And we hope to, of course, have you back. And we also do a triad event every year.

00:58:35:09 - 00:58:58:11

Peter Huessy

And hopefully, maybe we could do so. And when you were here in America and, you take part, it's down in Louisiana State University in Shreveport, next to the global strike command. I want to thank our sponsors and friends who are joining us today. I want to thank all of you for taking the time out of your busy day to come in to hear a perspective that is very important.

00:58:58:13 - 00:59:13:01

Peter Huessy

And again, Christine, on behalf of and ideas and our president, Jim Petrosky, want to thank you. And thank you for joining us. You did a great job, and we look forward to talking with you again. Take care.

00:59:13:03 - 00:59:14:16

Christine Leah

Thank you so much.

00:59:14:18 - 00:59:15:24

Peter Huessy

Thank you.