

National Institute for Deterrence Studies & Peter Huessy Seminar

The Challenges to Ensuring Nuclear Deterrence with Lt. Gen Armagost

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Webinar Transcript

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Abstract

In this virtual Huessy Seminar hosted by the **National Institute for Deterrence Studies (NIDS)** and moderated by **Peter Huessy, Lieutenant General Jason Armagost**, Deputy Commander of **Air Force Global Strike Command** and Deputy Commander for **Air Forces Strategic–Air, U.S. Strategic Command**, offers a comprehensive assessment of the evolving nuclear deterrence landscape amid intensifying great-power competition.

General Armagost situates today's deterrence challenges within a broader historical context, examining the transition from Cold War bipolarity to a complex, multipolar strategic environment shaped by simultaneous nuclear competition with Russia and China. He discusses the implications of adversary force structures that emphasize precision, dual-capable systems, and theater nuclear capabilities, and explores how these developments complicate escalation dynamics, extended deterrence, and crisis stability.

The seminar examines the U.S. nuclear modernization enterprise—including Sentinel, the B-21 Raider, bomber force recapitalization, and nuclear command, control, and communications (NC3)—highlighting the challenge of sustaining uninterrupted operational readiness while modernizing all legs of the nuclear triad simultaneously. General Armagost also addresses the role of strategic signaling, bomber task forces, allied assurance, and global strike operations in reinforcing deterrence below the threshold of conflict.

Throughout the discussion, emphasis is placed on the enduring importance of disciplined force design, resilient command and control, and the human dimension of deterrence. General

Armogost underscores that credible nuclear deterrence ultimately depends not only on platforms and capabilities, but on the professionalism, readiness, and judgment of the men and women entrusted with executing the mission. The seminar provides valuable insights into how U.S. Strategic Command and Air Force Global Strike Command are adapting deterrence strategy for a contested, multi-domain, and multipolar world.

Executive Summary

In this virtual **Huessy Seminar** hosted by the **National Institute for Deterrence Studies (NIDS)** and moderated by **Peter Huessy, Lieutenant General Jason Armogost**, Deputy Commander of **Air Force Global Strike Command (AFGSC)** and Deputy Commander for **Air Forces Strategic–Air, U.S. Strategic Command**, provided a comprehensive assessment of the current and future state of U.S. nuclear deterrence amid rapidly evolving global strategic competition.

General Armogost framed today’s deterrence challenges within the transition from Cold War bipolarity to a **multipolar nuclear environment**, marked by the simultaneous rise of **Russia and China as peer nuclear competitors**. He emphasized that this shift fundamentally alters force-planning assumptions, escalation dynamics, and extended deterrence requirements, particularly as adversaries pursue **precision-enabled, dual-capable, and theater nuclear forces** designed for warfighting and coercive leverage below the strategic threshold.

The discussion highlighted the **central importance of nuclear modernization** in sustaining credible deterrence. General Armogost detailed the scope and complexity of recapitalizing all three legs of the nuclear triad simultaneously—while maintaining day-to-day operational readiness—including progress on **Sentinel**, the **B-21 Raider**, bomber force modernization, and the modernization of **nuclear command, control, and communications (NC3)**. He underscored that delays or capability gaps during this transition period pose strategic risk in a multipolar environment characterized by opportunistic aggression and compressed decision timelines.

A major theme of the seminar was the expanding role of **strategic signaling** and **global strike operations** in deterrence. Bomber Task Force deployments were highlighted as a key mechanism for demonstrating U.S. resolve, assuring allies, integrating partner forces, and reinforcing extended deterrence across regions. General Armogost also addressed how conventional and nuclear capabilities must remain tightly integrated to deny adversaries perceived escalation advantages and to preserve credible response options for national leadership.

The seminar further addressed emerging challenges to deterrence from **cross-domain threats**, including cyber, space, information operations, and unconventional attacks on military and critical infrastructure. General Armagost emphasized that resilient, survivable, and assured command and control—extending across space and cyber domains—is inherent to the deterrence mission and remains a core focus of U.S. Strategic Command and AFGSC.

Throughout the discussion, General Armagost stressed that **deterrence ultimately rests on people**, not platforms alone. He highlighted the professionalism, discipline, and continuous readiness of Airmen, Sailors, and operators as enduring asymmetric advantages of the U.S. deterrent force—advantages that are difficult for adversaries to replicate. Sustaining this human capital, alongside modern capabilities, was identified as essential to long-term deterrence credibility.

The seminar concluded with a reaffirmation that **effective nuclear deterrence is foundational to national security**, enabling the defense of the homeland, assurance of allies, and prevention of great-power conflict. As the United States navigates a period of historic modernization and heightened strategic competition, General Armagost underscored the need for consistent bipartisan support, clear strategic focus, and continued investment in forces, infrastructure, and people to preserve deterrence in an increasingly contested world.

Unabridged Transcript

(Note: there will invariably be some word errors in the following transcript.)

00:00:06:13 - 00:00:31:13

Kimberly Cherington

Good morning. And thank you to everyone for joining us live today. We truly appreciate you taking the time to be part of this important discussion. My name is Kimberly Cherington, and on behalf of the National Institute for Deterrence Studies, I'd like to extend warm wishes to those observing. Happy Easter and Happy Passover. Today it's my pleasure to welcome a special guest, Lieutenant General Jason Armagost.

00:00:31:15 - 00:00:56:09

Kimberly Cherington

General Armagost is the deputy commander of Air Force Global Strike Command and deputy commander for Air Forces Strategic Air at U.S. Strategic Command. A graduate of the U.S. Air Force Academy, General Armagost has led in every level from bomber squadrons and wings to Eighth Air Force. And he served as the chief of Nuclear Operations on the Joint Staff.

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Kimberly Cherington

He has also helped coordinate historic U.S. security assistance efforts in Ukraine. We're

honored to have him here with us today, and we look forward to his remarks. Please join us next Friday as we welcome Mr. Mike white, former Principal Director for Hypersonics, within the office of the Undersecretary of Defense for Research and Engineering. Mr. white will address the urgent need to field both hypersonic strike weapons and counter hypersonic defenses at scale.

00:01:27:13 - 00:01:55:14

Kimberly Cherington

To register for this event and all of our upcoming events, we invite you to visit our website at Thinkdeterrence.com, where we also house, previous videos and transcripts from our past seminars. Throughout today's presentation, we encourage you to submit your questions using the chat function or the Q&A button at the top of your screen. We will address them during the Q&A portion of this seminar.

00:01:56:00 - 00:02:09:09

Kimberly Cherington

Now, I'm pleased to introduce our host and moderator for today's discussion, Mr. Peter Huessy, President of Geo Strategic Analysis and a Senior Fellow here at NIDS. Peter, over to you.

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Peter Huessy

Thank you very much, Kimberly, and I want to welcome General Armagost, who has been a longtime friend and colleague and speaker at a number of seminars and symposiums that I have hosted. I want to welcome you, General, and thank your staff for helping to arrange this. I do want to make, shout out to our many of our sponsors that are here today tuning in.

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Peter Huessy

There's a Systems Planning Analysis, GRC, Bechtel, TechSource, Northrop Grumman and others. I want to thank you for being here and for your support. I also want to welcome our friends from NNSA there are many of you here today, as well as Lawrence Livermore National Lab. And I want to remind people that we have... when we began the series way, way back in 1983, we did events at the Capitol Hill Club over breakfast, and we're going back there on May 15th with Admiral Weeks who is head of the SSBN program.

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Peter Huessy

And then we have General Lutton, who is also going to speak, and I think that's June 3rd again at the Capitol Hill Club. Please let us know that you wish to attend, because we need to get people signed up for that and know how many are going to be coming. General Armagost, on behalf of NIDS and myself, I want to thank you for taking the time to come and talk to us today about the nuclear landscape.

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Peter Huessy

And welcome and over to you, sir.

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Jason Armagost

All right. Thanks, Peter. And thanks, Kimberly, for the introduction. Looking forward to talking here for a little while, but then also interacting with some, some questions that come from the audience. So, I offer that early so that you can prep those and get those out in the, in the, into the chat. It's a, it's a fascinating time.

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Jason Armagost

It's always a fascinating time to talk about this topic, but then also, to kind of wrap it in world events as well, because I will tell you, as the deputy commander now for, Air Force Global Strike Command, we are a busy component of, Stratcom, er component of Stratcom with the bomber, the ICBM leg and a very large chunk of nuclear command and control for the nation, actually, and in, in support of the president for these strategic, these strategic platform strategic weapons and, the strategic geostrategic environment.

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Jason Armagost

So, really, I guess I want to start with context. You know, history is very telling in this, in this, deterrence discussion. It's very telling. And force structure discussions and it's very, very telling in geopolitical aspects of what we're always talking about. And, and clearly now, from the peace dividend of the fall of the Soviet Union in the early 90s, through today and the global war on terror and what that has evolved to in the world environment with, globalization simultaneous.

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Jason Armagost

We're we've really now seen, I think, an entrenched, and dynamic version of a shift from bipolarity to multi polarity, and the context that comes with that drives all kinds of hard questions into things like force structure, forces and, and the legacies we have of what is typically a force that takes a very long time to develop and a lot of infrastructure to really sustain and get to high levels of operational readiness with.

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Jason Armagost

And so obviously, the, the two peer adversaries or peer competitors that we have with Russia and China, the story is very telling and what they've done as well during that peace dividend with how they've structured themselves and the lessons they've learned from us and our force structure and how they have responded geopolitically going forward.

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Jason Armagost

So, I look forward to maybe dive in deeper on that through questions. Clearly, you know, if we're talking about nuclear deterrence, the stakes are extremely high. But it's always worth saying, that, that it has to be part of the discussion and why this is such a, such an emotional topic, such a hard topic and such a, an important topic because the stakes matter, and the stakes matter in a way that have evolved from, I think, quite often called Cold War levels of, understanding about what nuclear weapons mean and what how they were, developed and used, historically for deterrence.

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Jason Armagost

But then also, how they're structured, going forward in the, in the operational environment. So, the stakes matter. They will continue to matter. And as we watch our, our, competitors evolve their force structure, questions will continually be asked about that. So, we have an area of a, an era of persistent geopolitical competition and strategic signaling that's happening, not just through dynamic world events, but also through engineering and infrastructure and innovation that's happening inside of the operational military environment that then plays forward into, nuclear force structure as well.

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Jason Armagost

So, what we at Global Strike Command have to do, we are charged to do, is to provide flexible options to the president that bridge the gap between conventional and nuclear forces. And that is kind of a constant discussion we have internally about what that means and how we develop a professional force and structure ourselves so that there is no gap between our conventional capabilities and our nuclear deterrent.

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Jason Armagost

So, I would offer we have had a modernization imperative for quite some time. We have an endless string of congressional commissions. We have very consistent wording in nuclear posture reviews over numerous administrations now with a lot of consistency about the need to revalidate the triad, but then also to modernize all the legs of the triad.

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Jason Armagost

That has been a consistent message for quite some time. And we are in the midst now of a generational recapitalization that arguably, historically, probably should have started decades ago. So, so that we weren't doing all three at the same time. All three legs of the triad at the same time. But now we're in a state where we have to remain operationally ready, and we have to be dynamic to the responsive needs of, of the president and world events.

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Jason Armagost

And we have to be able to modernize simultaneously. So that's kind of where we are on that. Obviously, with the ICBM, the fielded Minuteman 3, is doing very well. But I would argue that that's on the backs of airmen who work very hard and who have sustained at an incredibly high rate, and have continued to work miracles on a system that was originally designed to be fielded for ten years, that was fueled in the early 70s.

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Jason Armagost

And it's also been very adaptive, to the need. Obviously, Sentinel is going to replace that. That is, evolving rapidly. We now have an administration that has created a, DERP a portfolio manager for strategic systems, with a four star General White in charge who answers directly to the Deputy Secretary of War, who is very clearly and very directly driving on the capabilities implementation in the, in the, acquisition side of, of strategic systems and Sentinel clearly falls in that, in that bucket, the B-21 is, is inbound and doing quite well.

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Jason Armagost

And we are very excited about what that's going to bring to our bomber leg of the triad, as we simultaneously reengineer and provide a new radar system for the B-52, it's going to become the B 52J. So that the both of those efforts are ongoing. And I think one of the fascinating things and maybe we can draw that out through questions as well.

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Jason Armagost

But one of the fascinating things in the design and implementation for B-21, what we have done is we have baked a modernization plan inside of an acquisition plan such that as technologies develop and our field the ball, technological insertion can happen in the B-21 as it's being fielded. So that's, that's pretty exciting to not engineer something.

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Jason Armagost

And then ten years later, receive a, a pre-engineered product that has not evolved for the need. And then obviously we are we are also conducting simultaneously NC3 modernization nuclear command and control communication. Modernization. And that has that's evolving for the cyber and space environment we live in today. But it's also an essential component of command and control for the president to the field and forces that can never, break.

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Jason Armagost

And so, there's a lot of exciting things happening in that as well. We're, ultimately replacing the E4B, the currently fielded E4B with the SAOC. And that system is underway now as well. So, operationally speaking, from global strikes perspective, we have we are always ready. But we have an operational very high operational tempo to maintain those older legacy systems to the need of the nation for strategic deterrence.

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Jason Armagost

But then simultaneously, we are going to field these new systems as, as they come to us. So, a lot of very interesting questions happening now about the size of the force required in a multipolar environment. A lot of interesting questions coming to us about targeting required in a, in a multipolar environment where we have, China rapidly fielding systems and Russia with a mostly modernized system that is also taking some strategic efforts to engineer and in place some very different and destabilizing capabilities as well.

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Jason Armagost

And we can talk about those if that comes up. Okay. So, the modernization gap has to be filled by us, with our operational forces as we go forward, into that newly acquired two legs of the triad systems for global strike command for the nation. So, the other component of this that I find pretty interesting is, how we bridge, really through the 90s, but, through the last couple of decades as well, conventional and nuclear integration and what historically we've had conventional overmatch over the last three decades or so where we can choose to use military force in that time and

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Jason Armagost

place of our choosing with overwhelming force. And, I would say that China and Russia have learned many of the lessons of us demonstrating that and have architected their forces to address that shortfall. And, you know, if we look at the history of strategic deterrence and fielded nuclear forces, there's a lot of advocacy from no nuclear weapons to, you know, disarmament to a strong force for deterrence.

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Jason Armagost

And then but between those that often gets lost, I think, in the in the advocacy discussions as a warfighting component and clearly with dual capable systems, with modernization, Russia and China have both kind of aimed their force structure at that warfighting component of, of nuclear, force design and nuclear structure. And so that's there are some interesting questions.

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Jason Armagost

We can, we can get after there as well. Arguably, I think much of the precision revolution has fully materialized. That was unique to the United States in the 90s, where we could, deliver precise weapons to great effect. That proliferation now of precision has translated, not only up into nuclear weapons capabilities, but also obviously into small, unarmed drone systems and things like that.

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Jason Armagost

So, there's, there's some interesting discussions to be had there. But clearly, if your adversaries are designing a force structure for nuclear warfighting that drives different questions for strategic deterrence as well. So from that perspective, one of the, arguably most interesting things I think we've done, over the last six years or so is bomber task force, we, are deployed on Bomber Task force around 40% of the year, to every theater worldwide, we have integrated with, I think, 64 nations now through Bomber Task force, through exercises, though shared air operations, through communications exercises, and through, theater level exercises.

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Jason Armagost

And so those are quite good at demonstrating to our partners and allies that we have a presence and an assurance for shared operations, shared interests, and also for, the ability to work together in a, in a military capacity. So, that's been quite exciting to see how that plays out as well. And arguably, there is a component of that that demonstrates to our partners and allies the extended deterrence and assurance piece, that is, they're they have high interest in. And then so probably one of the other more interesting things, if you, if you note, the, the verbiage of the Trump administration, from early

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Jason Armagost

2025 to today, you've seen a little bit of an evolution of the language as the National Security Strategy and National Defense Strategy has been fielded. Initially, Secretary of War, heck, Seth was, when he first came into office, was, talking about reestablishing deterrence. Within a very brief time after that, he was, you know, more tailoring his language to, say, reestablishing strategic deterrence.

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Jason Armagost

And as we've watched the national security strategy and then the National Defense Strategy we rolled out, the primary line of effort is defend the homeland. And within that line of effort, there is a subcomponent where it is very directly called out as nuclear modernization, as a component of Defend the Homeland. You can connect that back through historical deterrent behaviors and how we've structured our forces, all the way from the 50s through modern, modern, force structure and modern strategic deterrence, fielded forces efforts.

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Jason Armagost

I think one of the most interesting, ways to study that is really to take a look at the difference between the 1950s and the 1960s, where, we had a large force structure coming out of World War two and Korea and a rapidly evolving geopolitical environment with the Cold War and how we transitioned from, in particular B-47 to B-52 and actually shrunk our force size, but increased our capabilities from the 50s to the 60s, shrunk our forces by about 40%.

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Jason Armagost

But having gone from medium bombers to heavy bombers with the B-52 and accompanying tankers and force projection capabilities, it really shifted the game, on what deterrence means as we evolved our thinking about that as well. So, I think that's an interesting case study to look at from, a US perspective. So that adaptability, through Bomber Task Force into, kind of the gray zone has really played out as well.

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Jason Armagost

Obviously, in the last, less than a year, we have Operation Midnight Hammer with B-2 striking nuclear facilities in Iran in June, in conjunction with Operation Rising Lion. And then, through the fall, other activities in the Middle East around Yemen and then Absolute Resolve in December, January of, this year with, Venezuela and the Caribbean and Eastern Pacific counter cartel activities.

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Jason Armagost

So that has been a way to, show that adaptability and the connection between long range global strike capabilities, which is a Stratcom unified command plan mission and, that gray zone activity where, national security and vital interests are demonstrated and militarily addressed, with bomber and power projection global strike capabilities and all of that translates in my mind, from a military perspective to signaling in the information age.

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Jason Armagost

Arguably from global strikes perspective, we really see our mission as finding and holding at risk targets anywhere in the world as part of our global strike, order through the Unified Command Plan for, the United States Stratcom. And so, to do that and to demonstrate that connects the conventional capabilities through nuclear deterrence and our on our disciplined approach to things like targeting and operations, globally.

9

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Jason Armagost

And so that that's also another very interesting level of discussion. We could, we could undertake. But all of that is underpinned ultimately, from our organized training equip, charge, Air Force Global Strike Command. Really, it's about the people and the platforms and our readiness to conduct those types of operations. And so, we have a now a long history, having been established in 2009, as our Air Force Global strike Command about the core vital reasons of why we exist and our focus on nuclear and strategic deterrence.

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Jason Armagost

But then our ability to, to build a force that is conventionally capable to demonstrate that professionalism, to signal globally and to conduct military operations, that preclude and get us ahead of deterrence, such that our adversaries can clearly see what we're capable of. So that that happens, that's happened over a long period of time.

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Jason Armagost

We have global strike thinkers. We have now, I would argue a generation that is rising to the command levels of colonel and above that have kind of live that life and have seen that what strategic deterrence as an objective means and how that plays out in our new multipolar world. And so that intellectual leadership, that military core leadership that now is rising into the highest levels of field grade is really going to, help proliferate, that approach to strategic deterrence.

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Jason Armagost

So, that's underway. And, and going, well, the future posture. So, within our modernization efforts and our ability to demonstrate fielded forces for conventional operations and make available global strike capabilities. We're also undertaking a lot of innovative approaches to how we conduct global strike communication systems that have to evolve for the age of cyber and space capabilities and the electronic warfare environment as well, is rapidly evolving.

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Jason Armagost

And so, we're constantly innovating to bring those capabilities into our long-range systems and feel them in useful and meaningful ways. And so that is another solid effort that we are undertaking. I would offer also in the age of AI and information operations being prolific and constant, we are seeing how that will play out and undertaking to understand and implement properly, what that means to global strike forces.

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Jason Armagost

And so, there's some command-and-control levels of innovation were undertaken with that. But also, to just reiterate and reestablish the fact that the human component of nuclear and strategic desert deterrence is inherent and will always be a component of that. We, we approach that with, how do we build understanding and a framework for good and fast decisions?

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Jason Armagost

That are ultimately, with humans on the loop and humans in the loop, to conduct strategic deterrence for, for the nation. So we're expanding on that and trying to understand that in meaningful and operational ways going forward at the speed of relevance. And then, I was on a trip last fall with Senator Hoven and the commander of Air Force Global Strike Command time, General Boucher.

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Jason Armagost

And there was a discussion that came up about Golden Dome, and it was very interesting discussion. But, Senator Hoven was quick to point out that America's ability to deter strategic attack, is foundational to, first and foremost, are ready and alert ICBM force, as the first leg of our ability to deter adversaries from making the kind of a mistake on any given day, that would drive them to make a strategic attack on us.

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Jason Armagost

And so, I thought that was a very insightful approach to the Golden Dome discussion as well. So, we could, we can talk about that if you'd like to hear. And then I would just say, again, the modernization that we have undertaken and that is underway with great focus and, with a lot of oversight, across the nation, across the department, across the executive branch and across Congress.

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Jason Armagost

We have a lot of interest, and a lot of help. We have a lot of consistent messaging that's coming out of all of those organizations, regardless of administrations, about the importance and the criticality of how we undertake this modernization, how we field it, and the care with which it is brought forward into this multipolar environment.

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Jason Armagost

And I would offer, back to Peter. I, I've kind of said my piece on, kind of where we are in Global Strike Command, and then I'd offer for, discussion.

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Peter Huessy

Thank you very much, general. We have a number of questions that I'm going to just give them in the order of... One of the things we talked about previously was the have Russia and China moved towards a strategy of thinking nuclear weapons in the theater, in the conventional fight are usable. And I often referenced the Yeltsin decision in 1999 or the decree he put out saying developed battlefield, highly accurate, small nuclear weapons.

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Peter Huessy

Could you address how that's changed the nature of our requirements for deterrence?

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Jason Armagost

Yeah, I would say that is an element of dynamic approach as well. And so, from a military perspective. Right. There's all kinds of policy or doctrine discussions you could have. But from a military force structure perspective, I think the most important thing to look at there is, is there nuclear forces and what are those mean?

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Jason Armagost

Again, that proliferation of precision that has now happened through weapons delivery capabilities has altered the field a little bit on potential nuclear weapon use. And certainly, from a theater perspective. And I think your point about Yeltsin is, he very clearly laid out that he wanted a war fighting nuclear force to that point.

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Jason Armagost

It was as if, in the fall of the Soviet Union and then the former Soviet states, it was if the script had flipped where, you know, in the 80s, for example, we had theater nuclear forces in Europe to stop a massive invasion. And now with the dissolution of Warsaw Pact and the and the larger fielded conventional forces that Russia and the Soviet Union once possessed, the script had flipped a little bit and they, they had seen a large and looming and expanding NATO and wanted a militarily warfighting capability from the theater perspective to alter that calculus from a from NATO

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Jason Armagost

perspective for Russia. And so, again, I think the fielded forces piece of this is the most interesting question from a military perspective. In other words, you design a force to do what? And if that force is to have precise capabilities, low fallout and low likely... That it has militarily targeting useful cases with lower levels of civilian casualties that becomes a much more dynamic and destabilizing force from a nuclear perspective, nuclear force structure perspective, because I think the point of your question is nuclear use can very quickly transition to strategic crisis.

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Jason Armagost

And so even in low levels of theater combat, where a hard question could be asked where you have a very low yield weapon that was very precisely delivered against a military infrastructure or fielded forces, where the nuclear question has now been answered, But the response could be, well, how do you respond strategically to something like that?

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Jason Armagost

And so, I think it's just very important from a military perspective to look at force design, force structure and fielded forces, fielded capabilities.

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Peter Huessy

The corollary to that question has been asked is, is the use of theater nuclear weapons in a conventional conflict by its nature, almost inevitably going to be escalatory and move towards a strategic nuclear exchange, and therefore not worth pursuing in terms of even defending against

12

what the bad guys have.

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Jason Armagost

So, I don't see that as inevitable. I see that as a very challenging question to the point of incredibly low yields, that are, that are fallout free. Our, our military, from a military targeting perspective, is incredibly useful. They are, they answer hard targeting questions. They answer, number of platforms required to, to attain an objective, where, for example, if you had a, a sub kiloton weapon on an airfield, you could do, you could, you could take an airfield out of commission.

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Jason Armagost

That might take dozens or hundreds of conventionally delivered, even precisely delivered weapons with a single the single militarily relevant event. However, to your point, the question then becomes, what is what is the escalatory response? And if conventional overmatch and the ability to choose the time and place of our response is in question, and then the strategic implications are immediately on the table.

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Jason Armagost

And, and that's where crisis arises from. Right? Because you have different perspectives certainly on, what just happened. So I think to your point, the warfighting question is only getting harder in how our adversaries are configuring their forces and their ability to precisely deliver weapons in a manner that doesn't drive too high, civilian casualties, doesn't drive to out things like that.

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Peter Huessy

Another question related to that is that can we really do extended deterrence with multiple nuclear armed adversaries that may end up in multiple theaters? Because you have to do this simultaneously?

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Jason Armagost

Yeah. I think the fundamental question then becomes, ultimately the sheer number of targets, that are required to be held at risk, to then deny the benefits of use or, or compel a military, off ramp to use nuclear weapons. And so, you know, that gets dynamic very quickly. You have, the examples that are often given in these kind of discussions are, for example, a China and a North Korea scenario, or a Russia and Iran scenario, things like that, where you have a committed, essentially strategically deterrent, committed force, that is maybe theater focused in, in that, but then subsequently has to

00:33:04:13 - 00:33:34:12

Jason Armagost

deter, outside of that theater or to serve globally in the to the point of your question. And so that, that does drive hard questions about numbers and readiness, that are immediately called into question. And, and if you don't have the balance, right, going in, you're certainly not going to solve the balance, in the time of crisis, because what you have is what you have during the

crisis.

00:33:34:13 - 00:33:58:14

Peter Huessy

General, one of the things I've noticed that both people on different sides of the political spectrum have said that with respect to Ukraine, that the Russian threats are bluff and that therefore there's no will, there shouldn't be any inhibition in terms of what we provide Ukraine to not only fight this war, but hopefully win it. However, you may define that.

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Peter Huessy

Can you address that issue?

00:34:01:05 - 00:34:33:02

Jason Armagost

Yeah. So I was in Germany in the fall of 22 where this question was being asked very aggressively, by our European partners, by our own country, when Russia was retreating to sustainable logistical lines, through the city of Kherson, if you remember, in the fall of 22 and there was a there was an article, I think, I can't remember who wrote it, but it was the question was, catastrophic success...

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Jason Armagost

What if Ukraine actually pushed Russia out of the Donbas and, and went into Russia proper? Would Russia use a nuclear weapon in response to that? Because that is that was their doctrine at the time. Right. And so, Russia's doctrine has rapidly evolved through the Ukraine crisis. And, and I think there are a lot of people paying very close attention to that because, arguably red lines have been crossed, whether it's Ukraine's activities in Kursk or Operation Spiderweb that was, you know, an attack on Russian strategic systems in Russia.

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Jason Armagost

And so, the point of that question then becomes, what is a what options are available to them? And that force structure question is, is very, very important. And I think that does drive back to the question of fielded theater nuclear forces. The availability of a credible response in the face of that becomes very, very important.

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Jason Armagost

And so, I think Russia has configured themselves for a very high degree of options and ultimately that would be their decision as to the red line for use. And so, you know, we run military scenarios across the spectrum to try and understand what that would look like and what a response would be.

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Jason Armagost

And I would just offer that; it's kind of a closure on that.

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Peter Huessy

Would you address the question of we have generally not had dual capable systems. We it yes. Our bombers have a nuclear capability, but we basically restricted the number that can be used in any reasonable period of time to the number required by or allowed by an arms control deal, like new start. The Russians and the Chinese have dual systems across the board.

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Peter Huessy

How does that complicate your world and what are the strategic implications of dealing not just with one, but two nations that do this as a matter of course?

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Jason Armagost

Yeah, I think the I would say it in this way. I think, Russia and China paid very close to New Start favorite pay very close attention to new start. And the language of New Start was confined to strategic systems. And so again going back to the fielded, the theater systems or non-strategic systems that, again, to your dual capable part of your question, there is, there is the possibility of fielding systems, on different platforms that are designed to inherently, support nuclear weapons.

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Jason Armagost

Right. And so there's some because New Start was strictly aimed at, strategic systems, the ability to kind of close the gap through theater systems that could be also delivered potentially on strategic systems or longer-range systems that were only tested to theater restricted ranges. Really complicates the calculus on that. And again, I would argue what we have historically gone with is a conventional overmatch response that that takes that theater nuclear response off the table from an offensive perspective.

00:38:13:02 - 00:38:41:08

Jason Armagost

And so, the dual capable systems are something we pay very close attention to. And I think it's an open question for our own future as to how we how we go about that, because the commitment of resources required for single use capabilities is can be quite large. And so how do we respond from a policy and force structure perspective, where our adversaries have clearly built theater forces for use?

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Jason Armagost

In those scenarios?

00:38:45:02 - 00:38:59:00

Peter Huessy

The Posture Commission in 1920, 23? So, we noted in our previous conversation that it was necessary the program of record, but not adequate.

00:38:59:01 - 00:39:19:11

Peter Huessy

And I know, this is not you're not in the business of deciding what we should add, but what

would be some options that we could consider in terms of adding capability to our nuclear deterrent? If that's what if that's what our civilian bosses decide to do. How.

00:39:19:12 - 00:39:53:13

Jason Armagost

Well, so the Strategic Posture Commission report, I think is, is a really fantastic document because it, they very clearly, it was bipartisan, it was very deep and very thoughtful and informed by deep intelligence and, and clear trends and directions with our adversaries, implementation of their own force. And there's there is a litany of things laid out in that report that are very much worth discussion and very much worth thinking about.

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Jason Armagost

The report itself is a very thoughtful and good read. And it drives it the things that, that I'm talking about and, and hinting at. Right. Our ability to project power globally. In in not just a raid fashion or a simple way, but in a really sustained and committed way over time, they really lay out some good recommendations about what that would mean, what that force would look like to be able to do that, in the future, with multiple adversaries in a multipolar environment, with opportunistic aggression, with theater action, simultaneous with strategic actions.

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Jason Armagost

And so, it's a very, very good document, to really kind of bound that discussion and so we're going to differ greatly with what that means force structure. But they very clearly, I think, laid out some clear recommendations about how to respond to that.

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Peter Huessy

And another question came in is should we know we've traditionally talked about a triad, which is the three elements of, the force posture. And then we sometimes talked about what part of that is in C3. The question is where should space fit into that? Should it? One question, what should we make it instead of a triad, make it a quad and include space as an element of deterrence.

00:41:27:08 - 00:41:58:02

Jason Armagost

So, I think that track really conceptually for me, that tracks through, nuclear command and control, and nuclear command and control communication systems. So, in a sense that has been in existence for quite some time, even back into the Cold War. And so, the kind of, the unspoken component of, of a triad is your ability to command and control that triad from the president to the fielded forces in a reliable fashion, reliable, survivable, resilient fashion.

00:41:58:03 - 00:42:28:07

Jason Armagost

And so, I think, that's almost inherent to the discussion, but is it is evolving rapidly based on the electronic warfare environment, the dynamic, changing nature of that, the cyber environment and the dynamic and changing nature of that. Regardless of that dynamism, we have to be able to provide that level of connectivity and assured connectivity to fielded forces.

00:42:28:07 - 00:42:54:06

Jason Armagost

And so I think that to your point about space capabilities from my perspective right now, that has that is in existence and has been playing out, and it's something we look at, almost on a daily basis in how the status of our systems are and what we need to do to ensure that they're, viable into the future, viable and resilient and survivable in the future.

00:42:54:06 - 00:43:05:02

Jason Armagost

So, in a sense, it's inherent that obviously, you know, from an offensive space or defensive space capability going forward. That's a very open policy question.

00:43:05:04 - 00:43:12:03

Peter Huessy

So basically, we should include both space and cyber kind of almost automatically as part of our deterrent.

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Jason Armagost

I think inherently it is there. Right. And I think the I would argue is an Oracle example of that is kind of the shared understanding we had with the Soviets where both us and the Soviets saw a strategic attack on our ability to command and control and warn our forces or have warning of an attack.

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Jason Armagost

Right. That was seen as an inherently strategic operation. Right. And so, we had that shared understanding, I think, with the Soviets, that was very productive for stability. You could make an argument that in the age of cyber and space capabilities becoming prolific, there is an instability that is inherent to that. But I think from my perspective as a fielded forces person, the command-and-control element of that is, is the key component, and it's something we focus relentlessly on.

00:44:10:10 - 00:44:35:09

Peter Huessy

We had talked earlier, but I wanted to get a little bit more detail from you as there was a school of thought that believes that North Korea's nuclear forces are, as the North Koreans themselves say, due to America's hostile policy. I remember years ago, I asked the CIA director, has the United States used military force against North Korea since the end of the Korean War?

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Peter Huessy

The answer was no. And the converse, however, is that North Korea has used military force against South Korean and us both in terrorist attacks primarily. So, the question is. I argue that I think China may be the country most important to trigger North Korea's entrance into a conflict, or to deflect our attention and to keep us busy in that part of the Pacific.

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Peter Huessy

What's your, what are your thoughts on that?

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Jason Armagost

So, I think history would tell us that great powers use proxies and have used proxies and continue probably will continue to use proxies for exactly what you kind of just laid out right there. You know, I don't I, I won't pretend to know the deep connections between Russia and North Korea from an economic or an engineering and industrial capacity perspective or shared military technology perspective other than, all signs point to yes.

00:45:42:12 - 00:46:07:00

Jason Armagost

Where you have, you know, what's been historically referred to as the hermit Kingdom, that has been able to sustain itself, somehow through famine and corruption and very tight authoritarian control over a very long now period of time. And so, I think those generally don't happen historically without some kind of external help.

00:46:07:01 - 00:46:35:14

Jason Armagost

And so that that can translate in many ways, you know, through the entire the time, if you will, diplomatic and military and economic information, all of it. And so again, I think great powers, inherently will seek to use proxies to develop and use proxies. And arguably, you could make the case that, North Korea, despite rhetoric, that it's not the case.

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Jason Armagost

I think arguably, as is China sees them as very useful.

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Peter Huessy

One of the topics, in general, we're going to be talking about at the Triad event in Louisiana. And, and June 18th is what the commander asked us to look at was unconventional threats to the nuclear deterrent you have had recently. I believe some drones going overhead of Barksdale. But I'm not going to ask you about that.

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Peter Huessy

But one of the questions we had is, what's your sense is that weather within the Air Force or DoD as a whole is hardening our assets within our military base, but also our infrastructure, to deal with potential EMP or even cyber-attack on our infrastructure where the utility system would be shut down.

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Jason Armagost

Yeah. So, I think we're to we're going...

00:47:31:04 - 00:47:52:00

Peter Huessy

To look at that and one of our panels in, in Louisiana. But I guess I'm jumping the gun a little bit

18

and asking you to give me an idea of kind of where, where our thinking is within the, Air Force or within DoD or your own thoughts as to where we are on that. Because I think the concern is that we're behind the eight ball.

00:47:52:01 - 00:48:25:10

Jason Armagost

Yeah. I think, I think a lot of what gets told publicly about topics like that are, are, dramatic and incorrect often. And so, I'm, I'm pretty happy with the impetus we have behind the scenes to be able to handle those things. Certainly lately. And so I think, my first reaction on those kinds of things is to understand more deeply what actually is taking place and what we can do about it.

00:48:25:10 - 00:48:57:05

Jason Armagost

Right. And so again, I would offer that we have impetus that we have not had in the past, potentially. And so, I think that's just a rapidly involved, evolving environment. It's going to be continue to be a challenge. But I think, systemically, organizationally, the department writ large, not just the Air Force Global Strike Command, but the department is rising to that challenge in very interesting and useful ways, that that we're not hearing about so much, which is fine.

00:48:57:07 - 00:49:27:08

Peter Huessy

Which is good. Thank you very much for that. My final question before I turn it over to our president, Jim Petrosky, is this if you would walk through the B-21, the Sentinel, and to the extent that you can, the Columbia, I've noticed the news on all three on budget and schedule has been quite positive. And in particular, would you walk us through where we what you think is the progress that's been made.

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Jason Armagost

So yeah, I would offer that, you know, those are really good examples in my mind of clear asymmetrical advantages we have had over time. And so whether it's our stealth capabilities or in the case of the B-21 are long history of stealth capabilities, fielded forces with stealth capabilities. Now, and it's, when it's when it comes to the ICBM, we have a very highly disciplined and high alert rate force.

00:50:03:10 - 00:50:29:04

Jason Armagost

That I would offer is ready to be modernized, but the underpinning components of those are the asymmetric advantages we have with undersea technology, with a disciplined force, stealth technology, with disciplined and demonstrated capabilities and a disciplined force. And then that on alert, ICBM force, that is, has a disciplined and professional culture and.

00:50:29:04 - 00:50:54:13

Jason Armagost

Right. So, so those are those are actually true asymmetric advantages as we get to the fielding and the modernization piece. And to the point of your question, I think it's really important to understand, arguably over time, how little, deterrence, strategic deterrent force costs compared to the totality of fielded nuclear capabilities and what that means over time.

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Jason Armagost

And so that's why I think it's really important to remember that our asymmetric advantage in those cases, has played out over a very long period of time with a professional force. And so, as the cost question gets brought in, which it will constantly get brought in, and it's very important because we've now undertaken this modernization simultaneously across the triad.

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Jason Armagost

So therefore, the cost question becomes even more compelling because it's happening all at once. I would argue, just, history shows us that the, that the cost to build a deterrent force, that works, is much less than it cost to fight a war and potentially lose.

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Peter Huessy

It's very true. Yeah. Jim Petrosky, our president, will, we got about eight minutes. I'm going to turn it over to you, Jim. Because you always have good questions and, go ahead and thank you for joining us. And thank you for your leadership.

00:52:01:09 - 00:52:22:08

Jim Petrosky

Well, thanks for turning the floor over to me, Peter. General Ahmed Gosht, again, what an incredible discussion. Thank you, Peter, for also for, for sort of convolving all these many questions and the single questions that happened. So, I'm going to take a break from what a lot of people think of when we talk about, what Global Strike is doing.

00:52:22:08 - 00:53:03:04

Jim Petrosky

And one thing we haven't talked about is the incredible workforce that you have and the incredible airmen, strikers that you have that are there every day. And I think we're in Passover, you know, Passover season here, Easter season. And I know they're going to be working tirelessly throughout the weekend and not spending time with their families. And I thought I'd take this chance to pass it back to you, General Armagost to say a few words about what those people are doing through the year 24 and 765 days a week, 365 days a year, to really keep this country at peace and what that means and give you

00:53:03:04 - 00:53:24:03

Jim Petrosky

the opportunity to sort of close us out on that, because I think it's so important that is there.

Jason Armagost

Yeah, it really is. I and I just guess I said it, but I don't want the message to be lost or asymmetric advantage with our systems is there. But it's because of the professional and disciplined nature of our airmen over time.

00:53:24:03 - 00:53:51:08

Jason Armagost

And in our sailors in the case of Columbia and, and, and, and Ohio, they, they, they really are an asymmetric advantage. That's very, very difficult, by the way, for our, our adversaries to

20

develop. You know, if you look at the fielding of, the Strategic Rocket Force in China, there have been purges across their general officer corps.

00:53:51:09 - 00:54:21:13

Jason Armagost

And I think it started actually in the Strategic Rocket Forces arena that translate that that's often publicly displayed as, you know, corruption. But what that really translates in my mind to is it calls into question the professional nature of their downstream force. And that, you know, there's a lot of stories of corruption in Russia as well, some of which came into real clear contact with Russia invaded Ukraine.

00:54:21:13 - 00:54:46:04

Jason Armagost

And, and the equipment they had was, was completely faulty. The leadership they had was completely faulty. And that that is a to your point, the that is a real component of deterrence is that professional force that is an asymmetric advantage that our military hasn't enjoyed over a very long period of time now. And you're exactly right.

00:54:46:05 - 00:55:22:02

Jason Armagost

24/7, 365 we have ICBMs on alert. We have airmen generating, our, our bomber force for a range of, of activities, whether it's from developmental tests to operational test to conventional use, to nuclear generation exercises. That all translates inside of the professional and disciplined and, and frankly, patriotic nature of our force in particular. They know why they exist, and they know what it is they're charged to do on a daily basis.

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Jason Armagost

And they are big believers in and what it means to have a strategically deterrent force such that we can, if called, respond, but at the same time be strong enough such that our adversaries choose not to go down that path.

Jim Petrosky

Well, thank you so much for leading that group, sir. And I know, I know it's important to everyone, and I hope they think about them throughout the weekend.

00:55:49:09 - 00:56:07:07

Jim Petrosky

What they really mean to them. And so, with this, we'll go ahead and conclude this seminar. Sir, your time is valuable to us. I'm going to turn it over to Kimberly to close this out. Thank you. Audience. Thank you, General Armagost and of course, Peter Huessy for pulling this together for the National Institute for Deterrence Studies.

00:56:07:09 - 00:56:11:14

Jim Petrosky

Kimberly Tell everyone what we're doing and close this out.

00:56:12:00 - 00:56:42:00

Kimberly Cherington

Sure. I want to extend our sincere appreciation to you, General Armagost, for being here today. And thank you for all your good work. We did mention that next Friday we have Mike white, virtually here. Registration is on our web page. And also April 17th, we have Major General Stacy. Jo Huser, commander of the 21st Air Force on the ICBM mission.

00:56:42:01 - 00:56:45:05

Kimberly Cherington

Sorry, 20th Air Force.

00:56:45:06 - 00:57:14:02

Kimberly Cherington

20th Air Force. Thank you. April 24th, we have George Miller from Lawrence Livermore National Labs talking about nuclear deterrence without full scale nuclear testing, stockpile stewardship and beyond. We have Rear Admiral Weeks live at the Capitol Hill Club May 15th. And, of course, Lieutenant General Lutton live at the Capitol Hill Club. But registration is not open yet, but will be soon.

00:57:14:02 - 00:57:42:05

Kimberly Cherington

So, keep checking back to our website. And if you're new to news, we are a 501C3 nonprofit, dependent on your generous donations and dedicated to advancing peace and stability through a strong national security and nuclear deterrent, we thank you for your support and being part of our growing community. We wish you a peaceful day and a holiday, and we hope to see you back here next week. Thank you.

00:57:44:03 - 00:57:46:05

Jason Armagost

Thanks, Kimberly. Thanks, Jim. Thanks, Peter.

00:57:46:07 - 00:57:56:04

Peter Huessy

And to my friend General Armagost, thank you sir always. It's always a privilege to hear you and want to thank you and all my best to your friends and everybody else at Global Strike.

00:57:56:05 - 00:57:57:13

Jason Armagost

All right. Thank you. I'll see you.

00:57:57:13 - 00:58:03:01

Peter Huessy

Thank you sir, and have a happy Easter, everybody. And a good Passover.