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Resumption of U.S. Nuclear Testing: Implications for Global Strategic Stability

On 29 October 2025, President Donald Trump announced that he had directed the United States Department of Defense to immediately resume nuclear weapons testing. The declaration marked a dramatic rupture with more than three decades of restraint, as the United States had maintained a moratorium on nuclear explosive testing since 1992. Trump justified his decision by citing the rapid expansion of Russian and Chinese nuclear weapons programmes, arguing that renewed testing was vital to preserve America's deterrent credibility and sustain strategic parity.



The timing of the announcement—just days before Trump's summit with Chinese President Xi Jinping in South Korea—underscored its geopolitical weight. While it remained unclear whether the planned tests involved underground detonations or flight testing of nuclear-capable delivery systems, the signal was unmistakable: Washington was prepared to break with long-standing norms in pursuit of renewed nuclear dominance.

The directive reflected deepening strategic anxieties in Washington about the pace of nuclear modernisation by its principal rivals. China's arsenal, estimated at around 600 warheads, is expanding rapidly as Beijing develops new delivery systems capable of striking the U.S. mainland. Russia, meanwhile, has unveiled an array of advanced nuclear-capable systems, including the Burevestnik nuclear-powered cruise missile and the Poseidon underwater torpedo. These technological advances have intensified fears that traditional deterrence frameworks could be eroded, prompting calls within the U.S. defence establishment for renewed testing to validate the reliability of its own arsenal.

Trump's decision thus represents a broader shift in nuclear doctrine—from one of restraint and verification to one of demonstration and dominance. It signals a return to an era in which strategic credibility is measured not only by capability but by the willingness to test and display that capability openly.

Since the early 1990s, the United States has adhered to a self-imposed moratorium consistent with the principles of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT). Although Washington signed the CTBT in 1996, it never ratified it. Nevertheless, successive administrations respected its provisions, helping to sustain global confidence in the non-proliferation regime. Restarting nuclear testing now undermines the spirit of that treaty and risks unravelling one of the cornerstones of post-Cold War arms control. The move erodes U.S. moral authority and sets a precedent that could encourage other nuclear states to resume or initiate testing.

The Kremlin denounced the decision, with spokesperson Dmitry Peskov warning that Russia would "review its posture" and consider resuming testing if the United States proceeded—an implicit signal of reciprocal escalation. Although Moscow denied that its recent missile trials amounted to nuclear testing, it made clear that it would not remain passive if Washington dismantled the moratorium. Beijing's response was similarly firm. China urged the United States to uphold its

commitments under the CTBT and cautioned that renewed testing would gravely undermine global stability. Both Russia and China framed the move as a destabilising act that threatened to erode the fragile balance of deterrence and embolden proliferation elsewhere.

The United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres condemned the decision unequivocally, stating that nuclear testing “can never be justified under any circumstances”. He reminded the world of the devastating humanitarian and environmental legacy of more than 2,000 nuclear tests conducted globally over the past eight decades. The European Union joined in condemnation, urging Washington to reconsider and warning that renewed testing could unravel the already fragile post-Cold War arms control framework.

The strategic implications of this decision extend far beyond the United States, Russia, and China. Washington’s move could be interpreted as tacit legitimisation of new testing or modernisation efforts by other nuclear-capable states. Moreover, the decision complicates ongoing diplomatic efforts to sustain global arms control. Key agreements such as New START, which limits U.S. and Russian strategic arsenals, could face renewed strain. The broader non-proliferation regime, already weakened by the collapse of earlier treaties, risks further erosion as major powers revert to competitive posturing rather than cooperative restraint.

Supporters of the Trump administration argue that limited testing is necessary to ensure the reliability of an ageing arsenal and to validate new warhead designs. Yet critics maintain that existing non-explosive verification techniques—such as subcritical testing and advanced simulations—are sufficient. Resuming full-scale testing, they warn, delivers minimal technical benefit while carrying enormous diplomatic and strategic costs.

President Trump’s instruction to recommence U.S. nuclear weapons testing is a watershed moment with deep ramifications for global security. While designed to maintain U.S. strategic parity, the decision threatens to destabilise the international non-proliferation regime, foster a renewed nuclear arms race, and complicate diplomatic efforts aimed at global security.

Japan's First Female PM as Japan's Coalition Politics Shift

On 4 October 2025, the Liberal Democratic Party selected Sanae Takaichi as its president, setting in motion her historic ascent to Japan's premiership. Whilst she would become the country's first female prime minister, her path to power has triggered unprecedented political realignments and sparked considerable disquiet both regionally and internationally regarding her nationalist political stance.

Following Shigeru Ishiba's announcement that he would step down as LDP leader—and consequently as prime minister—the party convened internal elections to choose his successor. Unlike Ishiba's closely contested victory in October 2024, Takaichi's triumph was emphatic. She secured a comfortable lead over her rivals in the first round of voting itself, eliminating the need for a runoff. However, her decisive victory came despite—or perhaps because of—a campaign marked by controversial rhetoric. Throughout her pre-election speeches, Takaichi repeatedly invoked themes

traditionally associated with Japan's far-right, particularly concerning historical issues. More troublingly, she made unsubstantiated allegations against foreign residents and visitors in Japan, statements that numerous observers characterised as overtly xenophobic.

The regional response was telling. South Korean media reports revealed deep anxiety amongst senior officials in Seoul about the future of bilateral relations. Some dubbed her the 'female Abe' (女性版安倍), a reference to her political mentor, the assassinated former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, whose own tenure had strained relations with Seoul over historical grievances. Yet these international concerns appeared to have little impact on LDP electors' assessment of her suitability for leadership.



Takaichi's political views triggered a major shift in Japan's governing coalition. The Komeito—the Clean Government Party—had been the LDP's coalition partner since the mid-1990s. This centre-left party, affiliated with the Buddhist Soka Gakkai organisation, had long acted as a moderating influence on the LDP's conservative tendencies, often described by foreign commentators as a 'brake' on the party's rightward shift, though its effectiveness had been variable. During the election campaign, Komeito leaders made it clear they would reconsider the partnership if Takaichi became leader. Once she secured the party presidency, they followed through on this warning.

In tense negotiations, Komeito issued an ultimatum demanding three commitments: adherence to Article 9 of the Japanese Constitution (which renounces war), continuation of fiscally responsible policies, and public pledges to pursue non-xenophobic approaches towards foreign workers. When Takaichi failed to provide satisfactory assurances on these critical points, Komeito made the historic decision to withdraw from the ruling coalition, leaving the LDP scrambling for alternative partners and briefly raising the possibility that Takaichi might even seek support from far-right factions.

The solution involved negotiations with Nippon Ishin no Kai, a right-wing party mainly of former LDP members from Osaka. They agreed to support Takaichi for prime minister in exchange for a 14-point policy plan. This plan included raising income tax thresholds, controlling inflation, designating Osaka as Japan's second capital, increasing defence spending, and tightening foreign worker restrictions. With this support, Takaichi gained a simple majority in the Lower House on 21 October, becoming Japan's first female prime minister.

The international response to her appointment reflected divergent perspectives. China, referring to her as a 'representative right-wing politician', conspicuously declined to acknowledge her appointment. In contrast, the United States immediately congratulated her as a 'person of great wisdom and strength'. Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi also extended congratulations via social media, to which Takaichi responded with a message in Japanese, English, and Hindi—a gesture towards maintaining strong ties with New Delhi. Conscious of regional sensitivities, Takaichi extended an olive branch to South Korea during her policy

speeches, though whether this will translate into substantive improvements in bilateral relations remains uncertain.

Since assuming office, the new prime minister has moved quickly to establish her authority. She has assembled a cabinet combining former electoral rivals with loyal supporters, undertaken her first foreign trip to Malaysia, and hosted US President Donald Trump as her first foreign guest. Domestically, she has announced plans to revise the three key security documents issued in 2022 and pledged to consider raising income tax exemption limits.

Yet substantial questions linger. The stability of her tenure remains uncertain, particularly given her dependence on external support from the JIP. Many observers have expressed concern about a potential inward turn in Japanese policymaking, whilst the policy platforms of the new 'right-right' alliance have raised alarms regarding possible deleterious effects on Japan's democratic institutions and human rights protections. As Japan enters a new political chapter, the outcomes of this pivotal yet divisive transition remain uncertain.

Canberra's Strategic Balancing Act in the Age of Trump

Prime Minister Anthony Albanese's first in-person meeting with President Donald Trump marked a critical juncture for Australia's strategic alignment, raising questions over the balance between alliance dependence and national autonomy. The Washington engagement delivered tangible outcomes on defence collaboration, critical minerals, and the reassurance of Australia's central role in the AUKUS framework. Yet, these advances have revived debates in Canberra regarding sovereignty, leverage in future negotiations, and the durability of American commitments.



Held against the backdrop of heightened Indo-Pacific tension—driven in large part by China's growing influence over supply chains and maritime security—the visit was closely scrutinised in Australia. Domestic critics had contended that the delay in securing a face-to-face with Trump threatened to erode Canberra's influence in Washington. That perception was largely dispelled by the outcome of the meeting, as Trump provided direct personal support and reinforced Australia's status as a key ally. Nevertheless, polling in Australia reflects persistent public scepticism regarding the reliability of American leadership under Trump, highlighting an enduring policy dilemma: how to leverage the advantages of alliance while safeguarding the capacity for independent decision-making in a multipolar world.

A principal outcome was the launch of a major critical minerals partnership. This agreement commits both governments to jointly fund at least six projects in Australia, aimed at expanding the local supply and processing of essential defence and manufacturing materials. The timing—coming soon after Chinese signals about potential restrictions on rare earth exports—emphasises the urgency of industrial diversification and resilience. Canberra stands to benefit from increased investment and technology transfer, while Washington secures more reliable access to strategic

resources central to its defence industry. However, several analysts, including critics within the Labor Party, have flagged concerns over national autonomy. Reports suggest the deal incorporates offtake guarantees and security clauses, creating the prospect that Australian minerals could be prioritised for American use, thus potentially constraining future export opportunities. This dynamic underscores Australia's dilemma: advancing industrial strength via alliance channels, but risking future policy latitude as dependence deepens.

The most significant diplomatic signal from the visit was Trump's explicit endorsement of AUKUS, ending speculation about whether the United States would maintain commitments made earlier. Trump's pledge to accelerate the nuclear-powered submarine programme was welcomed in Canberra and London, reinforcing messages of deterrence aimed at China and providing reassurance about the pact's continuation. Despite this, practical uncertainties remain. American officials, notably Navy Secretary John Phelan, have highlighted "ambiguities" within the AUKUS framework which they claim require revision. Whilst President Trump dismissed these as minor details, neither side specified what changes might emerge, leaving open questions regarding funding, delivery timelines, and the extent of technology transfer. Given Australia's planned investment—exceeding \$360 billion—and its substantial dependence on American industrial capacity, such ambiguities pose risks for long-term strategic planning.

The optics surrounding the meeting were overwhelmingly positive. Trump lauded Australia as one of America's most trustworthy partners and refrained from pressing contentious issues, such as defence spending or climate policy—a notable departure from previous U.S. administrations. A fleeting instance of tension arose from the mention of Australian Ambassador Kevin Rudd's critical remarks about Trump, but this was diplomatically managed and did not detract from the tone or substance of the engagement. The symbolism of the meeting bolstered domestic and regional confidence in the alliance's continued vitality, sending a message to neighbouring nations and other U.S. allies about the resilience of Australia–U.S. ties in uncertain times.

From a trade perspective, progress was more subdued. Tariffs on Australian exports, including a ten per cent levy on key goods, remain unchanged. Prime Minister Albanese raised the matter, but President Trump indicated these arrangements would stand, considering them favourable in the global context. This outcome was cited by observers as evidence of Australia's limited leverage in bilateral trade negotiations at this juncture. Nevertheless, the minerals partnership and prospective integration into defence supply chains are expected to mitigate some economic impacts, providing high-value opportunities that may balance out ongoing tariff disadvantages.

The Albanese–Trump meeting thus delivered reassurance and renewed operational momentum, but it also exposed the complex dependencies that underpin Australia's modern strategic posture. As regional competition over technology, supply chains, and military presence intensifies, Canberra faces the challenge of maintaining alliance credibility while preserving sufficient autonomy to shape its own future. The true test will be whether Australia can sustain this delicate balance amid ongoing shifts in global and regional power.