

**Statement of  
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**House Armed Services Committee  
Subcommittee on Strategic Forces**

**Hearing on Fiscal Year 2027 Strategic Forces Posture**

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## Introduction

Chairman DesJarlais, Ranking Member Moulton, members of the subcommittee: Thank you for the opportunity to testify on our nation's strategic posture.

U.S. strategy is at a critical inflection point, driven by a confluence of stark realities. First and foremost, China's strategic nuclear breakout means we now face the unprecedented challenge of deterring two nuclear peers, China and Russia, simultaneously. This is not a distant problem; it is the central, organizing challenge for our defense strategy today. Compounding this external pressure are two other factors: the immense budgetary, industrial, and programmatic strains of modernizing all three legs of our nuclear triad and its command and control at once, and the expiration of the New START Treaty this past February.

The 2026 National Defense Strategy (NDS) correctly identifies this new, more dangerous environment. My purpose today is to outline how our nuclear posture must be adapted to support that strategy. The reality is that our nuclear forces, while foundational, are not a panacea. They are a necessary but insufficient component of a defense strategy focused on denial. Our primary goal must be to convince adversaries—first and foremost the People's Republic of China (China)—that they cannot succeed in using military force to achieve their objectives. Our nuclear posture must be a credible backstop to that denial strategy, not a substitute for it.

We must be rigorously clear-eyed about the threats we face. China represents the most significant and comprehensive challenge to U.S. national security. China is engaged in the most rapid and opaque nuclear expansion in history. In 2020, the Department assessed China's stockpile of operational nuclear warheads as being in the low 200s. Today it exceeds 600, and is on track to surpass 1,000 by 2030, with capabilities enabling the majority to reach the U.S. Homeland. This nuclear buildup is coupled with a massive investment in theater-range delivery systems, like the DF-26, designed to hold U.S. forces and allies and partners at risk in the Indo-Pacific region. The purpose of this expansion is clear: to create a strategic shield behind which the People's Liberation Army can conduct regional aggression, particularly against Taiwan. A force of this size and sophistication provides China with a spectrum of nuclear options to try to deter U.S. intervention and coerce a resolution to a conflict on China's terms.

Russia remains a formidable nuclear power with the world's largest arsenal and a doctrine that explicitly integrates nuclear weapons for regional coercion. Its ongoing modernization and development of novel systems, like Poseidon and Burevestnik, underscore its continued reliance on nuclear forces to offset conventional weaknesses. While the primary responsibility for the conventional defense of Europe must rest with our wealthy and capable European allies, the U.S. nuclear extended deterrence provides a critical backstop. This cannot, however, be the primary solution for European security. A credible deterrent in Europe requires a robust, in-theater conventional denial force, fielded overwhelmingly by the Europeans themselves.

We must now plan for the concrete possibility of coordinated or opportunistic aggression across multiple theaters. An American focus on a crisis in the Indo-Pacific region could be seen by Russia as an opportunity in Europe, just as a crisis in Europe could be seen as an opportunity for China. Our force structure, posture, and nuclear strategy must be robust enough to deter both peers simultaneously, even if we were to be engaged in a major conventional conflict with one. This does not mean we must match their combined arsenals warhead for warhead. It means we

require a nuclear force sufficient to inflict unacceptable costs on both adversaries under any contingency, ensuring neither believes they can exploit a crisis elsewhere for their own gain.

We must never be left vulnerable to nuclear blackmail. It is the Department's responsibility to provide the President with a credible nuclear strategy to defend our vital interests and the forces to support it. This means we require a strong and effective nuclear arsenal adapted to the nation's overall defense strategy. This arsenal must enable a strategy to deter nuclear and non-nuclear strategic attacks on the American homeland. This is important not only for deterring aggression but also to provide the President options to favorably manage escalation and achieve other objectives in the event of a conflict across the globe. For too long, America's nuclear strategy has been considered a separate, almost theological, enterprise. Now, our nuclear strategy must be coherently and rigorously integrated into our overall defense strategy.

Our nuclear strategy, therefore, must be subordinate to and supportive of our overall defense strategy. The NDS rightly prioritizes defending the Homeland and deterring China. The most effective way to do so is through a strategy of denial—convincing an adversary that their military aggression will fail to achieve its objectives. In the Indo-Pacific, this means fielding a conventional force, alongside our allies and partners, capable of deterring a conflict in the region, ideally by preserving military overmatch. The role of our nuclear arsenal in this context is not to fight and win a nuclear war, but to deter China from escalating to the nuclear level in the first place, or from believing it can use its nuclear arsenal to coerce us into accepting a *fait accompli*. Our nuclear forces must provide the President with credible options to manage escalation, demonstrating that any nuclear use will be met with a response that leaves the adversary worse off. This requires a flexible and modern nuclear posture.

A solvent defense strategy also requires our allies and partners to carry their fair share of the conventional burden. U.S. nuclear extended deterrence is a powerful enabler of this, providing our allies in both Europe and the Indo-Pacific region the security backstop they need to invest in their own conventional denial capabilities. But it must be a backstop, not a crutch. In the Indo-Pacific region, allies like the Republic of Korea and Japan must take the lead in building the conventional forces needed to deny regional aggression. Our nuclear umbrella makes it possible for them to do so without pursuing their own nuclear arsenals, but it does not absolve them of the primary responsibility for their own defense.

President Trump's "Golden Dome for America" initiative is a vital complement to our deterrent posture. It is not a replacement for our offensive nuclear forces. By strengthening our defense against missile attack, we demonstrate that coercion will fail, strengthening the President's hand in a crisis. Deterrence by denial (through missile defense) and deterrence by punishment (through nuclear response) are two sides of the same coin.

To execute our strategy, modernization programs are not optional; they are an urgent necessity. The transition from our legacy systems to a modernized triad occurs during a period of maximum geopolitical risk. There is no room for error. We must accelerate the Sentinel ICBM, the COLUMBIA-class submarine, and the B-21 bomber with its LRSO cruise missile. Critically, we must also field flexible, theater-range nuclear options. The SLCM-N is essential. It provides a persistent, survivable, and non-strategic nuclear presence in key regions, reducing reliance on land-based assets and providing the President with a credible deterrent against limited nuclear use. It is a vital tool for managing escalation in a conflict with a peer competitor.

We are entering a new, more dangerous era. The luxury of assuming a single major adversary is gone. The NDS provides a sound framework for this new reality, but a strategy is only as good as the will and resources committed to its execution. The cost of modernizing our nuclear deterrent and fielding the conventional forces to support a denial strategy is significant. But the cost of failing to do so is incalculably greater. Congress's continued support is essential to ensuring we have the deterrent we need to protect our nation and its interests.

Thank you.