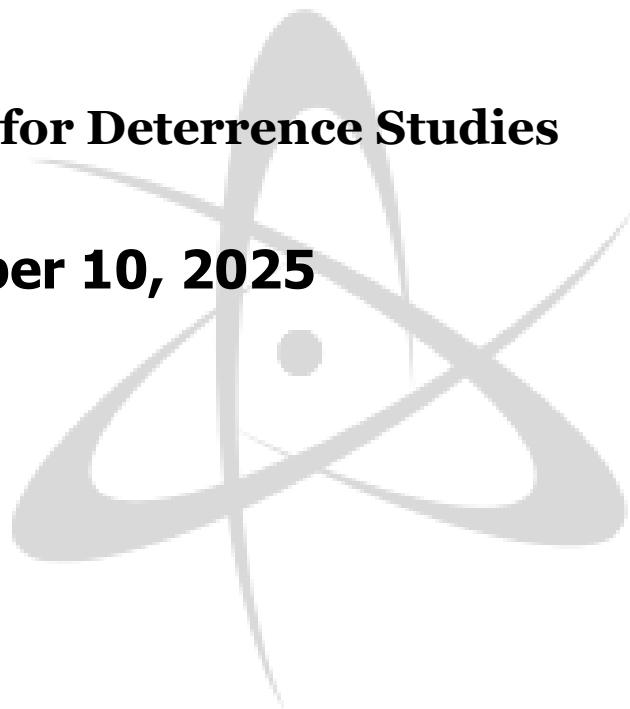


PEACE THROUGH STRENGTH: RENEWING AMERICA'S NUCLEAR DETERRENT

A PROPOSED NUCLEAR POSTURE REVIEW
FOR 2026

National Institute for Deterrence Studies

November 10, 2025



For more information on this publication, visit

www.thinkdeterrence.com

About the National Institute for Deterrence Studies (NIDS)

NIDS is a 501(C)(3) nonprofit organization that provides national security analysis, policy solutions, and deterrence education. It informs involved or interested parties, while advocating for peace through the responsible application of America's vibrant nuclear deterrent.

NIDS publications do not necessarily reflect the opinions of its donors and sponsors.

Published by the National Institute for Deterrence Studies, Fairborn, OH.

PREFACE

In the context of today's global threats and with an eye toward tomorrow's challenges, this Nuclear Posture Review (NPR) proposal is designed to outline U.S. nuclear deterrence policy, clarify the role of nuclear weapons in national security, and establish expectations for their use. Additionally, this NPR is designed to guide decisions on the sustainment and modernization of the U.S. nuclear arsenal to ensure its continued effectiveness and reliability. Moreover, through its declaratory statements, it enhances strategic stability by articulating performance expectations, delineating force posture, and assuring allies and partners.

National security experts and members of the intelligentsia have proposed foregoing the tradition of publishing an updated NPR for President Donald J. Trump's second administration. These respected members of the national security community argue that conducting a new Review would be both costly and time-consuming, especially at a moment when delaying the nuclear modernization program of record is not an option. Additionally, they note that the President already has a Nuclear Posture Review from his first term. However, neither of these justifications sufficiently addresses the need to advance America's nuclear policy and strategy today.

The world has dramatically changed since the beginning of the first Trump administration, and the second administration must establish its nuclear policy to address threats and changes that have arisen since the first term, rectify the past administration's missteps, and outline the role of nuclear weapons and nuclear deterrence regarding the President's **Peace Through Strength** national security doctrine. The policy should be clearly and succinctly translated into an unambiguous declaratory statement, providing specific guidance to the force for planning and resourcing. Drafting this NPR does not need to take a year or cost millions of dollars. Failing to produce a new NPR at "Trump speed" would burden the President with the remnants of a poorly constructed 2022 Nuclear Posture Review and a legacy of ineffective policies embedded in government directives that require adjustment, replacement, or removal. Therefore, a new NPR is necessary, not optional.

This 2026 Nuclear Posture Review proposal is intended as an aspirational companion piece to the recent *Strategic Posture Commission* report titled "America's Strategic Posture: The Final Report of the Congressional Commission on the Strategic Posture of the United States," published in October 2023. The *Strategic Posture Commission* report serves as a seminal document for serious strategists looking toward 2040. While acknowledging the *Strategic Posture Commission's* assessment of the global threat and implementing its recommendations is necessary, it is not sufficient. We can no longer ignore adversary interests in the blind pursuit of reducing or eliminating U.S. nuclear capabilities. Our adversaries view U.S. dominance in conventional military capabilities as destabilizing, and the ongoing U.S. pursuit of more usable conventional alternatives to nuclear weapons compels adversaries to respond with increased nuclear forces. The United States should prioritize arming for deterrence rather than preparing for war—structuring its military posture to prevent conflict instead of engaging in it. This approach emphasizes developing capabilities and technologies and forming alliances that effectively deter aggression by making the costs of war prohibitively high and minimizing an adversary's success, while avoiding conflict. Emphasizing deterrence highlights the importance of capability, credibility, readiness, and resilience rather than dependence on expeditionary or attrition-based warfare. This approach enables the United States to maintain stability, support international norms, and safeguard national interests while avoiding large-scale conflicts.

A dominant nuclear deterrent aligns with an *America First* strategy by providing the ultimate safeguard for the homeland and countering nuclear blackmail, thereby ensuring national security without relying on costly foreign interventions. Furthermore, a robust nuclear arsenal allows America to reassure allies through extended deterrence without necessitating the overcommitment of massive, costly conventional forces, enabling the nation to project strategic power more efficiently and adapt to modern threats with a reduced financial and human cost compared to maintaining an overwhelmingly large conventional military.

This 2026 Nuclear Posture Review offering was crafted without a published National Defense Strategy, was devised and is publicly endorsed by a team of practitioners and policy experts with over 850 years of experience in the nuclear deterrence enterprise and presents a decisive course correction to restore the credibility of nuclear deterrence in an era of near-peer nuclear threats. Unlike previous NPRs, which prioritized risk reduction and arms control, this document articulates a maximalist deterrence strategy to address an increasingly perilous security environment through rapid force augmentation, triad modernization, future force expansion, and the re-establishment of strategic and regional escalation control in a world lacking meaningful arms control treaties. We sincerely hope that this proposed 2026 Nuclear Posture Review will expedite the Administration's decision-making and help develop a more assertive nuclear deterrence strategy for America and its interests.

National Institute for Deterrence Studies (NIDS)
4201 W. Enon Road
Fairborn, Ohio 45324
www.thinkdeterrence.com

National Institute for Deterrence Studies NPR contributors

Kirk Fansher
Curtis McGiffin
Dr. Adam Lowther
Dr. James Petrosky
Dr. Kerry Kartchner

National Institute for Deterrence Studies NPR Public Endorsements

| | | |
|-----------------------|------------------------|---------------------|
| Joshua Ball | Dr. Justin J. Jacobsen | Larry Schoof |
| Christophe Bosquillon | Dr. Christine Leah | Scott Solomon |
| Gregory Bowen | E. Lee Hill | Dr. Samuel Stanton |
| Joe Buff | Bob Lindseth | Dr. John Swegle |
| Dr. Inbum Chun | Dr. Alexis Littlefield | Joshua Thibert |
| Dr. Wallace Clark | Dr. Paul Hendrickson | Dr. Brandon Toliver |
| Peter Huessy | Robert Peters | |

2025 NUCLEAR POSTURE REVIEW CONTENTS**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

- I. INTRODUCTION**
- II. A NATIONAL DETERRENCE STRATEGY FOR A NEW ERA**
- III. DECLARATORY POLICY**
- IV. STRATEGIC INTENT**
- V. GUIDANCE TO THE FORCE**
- VI. THE HEDGE STRATEGY: DEPLOYING RESERVE NUCLEAR CAPABILITIES**
- VII. STRENGTHENING EXTENDED DETERRENCE & SHARED REGIONAL DETERRENCE**
- VIII. STRATEGIC FORCE MODERNIZATION & INVESTMENT PRIORITIES**
- IX. REBUILDING THE NUCLEAR DETERRENCE WORKFORCE**
- X. CONCLUSION**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This proposed Nuclear Posture Review (NPR) for 2026 reaffirms the United States' commitment to a national security doctrine of **Peace Through Strength**. It outlines the purpose and role of U.S. nuclear deterrent forces within a broader deterrence and defense strategy that uses all the United States' economic, diplomatic, and military capabilities to promote a global security environment favorable to the U.S., its interests, and overall global peace and stability.

America's nuclear deterrent must remain credible, flexible, and survivable in an era of unprecedented strategic competition. It is essential for maintaining peace and averting great power wars. The global security landscape has significantly evolved since previous NPRs, necessitating appropriate adjustments in U.S. nuclear policy and force posture to reassure allies and effectively deter and defeat multiple nuclear-armed adversaries simultaneously.

The U.S. must act **immediately to adapt, modernize, and expand its nuclear forces** in response to China's rapid nuclear arsenal expansion, Russia's large and modern nuclear force, continued noncompliance with existing treaty obligations, and rogue-state nuclear development to curtail their coercive nuclear threats to U.S. interests and citizens.

This NPR outlines a **comprehensive strategy** that restores both general and immediate deterrence, accounts for the collective nuclear threat posed by potential adversaries, enhances **U.S. escalation control**, increases the **resilience, survivability, and lethality** of U.S. nuclear forces, and strengthens **extended deterrence** through regionally based forces. This NPR establishes a **new nuclear force posture** built upon:

- **A National Deterrence Strategy** that embodies the Department of War's mission "to provide the military forces needed to deter war and ensure our nation's security." This involves adopting the President's "peace through strength" doctrine and nuclear deterrence.
- **Survivability Enhancements** that guarantee a second-strike retaliation capability beyond the limited sea leg of the triad.
- **Urgent Nuclear Modernization and Expansion** per the *Strategic Posture Commission's* recommendations.
- **Halting Nuclear Weapon Reductions and reversing system retirements** in favor of force retention and expansion.
- **Deploying Hedge Capabilities** from the nuclear stockpile, including **uploading and re-MIRVing ICBMs** and **reactivating Ohio-class launch tubes**.
- **Reinforcing Forward-Based Shared (Extended) Regional Deterrence** by deploying robust non-strategic nuclear capabilities in **Europe and the Indo-Pacific**, to counter adversary dominance in regional and limited nuclear warfighting capabilities.
- **Communicating Declaratory Policies** to deter **asymmetric non-nuclear attacks** on the United States' **homeland, space, and cyber infrastructures**.

To maintain deterrence, the U.S. must act immediately in a rapidly shifting global environment. This 2026 NPR provides a roadmap for modernizing the force, strengthening extended deterrence, and deterring adversaries through overwhelming strategic and regional escalation dominance.

“We will measure our success not only by the battles we win, but also by the wars we end. And perhaps most importantly, the wars we never get into. It's called peace through strength. We won't have to fight the war. We don't have to fight the wars. If we can do it without fighting, as long as we have total victory, we do it without fighting. Through our power and might, we will lead the world to peace, our friends will respect us, our enemies will fear us, and the whole world will admire the unrivaled greatness of the United States military.”

– President Donald Trump, January 21, 2025

I. INTRODUCTION

The Secretary of War outlined three guiding principles for America’s military: 1) restoring the warrior ethos in everything we do, 2) rebuilding our military, and 3) reestablishing deterrence. Deterrence is defined as the strategy and effect of deliberate efforts to prevent an attack or hostile action by threatening serious consequences through fear of an unacceptable response. In other words, deterrence is a proactive approach that shapes an adversary's behavior by influencing their decision-making. It is also a result where the adversary chooses not to act out of fear of catastrophic or existential consequences.

Successful deterrence arises from the accumulation of perceived fear among America’s adversaries. Henry Kissinger’s formula for effective deterrence is relatively straightforward: “power” (capability) times “will” (resolve) times “assessment” (perception by the adversary) equals “deterrence.” Since this formula seeks a product rather than a sum, the deterrence outcome is zero if any of the three elements are absent. Furthermore, the mechanisms of deterrence can be defined as both process and product. The process encompasses people and policy, while the product refers to weapons and deployment posture. Therefore, restoring the warrior ethos inspires people, while rebuilding our military guides the product. Reestablishing deterrence is a deliberate effort that necessarily focuses on deploying sufficient deterrence-related capabilities and capacities to prevent war.

A strong and credible nuclear deterrent remains the cornerstone of U.S. national security and the ultimate safeguard of American sovereignty. With an “America First” doctrine of prioritizing U.S. security, prosperity, and independence, nuclear deterrence ensures that no foreign power can threaten the homeland, coerce national decision-making, or constrain America’s freedom of action in any domain. A robust American nuclear arsenal has effectively deterred the next great power or world war for 80 years by clearly signaling to enemies that any attack on the U.S. or its allies will be met with a swift and devastating response.

This proposed 2026 Nuclear Posture Review (NPR) marks a significant shift from earlier versions in policy, format, and content. It offers clear and unequivocal guidance to the Force, sending a strong and credible message of deterrence to adversaries and providing firm reassurance to allies and partners. Rooted in the principle of “Peace Through Strength,” it reflects the accumulation and display of national power to shape a favorable international environment. Its main goal is to promote a maximum deterrence model that prioritizes a robust modern nuclear posture, emphasizing essential changes in posture, planning, and capabilities to maintain deterrence in an increasingly competitive security landscape while supporting the 2025 National Defense Strategy’s emphasis on homeland security and strategic sovereignty.

Maximum deterrence underscores America's ultimate commitment to maintaining a credible, capable, sizable, and technologically superior nuclear arsenal to deter manipulation, coercion, and aggression from autocratic great powers or rogue states. It emphasizes a modernized, unassailable strategic nuclear triad, as well as a consequential array of non-strategic nuclear weapons, as the foundation of "peace through strength," ensuring that no adversary would contemplate a large-scale attack on the homeland, America's interests, or allies due to the certainty of catastrophic retaliation. By combining strategic nuclear, non-strategic nuclear, hypersonic, cyber, space, and missile defense capabilities, the United States can maintain deterrence and a lasting peace without relying on fragile arms control agreements. This approach preserves strategic autonomy, safeguards the homeland and Western Hemisphere, and reinforces nuclear deterrence as the ultimate guarantor of American sovereignty in an increasingly unstable world.

There are many definitions of deterrence. In 1994, the Department of Defense (DoD) defined deterrence as "...the prevention from action by fear of consequences. Deterrence is a state of mind brought about by the existence of a credible threat of unacceptable counteraction." This differs from the DoD's 2022 definition of deterrence: "...the prevention of action by the existence of a credible threat of unacceptable counteraction and/or belief that the cost of action outweighs the perceived benefits." The 1994 definition focuses on the deterrence target by measuring fear rather than relying solely on cost-benefit analysis. America's autocratic adversaries are described as rational due to their use of calculation, though their objectives and conclusions may differ from those of others. Therefore, America must ensure that its nuclear arsenal is both feared and respected for its lethality and modulated by its clarity, so that our deterrence goals are understood and achieved without being overly provocative.

Our adversaries' aggressive and coordinated actions undermine the rules-based international order, threatening global peace and stability. Their revisionist and belligerent behavior, supported by the rapid expansion of modernized nuclear forces and a comprehensive, collaborative strategic partnership, poses an existential risk, even a threat, to the U.S., our allies, and our strategic partners. As stated in the *2023 Final Report of the Congressional Commission on the Strategic Posture of the United States*, "The risk of failing to deter potential opportunistic or collaborative two-theater aggression in the 2027-2035 timeframe will not be mitigated unless the U.S. modifies its defense strategy and the strategic posture that enables it." This situation constitutes a national security emergency. The U.S. requires a nuclear deterrence force built around six core efforts to address this national crisis.

1. **An immediate change in force posture** to significantly improve the survivability of sea, air, and ground-based forces capable of delivering a devastating second strike against any adversary or combination of adversaries. *General deterrence* relies on a credible second-strike capability, which involves enhancing the readiness and responsiveness of the nuclear arsenal, as well as maintaining survivable reserve forces.
2. **The prompt suspension of New START**, in response to Russia's suspension of the treaty, will initiate the re-deployment of U.S. nuclear "hedge stockpile" weapons and reverse all de-nuclearization actions to return the number of operational systems to pre-treaty levels by February 5th, 2026. Prepare for a world without nuclear arms control treaties. Treaties are agreements between states, so a single state cannot 'remain' in a treaty independently.

3. **An accelerated implementation of the *Strategic Posture Commission's* “urgent” recommendations** for modernizing nuclear forces should be implemented within the Five-Year Budget Planning Cycle.
4. **Enhance U.S. regional deterrence policy from one of “extended deterrence” to “Shared Regional Deterrence”** with our regional allies and partners, through empowerment, investment, and reciprocal cost-sharing to meet regional needs. This ensures *immediate deterrence* by enabling urgent escalation management and messaging during crises. No nation benefiting from U.S. nuclear assurance should enjoy its benefits without contributing to regional collective defense and deterrence.
5. **Enhance and expand nuclear weapon capabilities and capacities**, including upgrading the current arsenal and developing future ones. America must continue and even accelerate its existing nuclear modernization program of record. However, this alone is not enough to meet future deterrence needs. New capabilities and larger capacities must be pursued to protect America's security and promote global stability.
6. **Reduce the vulnerability of the strategic nuclear triad** by developing both passive and active defenses to safeguard America's second-strike capability. Maintain nuclear command, control, and communications to detect, decide, and direct a nuclear response in all-hazards scenarios. This requires a coordinated effort in support of Presidential Executive Order 14186, “The Iron Dome for America.” Additionally, the deterrence infrastructure must provide enough capability, capacity, and resilience to keep America's deterrent fully operational, perpetually enduring, and expositive in design.

The Secretary of War shall prioritize America's nuclear deterrence mission above all else. All strategic planning, defense, and diplomatic policies must be promptly aligned with the clear intent of this policy or revoked through an executive order implementing this guidance.

*“We do not mistrust each other because we are armed,
we are armed because we mistrust each other.”*

– President Ronald Reagan, April 21, 1988

II. A NATIONAL DETERRENCE STRATEGY FOR A NEW ERA

Great-power competition refers to the strategic rivalry among the world's most powerful nations as they vie for global influence and dominance across military, economic, technological, and political arenas. For the United States, this era is an ongoing struggle with adversaries to shape the geopolitical landscape while continuing to define global norms and trade practices. Today's environment features intensifying rivalries, unexpected collaborations among unaligned states, and a shift in influence toward authoritarian regimes. An aggressive China, revanchist Russia, menacing North Korea, and Iran's genocidal nuclear ambitions form an “axis of autocracies” determined to revise the 75-year-old global order through nuclear expansion, military growth, economic realignment, coercion, and political restructuring. These actions collectively challenge the U.S.-led, rules-based international order, seek to weaken American global leadership, and pose a threat to international peace and stability. As a result, it is essential to develop a comprehensive U.S. strategy to effectively respond to and counter this era of expanding great-power competition.

America's strategic national interests guide U.S. foreign and defense policy, shaping decisions to ensure national security, Western prosperity, and global influence. Nuclear weapons underpin these priorities by deterring strategic attacks against the homeland or national interests, maintaining military superiority, and reinforcing alliances and non-proliferation through the U.S. “nuclear umbrella.” Nuclear weapons also promote economic prosperity by averting destructive, large-scale wars that disrupt trade and cost lives. The stability provided by U.S. nuclear deterrence strengthens alliances that foster trade relationships and technological access. Overall, America's nuclear posture helps maintain peace and stability by preserving U.S. superpower status, countering adversary coercion, and bolstering diplomacy, while also supporting Western non-nuclear mechanisms that protect freedom of navigation, promote human rights, combat transnational threats, and hedge against rising powers seeking to challenge the international order.

The role and function of America's nuclear arsenal have diminished in recent decades since the end of the Cold War. Previous presidents have sought to reduce the salience of nuclear weapons by attempting to lessen their role in U.S. strategy. Unfortunately, this naive and idealistic effort has neither lowered the likelihood of nuclear use nor encouraged America's nuclear rivals to respect or reliably pursue nuclear arms control agreements faithfully. The results have fostered skeptical allies now considering proliferation, as well as adversaries openly coercing and threatening to use nuclear weapons to advance their national interests. It is not enough to maintain a safe, secure, and effective nuclear deterrent; we must develop a nuclear arsenal that is safe, secure, effective, reliable, modern, and lethal—one that **America is proud of, that our allies and partners trust, and our adversaries fear**. Therefore, the U.S. nuclear arsenal and deterrence posture must be capable of deterring, defending against, and, if necessary, defeating adversarial threats.

Our strategic rivals are increasingly expanding, modernizing, and diversifying their nuclear capabilities, incorporating new systems that are destabilizing to the rules-based international order. They are deliberately entangling their nuclear and non-nuclear command and control, as well as deploying robust non-nuclear options that may be employed for strategic attacks. This complicates any actions to reduce or avoid nuclear attacks. They demonstrate little to no interest in decreasing

their dependence on or reducing their nuclear weapon stockpiles. Unless U.S. policy and strategy change, there is no reason to believe this will not persist.

Arms control agreements are often fragile and frequently fail to achieve their intended goals. Longer-term treaties with strategic rivals we distrust are particularly risky. Treaties, in general, and long-term treaties in particular, often fail to adapt to the fluctuating geopolitical threats, shifting national interests, or technological advancements. Therefore, the U.S. must prepare for a world without viable or fully compliant nuclear arms control agreements with nuclear-armed rivals. The United States can no longer rely on arms control treaties to:

- Alleviate potential nuclear threats with nuclear-armed peer adversaries.
- Manage strategic rivalries or their national interests.
- Regulate, modulate, or mitigate technological advancements that otherwise increase susceptibility or magnitude of attack, thus stabilizing deterrence.
- Minimize the costs associated with nuclear competition, deterrence, or potential damage resulting from a nuclear exchange.

These must be addressed now, through robust strategic and regional nuclear deterrence mechanisms that clearly communicate a commitment to secure America's interests.

The Failure of Arms Control and the Need for a New Strategy

Russia, China, and North Korea are rapidly expanding and diversifying their nuclear arsenals, disregarding arms control treaties and norms. We are entering a new nuclear age characterized by an unprecedented mix of aggressively revisionist nuclear powers that show little interest in nuclear arms control or transparency efforts.

In 1987, President Reagan informed Congress that the Soviet Union violated key arms control agreements, including the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (SALT) I and II Treaties, the Limited Test Ban Treaty, among others. In 2023, the *Strategic Posture Commission* stated that no meaningful arms control treaty with Russia is likely soon, citing Russia's consistent violations of major arms control agreements over the past two decades. The Obama, Trump, and Biden administrations concluded that Russia had violated the Intermediate Nuclear Forces (INF) and New START Treaties, respectively. The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) formally recognized that Russia's actions were a "material breach" of the INF Treaty in 2019. Additionally, China has avoided any efforts to engage in extensive, legally binding arms control agreements that would restrict the development or size of its nuclear arsenal and has openly violated Articles I, III, and VI of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT).

Arms control treaties are essential to the liberal rules-based international order, which promotes diplomacy, cooperation, and multilateralism to reduce nuclear threats and enhance stability. These treaties seek to limit the spread of destructive technologies and decrease the risk of conflict. However, autocratic regimes, which often oppose transparency and accountability central to international order, are less likely to abide by arms control agreements in good faith. Countries like Russia, China, North Korea, and Iran, which actively challenge or undermine the liberal rules-based international order and its treaties, prioritize their own strategic interests over international norms. Autocracies often use arms control to gain a strategic advantage or project power rather than to enhance global stability. As a result, it is unlikely that autocratic regimes with nuclear weapons and aggressive goals will engage in arms control in a way that aligns with the spirit of

international order. One should not expect autocracies that fundamentally reject international order to faithfully abide by treaties created under that very system, since their participation may not be grounded in a genuine commitment to shared norms or mutual restraint. Consequently, the U.S., together with its allies and partners, **must prepare for a world without mutual and verifiable arms control** beyond the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.

No liberal democracy can afford to weaken its security posture through unilateral compliance with any arms control treaty. History shows that trusting arms control treaties to constrain autocracies or expecting Western deference to ensure benevolent compliance is a dangerous delusion. Such regimes often exploit such agreements to gain advantage while disregarding obligations that limit their ambitions. An arms control treaty that only constrains the willing is a treaty that will not control arms.

Considering the track records of China, Russia, North Korea, and Iran, it is unrealistic to expect to contain their rapidly growing nuclear threat without a shared and credible nuclear deterrent led by the U.S. along with regional allies and partners. To make any treaty effective, an autocratic regime must value the agreement at least as much as a democracy does. Decades of diplomatic efforts to engage potential adversaries in negotiations have often resulted in unfavorable outcomes or outright refusals. Therefore, **the U.S. will develop and maintain a nuclear deterrent force of the appropriate size and scope to deter, defend, and thereby motivate an adversary's interest in and compliance with arms negotiations and treaties.**

The Six Fundamental Tenets of Deterrence

The *Strategic Posture Commission* identified six fundamental tenets of deterrence that must be applied to address and deter threats from 2027 to 2035. They are:

1. **Assured Second Strike:** America's ability to survive and retaliate appropriately, even after detonations occur within U.S. territory or upon the U.S. nuclear triad, without fail, is key to our deterrent threat.
2. **Flexible Response:** This ensures the President has a range of diverse options to address adversary escalation and facilitate conflict resolution on terms acceptable to the U.S. while minimizing damage. These options deter limited nuclear escalation when a large-scale response may lack credibility or desirability. A flexible response depends on survivable strategic and theater nuclear forces with various delivery methods, yields, and timelines.
3. **Tailored Deterrence:** This addresses the unique factors in each adversary's decision-making, values, and interests. It aims to influence the perceived benefits and costs associated with actions the U.S. seeks to deter, as well as the adversary's restraint from those actions.
4. **Extended Deterrence and Assurance:** This strengthens allied security and binds mutual national interests. Extended deterrence relies on America's ability to credibly project security guarantees to its allies. Successful assurance may prevent proliferation, stabilize global politics, and enhance strategic influence while discouraging adversaries from taking aggressive actions against our allies.
5. **Calculated Ambiguity in Declaratory Policy:** This fosters uncertainty for adversaries, suggesting that the U.S. could employ nuclear weapons first in defense if needed. While calculated ambiguity can allow for greater response flexibility, it also has potential adversary misinterpretation or escalation, and its overuse could erode credibility.

6. **Hedge Against Risk:** This protects against unforeseen adverse geopolitical, technological, or programmatic risks while diminishing potential adversaries' belief that they can gain an advantage through a strategic "breakout" or expansion of nuclear capabilities. America must maintain adaptable nuclear capabilities and capacities to effectively manage both expected and unexpected risks.

Historically, nuclear deterrence has been central to averting both nuclear war and great-power conventional war. It has enabled unprecedented global prosperity. However, the current strategic environment presents significant challenges, with autocratic adversaries seeking to disrupt the American-led rules-based international order. The growing nuclear arsenals of authoritarian states intend to coerce and deter American intervention in regional conflicts, necessitating a shift from the "business as usual" nuclear policy and strategy of the post-Cold War past.

Dynamic Parity

In the context of nuclear deterrence, a **strategy of Dynamic Parity** provides a strategic shift from the traditional "static disparity" of America's hopeful status quo. Instead of maintaining a strictly fixed nuclear arsenal that willfully ignores the collective nuclear forces and intentions of our adversaries, Dynamic Parity emphasizes achieving a symmetrical balance of nuclear capabilities with those of our collective nuclear adversaries. Rather than attempting to "lead from behind" and believing that setting an example is the only way to encourage our adversaries to adopt shared values and follow the disarmament path established by the U.S., Dynamic Parity emulates adversarial nuclear behavior, instilling the fear of driving escalation to their detriment.

The strategy of **Dynamic Parity**:

1. Seeks to balance nuclear capability and capacity between the "axis of autocracies" and the U.S., thus preventing either side's perceived numerical superiority.
2. Enhances regional deterrence by assuring America's allies that any expansion of adversary strategic and non-strategic nuclear forces is met with a comparable expansion by the U.S. and its allies. In short, there is always enough for them. This benefits America's non-proliferation goals and solidifies collective alliances that depend on America's nuclear arsenal and promise.
3. Creates a framework for managing the growth or decline in operationally deployed nuclear weapons in the absence of bilateral or multilateral arms control treaties.
4. Informs the configuration and size of the American nuclear arsenal.

The American people and those allies depending on America's "nuclear umbrella" deserve a nuclear strategy that ensures peace and security moving forward. Continuing to address nuclear threats in a business-as-usual manner through appeasement, altruism, and benevolence is folly.

Dynamic parity enables the U.S. to effectively tackle challenges to its security and leadership within or outside the rules-based international order. Adversaries are unlikely to adhere to these rules, as they seek to dismantle them. By recognizing and circumventing the troubling actions of our nuclear autocratic rivals, dynamic parity ensures a degree of collective parity and capability relative to those regimes despite their behavior or failures to comply with treaties.

Attempting to deter China, Russia, North Korea, and Iran as separate entities is a grave mistake. When describing the value of deterrence, the recent commander of U.S. Strategic Command, Admiral (Ret.) Charles A. Richard said it best.

“Every operational plan in the Department of Defense, and every other capability we have, rests on an assumption that strategic deterrence will hold. And if strategic deterrence, and in particular nuclear deterrence, doesn't hold, none of our other plans and no other capability that we have is going to work as designed.”

– Admiral (Ret.) Charles A. Richard, August 13, 2021

Democracies go to war when they fail to deter autocratic aggressors adequately. Wars tend to start when there is a combined absence of the required deterrence capability, insufficient communication of intent, and a lack of credibility with adversaries. Dynamic parity addresses all three potential pitfalls to ensure the success of deterrence.

“If I may say this, Members of Congress, be careful above all things, therefore, not to let go of the atomic weapons until you are sure, and more than sure, that other means of preserving peace are at your hands. It is my belief that by accumulating deterrents of all kinds against aggression we shall, in fact, ward off the fearful catastrophe, the facts of which darken the life and mar the progress of all the peoples of the globe.”

– Sir Winston Churchill, January 17, 1952

III. DECLARATORY POLICY

Nuclear deterrence is the cornerstone of U.S. national security. It is more important now than at any time since the Cold War began, due to the aggressive actions and the number of nuclear-armed adversaries. A limited nuclear strike on the U.S. or its allies would pose the most catastrophic threat to U.S. security, and for the first time in over three decades, a large-scale existential nuclear attack on the homeland is possible. Our nuclear arsenal and the deterrence it provides serves as the nation’s ultimate safeguard against such threats. Additionally, together with our conventional forces and other elements of national power, America’s nuclear forces play a vital role in managing competition and preventing regional conflicts from escalating into great-power wars. For these reasons, nuclear deterrence remains the Department of War’s top priority.

America’s nuclear deterrent must be effectively focused on discouraging large-scale attacks on the homeland, averting regional war, and sustaining strategic stability. To achieve this, we will ensure that America’s nuclear doctrine, policy, posture, and arsenal properly align with its four key functions and incorporate the “Three Nos” of our deterrence strategy.

U.S. nuclear forces serve four key functions in the country's national security strategy. U.S. nuclear forces must be capable of:

1. Detering both nuclear and significant non-nuclear attacks.
2. Assuring allies and partners while managing escalation.
3. Hedging against an uncertain future that includes a world without meaningful or effective arms control treaties.
4. Achieving U.S. objectives in the event of deterrence failure.

These affirmative functions are interdependent, making it essential to assess the adequacy of U.S. nuclear forces in fulfilling each function and their collective role overall. America’s nuclear arsenal must first and always deter, and if necessary, be able to achieve U.S. national interests should deterrence fail.

U.S. nuclear forces must also reject in both form and function the three deterrence fallacies of the past. America’s nuclear deterrence strategy must firmly say “no” to policies or postures:

- Suggesting or codifying nuclear “no first use” or “sole purpose” use.
- Embracing vulnerability or “mutual vulnerability.”
- Embracing the concept of “minimum deterrence.”

These fallacies cause strategic confusion, undermine national security objectives, and generate ethical issues for our citizens. By saying “no” to these canards, the U.S. will enhance its vision of *peace through strength*.

Key Functions of the U.S. Nuclear Deterrent

First, it shall be the policy of the U.S. and this Administration to **deter potential adversaries from launching a nuclear attack upon the United States or its sovereign territories by ensuring that any such strike would result in a timely, overwhelming, and intolerable response.**

Section 2 of Article II of the U.S. Constitution gives the President of the United States (POTUS) the title of Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces. This power grants the President the authority to direct military operations, including the employment of nuclear weapons, in times of war or national emergency. The President does not need the concurrence of the U.S. Congress to order the retaliatory launch of nuclear weapons, and neither the military nor Congress can overrule these orders.

For any President, the employment of nuclear weapons is considered only in the most severe of circumstances to preserve our vital national interests and those of our allies. Effective deterrence depends on a credible nuclear posture—one rooted in robust nuclear capabilities and the firm national resolve to employ them if necessary. America’s nuclear posture does not imply a desire to engage in or win a nuclear conflict; instead, it enhances deterrence and encourages nuclear arms to remain “on the shelf.”

Addressing Asymmetric Strategic Threats

Potential adversaries, such as Russia, have demonstrated that early strategic strikes aimed at disrupting civilian life and undermining national morale are vital to their military strategy. Therefore, we must acknowledge that any conflict is likely to involve early non-nuclear strategic strikes against critical commercial or government infrastructure, degrading the national will and reducing military capabilities. Additionally, we should assume that **any attack on the U.S. nuclear command and control architecture serves as a warning of an imminent nuclear strike.** Irrespective of the means of attack, such actions pose a catastrophic threat that necessitates a robust and clear response to prevent further escalation.

Non-nuclear strategic attacks are actions designed to achieve major national objectives without employing nuclear weapons, relying instead on conventional military force, cyber operations, or other coercive measures to influence an adversary’s behavior, weaken its capabilities, or disrupt its decision-making processes. These attacks can have profound effects on domestic and international stability, and the evolution of conflict, while avoiding the

There are 16 critical infrastructure sectors whose assets, systems, and networks, whether physical or virtual, are considered so vital to the United States that their incapacitation or destruction would have a debilitating effect on national security, national economic security, national public health or safety, or any combination thereof.

immediate existential consequences of nuclear warfare. Against the United States, attacks could include large-scale cyber operations that disable or destroy critical governmental, commercial, or financial infrastructure; conventional strikes targeting essential facilities or senior leadership; disruptions to vital energy or food supplies; or significant naval, air, or space blockades.

Importantly, any action aimed at undermining or disabling the President's ability to exercise command and control over U.S. nuclear forces constitutes a strategic attack, regardless of whether nuclear weapons are used. **Potential adversaries must understand that any such non-nuclear strategic attacks will be considered so egregious that the U.S. reserves the right of self-defense, using all available options, including a nuclear response.**

Our adversaries must also understand that attacks aimed at compressing the President's decision timelines are extremely escalatory and destabilizing. In the case of attacks against the U.S.'s early warning and reconnaissance assets, and the resulting impact on indications and warning of an imminent nuclear attack, such actions would predictably result in an appropriate elevation of the U.S. response posture to ensure credible deterrent options against both an aggressor and any other opportunistic adversary.

The United States will not rely solely on detecting actual nuclear detonations to confirm a nuclear attack upon the homeland before responding with remaining forces. Adversaries must not be tempted to believe the U.S. would tolerate or "ride out" a crippling surprise nuclear attack or selectively absorb catastrophic damage and loss of life — an assumption that would weaken deterrence. America maintains a significant and reliable early warning architecture and assessment framework; these systems are designed to detect an adversary's nuclear missile launch, enabling an appropriate and prompt response, rather than serving as an obituary notice. Therefore, **the United States explicitly retains the option to respond to an initial attack prior to detonation, including the possibility to "launch on assured warning,"** akin to the doctrine of America's nuclear adversaries.

The following are key to meeting **American strategic deterrence assurances**:

A. **Responding to a Strategic Attack.** America's nuclear arsenal is a sensible and stabilizing capability meant to deter attacks on U.S. sovereignty, citizens, and vital interests. **As long as autocratic great powers possess nuclear weapons, the fundamental role of America's nuclear arsenal is to deter nuclear attack against the United States, its allies, and partners, while also countering nuclear coercion by adversaries who might attempt to use the threat of such weapons to achieve counter-intervention objectives.**

The United States would only consider the use of nuclear weapons in extreme circumstances to defend the vital interests of the United States or its Allies. The United States pledges not to employ, or threaten to employ, nuclear weapons against non-nuclear-weapon states that are parties to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, remain in compliance with their obligations, and refrain from the use of other weapons of mass destruction, such as chemical or biological arms, or weapons of mass effect, including large-scale cyber or electromagnetic pulse attacks. However, for all other states, U.S. nuclear weapons may serve a legitimate role in deterring strategic-level attacks against the United States, its allies, or partners.

B. The U.S. upholds formal commitments that assure its European, Asian, and Pacific allies. These commitments include, but are not limited to, the possible employment of America's strategic arsenal. However, the U.S. reserves the right to modify its nuclear force structure, posture, and capacities based on the current and future security environment to ensure the maintenance of deterrence and assurance.

C. America's rival adversaries do not share the same Western views on stabilizing behavior, as demonstrated by their implementation of a launch-on-warning doctrine and their integration

of conventional and nuclear command and control. Since the height of the Cold War, the U.S. has never adopted a launch-on-warning response policy due to its inherent risks and the immaturity of detection technology. However, acknowledging our technological capability to detect and assess an attack against the U.S. with high certainty, **America's nuclear forces shall be postured to provide the President the option to promptly launch America's retaliatory capacity upon credible warning, like that of our adversaries.**

D. Countering Asymmetric Threats. Despite lacking nuclear explosives, an asymmetric threat that is countered with nuclear weapons could have strategic, existential, or coercive effects like a nuclear attack. Not only are these activities by our adversaries a direct threat to the American homeland, but they also represent an unacceptable destabilizing risk that regional or asymmetric conflicts could rapidly escalate into a full-scale nuclear exchange. As such, the U.S. must make every effort to address these asymmetries in regional nuclear forces and asymmetric capabilities to establish and maintain the ability to exercise escalation control at every level of conflict on terms favorable to the U.S. This effort will involve the acquisition, stockpiling, and deployment of smaller, low-yield nuclear capabilities, along with agile, categorically determined non-nuclear capabilities.

E. Preemption of an Imminent Attack. This includes the ability to preempt, by any necessary means, any attack that poses an existential or catastrophic threat to the United States or its allies with whom we have an extended deterrence commitment.

F. Maintaining Credible Deterrence requires the U.S. to be ready to respond effectively if deterrence fails, achieving our objectives while protecting American and allied interests. Non-nuclear capabilities support this but cannot replace the fear-inducing power of America's nuclear weapons. Since the dawn of the Cold War, U.S. presidents have viewed the use of nuclear weapons as viable only in the direst circumstances or extreme defensive situations. If deterrence is unsuccessful, the United States will seek to resolve the conflict, reestablish deterrence, and limit harm to itself, its allies, and partners. It will also strive to reduce civilian harm as much as possible and achieve all necessary objectives. Flexible response options are required to maintain a credible deterrent in unpredictable circumstances.

It is not enough to appear ready; we must be ready. Allies involved in U.S. extended nuclear deterrence should be prepared, willing, and capable of supporting nuclear operations within or near their territories.

Extended Deterrence and Assurance

Second, countries such as Russia, China, and – to an extent – North Korea maintain a nuclear warfighting doctrine at the regional and limited level of conflict. These nations and their allies continue to modernize these capabilities alongside the development of asymmetric non-nuclear strategic attack capabilities designed to challenge American interests, hold allies and partners at risk, and potentially undermine the American way of life on the U.S. homeland.

The U.S. maintains official commitments to extend its deterrence beyond its coastlines, assuring allies in Europe, Asia, and the Pacific. This involves informing U.S. allies that American defense commitments include a credible extended regional nuclear deterrent to protect them. By pledging to employ America's nuclear and conventional forces in response to any threats on their behalf, the U.S. strengthens security cooperation and reduces the need for these nations to develop their own nuclear weapons. This approach helps maintain regional stability, encourages non-

proliferation, and solidifies our collective military alliances. However, America's extended "nuclear umbrella" cannot be offered to any ally or partner state that is a party to the United Nations' Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons.

Extended deterrence is not a one-way transaction. It is a mutually beneficial relationship that must sufficiently meet the national interests of all parties to ensure a proper balance of access and burden sharing. Allies involved in U.S. extended regional nuclear deterrence must be ready and willing to engage in appropriate planning, resourcing, and supporting of nuclear operations for deterrence.

Responding to a Nuclear Attack. The U.S. upholds formal commitments that assure its European, Asian, and Pacific allies. This reassurance results from collaborative efforts with allies, supported by the credible strength of America's nuclear arsenal to counter and overcome threats we face. No nation should doubt the reliability of our assurances or the ability and resolve of the U.S. and its allies to deter and, if necessary, confront any potential adversary's nuclear or non-nuclear threats. Often, effectively reassuring allies and partners depends on their trust in the credibility of U.S. regional nuclear deterrence, which helps most nations avoid acquiring nuclear weapons and advances non-proliferation goals. However, the U.S. reserves the right to modify its nuclear force structure, posture, and capacities based on the current and future security environment to ensure the maintenance of deterrence and assurance.

Escalation Control

Maintaining peace through strength requires that America possess the policy, resolve, and capability to manage escalation successfully. The fear of nuclear escalation can foster a conciliatory effect and help prevent smaller crises from growing into larger, unconstrained wars.

The ability to manage escalation bolsters strategic stability and contains conflict to its lowest levels. If adversaries understand that any escalation of conflict could trigger devastating retaliatory responses, they are less likely to overreach. The capacity to manage nuclear escalation is intended to prevent any party from believing they can achieve victory in a conventional conflict by threatening or employing nuclear weapons without consequences. America cannot and will not allow itself to be coerced by any adversary seeking to terminate a conventional conflict through the threatened or actual use of nuclear weapons or impose any sort of "escalate-to-de-escalate" strategy.

Managing an adversary's proclivity for escalation hinges on deliberate, full-spectrum deterrence and escalation management expertise—discouraging the adversary by demonstrating that the costs will outweigh the benefits of escalation. When adversaries are heavily armed with a wide range of nuclear and non-nuclear military capabilities and have asymmetric interests in the conflict, imposing escalation dominance can be challenging. Therefore, the POTUS must be afforded every resource necessary to dissuade an adversary from attempting to control the escalation ladder or coerce the United States into retreat. Therefore, **the U.S. will ensure it has asymmetric and symmetric options for escalation management** across the conflict spectrum to avoid conceding any escalation dominance, including adversarial low-yield nuclear employment.

The role of non-nuclear or conventional capabilities

For decades, the U.S. has pursued a policy of reducing reliance on nuclear weapons wherever possible in favor of exquisite non-nuclear or conventional capabilities. While the reduction of the number of nuclear weapons in the world may be an admirable goal, the policy has reduced U.S. nuclear forces to a dangerously low level while ignoring clear signals from potential adversaries

to move in the opposite direction. American conventional warfare dominance and a propensity for “regime change” have compelled countries like North Korea and Iran to seek a nuclear deterrent to U.S. conventional actions.

The relentless pursuit of non-nuclear conventional weapons since 9/11 has been costly. Since the conclusion of the Global War on Terror, America's spending on conventional weapons has surpassed its spending on nuclear weapons by a ratio of more than five to one. The notion that America can avoid a nuclear conflict merely by simply employing a large, lethal, and credible conventional arsenal has now proven to be overly provocative to autocratic states that possess nuclear weapons. The 2025 Director of National Intelligence *Threat Assessment* noted that “Russia's vast arsenal of non-strategic nuclear weapons helps it to offset Western conventional superiority.” Recent updates to Russia's nuclear doctrine state that any attack that attempts to disrupt Russian nuclear response actions, including conventional attacks threatening Russian sovereignty, would justify a nuclear response. The U.S. must carefully consider the perspectives of Russia and China regarding the use of conventional weapons as a potential asymmetric challenge to their nuclear deterrence capabilities and national interests. This is incredibly destabilizing, and **the U.S. will no longer pursue conventional weapon options to avoid nuclear weapon options** when they are necessary to ensure deterrence.

Conventional weapons deterrence will not replace strategic nuclear deterrence. The sheer scale of conventional weaponry needed to generate the same level of fear and devastation as nuclear weapons would be unaffordable and excessively provocative. However, conventional capabilities will continue to provide the president with additional deterrence and escalation management options but should be viewed as a complement to the nuclear deterrent force rather than a replacement. The U.S. must possess all the capabilities necessary to manage escalation effectively, including non-nuclear pre-emptive capabilities.

Shifting to “Shared Regional Deterrence”

The U.S. regional nuclear deterrence capabilities are meant to discourage the limited use of nuclear weapons by Russia, China, and regional nuclear powers, to counter those attempts at nuclear coercion against U.S. allies and partners within the region, and, if necessary, be employed to counter an adversary's overwhelming conventional attack, when the survival of the allied nation is at risk.

Currently, the U.S. supports its regional assurance promises to allies via forward-deployed nuclear weapons, aircraft stationed in the U.S. and abroad to execute conventional or nuclear missions in times of crisis, and its strategic nuclear forces. Dual-capable NATO aircraft performing “nuclear burden sharing” operations using regionally based weapons are examples of regional nuclear deterrence capability.

Throughout the Cold War, the U.S. deployed consequential amounts of nonstrategic nuclear weapons, most of which were unilaterally retired in the 1990s. Today, Russia's unverified non-strategic nuclear weapon advantage is estimated to be 10 to 1; however, other experts suggest that the advantage may be as high as 25 to 1. This is a destabilizing advantage for Russia and a direct threat to NATO and our European partners.

While U.S. allies and partners have a distinct conventional weapon advantage, we must also have the regional nuclear deterrence capabilities and posture necessary to deter attacks, resist nuclear coercion, and defend their sovereign territory. According to NATO, “nuclear weapons are a core

component of [the alliance’s] overall capabilities for deterrence and defense, alongside conventional and missile defense forces.” NATO refers to U.S. strategic nuclear forces and the independent strategic nuclear forces of the U.K. and France as the “supreme guarantee” of the security of NATO’s 32 member states. To maintain ongoing security, the Secretary of War is directed to provide recommendations for the enhancement of U.S. regional nuclear capabilities within twelve months following the approval of this NPR.

This evolving geopolitical landscape demands a comprehensive shift toward a more credible, flexible, and regionally tailored deterrence strategy. The past strategy of Extended Deterrence fails to meet the demands of the new global security environment for several key reasons:

1. **Credibility Gap:** Adversaries and allies question, “Would the U.S. really trade Seattle for Seoul or Boston for Berlin?”
2. **Overextended Capabilities:** Bilateral arms reductions have asymmetrically reduced total U.S. capability while adversaries ignore NPT obligations and expand regional and strategic capabilities.
3. **Asymmetric Interests:** Adversaries often perceive their regional interests as existential, whereas the U.S. can perceive those same interests as peripheral or less critical, eroding perceived resolve.
4. **Capability and Commitment Mismatch:** Many allies have historically relied too much on U.S. protection without sufficiently investing in their own defense. “Free riding” often leads to a smaller or limited regional defense force with which to deter.
5. **Proliferation:** Adversaries have modernized and expanded their nuclear arsenals and missile capabilities, creating a complex, multipolar nuclear environment.
6. **Centralized Deterrence Structure:** Dependence on U.S.-based strategic forces makes response slower, more predictable, and easier to counter through anti-access strategies.
7. **Limited Escalation Management:** Dependence on U.S.-based strategic forces, mostly consisting of large-yield warheads that must travel long distances via ballistic trajectories severely limits lower-level escalation management. These systems may lack proportionality or could trigger escalation due to their launch profiles.
8. **Insufficient Regional Integration:** Limited regional integration leads to a lack of regional deterrence and escalation literacy, thereby slowing decision-making. Limited forward-deployed nuclear options diminish operational flexibility, weakening deterrence posture against rapid escalation.

Shared Regional Deterrence addresses these fundamental shortcomings by emphasizing forward-deployed, credible, and regionally tailored capabilities, explicit ally commitments, and integrated missile defense to restore the credibility and effectiveness that traditional extended deterrence strategies have failed to deliver. Specifically, we must address gaps in capability and expertise, specifically the:

- Atrophy of U.S. nuclear decision-making expertise.
- Fragility of extended deterrence under multipolar conditions.
- Overconfidence in Cold War-era arms control frameworks.
- Need for tailored regional escalation management and crisis decision training.
- Danger of having to relearn nuclear crisis management “under fire.”

Shared Regional Deterrence contributes to strategic deterrence by minimizing regional capability disparities that can promote destabilizing aggression and miscalculations. Nuclear deterrence experts and wargames have shown how disparities in adversary escalation ladders can add ambiguity on top of inappropriate mirror imaging and are inherently destabilizing. A weak extended deterrence guarantee is one that primarily relies on U.S.-based nuclear forces and deployed nuclear-powered ballistic missile submarines (SSBNs) for low-yield symmetric response capabilities, which risks disastrous escalation due to nuclear illiteracy, insufficient participation in national command authority exercises, and a lack of flexible and symmetric response options.

Hedging against an uncertain future that includes a world without [arms control] treaties refers to the strategy of preparing for a range of likely future scenarios, particularly in the context of nuclear threats and uncertainty about arms control agreements. Hedging without arms control treaties reflects a precautionary approach to mitigate the risks of nuclear escalation, uncertainty in international agreements, and technological developments that could change the balance of power. It is about ensuring that a country is prepared for unforeseen scenarios while managing the risks associated with those uncertainties.

In the absence of formal arms control treaties or when arms control agreements are weak or deteriorating, we must hedge to prepare for potential shifts in the geopolitical security environment. Our hedging strategy must sufficiently mitigate the following that will emerge over time:

- Unexpected risk and danger from diverse and expanding threats posed by adversaries. This includes technological breakthroughs or strategic breakouts not covered by the existing treaty.
- Unexpected failure of arms control treaties or agreements constraining or restraining weapons of mass destruction or weapons of mass effect.
- Unexpected technical or operational failures of U.S. nuclear capabilities or capacities.

Hedging strategies include the following:

- Sustaining sufficient inactive and active reserve capacity and capability to upload and replenish weapons and weapons systems restricted by treaty. America must have the ability to rearm quickly should the need arise.
- Modernizing the nuclear arsenal as the threatscape evolves to ensure that it can maintain a credible deterrent. This means having the ability to retaliate with nuclear weapons if attacked, especially in cases where adversaries are enhancing their nuclear arsenals or developing advanced technologies, like missile defense systems that could undermine our ability to retaliate credibly.
- Developing a diverse arsenal for deterrence and defense involves strengthening both nuclear and non-nuclear military forces to cover a broader range of threats.
- Preparing for technological advancements and arms races as nations may attempt to outpace one another in nuclear technology and delivery systems. Hedging involves preparing for such a scenario by investing in technologies that can maintain or enhance strategic stability, even if other nations pursue more aggressive nuclear postures.
- Nuclear proliferation in a world without arms control agreements may be more prevalent as countries seek to enhance their hedging strategies by developing their own nuclear capabilities. This could also happen if allies and partners perceive a growing threat from other nuclear states or lose confidence in America's credibility of extended deterrence.

The U.S. will continue efforts to create a greater cooperative and benign security environment but must also hedge against prospective and unanticipated risks. Hedging also contributes to deterrence, reducing potential adversaries' confidence that they can gain an advantage through a "breakout" or expansion of nuclear capabilities.

Achieving U.S. objectives in the event of deterrence failure refers to the contingency plans and strategies the U.S. must implement to meet its strategic and political goals, even if deterrence fails. However, should deterrence fail and an adversary proceed with an attack or conduct other forms of coercive aggression. In that case, the U.S. must have the means and resolve to achieve its strategic security objectives, including the initiation and conduct of nuclear operations.

Regardless of its size, war is always costly and brutal, which is why successful deterrence is crucial to maintaining peace, stability, and prosperity. Therefore, America's armed forces must be capable of rapidly shifting from a deterrence posture to defensive operations, including full-spectrum combat operations. These combat operations may include missile, air, space, and cyber defense, as well as similar offensive operations necessary to neutralize the threat, limit potential damage, and counter escalation risks.

The U.S. must be prepared to respond decisively, effectively, and lethally with appropriate nuclear and non-nuclear force if deterrence fails to avert an attack. The goal is to ensure that the nation can still achieve its strategic objectives, safeguard its interests, and uphold global stability, even in the face of aggression.

Any U.S. conduct regarding nuclear employment operations must comply with the law of armed conflict and the Uniform Code of Military Justice. The U.S. intends to terminate conflicts and reestablish deterrence, ensuring minimal damage to itself, its allies, and partners. It will also seek to reduce civilian harm as much as possible while achieving its objectives.

Three “Nos” of America’s Nuclear Deterrent

For decades, the United States has deliberately avoided adopting a “no first use” or “sole purpose” nuclear policy, instead maintaining strategic ambiguity to reinforce deterrence and assure allies. The 2018 and 2022 NPRs, consistent with previous administrations, reaffirmed that the U.S. would consider nuclear use only in extreme circumstances to defend vital national interests. While strategic ambiguity can project some risk upon calculating autocracies, the clarity of a “no first use” or “sole purpose” policy would be perceived as credible, potentially encouraging adversaries to launch strategic attacks and weakening the integrity of U.S. deterrence. Additionally, adopting such policies might alarm allies who rely on U.S. extended nuclear deterrence, possibly destabilizing key alliances and triggering nuclear proliferation among partners who feel less secure.

The U.S. has long eschewed any declaratory policies of “no first use” or “sole purpose” and will continue to do so. The U.S. firmly believes that these policy approaches regarding its nuclear deterrent would lead to an unacceptable level of risk. Moreover, while nuclear weapons exist, the U.S. will not take any unilateral action that would otherwise cause adversaries, allies, or partners to question American resolve to maintain global peace and stability. These kinds of negative security assurances are rarely credible with aggressive nuclear-armed rival adversaries and are detrimental to America’s non-proliferation goals.

Avoiding the “mutual vulnerability trap” is essential for effective deterrence. The “mutual vulnerability trap” describes the strategic danger that comes from accepting vulnerability to a nuclear attack to maintain deterrence, but in doing so, may undermine aspects of one's own security or provoke escalation by discouraging investments in offense, defense, and resilience. This Cold War remnant can encourage adversary coercion, lead to escalation, and limit U.S. options. By steering clear of this trap, the U.S. does not legitimize adversary nuclear expansion, weaken extended deterrence, or lower the threshold for coercion. Mutual vulnerability is no longer a practical approach, given the rise of multiple nuclear-armed states with strategic reach. Recognizing U.S. vulnerability openly exposes the homeland to catastrophic threats, signals weakness that adversaries might exploit, and increases the risk of coercion, escalation, or attacks on American society and infrastructure. From any perspective, it is immoral to refuse to defend America and its allies against catastrophic threats. Therefore, the U.S. will take all reasonable steps to reduce, eliminate, and mitigate vulnerabilities that threaten our ability to maintain a guaranteed second-strike capacity—the core of successful deterrence.

Adversaries must recognize that any effort or attempt to attack the U.S. or its most senior leadership would be reliably and consistently detected and, if not intercepted, would have a minimal impact on the president's ability to respond with suitable force. Therefore, it should be completely clear that **the U.S. will not deliberately “ride out” a first attack, including nuclear detonations,** before delivering an appropriate and overwhelming retaliatory response. Consequently, the U.S. expressly reserves the right to respond to any impending strategic attack, including the capability **to activate and promptly launch its nuclear forces upon receiving credible warning** data about a significant launch of ballistic, cruise, or hypersonic missiles or large-scale attacks involving aerial vehicles such as manned bombers and unmanned drones targeting the sovereign territory of the United States of America.

Another approach to reinforce nuclear deterrence is **nuclear defense.** This refers to a comprehensive set of efforts to mitigate the impact and consequences of a nuclear attack through

both active and passive resilience and protection measures. Its main goal is to reduce vulnerability while enhancing the nation's ability to survive and recover. In this framework, defeating a nuclear adversary means credibly engaging and neutralizing opponents who intend to employ their nuclear weapons against the United States and its allies. This approach helps reinforce deterrence and highlights the importance of a credible, survivable, and effective defense posture.

The effort to deploy a “Golden Dome” Ballistic Missile Defense capability will reduce vulnerability and provide a measure of damage limitation. While the February 3, 2025, Executive Order 14186, titled “The Iron Dome for America,” is focused on defending the United States writ large, this NPR acknowledges its ability to specifically decrease the vulnerability of U.S.-based strategic and regional deterrence forces. Early deployment of missile defense to ensure a survivable and robust U.S. second strike capability reduces the likelihood of any nuclear attack on the U.S. or its allies and partners.

An assured and survivable second-strike deterrent is essential, but not sufficient to ensure deterrence and the survival of the U.S. and our allies as a free and democratic people. Relying solely on an arbitrarily established minimal-size second-strike deterrent during the Cold War hinged on mirror imaging with our adversary to provide assured destruction and reach assumed symmetrical pain thresholds, which were later disproved after the fall of the Soviet Union.

Minimum deterrence strategies are problematic, as they do not align with U.S. ethics and morals, may not instill sufficient fear in adversaries, and fail to reassure allies or prevent unwanted proliferation. Therefore, this NPR **fundamentally rejects any minimum deterrence strategy or force posture.**

Minimal deterrence strategies rely on knowing, without question, the minimum deterrent level that an adversary perceives as sufficiently intolerable. It is impossible to know whether a small nuclear arsenal will deter as effectively as a large nuclear arsenal until deterrence fails. Smaller arsenals mean fewer nuclear weapons to attack and destroy first, as well as fewer nuclear weapons to absorb in response, should some survive and launch in response. These odds increase the chances of a risk-averse, aggressive autocracy initiating an attack.

Minimum deterrence centers on maintaining just enough credible nuclear force to prevent an adversary from attacking the homeland. A relic from the Cold War, when the U.S. faced only the Soviet Union, any strategy advocating a minimal nuclear deterrent depends on mirror imaging—the projection of U.S. values, interests, and cultural nuances onto an adversary—and assumes that the adversary's motivations and fears are the same as America's. This is simply a fallacy.

Minimum deterrence assumes that adversaries can be effectively deterred regardless of the size or posture of nuclear arsenals, and without recognizing that our adversaries may not share U.S. values or risk tolerance. It presumes that all weapons in a small arsenal will survive a first strike, even though the lack of redundancy could invite such an attack. The strategy also relies on the flawless performance of each weapon through launch, flight, penetration, and detonation, despite historical evidence of system failures and the need for redundancy. Lastly, it holds that only a few nuclear weapons are necessary to threaten densely populated areas, although the U.S. has avoided intentional counter-value targeting since the 1960s due to legal and moral considerations.

Minimal deterrence strategies have always been based on flawed and dangerous assumptions. These fundamentally flawed strategies are extremely destabilizing and counterproductive, as they rely on several historical assumptions.

- Minimum deterrence assumes that all nuclear-armed rivals will behave prudently and predictably. This requires a persistent and perfect understanding of an adversary's values, intentions, interests, motives, and decision-making processes.
- Minimum deterrence seeks to maintain only the smallest nuclear arsenal necessary to credibly deter adversaries from launching a nuclear attack on the homeland. It rejects the need for large, diverse, or warfighting-capable nuclear forces.
- Minimum deterrence requires a “guaranteed” second-strike capability with a sufficiently small force to ensure the ability to retaliate and impose unacceptable costs on any aggressor. This approach also embraces concepts of mutual vulnerability and avoids missile, civil, and air defenses.
- Minimum deterrence undermines the credibility of U.S. extended deterrence or “nuclear umbrella” due to its deliberately reduced arsenal size. Unassured allies may no longer find extended deterrence credible, setting the stage for possible nuclear proliferation by allies and partners.
- Minimum deterrence undermines the role of nuclear weapons in deterring and containing conventional conflict. Nuclear arms serve far more than just deterring nuclear attacks. By definition, nuclear arsenals that are minimally sized and consist only of high-yield warheads cannot effectively deter the use of low-yield nuclear weapons. Responding to a low-yield nuclear detonation on the battlefield with the only available high-yield strategic weapons is not an act of retaliation; it would be an act of escalation.
- Minimum deterrence overlooks the essential need for strategic stability below the threshold of existential retaliation, particularly during a crisis involving nuclear-armed adversaries. Insufficient capability may encourage an adversary to act aggressively.

The theory of numerical superiority refers to the idea that having superior numbers presents a decisive advantage—having more offensive capability can lead to strategic dominance or victory in conflict scenarios. The U.S. must never allow any nuclear-armed adversary to perceive or believe that any numerical superiority on their part grants them an assured path to victory.

Other Guidance

To ensure a clear and unified policy position, all existing legacy guidance shall be immediately revised and reissued to comply with this new strategic direction.

“The dogmas of the quiet past, are inadequate to the stormy present. The occasion is piled high with difficulty, and we must rise -- with the occasion. As our case is new, so we must think anew, and act anew.”

– President Abraham Lincoln quote, December 1, 1862.

IV. STRATEGIC INTENT

The Evolving Strategic Threat Environment

For the first time since 1945, the U.S. is facing two peer nuclear powers that are actively collaborating in a “no limits” partnership. Together, they share a common goal of undermining or replacing the current Western-determined rules-based international order, are aggressively pursuing regional, if not global, hegemony, and have embarked on a collective sprint toward nuclear superiority. Furthermore, Russia’s conflict with Ukraine has shown an authentic readiness among these autocratic powers to back each other with weapons, munitions, and soldiers. This partnership indicates a heightened risk for the U.S. concerning opportunistic or collaborative aggression against our interests.

Dr Keith Payne noted in 2021 that Russia’s coercive use of nuclear threats goes well beyond the Cold War’s assumed stable balance of terror dialogue that, “if you strike me, I will retaliate massively,” as Western policy intended to defend the status quo. What Russia and China now brandish is an “if you resist my expansionist encroachment, I will strike you” offensive character. Adversary doctrine clearly describes when nuclear weapons might be employed. Their edicts do not distinguish between nuclear and non-nuclear missile strikes, for example. Therefore, we must recognize that our adversaries may not refrain from using nuclear weapons in response to any Western conventional response perceived to meet their doctrinal definitions.

Strategic and Regional Nuclear Threats from China

Chinese deterrence (Weishe) is often characterized as a mix of traditional deterrence (persuading an adversary from taking an undesired action) and compellence (coercing an adversary to take a desired action). China implements its Weishe strategy through an “informationalized deterrence” approach, which integrates information warfare with modern technologies—particularly cyber operations, electronic warfare, and advanced data-driven tactics—alongside media influence, psychological operations, and nuclear coercion. This approach intends to shape their neighbors’ and adversaries’ behavior alike, deter hostile actions against China, influence international opinion in China’s favor, and maintain strategic advantage in regions where China seeks to assert its interests, reflecting a deterrence model that relies as much on controlling information and cognition as on traditional military capabilities.

The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) is determined to align the size and posture of its nuclear arsenal for strategic rivalry with the U.S., as its leaders believe that their previous minimum nuclear deterrence strategy was insufficient. Regional threats, particularly those regarding Taiwan, also drive the expansion of China’s nuclear forces, along with territorial disputes from the South China Sea to the Korean Peninsula. **Strengthening its nuclear capabilities is viewed as a method to deter foreign intervention in these disputes**, especially from the U.S. and its allies. Moreover, this nuclear expansion is prompting the development of a more technically sophisticated arsenal that includes longer-range delivery systems, new warheads, hypersonic weapons, and orbital weapons, all intended to circumvent or overcome U.S. defenses. This nuclear expansion also

emphasizes deploying a more survivable force encompassing hundreds of newly constructed super-hardened missile silos, elusive mobile missile systems, upgraded nuclear submarine forces, and the objective of establishing an “early warning counterstrike” doctrine or a “launch on warning” posture.

With the Chinese nuclear breakout and introduction of new advanced nuclear, space, hypersonic, and cyber capabilities, including the construction of over 300 new ICBM silos, the U.S. must consider the real possibility that the CCP's strategic and non-strategic nuclear forces may have been underestimated and could even exceed the deployed capability of the United States. The CCP is the fastest-growing nuclear power on the planet, producing over 100 nuclear warheads per year. It is rapidly expanding and modernizing its nuclear triad and is now actively penetrating the American Air Defense Identification Zone. Prudence dictates that the U.S. regard the CCP as a nuclear peer adversary today, not tomorrow.

Some U.S. defense experts and military leaders are expressing growing concern about a possible forced reunification of Taiwan by 2027, which coincides with the 100th anniversary of the People's Liberation Army's founding. Although this timeline is not a firm deadline, the CCP has signaled that China should be prepared for significant military action in that period. This could coincide with a CCP assessment that their enlarged nuclear capabilities will be sufficient to coerce American leadership and hinder U.S. forces from effectively defending Taiwan at that time.

Strategic and Regional Nuclear Threats from Russia

Russia's aggressive actions, coupled with its rejection, suspension, or violation of arms control agreements, require the U.S. to adjust the size and posture of its nuclear deterrence arsenal to address this emerging Russian threat to global stability. Russia has proven not to be a dependable, trusted, or honorable partner. The U.S., its allies, and partners can no longer rely on hope or Russian redemption to alleviate the Russian nuclear threat. Of critical importance is the asymmetry in the philosophies and doctrines regarding nuclear weapon use between the U.S. and its allies, compared to Russia and its sphere of influence. Succinctly, our adversary's doctrine integrates the battlefield use of nuclear weapons in regional and theater war as well as strategic nuclear war. The U.S. lack of comparable theater nuclear capabilities and symmetric escalation options represents a critical vulnerability in escalation control that must be urgently addressed through an evolution in U.S. Extended Deterrence to a strategy of forward-based **Shared Regional Deterrence**.

Thus, the 2010 NPR and New START were designed to support U.S. political goals and Russian military objectives—insisting that a treaty addressing non-strategic weapons was not an option. At the same time, Russia's doctrine involved using battlefield and regional nuclear weapons to counter U.S. conventional forces while threatening NATO bases and European population centers—an approach known as “escalate to de-escalate.”

Since its invasion of Georgia in 2008, Moscow's intent to disrupt the existing international order and reassert its imperial ambitions has been clear. Russia used aggressive military and diplomatic actions, supported by coercive nuclear threats, as a strategy to deter Western intervention while furthering its expansionist goals and asserting dominance over neighboring regions. Understanding this strategy is crucial for developing and implementing effective deterrence measures against potential Russian provocations.

Russia's seizure and annexation of Crimea in 2014 served as further evidence of Moscow's intentions. It blatantly violated Ukraine's sovereignty and international law, revealing significant

flaws in non-treaty international agreements related to security, such as the Budapest Memorandum. Over the next eight years, Ukrainians faced a prolonged conflict with pro-Russian separatists, while Europe contended with hybrid warfare—including cyberattacks and disinformation—and a continual humanitarian crisis. This situation reached a breaking point in February 2022 when Russia launched a full-scale invasion of Ukraine. Moscow's ongoing efforts to extend its influence over Ukraine continue to challenge the post-Soviet order and undermine the West's presence in Eastern Europe.

To maintain its international influence, Russia has intensified its efforts in nuclear deterrence. Russia is focused on developing long-range nuclear-capable missiles, hypersonic missiles, glide vehicles, and underwater delivery systems to bypass U.S. missile defenses. Additionally, Russia claims that 95 percent of its nuclear arsenal has been modernized and is expanding its variety of nonstrategic nuclear systems, which it considers as offsetting asymmetric options for deterring adversaries, managing escalation, and countering U.S. and Allied conventional forces. Specifically, the DNI recently assessed that “Russia will continue to modernize its nuclear weapons capabilities and maintain the largest and most diverse nuclear weapons stockpile.” Moscow views its nuclear capabilities as essential for deterrence and for achieving its strategic objectives in a potential conflict with the U.S. and NATO. Moscow considers nuclear weapons the ultimate safeguard for Russia's security. Due to its struggles in achieving quick victories on the battlefield and Ukrainian strikes within Russian territory, there are growing concerns that President Putin may resort to nuclear weapons.

Finally, Moscow recently updated its nuclear deterrence doctrine. The “Fundamentals on the State Policy of the Russian Federation in the Area of Nuclear Deterrence” was published as both a declaratory policy and a strategic planning document. This document outlines goals aimed at maintaining sufficient nuclear capabilities to ensure deterrence, safeguard the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Russian State, project deterrence against potential aggression toward Russia and its allies, prevent escalation, and ensure the cessation of hostilities on terms acceptable to Russia. Furthermore, the policy describes conditions under which Moscow might use nuclear weapons, including aggression against Russia or its allies by any non-nuclear country with the support of a nuclear state and the receipt of reliable information regarding the launch of ballistic missiles or a large-scale launch of aerospace strike capabilities (strategic and tactical aircraft, cruise missiles, unmanned systems, hypersonic vehicles, and other aircraft) that cross the borders of the Russian Federation [or its allies].

Although the Russian policy warnings are explicit, we must not discount their threat, methods, or national goals. Ignoring them would be dangerous. Moscow's illegal suspension of the New START treaty undermines and devalues any future arms control efforts and raises concerns about its uploading of warheads and deployment of destabilizing terror weapons like the nuclear-armed Poseidon torpedo and the heavy Sarmat ICBM capable of carrying 12-20 MIRV warheads.

Regional Nuclear Threats from North Korea and Iran

The nuclear programs of North Korea and Iran remain a threat, especially in conjunction with and supported by Russia and China. Taken as a whole, the threat of escalating regional conflicts poses a significant threat. To address this threat, the U.S. needs to evolve regional extended deterrence to build a robust capability to deter regional war and control potential escalation resulting from tactical or theater use of nuclear weapons by an adversary.

Iranian Nuclear Ambitions and Regional Instability

The threat posed by Iran's potential acquisition of nuclear weapons poses an unacceptable risk and demands rigorous deterrence and denial strategies to hinder its goals. While the success of Operation MIDNIGHT HAMMER in June 2025 may have set back Iran's nuclear program by 5-10 years, no definitive evidence confirms Iran has abandoned its nuclear ambitions. Covert efforts to rebuild are plausible, and given Iran's history, we must presume them to be probable.

The immediate danger is the threat to U.S. allies in the Middle East, especially Israel and the Gulf states. The U.S. must also consider Iran's potential threat to Europe. Iran often possesses a large and sophisticated ballistic missile arsenal and has demonstrated a willingness to employ them in large-scale salvos. The U.S. must prepare NATO to actively deter and defend against Iranian attacks upon Europe to include U.S. forces stationed in Europe.

The international community must prepare for a nuclear-armed Iran, whose ideological commitments, strategic goals, and security culture differ sharply from those of the West. Deterring Iran will require a tailored, collective approach that combines extended deterrence, credible retaliation, active denial, and cooperative defense. The U.S. must acknowledge that regional threats like Iran can operate with strategic reach and should consider deterring potential direct attacks on the homeland by Iran. Although Tehran does not possess an ICBM, it could launch attacks from maritime approaches using ships, including from the Atlantic coast and the Gulf of America.

North Korea's Expanding Nuclear Capabilities

North Korean nuclear capabilities continue to grow in sophistication, numbers, and capabilities. They are building and test-launching at a greater rate than any Western nation and learning from every failure. Additionally, North Korea's cantankerous nuclear rhetoric and unveiled threats against the U.S., South Korea, and Japan have become almost routine.

In exchange for North Korea's material support for its war with Ukraine, Russia is likely offering technical assistance that will accelerate the development of North Korea's nuclear arsenal. This could advance North Korea's direct threat to the United States' homeland by years if not decades. Experts posit that North Korea could have as many as 300 nuclear warheads and 50 ICBMs by 2035, which is more than France or the United Kingdom today. The U.S. must assume that many of these nuclear warheads will be loaded onto ICBMs aimed at U.S. cities.

Finally, the potential for North Korea to either collaborate or coordinate with China and Russia is real and must be assumed in any worst-case scenario. There is potential for opportunistic aggression by North Korea toward South Korea and Japan while the U.S. is embroiled in another conflict. Moreover, North Korea, which recently entered into a defense treaty with Russia, could use its nuclear forces as part of an allied strike against the West beyond the Korean peninsula. Therefore, **the U.S. must account for North Korea's nuclear arsenal alongside the nuclear arsenals of Russia and China** when determining and deploying America's nuclear deterrence strategy.

“Our adversaries are advancing, global nuclear threats are on the rise and deterrence is paramount. Our national defense requires urgent action and reform across the board. We must go faster. We must move with a sense of urgency. We can never forget that our number one job is to create peace through overwhelming strength.”

– General John D. Caine, 22nd Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, April 1, 2025

V. GUIDANCE TO THE FORCE

The Strategic Nuclear Triad

The primary purpose of the triad is to deter nuclear attacks by ensuring that the U.S. can respond with overwhelming force in the event of a nuclear strike. The triad provides the U.S. with multiple, independent capabilities to retaliate, thereby reducing the likelihood that an adversary would believe they could launch a first strike successfully without facing devastating consequences. The triad grants the President flexibility while protecting against technological surprise or abrupt shifts in the geopolitical landscape.

The U.S.'s strategic nuclear triad remains foundational to U.S. deterrence. For over six decades, every president, regardless of political party, has validated the importance and relevance of a nuclear force that effectively deters adversaries, assures allies and partners, achieves U.S. strategic objectives if deterrence fails, and hedges against uncertain threats. Each leg of the triad (SSBNs, ICBMs, and bombers) is traditionally associated with the three cornerstone attributes: survivability, responsiveness, and flexibility, respectively. However, each leg of the triad possesses each of these attributes to some degree.

The U.S. nuclear deterrence must be credible to be effective, which means that an adversary believes that the U.S. can and will use its nuclear weapons in response to an adversary's actions if necessary. When a nation’s nuclear deterrence is credible, it is less likely to be attacked or provoked, as adversaries perceive the costs of such actions to be unacceptable. **Credibility** is born from the following five efforts:

1. America’s **reputation** to maintain resolve, its global influence, and its warrior ethos.
2. America’s **investment** in and timely acquisition of powerful capabilities and capacities that are consequential, not just sufficient.
3. The **readiness** and ability of America’s nuclear arsenal to respond and retaliate to threats or attacks promptly and effectively.
4. The **survivability** of America’s nuclear arsenal and its ability to endure any first strike.
5. The **clarity** of the deterrent message. Deterrence must be seen, exercised, and communicated consistently and persistently.

Prioritizing credibility is crucial for preventing strategic or large-scale attacks, reassuring allies, and maintaining “superpower” status. To enhance credibility, the U.S. must adopt a prompt, phased approach to rapidly boost current deterrent capabilities and adjust the force's size and posture to address both immediate and long-term challenges. This plan is based on the following prioritization of actions:

- **Leverage flexibility** to achieve maximum rapid improvement in survivability and responsiveness of the U.S. deterrent and nuclear arsenal in a multi-peer threat environment.
- **Increase survivability** through changes in force posture, operational deployment, increased nuclear arsenal capacity, and force modernization.
- **Improve responsiveness** through changes in force posture and improved command, control, and decision-making structures as well as exercises.
- **Operationalize the hedge stockpile** to rapidly increase strategic and regional deterrence capacity, including an enhanced **Shared Regional Deterrence** strategy.
- **Accelerate acquisition, modernization, and industrial base investment** efforts to expedite force capacity and capability, reassure allies, and enhance escalation management.

Eliminating components of the strategic nuclear triad would diminish the nuclear force's overall strength, simplify adversary targeting by reducing hundreds of counterforce targets to a few dozen, and significantly lower the threshold for an attack against the U.S. homeland. Therefore, **the U.S. shall continue to posture, operate, maintain, sustain, and invest in all three legs (land, sea, and air) of the strategic nuclear triad** while expanding the concept to Shared Regional Deterrence forces.

Force Survivability and Lethality

Although recapitalizing, expanding, and incorporating new weapon systems are urgent priorities, they do not offer an immediate solution to the rapidly growing threat of deterring the combination of Russia and a peer nuclear China. Therefore, the U.S. will redeploy hedge capabilities in the interim and return the air leg of the triad to an alert status.

To “reestablish deterrence” as directed by the Secretary of War, the U.S. shall immediately initiate actions to make U.S. deterrence forces less vulnerable to a first strike counterforce attack. Enhancing the force's survivability through adjustments in posture and deployment results in an immediate boost to a resilient and flexible second-strike capability, effectively deterring any aggressor or collection of aggressors while also dissuading and deterring opportunism from additional adversaries.

The immediate strategy will also address the disparity in theater-range nuclear forces through a combination of policy changes to response criteria, increased alert postures, dispersing forces, augmenting the number of warheads on deployed delivery systems, and expanding the type and number of nuclear systems forward deployed.

To ensure a survivable second-strike capability during the early years of the Cold War, the bomber force was dispersed from a small number of large, multi-wing bases to single-squadron wings deployed on nuclear alert at air bases worldwide. This ability to rapidly launch a widely dispersed alert force capable of retargeting and recall provided a responsive, flexible, and survivable capability that sufficiently deterred our adversaries.

Activate the Air-Leg of the Triad--Return to Bomber Alert Status

The U.S. has the only strategic bomber fleet in the free world. Bombers are the most flexible and visible leg of the nuclear triad. Some experts consider bombers the most stabilizing of the three legs since they are recallable, allowing the president to reconsider an attack at the last minute. Openly deploying bombers in response to potential crises can be a significant messaging or de-

escalating tool for the president. Additionally, when “cocked on alert,” bombers can serve as a survivable hedge against the catastrophic failure of the sea or land leg. However, reductions in and consolidation of the nuclear bomber force have raised the vulnerability of the nuclear bomber force to the greatest level since 1945.

America's security interests and those of our allies and partners have relied on their range, speed, capacity, and lethality in every major conflict since the end of the Cold War, including most engagements in the Middle East and the Balkans. Furthermore, their presence has stabilized the Korean Demilitarized Zone, reassured Eastern Europe, and supported freedom of navigation operations in the South China Sea.

Near term actions

The need for bombers extends beyond nuclear deterrence, making them the most sought-after capability of the conventional U.S. military. Therefore, the Secretary of War must ensure that acquisition and modernization plans include adequate dual-capable bomber forces to meet the growing demand for strategic bombers, addressing rapidly expanding regional conventional and deterrence requirements. The Secretary of War will also determine how many dual-capable bombers, beyond the current programs of record, are necessary to ensure sufficient deterrence and defense operations, including potential acquisition of B-21 Raider bombers by our AUKUS partners as part of future theater burden-sharing strategies.

In preparation for the potential suspension or termination of New START, and to guarantee the continued viability of a second-strike capability in response to emerging threats, the U.S. Air Force will immediately activate an Alpha Alert Bomber Force to ensure asset survivability. Immediately, the Air Force will generate a select number of bombers for alert and be able to demonstrate the ability to generate and disperse up to 25 percent of the bomber force within 24 months. Furthermore, USSTRATCOM will work with the Department of the Air Force and appropriate Geographic Combatant Commands to establish dispersal locations for each bomber squadron and will exercise an initial dispersed alert capability within 12 months of the publication of this NPR. In coordination with USTRANSCOM and USSTRATCOM, the Department of the Air Force will also reconstitute an appropriate alpha alert tanker force required to support the alpha bomber alert missions. The Department of the Air Force and National Guard Bureau will also complete deliberate planning for the reconstitution of the Air Force Reserve and Air National Guard tanker alert mission within six months of this NPR's approval. As part of this combined effort, the Department of the Air Force and USSTRATCOM will prepare a report to the Secretary of War within three months on the feasibility of initial bomber dispersal operations at current tanker bases that have previously hosted alert bomber aircraft.

Furthermore, in coordination with USSTRATCOM, the Air Force shall prepare, fund, and execute actions necessary to convert conventional-only B-52 bombers into nuclear-capable bombers as soon as practical and establish plans for converting conventional-only B-1 bombers for nuclear alert duty as soon as practical. The B-52 bomber force must be converted as quickly as possible, but not later than December 31, 2029, in accordance with 2025 NDAA.

Long term actions

The last B-52H was produced in 1962. Their upgrade to the B-52J is paramount to preventing any potential bomber gap in the future. The Air Force shall complete the B-52J upgrade and bring all 74 bombers to a fully nuclear-capable status as directed by the FY2025 National Defense

Authorization Act, which requires the reconversion of any B-52 bombers that had been previously modified to carry only conventional weapons to conform to the New START Treaty by December 31, 2029.

The B-1B, designed as the B-52 successor in the late 1980s, was converted in the 1990s to conventional missions, disabling its nuclear capabilities to comply with START I. It can carry the largest weapons load in the Air Force. Due to global threats and high bomber demand over the next 5-10 years, the retirement of the B-1B shall be delayed until enough B-52Js and B-21s are available. The B-1B's payload size means it should not be a one-for-one direct replacement. The Air Force will maintain the B-1B fleet to meet readiness and availability standards.

The B-2A is a dual-capable, multi-role heavy bomber and is considered a stealthy, low-observable aircraft. The B-2A can only deploy nuclear gravity bombs and thus must overfly the target. The Air Force shall continue to appropriately sustain and modernize the remaining B-2A inventory until enough B-21s are available. Given the B-2A's payload size means it should not be a one-for-one direct replacement.

The B-21 is a sixth-generation, dual-capable, penetrating-strike stealth bomber currently under development. It resembles the B-2 but is slightly smaller. The B-21 will be capable of "employing a broad mix of stand-off and direct-attack munitions," including the nuclear-armed Long Range Stand Off (LRSO) cruise missile and nuclear gravity bombs. The current program plans for purchasing at least 100 B-21 aircraft, which are expected to begin entering service in the mid-2020s. Within three months of NPR approval, the Department of War, in collaboration with USSTRATCOM and the Department of the Air Force, will assess and inform Congress of the ideal number of B-21 bombers required by 2035 to meet deterrence and defense needs.

The LRSO will replace the 40-year-old AGM-86B Air-Launched Cruise Missile and will become the primary nuclear weapon for the upgraded B-52J bomber as well as the new B-21 bomber. LRSO's long range and stealth allow bombers to strike from safer distances, enhancing flexibility and lethality, while preserving the air leg's survivability against advanced threats. A cornerstone of U.S. nuclear modernization, the air leg of the triad would be a less credible deterrent against evolving threats without enough LRSO missiles. Increasing the number of nuclear-capable B-52s and adding more B-21s would necessarily demand more LRSO missiles to ensure the credibility of deterrence.

Bolster the Land-Based Deterrent

The United States maintains the sole intercontinental ballistic missile force among free nations. It bears a distinctive responsibility to uphold strategic deterrence, reassure allied nations, and counter adversarial ICBM forces. The ICBM is the most responsive and ready leg of the nuclear triad. The Department of War is replacing the Air Force's Minuteman III missile, which is over 50 years old, with the new Sentinel system. The transition is the most complex project the service has ever undertaken.

Bolstering the land-based ICBM force focuses on sustainment of the legacy Minuteman III system, accelerating modernization, and enhancing survivability and readiness. The LGM-35A Sentinel program is not expected to achieve initial operational capability until 2030. Until its replacement is fully mission capable, every effort shall be made to sustain the Minuteman III force.

Near term actions

In anticipation of the suspension, termination, or expiration of New START, the Air Force shall immediately plan for and exercise uploading ICBM warheads as recommended by the *Strategic Posture Commission*. Since the FY2017 NDAA, Congress has required that the Air Force deploy no fewer than 400 on-alert U.S. ICBMs. This is a floor, not a ceiling. Therefore, the Air Force shall ensure that all 450 launch facilities and 45 launch control centers are fully operational and considered “deployed launchers.” Moreover, the Commander of USSTRATCOM will determine and recommend to the Secretary of War the optimal mix of MIRV-enabled ICBMs to enhance the force’s survivability, lethality, and ability to maximize adversary target risk. Plans to achieve the optimal mix of MIRV weapons must be finalized as soon as possible, with implementation within 12 months of this NPR’s approval. The Minuteman III force must initiate MIRV uploads as soon as practical, with 50 percent of the force uploaded and fully mission-capable within 24 months of this NPR’s approval. Additionally, all efforts shall be made to maximize the MIRV capacities of the oncoming Sentinel missile systems. Additionally, the Department of the Air Force shall devise, develop, or refine launch-on-assured-warning capabilities and options for the President to consider within 12 months of this NPR’s approval.

Long term actions

Emerging adversary threats require added survivability of our second-strike capability. In response to these threats and to meet mission requirements the Secretary of War, in conjunction with USSTRACOM and U.S. Air Force, will immediately devise a plan to implement mobile ICBM options as outlined by the *Strategic Posture Commission* report. The plan should leverage synergies in infrastructure and geography that result from enhancing bomber force dispersal and asset survival. This will give pause to any adversary intent on a first strike. Mobile systems are a staple within adversary nuclear triads and present a targeting challenge to U.S. forces while forming the backbone of their secure second-strike capability. The U.S. must impose this cost and targeting challenge on our nuclear adversaries in kind while enhancing America’s second-strike deterrent threat survivability.

Reconstitute and Enhance the Sea-Based Deterrent

Enhancing the U.S. sea-based deterrent requires multiple strategic time-phased improvements to optimize its capability in the shortest time possible. The immediate imperative is to restore capabilities surrendered during previous or expired treaty obligations to an operational status and to reconstitute the strategic delivery vehicle capacity.

With increased urgency of countering Chinese aggression in the Pacific, the U.S. must prioritize a regional approach that ensures a robust NATO deterrence posture while focusing on the primary challenge, deterring and defeating Chinese military expansion in the Indo-Pacific. In both cases, regional allies must play a more active and substantial role in building regional deterrent capabilities that ensure the common defense and strategic deterrence.

This rebuilding effort must consider fiscal and industrial base limitations but should be prioritized highly to restore pre-New START capability levels. It should adopt a time-phased strategy to develop a sea-based deterrent suitable for addressing evolving strategic and regional threats.

Near term actions

Within 12 months of this NPR’s approval, the Commander of USSTRATCOM, in coordination with the U.S. Navy, will determine and recommend to the Secretary of War the reactivation of

decommissioned Submarine-launched Ballistic Missile (SLBM) launch tubes on *Ohio*-class SSBNs during regular maintenance cycles. Additionally, the Commander USSTRATCOM will recommend a limited-Service Life Extension Program (SLEP) for the necessary number of the *Ohio*-class boats to mitigate risk in the delayed *Columbia*-class program. Furthermore, the Trident II D5 SLBMs must be maintained to support extended service and missile capacity of the *Ohio*-class SSBN.

Since 1984, the U.S. has regarded nuclear-armed Sea-launched Cruise Missiles (SLCMs) on submarines and surface ships as a cost-effective and operationally efficient option against a wide range of targets. Nuclear-armed SLCMs across multiple vessels complicate an attacker's planning and enhance the overall survivability of the force. Within 24 months of this NPR's approval, the U.S. Navy will redeploy either the nuclear-armed *Tomahawk* land-attack cruise missiles (TLAM-N) or sea-launched cruise missile-nuclear (SLCM-N) on *Ohio*-class nuclear-powered guided missile submarines (SSGNs) to provide increased regional deterrence and low-yield escalation management and response options that do not compromise the security and sanctuary of the *Ohio*-class SSBN strategic deterrent. Starting with the SSGNs, these actions would enhance the potential at-sea deterrent by 30 percent without requiring the addition of a new ship or submarine. Additionally, they must delay the scheduled retirement of the *Ohio*-class SSGNs until a replacement is fully deployed.

Mid term actions

Replace the TLAM-N with a modernized SLCM-N. The 2018 NPR called for the development and deployment of a SLCM-N as an immediate acquisition requirement to provide a flexible low-yield nuclear deterrent option for both the Indo-Pacific and NATO theaters as a “prudent option for enhancing the flexibility and diversity of U.S. nuclear capabilities to help address emerging deterrence requirements in the near term and beyond.”

Cruise missiles present a dramatic and cost-effective strategy for imposing costs, enabling simultaneous multi-axis attacks without concerns about ballistic overflight. This approach exponentially increases the adversary's defensive complexities and the target's vulnerability.

Long term actions

The revitalization of the defense industrial base is a critical imperative for the long-term strength of the United States. On April 9, 2025, President Donald J. Trump signed Executive Order 14269, titled “Restoring America’s Maritime Dominance”, which establishes a national policy to revitalize and rebuild the U.S. maritime industrial base, citing national security and economic prosperity concerns.

- Maritime Action Plan (MAP): Mandates the development of a comprehensive strategy within 210 days to revitalize maritime industries.
- Defense Production Act (DPA) Utilization: Directs the Secretary of War to assess options, including the use of DPA Title III authorities, to invest in and expand the maritime industrial base.

Challenges in the submarine/maritime industrial base require urgent attention to meet the demands of the AUKUS submarine program while expanding capacity to accelerate the deployment of *Columbia*-class SSBNs, expanding forward deployment of nuclear-capable submarines in NATO and Indo-Pacific waters, and increasing NATO burden-sharing.

To complement the future *Columbia*-class SSBNs and address the deterrence gap created by the reduced sea-based deterrent capacity resulting from fewer boats and missile tubes, the Secretary of War will explore the potential of adapting and deploying Virginia-class SSNs as SSGNs or building *Columbia*-class SSGNs to enhance SLCM-N deterrent capacity.

Nuclear Command and Control (NC3) Modernization

The NC3 is a system and system of systems by which presidential authority (NC2) is exercised, and operational command and control of nuclear operations are conducted. In 2016, the USAF designated its NC3 system-of-systems as a weapon system to consolidate an otherwise disparate set of legacy systems. Despite its aged and diffused architecture, this system must detect an adversary launch, support a decision on an appropriate response, and facilitate force direction under the most extreme situations. This detect, decide, and direct process takes place in a threat environment that is compressed by modern, multidomain adversary technology.

Ensuring this U.S. capability will forever be required to respond to a nuclear attack on the U.S., its partners, or allies. **This is a no-fail mission!** Without an effective and reliable NC3, our nuclear deterrent lacks credibility. Any potential nuclear adversary must believe that a first strike on America's NC3 system will fail and trigger a catastrophically unacceptable U.S. nuclear response.

The current NC3 modernization program of record must continue with the following considerations:

Near term actions

- Assess and prioritize any integrated tactical warning and attack assessment gaps, including all approaches and altitudes, and begin mitigation.
- Harden and protect the NC3 infrastructure from drone, cyber, and EMP threats.
- Ensure regular senior leader involvement in planning and execution exercises, including the line of succession of cabinet officers identified in the Presidential Succession Act of 1947.
- Develop advanced capabilities and tools to fortify and expedite the detect, decide, and direct process of the NC3 planning and communications cycle, including the appropriate use of artificial intelligence. A combination of artificial intelligence and robust data analytics will provide a strategic advantage, thus enhancing the U.S. deterrence force posture and messaging. However, America must never allow artificial intelligence to make actual launch decisions, which are reserved for the President alone. A superior integration of NC3 and artificial intelligence will improve situational awareness, facilitate faster decision-making, and accelerate effective communication.

Long term actions

- Eliminate any integrated tactical warning and attack assessment gaps to include subsurface approaches, hypersonic attack systems, and small drone challenges.

Immediately Upgrade Deterrence and Response Posture

The Biden Administration officially declared the post-Cold War era over in 2022, marking the beginning of a new era of Great Power Competition. Given the actions of the People's Republic of China and the Russian Federation, it would be negligent for the U.S. to maintain its post-Cold War Alert Posture.

Moscow, Beijing, and Pyongyang are making significant strides in developing, modernizing, and increasing their nuclear arsenals and delivery systems. The current strategic landscape is increasingly characterized by transactional relationships and pacts among U.S. nuclear-armed rivals and those aspiring to join their nuclear ranks. This situation represents a national security emergency.

Activities such as technology transfers, military deployments, joint exercises incorporating nuclear simulations, sanction-defying trade, and mutual endorsements of each other's breaches of international law are becoming more frequent. The potential for simultaneous, near-simultaneous, or opportunistic conflicts across different theaters further complicates escalation dynamics. The U.S. must never presume that our opponents are not serious about their investments or intentions.

Adherence to New START and other arms control treaties, considering the Chinese nuclear breakout and the violations of international arms control regimes by both China and Russia, has strategically handicapped the United States. The United States must never tolerate treaty violations, nor should it remain in any treaty by itself. Arms control and international agreements must strengthen, not endanger, the security of the United States—no treaty should ever become a suicide pact that endangers American sovereignty or the lives of its citizens.

China's economic and military rise, along with Russia's aggressive reassertion in Europe and surrounding regions, presents America with a vastly complicated and competitive landscape. It involves military power, economic rivalry, technological prowess, cyber warfare, information campaigns, and global influence. As competition continues and nations pursue their interests, America's nuclear deterrent helps to maintain the gap between competition and conflict.

This new era of great power competition also requires a different deterrence force posture. To ensure that the U.S. can effectively deter large-scale or nuclear conflict in this new era, America must now establish and implement a more responsive, diverse, and flexible force posture—one that more closely resembles the Cold War era rather than the post-Cold War period.

“For only when our arms are sufficient beyond doubt can we be certain beyond doubt that they will never be employed.”

– President John F. Kennedy, January 20, 1961

VI. THE HEDGE STRATEGY: DEPLOYING RESERVE NUCLEAR CAPABILITIES

From 1994 to 2022, the U.S. continued to stockpile non-deployed nuclear weapons as a hedge against technological and strategic risk, as well as adversarial strategic nuclear breakout. With the abandonment of the New START framework by the Russian Federation, the nuclear breakout by China, the pace of North Korean nuclear maturation, and the inability to address the significant imbalance in non-strategic theater nuclear weapons, the U.S. must immediately employ the hedge stockpile to address growing strategic and regional nuclear risks.

Hedging against an uncertain future without effective treaties or against adversaries who rapidly expand and modernize their nuclear arsenals means preparing for various nuclear threats. The U.S., its allies, and partners that depend on U.S. deterrence cannot afford to be caught unprepared or on the wrong side of the nuclear coercion equation. We must hedge when formal arms control treaties are absent or ineffective to adapt to geopolitical shifts.

To meet emerging threats, the U.S. must highlight increasing the number of deployed strategic weapons and non-strategic theater nuclear weapons in regions of concern. The priorities for stockpile management and deployment are as follows:

- Prepare appropriate warheads for uploading onto existing Minuteman III ICBMs to restore full MIRV capability.
- Prepare appropriate warheads for uploading onto existing Trident II D5 SLBMs to include additional missiles for reopened tubes.
- Refurbish and rearm remaining BGM-109 TLAM-N cruise missiles with the W-80 warhead for deployment on submarines and surface ships to meet *Shared Regional Deterrence* objectives.
- Restore and refurbish all remaining B-61s not already designated -12 or -13 and prepare for future deployment.
- Implement the *Strategic Posture Commission's* modernization recommendations.
- Expand production of new nuclear warheads to meet future deterrence needs.
- Update stockpile sustainment and rapid reconstitution planning.

Stockpile modernization is essential to meet the growing threat, constitutes a national security emergency, and may require a waiver of regulatory obstacles to the expansion of the nuclear weapons industrial base. As such, the **Defense Production Act (DPA)** must be invoked to meet this emergency.

The Stockpile Stewardship and Management Plan (SSMP) is the roadmap to ensure a safe, secure, and effective nuclear deterrent for the U.S. The SSMP can no longer be a retirement protocol for America's nuclear warheads and bombs. It must now serve as a blueprint for developing the most modern, vibrant, and robust next-generation nuclear weapons.

The Secretaries of War and Energy will suspend further retirements and accelerate the:

- W78 Warhead preparations for immediate Minuteman III upload
- W80-4 Life Extension Program (LEP)
- W87-1 Modification Program
- W93 warhead deployment
- Completion of the W88 Alteration of 370 warheads
- Sustain the B83-1 at maximum capacity
- Redeployment of the TLAM-N systems
- Establishment of a program of record for the Land and Sea-Launched Cruise Nuclear Missiles
- Execution of the B61-13 upgrade program

During the Cold War, the U.S. produced well over 1,000 pits per year (PPY). Experts have noted that Russia can produce between 1,200 and 2,000 plutonium pits for nuclear weapons modernization in a single year. China is estimated to have the capability to produce 200 nuclear pits annually. Therefore, the Secretaries of War and Energy must redouble America's pit production program to not less than 160 PPY by 2027 and 500 PPY by 2032.

“Conventional weapons have never been enough to deter war. Two world wars showed us that. They also showed us how terrible a war fought even with conventional weapons can be, yet nuclear weapons have deterred not only nuclear war but conventional war in Europe as well. Without far greater trust and confidence between East and West than exists at present, a world without nuclear weapons would be less stable and more dangerous for all of us.”

– UK PM Margaret Thatcher, March 30, 1987

VII. STRENGTHENING REGIONAL DETERRENCE

Russian aggression in their near abroad, Chinese provocations in the Asia-Pacific, and a menacing North Korea inextricably link regional escalation dynamics to the probability of opportunistic or coordinated nuclear coercion or employment. Additionally, Russian and Chinese warfighting doctrines and regional ambitions pose significant risks and can be highly provocative to their Western opponents. Both countries explicitly state that nuclear and other weapons of mass destruction can have legitimate use in limited or regional conflicts, should they deem it necessary to win or prevent a catastrophic loss. Therefore, the U.S. must ensure that an adversary cannot employ strategies like “escalate-to-deescalate” or “escalate-to-win”—like Russia’s Ivanov Doctrine—that rely on threats or limited nuclear use to pressure an opponent into stopping military actions or ending a conflict on advantageous terms, due to the absence of American non-strategic nuclear options.

During the New START negotiations, Russia maintained that there would be no future talks on “non-strategic” nuclear arms, in which Russia held a significant numerical advantage. Putin also warned that any U.S. conventional attack on Russian strategic assets or command and control/leadership would provoke a nuclear response. Over time, these actions have shown that Russia and China intend to establish regional nuclear dominance, which hampers U.S. foreign policy and secures regional freedom of action, including in the Arctic.

To avoid these perils, the United States and its allies have a long and storied history of working collectively to deter aggression, uphold international stability, and protect mutual interests. This includes commitments, such as those in NATO, where an attack on one is considered an attack on all, as well as bilateral treaties aimed at promoting peace, averting conflict, and preserving a rules-based international order. These regional security arrangements focus on shared regional deterrence, which involves American extended nuclear deterrence and the guaranteed protection provided by America’s “nuclear umbrella.”

Shared Regional Deterrence

Shared Regional Deterrence is a cooperative defense strategy in which multiple allied or partner nations deliberately collaborate to deter potential aggression within a specific geographic region. This approach to collaborative deterrence emphasizes:

- **Tailored deterrence:** Strategies and capabilities are proportionally customized to address the distinct threats, actors, geopolitical and geographical conditions, and security dynamics of each region. Because regional threats to stability often overlap with U.S. strategic interests, tailored deterrence not only enhances local security but also advances broader American security interests.

- **Credible signaling:** A joint force posture seeks to convince adversaries that any attack would provoke a coordinated and effective response from multiple nation-states. Regular demonstrations of cooperation, exercises, and intelligence sharing can enhance this.
- **Collective responsibility and integrated capabilities:** Deterrence responsibilities must be fairly shared among allies to maintain a credible and resilient defense posture. Effective pooling of resources and operational responsibilities projects unity and strengthens deterrence. Conversely, “free riding” allies who rely on U.S. protection while underfunding their own defense weaken the alliance’s credibility, cohesion, and readiness. Persistent underinvestment creates capability gaps, impairs interoperability and logistics, and erodes public support. By insisting on equitable burden-sharing, the United States empowers partners through shared responsibility—an expression of respect that affirms they are not dependents, but essential contributors to deterring war and defending the rules-based international order.

Shared Regional Deterrence suggests a strategy of widely dispersed U.S nuclear capability for survival and forward based for flexibility and credibility during a regional crisis. Regional allied forces must also actively and meaningfully integrate into their shared deterrent responsibility by mutually providing non-nuclear capabilities, readiness, infrastructure, and intelligence contributions, maximizing the specific core competencies and geography of associated allies and partners. Shared Regional Deterrence must include the following activities to meet future challenges on time:

- Mandatory nuclear crisis decision training for associated allies and partners not encumbered by the United Nations’ *Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons*.
- Acquisition and deployment of ally and partner capabilities and capacities that complement the shared deterrence mission.
- Tailored regional escalation management planning—non-nuclear only for states encumbered by the United Nations’ *Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons*.
- Compulsory deterrence exercises, designed to display power and interoperability.
- Forward-based, survivable deterrence capability and capacity--non-nuclear only for states encumbered by the United Nations’ *Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons* or those states encumbered by any United Nations’ Nuclear-weapon-free zone agreement.

Enhance Credibility

Regional Deterrence Credibility is the cornerstone of deterrence, enabling **stability**. Having U.S. forces permanently forward deployed sends an unmistakable signal to our adversaries that we view regional deterrence as vital to the U.S. national interest. U.S. nuclear extended deterrence is vital for allies like Australia, Japan, South Korea, and NATO members, assuring them against nuclear threats from nuclear-armed autocracies like North Korea, China, or Russia. America’s nuclear assurance enhances allied security, discourages nuclear proliferation, and sustains alliance cohesion, but it depends on credible U.S. commitments, demonstrable capabilities, and, when necessary, regional deployment for effectiveness.

Decreasing Nuclear Expertise Is A Source Of Instability

A nation that does not understand nuclear dynamics cannot manage them. Poorly informed public and political leadership, both domestically and amongst allies and partners, can lead to detrimental security and stability policy decisions based on geostrategic misconceptions or political expedience rather than sound strategic judgment. Moreover, misinterpreting adversary signals in a crisis can lead to miscalculations, inadvertent escalation, or underreaction to bona fide threats or dangers.

The regional hosting and provision of dual-capable weapons systems, effective surveillance and warning, efficient command and control, and the deployment of integrated missile, air, and maritime defense capabilities demonstrate mutual resolve and the ability to coordinate and manage actions during a crisis escalation.

Nuclear Operations Integration

The comprehensive and adaptable integration of nuclear operations and deterrence into every regional alliance and suitable partnership provides greater strategic depth and crisis flexibility than America's current force posture alone can offer. Shared Regional Deterrence expands strategic choices and decreases the risk of regional opportunism or nuclear coercion during a crisis. The current modernization and recapitalization of the U.S. nuclear enterprise present a unique opportunity to forge shared deterrence partnerships that are greater than the sum of their parts. Leveraging allied capabilities in organic dual-capable air, land, sea, space, and cyber systems can forge a global network of partners working together to reduce the threat of instability and adversary opportunism.

Basing nuclear-capable bombers in or adjacent to critical regions increases familiarity with the region and ensures a responsive capability during any regional crisis without the need to diminish America's strategic homeland deterrence posture. Whether signaling U.S. commitments over the DMZ or projecting deterrence in Europe, America's dual-capable bombers have been in high demand for the last three decades. The U.S. must **assemble a Western bomber fleet** to meet a growing need, anticipating continued high demand. Leveraging and expanding the AUKUS agreement and allowing and encouraging the UK and Australia to re-enter the ranks of strategic bomber capabilities would lower acquisition costs and provide an additional allied squadron of B-21s in each major region. This would enhance regional power-projection capabilities in the Indo-Pacific, Europe, and the Arctic.

Relying on the most survivable leg of the strategic nuclear triad to message allied assurance and provide low-yield theater response options provides minimal flexibility and responsiveness while needlessly exposing the U.S.'s few ballistic missile submarines. This effort can be carried out more effectively and with less risk by using theater-based nuclear-tipped Long-Range Stand-Off (LRSO) missiles and other cruise missile variants.

To strengthen regional deterrence credibility and operational resilience, shared efforts would include deploying future LRSOs and SLCM-Ns, as well as encouraging allied participation in integrated nuclear force-support procedures. Allied conventional capability and capacity, purposed to support US nuclear operations in support of regional deterrence, would include both attack submarines (SSNs) and surface combatants equipped with land-attack missile systems, alongside dual-capable air assets.

Such horizontal dispersion of capability to support nuclear operations contributes to overall survivability by denying the adversary a limited set of high-value targets and instead presenting a

geographically and operationally diverse strike network. This approach enables flexible control and warhead assignment in accordance with U.S. policy while reinforcing allied commitment and regional ownership of the deterrent mission.

An essential pillar of shared regional deterrence is protecting regionally based forces through robust, multilayered, **integrated theater missile defense systems**. Given the increasing sophistication of adversary arsenals, which includes hypersonic glide vehicles, maneuverable reentry vehicles, and saturation-level ballistic salvos, the survivability of dispersed nuclear delivery platforms cannot be assured without comprehensive regional missile defense cooperation. To this end, allies must contribute materially to theater missile defense architectures tailored to their region. This includes co-locating forward-based sensors and interceptors, participating in distributed battle management networks, and deploying capable air defense munition systems.

“China has surpassed the U.S. in the number of ICBM launchers – this should serve as a wake-up call for the United States. It is not an understatement to say that the Chinese nuclear modernization program is advancing faster than most believed possible. We have no time to waste in adjusting our nuclear force posture to deter both Russia and China. This will have to mean higher numbers and new capabilities.”

– U.S. Senators Deb Fischer (R-Neb.), Ranking Member of the Subcommittee on Strategic Forces, and Roger Wicker (R-Miss.), Ranking Member of the Senate Armed Services Committee, and U.S. Representatives Mike Rogers (R-Ala.), Chairman of the House Armed Services Committee, and Doug Lamborn (R-Colo.), Chairman of the Subcommittee on Strategic Forces, February 7, 2023

VIII. STRATEGIC FORCE MODERNIZATION AND INVESTMENT PRIORITIES

The post–Cold War “nuclear procurement holiday,” born of misplaced optimism in the 1990s and prolonged through the Global War on Terror, proved a perilous miscalculation. The United States now faces the consequences of deferred modernization and must act decisively to restore and sustain the nuclear deterrent required for Peace Through Strength.

The nuclear modernization program, formulated fifteen years ago, is no longer sufficient to sustain credible deterrence in the face of new and evolving threats. The U.S. legacy systems are decades past their intended service life, and the U.S. has no margin left for delaying the modernization of its nuclear forces. Moreover, with the atrophy of our critical nuclear core competencies and defense industrial base, it is unlikely that the planned recapitalization will be delivered on time or on budget.

The *Strategic Posture Commission* noted in its 2023 report, “the current U.S. strategic posture will be insufficient to achieve the objectives of U.S. defense strategy in the future due to the rapid advancement of the threat, particularly the nuclear threat of two peer adversaries. Urgent, significant change is required in the U.S. overall strategic posture, particularly with respect to U.S. nuclear posture. Furthermore, the *Strategic Posture Commission* also noted:

“The current multi-program, multi-decade U.S. nuclear modernization program is necessary, but not sufficient to enable the nuclear strategy recommended by the Commission to address an unprecedented two-nuclear-peer threat environment. To avoid additional risk and meet emerging challenges, the United States must act now to pursue additional measures and programs. Additional measures beyond the planned modernization of strategic delivery vehicles and warheads may include either or both qualitative and quantitative adjustments in the U.S. strategic posture.”

America’s nuclear rivals are modernizing and expanding their next generation of nuclear forces, regardless of cost. The U.S. is behind in modernization, and we must therefore accelerate our pace of modernization and adopt new strategies. Therefore, the following must be considered key national priorities to keep pace:

- The current strategic nuclear triad modernization/recapitalization program of record, including NC3 modernization, must be continued without delay and in parallel with a deliberate effort. The U.S. will make every effort to accelerate the development and delivery of all systems.

- The U.S. must immediately cease all warhead dismantlement and begin urgent refurbishment of the remaining 2,000 retired warheads. The provisions of the 2025 NDAA, including salvaging the B83 bombs and W-76 warheads from retirement, will be implemented immediately. In conjunction with the 2023 decision to build a B61-13 bomb, the Secretaries of War and Energy must ensure the reconditioning and deployment of every weapon in the active and inactive stockpiles necessary to meet policy requirements as soon as possible.
- Every effort must be made to explore, devise, develop, and implement new nuclear capabilities by converting current conventional weapon delivery systems to nuclear as appropriate. This will expand the future options addressing the collective threat posed by America's two nuclear peers and their junior partners.

These additional measures are necessary to ensure effective deterrence in a multi-nuclear peer environment, where the current program of record is inadequate to address the pacing threats. Planning and programming for such capabilities must begin now to enable the industrial base and production infrastructure to respond in a timely manner to address the challenges of the 2026-2035 period.

The top investment and acquisition priority of the Department of War and the Department of Energy shall be restoring, modernizing, and expanding nuclear deterrence capabilities to ensure the maintenance of peace and the security of the United States homeland and those of our regional allies and security partners. These priorities specifically include:

1. Fully fund and expand the Nuclear Triad

- Resume partial bomber ground alert and improve dispersal of the bomber alert force. The USSTRATCOM, in consultation with the Air Force, will immediately determine the requirements for a dispersed ground alert force of bomber and tanker aircraft and establish an implementation timeline. The use of dispersal bases is directed. By activating an armed rapid alert force, the adversary's targeting will become more complicated, thereby increasing the survivability of nuclear forces for second-strike capabilities. Furthermore, these actions will communicate greater resolve to deter a first-strike nuclear attack.
- **Re-MIRV** alert *Minuteman III* ICBMs to a three-warhead configuration to the maximum extent practicable.
- **Re-load** vacant but capable launch facilities with alertable *Minuteman III* ICBMs loaded to a three-warhead configuration to the maximum extent practicable.
- **Rearm (and delay retirement of) all four Ohio-class SSGNs** from conventionally armed TLAM cruise missiles to nuclear armed cruise missiles (TLAM-N/SLCM-N) to bolster regional deterrence capabilities. The TLAM-N/SLCM-N does not violate the New START, and it increases America's sea-based nuclear deterrent by 28 percent without the cost of any new nuclear submarines.
- **Return** nuclear-armed SLCM to a deployed status on *Virginia-class SSNs* and appropriate surface combatants to provide regional low-yield escalation response options. These deployments enhance regional deterrence and assure regional allies in the Western Pacific and NATO.

- **Reconfigure** *Ohio-class* SSBNs to their pre-New START SLBM configurations.
- SLEP six (6) *Ohio* Class SSBNs to mitigate risk in the *Columbia* SSBN program and ensure increased sea-based second-strike capability.
- **Accelerate** *the Columbia-class SSBN program* to avoid a shortfall in at-sea deterrent forces.
- **Delay the retirement of B-1 and B-2** nuclear-capable bombers to maintain adequate bomber numbers and payload capacity until enough B-21s are deemed fully mission-capable, first to cover the nuclear deterrence mission and then the non-nuclear mission sets.
- **Re-nuclearize** B-52 aircraft that were previously de-nuclearized under suspended and/or expired arms control agreements and consider re-nuclearizing the B.1 for ground alert.
- **Accelerate** the acquisition of the B-21 Raider bomber and determine the number of bombers required to adequately support global commitments. Ensure that a sufficient payload capacity is maintained as older systems are retired.
- **Study the potential sale** of B-21 aircraft to AUKUS as part of an increased buy of B-21 aircraft. This strategy reinstates organic heavy bomber capabilities to address regional conventional and nuclear requirements without adding deployment stress to U.S. bomber forces and provides B-21-compatible forward basing options for crisis management.
- **Construct hardened shelters for strategic bombers and tankers to mitigate risks and deter potential attacks** on high-value assets. While the B-21 will be nearly impossible to detect or destroy in flight, it will be vulnerable when on the ground. Bombers and tankers routinely exposed on open tarmacs are at risk of a potential first strike and drone attacks like those observed in the Ukraine-Russia conflict.
- **Accelerate and expand** the acquisition of the **Long-Range Stand-Off (LRSO)** nuclear-armed cruise missile. Design and deploy variants of LRSO to include a Long-Range Sea-Launched Option (LRSLO) and a Long-Range Ground-Launched Option (LRGLO) nuclear variant, to meet regional non-strategic deterrence shortfalls.
- **Develop and deploy** a stand-off nuclear munition for dual-capable aircraft, including the F-35. A nuclear-tipped missile designed for a small airframe fighter aircraft would allow greater flexibility and enable penetration of adversary anti-access capabilities, enhancing the regional deterrent. This might include converting the JASSM ER into a JASSM ER-N.
- The Service Secretaries **shall study and present options** for the implementation of nuclear-armed supersonic and hypersonic missiles into their strategic plans.
- **Sustain**, do not retire **the B83-1 bomb until a replacement** megaton-class nuclear weapon **is deployed**. The B83-1 is America's only megaton-class nuclear weapon.

- **Continue to develop, modernize, and deploy** the B61-13 nuclear bomb as programmed. Identify additional B-61 variants in the stockpile for -13 upgrades and seek additional funding for modernization.
 - **Accelerate** the *Sentinel* ICBM deployment (using DPA), including fielding a **mobile version** of the *Sentinel* to improve assured second-strike capability.
 - **Implement and accelerate** the stockpile modernization recommendations made by the *Strategic Posture Commission*.
 - Fund forward deployment of non-strategic deterrence capabilities to support the evolution of an extended deterrent to a new *Shared Regional Deterrence* model.
2. **Reconsider the need for larger megaton-class weapons** to hedge against improved accuracy assumptions and expand target coverage options. This is a counter to Russian and Chinese nuclear modernization, and space denial and counter-accuracy efforts. Some options include:
- Develop a W-93-1 warhead with a one megaton yield option. This would be America's only 1 megaton warhead and match Russian, Chinese, and North Korean megaton-yield weapons as a potential negotiation and risk-mitigation strategy.
 - In addition to reconstituting the B83, design and deliver a new class of megaton bomb specifically for the B-21 strategic bomber.
3. **Enhance the NC3 connectivity and resilience**

The NC3 system must operate continuously—before, during, and after any attack on the U.S.—to surveil, assess, and detect the operational environment; facilitate planning and decision-maker conferences; and transmit orders in methods of non-repudiation from the president to U.S. nuclear forces—aircraft dispersed on the ground or in the air, SSBNs submerged, and ICBMs across the continent. **Non-repudiation refers to the capability of ensuring that a party cannot deny the authenticity or integrity of a message or transaction they have sent or received.**

- Hardening the space-based and ground-based NC3 architecture against nuclear, environmental, and cyber threats. The NC3 system of systems infrastructure must be able to execute its assigned detect, decide, and direct mission functions regardless of jamming, spoofing, exploiting, dazzling, as well as other kinetic and non-kinetic disruptions.
- Given the increasing vulnerability of space-based assets to disruption and destruction, the United States must have resilient, alternative communication and surveillance systems that do not rely on space-based technology. Alternative architecture should leverage terrestrial, airborne, and undersea capabilities to sustain uninterrupted command, control, communications, and situational awareness, even in space-denied environments or following a nuclear first strike. These systems must be rapidly deployable, interoperable across domains, and hardened against electronic warfare and cyber threats. Diversifying beyond space-based systems is essential to maintaining reliable connectivity and strategic warning under all conditions, ensuring that no adversary can perceive or exploit gaps in U.S. decision-making or nuclear response capability. The assured existence of such alternative systems reinforces deterrence by

making clear that no attack—no matter how sophisticated—can prevent a guaranteed and catastrophic retaliation.

Develop new capabilities

- No longer will the adversary remain unburdened by the fear of American mobile ICBMs. No longer should America’s nuclear enemies have the potential to use “nuclear blackmail”—the threatened continued use of nuclear weapons after a disarming counterforce strike to force surrender. America will develop and deploy a mobile ICBM system to ensure survivability and provide a second-strike capability, thereby complicating adversary targeting and mirroring the risks they pose to the United States.
 - Develop and deploy long-range nuclear-armed hypersonic glide vehicles and nuclear-armed hypersonic missiles to address similar adversary capabilities, thereby mirroring the risks they pose to the United States.
 - Deploy “Iron Dome/Golden Dome” point defense systems to protect deterrence forces against an adversary counterforce first strike and limit societal damage, as directed in Executive Order 14186, “The Iron Dome for America.”
 - Build and prioritize a robust academic, operational, and analytic capability to anticipate trends and shifts in the global nuclear security environment and advocate for next-generation deterrence systems required to meet a continuously evolving threat.
4. The greatest threat of nuclear war stems from regional conflicts that rapidly escalate due to mistakes, misunderstandings of the adversary, and the profound general atrophy of nuclear deterrence and crisis management skills at the national and regional levels. To address this pre-eminent nuclear threat, the Department of War, in coordination with the Department of State, will develop an urgent program to reconstitute lost corporate knowledge sufficient to meet this challenge. Within six months of release, the Departments will implement initial nuclear crisis management training for senior department, military, and National Security Council members, culminating within one year in a tabletop exercise including senior government officials and those in the immediate line of succession under continuity of government plans.
- Conduct Continuity of Government exercises with key personnel that incorporate nuclear escalation scenarios.
 - Exercise Nuclear Crisis Management annually to coincide with the Presidential election cycle to ensure incoming senior leaders are exposed to and have practiced nuclear crisis management as soon as practicable after the peaceful transition of power.
 - Develop a schedule of exercises that includes regional commanders in senior-leader/decision-making positions.
 - Each regional combatant commander will institute an annual regional nuclear crisis management staff exercise, including shared regional deterrence partner nations.

“Today we need a nation of minute men; citizens who are not only prepared to take up arms, but citizens who regard the preservation of freedom as a basic purpose of their daily life and who are willing to consciously work and sacrifice for that freedom.”

– President John F. Kennedy, January 29, 1961

IX. REBUILDING THE NUCLEAR DETERRENCE WORKFORCE

The United States' ability to sustain a credible and effective nuclear deterrent depends not only on platforms and warheads, but also on the people who strategize, design, build, operate, and support them. Since the end of the Cold War, the national focus on nuclear weapons and deterrence has diminished significantly. This shift has led to a gradual atrophy of the nuclear enterprise workforce across all levels—from technical trades to advanced scientific research. For the current modernization effort spanning over four decades of development to succeed and remain viable in the future, a dedicated effort in training, education, and retention is required to make the necessary skills available and preserve legacy knowledge.

A Decline in Public Awareness and Education

Over the past three decades, nuclear weapon information has largely disappeared from public discourse and education. Civics curricula in secondary and post-secondary institutions rarely address the structure and function of national security, continuity of government, or the role of nuclear deterrence in averting war. As a result, generations of Americans have a limited understanding of the responsibilities, risks, and strategic imperatives associated with nuclear weapons' purpose, policy, and processes.

This educational gap has contributed to a shrinking pool of young professionals interested in entering the nuclear fields. Without a foundational understanding of the nuclear mission, fewer students pursue relevant degrees or technical training, and even fewer are prepared for careers in the nuclear enterprise.

Critical Shortages in Technical and Scientific Talent

Modernizing the U.S. nuclear deterrent requires a robust, diverse workforce. However, there are acute shortages in both skilled trades and advanced technical disciplines. The nuclear enterprise faces a shortage of technicians, tradespersons, and data entry professionals — roles essential to the refurbishment of aging infrastructure and the deployment of new systems.

Simultaneously, the pipeline for highly skilled research scientists, systems engineers, physicists, and computer programmers with domain-specific knowledge of nuclear systems is insufficient to meet current and projected demands. Many of the experts who built and sustained the Cold War-era deterrent have retired or are nearing retirement, and their replacements are too few and often lack hands-on experience with nuclear systems. Still, many lack an appreciation for the value of nuclear weapons and deterrence, often influenced by the misleading perspective of the disarmament community that vilifies those who serve the nuclear enterprise.

Strategic imperatives for workforce renewal

To address these challenges, the United States must pursue a comprehensive strategy to rebuild the nuclear workforce. This includes:

- **Revitalizing education** in national security, nuclear policy, deterrence theory, and crisis governance through updated civics curricula at public universities and high schools.
- **Expanding technical training pipelines** in partnership with community colleges, trade schools, and apprenticeship programs to replenish the skilled labor force.
- **Investing in early-career development** for scientists and engineers through internships, fellowships, and rotational assignments across the nuclear enterprise.
- **Sustaining institutional knowledge** through mentorship programs and knowledge transfer initiatives between retiring experts and new workforce entrants.
- **Elevating public awareness** of the nuclear mission’s role in national security to inspire a new generation of professionals and inform the citizenry of the value of the nuclear deterrent.

Development initiatives for a sustainable and mission-ready civilian workforce are essential:

- **Programmed budget investment** into education and skill programs that introduce deterrence and foster career pathways into trade skills, technical disciplines.
- **Incentives for educational partnerships** between secondary schools, technical institutes, and universities with key defense contractors and government organizations to familiarize students with career opportunities that align with their disciplines and skills.
- **A national skills tracking framework** to project and communicate critical path workforce needs for nuclear modernization programs, enabling students to align their interests with emerging national security demands.
- **A cross-sector retention and development program** to facilitate career mobility between national laboratories, defense industries, and government agencies—broadening workforce expertise and preserving legacy knowledge across platforms.

Development initiatives for a military workforce include deliberate steps to guarantee that nuclear mission readiness is integrated throughout the force. Key initiatives include:

- **Mandatory nuclear deterrence and operations training** across all service branches, tailored to skill level and rank, to ensure that all government and contracted personnel understand the strategic importance and operational demands of the nuclear mission.
- **A nuclear skills and assignment tracking system** to manage personnel with nuclear expertise, monitor career progression, and provide an annual readiness and development report to the Secretary of War on effectiveness and shortages.
- **Targeted recruiting and ROTC incentives** to attract candidates with critical skills in nuclear operations, engineering, cyber, and command and control systems—ensuring a steady pipeline of qualified officers, enlisted, and civilian personnel.

The future of U.S. nuclear deterrence hinges not only on the systems America constructs, but also on the workforce empowered to build and maintain them. Reversing the decline in nuclear workforce capacity is essential. It is a strategic imperative.

“We now find ourselves in nothing short of a new nuclear age, an unprecedented mix of multiple revisionist nuclear challengers who are uninterested in arms control or risk reduction efforts, each rapidly modernizing and expanding their nuclear arsenals and openly threatening to employ nuclear weapons to achieve their aims. Absent a change in the nuclear trajectories of the PRC, Russia, and North Korea, we may reach a point where a change in the size or posture of our current deployed forces is necessary.”

-- Dr. Vipin Narang, Acting Assistant Secretary of Defense for Space Policy, August 1, 2024

X. CONCLUSIONS

In today's increasingly complex and volatile security environment, the United States must maintain a safe, secure, effective, reliable, modern, and lethal nuclear arsenal—one that America and the free world can take pride in. Both the American people and our allies must have unwavering confidence in the credibility and effectiveness of the U.S. nuclear deterrent. America's nuclear posture will continue to anchor strategic and global stability, providing credible extended deterrence to allies and advancing the broader objectives of the National Defense Strategy. To preserve this foundation of peace through strength, the United States must expedite the completion of ongoing strategic triad modernization, accelerate upgrades to its nuclear force posture, and pursue innovative methods to deter strategic competitors across the full spectrum of conflict.

Our autocratic rivals have little motivation to restart arms control negotiations because they do not fear America's nuclear posture or politics. Therefore, America and its allies and partners must prepare for a world without meaningful nuclear arms reduction treaties and instead design a dynamic strategy to achieve and maintain nuclear “parity.” Once our autocratic rivals change their perspective, abandon their revanchist goals, and actively support the rules-based international order rather than reject it, the United States can pursue practical approaches to arms control. Recognizing the catastrophic risks posed by large-scale conventional and nuclear coercion or attack, America will invest in deterrence to reduce those dangers by strengthening the role of nuclear weapons in our national security strategy, understanding that any effort to lessen their global importance weakens the West's ability to deter aggression.

In a world where nuclear-armed rivals and adversaries are modernizing and expanding their arsenals, nuclear weapons continue to provide unique deterrent effects unmatched by any other element of U.S. military power. For the foreseeable future, our nuclear forces will not only remain an essential component of America's defense and deterrence posture, but they will also be our top priority. Only with a strong and adaptable deterrent can we shape the conditions necessary for global peace, stability, and long-term security, and thus achieve the vision of “peace through strength.”

References

- Nuclear Posture Review, 2018
- Nuclear Posture Review, 2022
- *America's Strategic Posture: Final Report of the Congressional Commission on the Strategic Posture of the United States*, 2023
- *Dynamic Parity: A New Approach to American Nuclear Deterrence*, 2024
- *The 2025 Director of National Intelligence Threat Assessment*
- Nuclear Stockpile Hedge Capabilities & Activation Timelines
- Extended Deterrence Forward Deployment Options

FINAL NOTES

This **2026 NPR** proposal represents a decisive **course correction** aimed at restoring nuclear deterrence credibility in an era of collective, multipolar nuclear threats. Unlike previous NPRs, which prioritized **risk reduction and arms control**, this strategy **recognizes the urgency** of addressing an unstable security environment through **modernization, force expansion, and escalation management**.

This posture ensures that the **U.S. and its allies remain free and secure** through **unparalleled strategic flexibility, survivability, and credible nuclear deterrence at every level of conflict**.