

21ST ASIA SECURITY SUMMIT
THE SHANGRI-LA DIALOGUE

SIMULTANEOUS SPECIAL SESSIONS – SESSION 1
DETERRENCE AND REASSURANCE IN THE ASIA-
PACIFIC
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ADMIRAL SAMUEL PAPARO
COMMANDER, US INDO-PACIFIC COMMAND

Veerle Nouwens, Executive Director, IISS–Asia

Admiral, over to you.

Admiral Samuel Paparo, Commander, US Indo-Pacific Command

Thank you. Thanks to IISS. This is my first Shangri-La Dialogue. I am very honoured to be here. I am very honoured to be here with my fellow panellists. And thank you, Minister, for your very salient words.

I will go quickly because the power is in the dialogues. It is not the Shangri-La monologues. Deterrence and assurance are the cornerstones of modern military strategy. It works hand in hand to prevent conflict and maintain a stable order. Both seek peace, but each take a distinct approach, but they are in fact a synergy. Understanding the difference is crucial.

Deterrence is our highest duty. It is that result of capability and will and the potential adversary's awareness of the same. It relies on the potential enemy's believing the risk – military defeat, but also economic loss, diplomatic isolation, or a combination of all the above – outweighs any perceived gains. Deterrence is effective when it is credible: the adversary believes that the defending side will act on its threats when it is capable. A robust military with the ability to project power globally and inflict significant damage on the aggressor is essential. And when it is integrated, modern deterrence strategies go beyond traditional military might. They encompass economic sanctions, cyber-defence capabilities, diplomatic pressure, coordinated across all government agencies. This integrated deterrence approach makes aggression a much riskier proposition.

Assurance focuses on building trust and confidence, as the Minister said, with allies and partners. It intends to reassure allies that partners will come to their aid in the case of aggression, fostering stability within alliances and partnerships and discouraging potential aggressors who recognise the combined might and will of the coalitions and alliances. Maintaining a strong military presence, joint military exercises, the sharing of intelligence, demonstrating a concrete commitment to shared capability. We are never stronger than we are when we are together. Building strong political and economic ties between allies and partners strengthens the sense of shared purpose and discourages aggression in the first place.

Collaborative efforts beyond military means – industry partnerships, and commerce cooperation across industry – further solidifies partnerships. Inter-agency coordination: effective assurance requires cooperation between military and civilian institutions. Sharing resources, expertise, planning across agencies strengthens the overall response capabilities.

My friends, deterrence and assurance are not mutually exclusive, but in fact are a synergy. A strong deterrent posture reassures allies and partners as it demonstrates the commitment to resisting aggression. Conversely, a robust network of alliances and partners strengthens deterrence by making the cost of an attack even higher for the potential aggressor.

The twenty-first century presents new challenges for deterrence and assurance strategy. The rise of cyber warfare, the proliferation of ballistic missiles, advances in unmanned capabilities, and the emergence of non-state actors all complicate traditional methods. The rise of artificial intelligence, advances in compute, the rising integration of world economies – all of this presents grave challenges in the twenty-first century. Never have the costs of war been so high. This is a profound duty that rests on all of our shoulders.

Deterrence and assurance is essential. And in the Indo-Pacific century, that duty rests on each and every one of us.

I will pass on to my fellow panellists.

Veerle Nouwens, Executive Director, IISS–Asia

Thank you very much, Admiral.