

Congressman Ted Poe
Statement for the Record
TNT Hearing, “Russian and Chinese Nuclear Arsenals: Posture, Proliferation, and the
Future of Arms Control”

The world today is in a new era of great power rivalry. Resurgent Russia and China are challenging U.S. interests across the globe. Both are rapidly modernizing their militaries to directly challenge America’s dominance on the battlefield and to undermine our alliances around the world. The potential for major conflict is closer now than it has been since the Cold War.

China and Russia’s rising power has huge implications for how we trade, how we target rogue regimes, and how the entire international system works. While we often focus on Iran and North Korea’s nuclear programs, we tend to overlook the two atomic arsenals that pose the greatest danger to our security. But with Russia and China’s aggressive behavior in places like Ukraine, Georgia, and the South China Sea, we are forced to rethink our deterrence against such threats.

Comparing our nuclear arsenals, it’s clear China and Russia have been intent on challenging U.S. dominance and coercing our friends for some time. While we have barely upgraded some of our nuclear systems since they were first deployed in the early 1980s, China and Russia have introduced new weapons. We may be reluctant to maintain and upgrade such devastating weapons, but our strategic rivals are not. If we allow Russia or China to achieve nuclear superiority over us, the results will be dire for our allies and for the international order we have spent decades building.

Just in March, Vladimir Putin unveiled several new nuclear weapons intended to make our missile defenses “useless.” They include a new heavy ICBM, a nuclear-powered cruise missile with “unlimited range,” and a nuclear-powered unmanned submarine designed to sneak into coastal cities and explode. Such a heavy investment in nuclear arms is concerning and demonstrates Putin’s priority is not disarmament but strategic dominance.

However, Putin left something out of his threatening display. He did not include the new ground-launched cruise missile which the State Department has said for years is violating the INF Treaty. This missile undermines years of arms control negotiations and the good faith we have hoped to build with the Russians since the end of the Cold War. With the New START treaty expiring in 2021, the INF violation casts real doubt on continued strategic arms limitations with the Russians going forward. If the START treaty expires, the Russians will be completely free to expand their nuclear stockpile to what it was during the darkest days of the Cold War. This will likely force others—including ourselves—to also build more bombs.

Worse, now that China is a major rival, we could be pushed into a situation more dangerous than the Cold War. We have been fortunate that China has kept its nuclear stockpile relatively small, focusing on minimal deterrence. But China is building new delivery systems to match our own and is not restrained to arms control agreements like those between the U.S. and Russia. China is rapidly building new ballistic missile submarines and mobile ICBMs which will further strain our military’s ability to track. Beijing is also making advances in hypersonic missiles that will make early warning systems ineffective.

Yet, the major concern with China is its willingness to proliferate nuclear technology to rogue regimes. Iran, North Korea, and Pakistan have all benefited from Chinese assistance. In many cases, China has directly sold nuclear and missile technology to these terrorist regimes. China's low regard for non-proliferation standards has been irresponsible and created increased instability around the globe.

For too long we have not address the source of these rising threats. North Korea and Iran are major problems, but they would be far more isolated and far less dangerous if they did not have backing from Russia and China. Even our need for missile defense—which China and Russia claim is so destabilizing—would be unnecessary if these rogue regimes did not have help from Moscow and Beijing.

As we think about the future of our nuclear forces and the future of arms control, we must have a clear view of the threats we face. China and Russia are capable adversaries. Left unchecked they will surpass us and make the world less safe. Therefore, we must continue to engage them to restrict the number and capability of these terrible weapons while making clear we will not allow them to gain the nuclear advantage.

Ronald Reagan once said, “a nuclear war cannot be won and must never be fought.” We must continue his legacy by seeking a world without nuclear arms. And that's just the way it is.