

Organizing for Deterrence and Urgency with Drew Walter

5/8/2026 Time: 10:00-11:00 AM (Eastern)

Webinar Transcript

How to cite:

National Institute for Deterrence Studies. Huessy Seminar, *Organizing for Deterrence and Urgency with Drew Walter*, moderated by Peter Huessy. Video, May 8, 2026. YouTube. <https://youtu.be/XKEVd7PMwQ>.

Abstract

On May 8, 2026, the National Institute for Deterrence Studies hosted a Huessy Seminar featuring **Drew Walter**, Acting Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for **Nuclear Deterrence, Chemical and Biological Defense Policy and Programs**. Mr. Walter provided an authoritative assessment of the current state and future direction of U.S. nuclear deterrence amid an increasingly complex global security environment.

Drawing on firsthand experience from the Pentagon, Mr. Walter outlined the standing up of the newly established NDCBD office under the National Defense Authorization Acts, emphasizing Congress's intent to consolidate nuclear policy and program oversight within a single, accountable civilian authority. He addressed the unprecedented challenge of deterring two nuclear peers simultaneously, the urgency of modernizing an aging nuclear triad and NC3 architecture, and the need to accelerate acquisition and fielding timelines after decades of deferred investment.

The discussion highlighted critical nuclear modernization priorities—including strategic delivery systems, command and control resilience, pit production capacity, missile defense integration, and industrial base revitalization—alongside emerging challenges posed by advanced technologies, non-kinetic threats, and compressed decision timelines in crisis scenarios. Mr. Walter underscored the importance of risk-informed acquisition reform, interagency coordination

with the Department of Energy and NNSA, and sustained collaboration with allies to preserve strategic stability.

The seminar concluded with a robust question-and-answer session moderated by **Peter Huessy**, addressing nuclear strategy, force posture, deterrence credibility, workforce development, and allied nuclear literacy. Together, the discussion underscored the central theme of the seminar: **the imperative to act with urgency to ensure the U.S. nuclear deterrent remains ready, reliable, and resolute in a rapidly evolving threat environment.**

Executive Summary

On May 8, 2026, the National Institute for Deterrence Studies convened a Huessy Seminar featuring **Drew Walter**, Acting Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for **Nuclear Deterrence, Chemical and Biological Defense Policy and Programs**. The seminar provided a comprehensive assessment of the state of U.S. nuclear deterrence at a time of unprecedented strategic complexity and accelerating global competition.

Mr. Walter addressed the historic challenge of deterring **two nuclear peers simultaneously—Russia and China—while also managing regional threats**, underscoring that this environment is not a future concern but an immediate reality. He outlined how recent National Defense Authorization Acts established a new, consolidated civilian leadership structure within the Department of Defense to strengthen accountability, integrate nuclear policy and programs, and improve decision speed across the nuclear enterprise.

A central theme of the discussion was **urgency**. Mr. Walter emphasized that decades of deferred modernization have left critical elements of the U.S. nuclear triad, NC3 architecture, and supporting infrastructure operating well beyond their intended service lives. He highlighted ongoing efforts to accelerate modernization programs—including strategic delivery systems, nuclear command and control, pit production capacity, and flexible nuclear options—while sustaining legacy systems during the transition period.

The seminar also examined the importance of **risk-informed acquisition reform**, industrial base revitalization, and closer coordination with the Department of Energy and the National Nuclear Security Administration. Mr. Walter stressed that strengthening deterrence requires both faster program execution and a durable defense industrial workforce capable of meeting long-term demands.

During the moderated question-and-answer session led by **Peter Huessy**, participants explored nuclear strategy, force posture, arms control integration, emerging technologies, missile defense, allied nuclear literacy, and workforce development. The discussion reinforced the seminar's

overarching conclusion: **maintaining credible deterrence in today's environment requires decisive action, sustained investment, and unified national effort.**

The seminar underscored that U.S. deterrence remains robust, but its future credibility depends on acting with urgency to ensure the nuclear deterrent remains **ready, reliable, and resilient** in the face of evolving strategic threats.

Unabridged Transcript

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

00;00;07;10 - 00;00;23;23

Kimberly Cherington

Good morning and welcome. I'm Kimberly Cherington and on behalf of the National Institute for Deterrence Studies, thank you for taking the time today to join us for this important discussion with Mr. Drew Walter, welcome to those joining us live. We encourage you to submit your questions

00;00;23;23 - 00;00;45;20

Kimberly Cherington

We will address these questions during the Q&A portion of our seminar. We invite you to join us virtually on June 5th here when we welcome Frank Rose, former Principal Deputy Administrator of the National Nuclear Security Administration, who will speak on missile defense, its effectiveness now and into the future.

00;00;45;23 - 00;01;16;00

Kimberly Cherington

We are also hosting two live events in Washington, DC at the Capitol Hill Club. Rear Admiral Weeks will be next Friday, May 15th and General Lutton in person on June 3rd. These intimate seminars offer a unique opportunity to engage directly with these distinguished leaders, ask questions, participate in discussion and enjoy breakfast provided by our gracious sponsors and donors in partnership with BRF.

00;01;16;07 - 00;01;41;20

Kimberly Cherington

NIDS presents the fifth Annual Nuclear Triad Symposium, which will take place on June 18th at Louisiana State University in Shreveport. You can find more in Register for these events and live symposium on our website, along with all of our events at Think Deterrents. Follow us on LinkedIn and subscribe to our newsletter and receive important event updates.

00;01;41;23 - 00;02;08;14

Kimberly Cherington

Today, we are honored to welcome Mr. Drew Walter, who serves as the Acting Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Nuclear Deterrence, Chemical and Biological Defense Policy and programs. He previously served as the Deputy assistant secretary for Nuclear Matters or nuclear Deterrence Policy in the House Armed Services Committee, and began his career at Sandia National Laboratories.

00;02;08;16 - 00;02;30;15

Kimberly Cherington

We're honored to have you, sir. Thank you for being here. And I also want to pass on and introduce our hosts for today's event. And moderator, Mr. Peter QC. He's the president of Geostrategic Analysis and a Senior Fellow here at NIDS. Peter.

00;02;30;18 - 00;02;45;28

Peter Huessy

Thank you very much Kimberly. And I want to welcome our guests. We have over 140 people that have signed up, which is great. Drew Walter is a colleague that I've known since he was on Capitol Hill.

00;02;46;01 - 00;03;20;00

Peter Huessy

He's going to talk to us about what's in his inbox, basically. And a lot of that has to do with nuclear deterrence and also chembio and nuclear matters that he has in his bailiwick. Drew, on behalf of NIDS and our numerous sponsors that are here today, including Bechtel and BRF, which is our Louisiana friends Shreveport or in General Dynamics, L3 Harris, Lockheed Martin, Northrop Grumman, Systems Planning and Analysis, I want to welcome them as our today.

00;03;20;00 - 00;03;55;17

Peter Huessy

They're attending. And thank you all for your support. I want to remind people June 18th is our 23rd or 24th Triad Symposium, which we have a full list of speakers led by Steven Davis, who's the Commander of the US Air Force Global Strike Command. We also have Chris Yeaw who's the assistant and secretary of state who handles arms control and proliferation in his bailiwick, which is always interesting to hear from Chris and look forward to your attendance.

00;03;55;17 - 00;04;17;19

Peter Huessy

So, we have both virtual and in person, and Kimberly can send that to you. So, Drew, on behalf of NIDS and myself and our sponsors and attendees today, I want to thank you for taking the time out of your busy schedule and tremendous amount of work that you do in this area. Want to hear from you. And so over to you, sir, and thank you again for dropping by and talking to us.

00;04;17;21 - 00;04;39;13

Drew Walter

Of course. Thank you. Peter. Thank you, Kimberly, for the introduction and for inviting me to

speak. I'm here in my office in the Pentagon. So, you don't get a video feed of me. You appear to get a picture of me. And actually, I was sitting here at my desk. I actually shut down my inbox. So, it's not constantly digging in the background so I can have a good conversation with you all.

00;04;39;14 - 00;05;14;14

Drew Walter

But obviously it's a pleasure to be here again discussing my favorite topic, the nuclear deterrent, its future, and how we're moving forward, both organizing for deterrence and finding that sense of urgency required to ensure peace through strength. So, I've got 20 plus minutes of remarks. Looking forward to some Q&A. But last time I spoke at one of your events, Peter, I was the Deputy Assistant Secretary of War, then defense for Nuclear Matters.

00;05;14;16 - 00;05;45;19

Drew Walter

Today, as Kimberly said, I'm acting as the Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of War for Nuclear Deterrence, Chemical and Biological Defense Policy and Programs. To shorten this speech considerably, I will shorten the name of our office to NDCBD, and I will assure everyone the length of the title has no bearing on how much I get paid. But Dr. Robert Kadlec, Honorable Robert Kadlec, my boss was confirmed a little over four months ago as the first Assistant Secretary for NDCBD and his job is a big one.

00;05;45;19 - 00;06;20;03

Drew Walter

So by law, the Assistant Secretary is the principal civilian advisor to the Secretary of War on Nuclear Deterrence Policies, Operations, associated programs. And his principal duty is the overall supervision of nuclear deterrence policy, resources and activities across the Department of War. This includes development and supervision of policy, program planning, execution and allocation, and use of resources on all matters relating to sustainment, operation, and modernization of U.S. nuclear forces.

00;06;20;06 - 00;07;00;05

Drew Walter

And. Oh yeah. He's also responsible for all matters relating to chemical and biological defense, encountering weapons of mass destruction. So, as the first ever Assistant Secretary, NDCBD Dr. Kadlec has a lot going on. Our office was statutorily stood up and reorganized in the FY25 NDAA. Some additional guidance on FY26 NDAA. And it is clear that Congress has purposefully created this organization to consolidate direction and oversight for the nuclear deterrent into a single, accountable, mission focused organization with a Senate confirmed official at its head.

00;07;00;13 - 00;07;35;20

Drew Walter

And so, as Senator King said at Dr Kadlec recent congressional hearing just last month, I believe

Dr. Kadlec's position provides quote one throat to choke for nuclear responsibilities and accountability. And as Dr. Kadlec joked back to Senator King at this hearing, he's a size 16 neck and Dr. Kadlec has jumped right in over the last four months to really provide some very clear direction to our team and to the broader nuclear enterprise, where we need to be heading with the nuclear deterrent.

00;07;35;21 - 00;08;01;21

Drew Walter

I'll focus my remarks on the nuclear side because of this crowd, and I think I see a lot of familiar names on the list. They're great to see so many folks and looking forward to questions there. But I will also offer chem Biodefense Countering Weapons of Mass Destruction in my year last year. The better part of the year anyways, as the Acting Assistant Secretary.

00;08;01;27 - 00;08;31;03

Drew Walter

As the office got stood up while we waited confirmation of Dr. Kadlec. Frankly, it's sometimes the bio side, the chemical side that should truly frighten us. But I'm going to leave that aside and focus on the nuclear deterrent, because I think that's where you all came to talk. So, as we in this new office, I'm humbled to support Dr. Kadlec as his acting principal deputy and as the 2025 National Security Strategy from the white House and the 2026 National Defense Strategy.

00;08;31;03 - 00;08;55;09

Drew Walter

Lay out really the stark, sobering reality is the first time in our history the United States will face the challenge of deterring two nuclear peers, Russia and China, as well as regional powers with growing capabilities, certainly like North Korea. And as the 2023 Posture Commission ably points out and repeatedly points out, this isn't a distant problem.

00;08;55;09 - 00;09;26;10

Drew Walter

It's upon us today and it demands decisive action under Dr. Kadlec's leadership, our job in NDCBDs is to ensure senior leaders are fully scoped on risks, issues and opportunities across the nuclear deterrent and are provided the information and decision space they need to make timely and informed decision to strengthen our deterrent and ultimately, to ensure that the nuclear enterprise writ large, understands and acts with the urgency required.

00;09;26;13 - 00;09;50;13

Drew Walter

So let me I gave you a little bit about the stand-up of our new organization. Let me give you just a little bit more, because it is as Peter said, something that's in my inbox every day as we as we coalesce around our new structure and, and figure out how we collaborate across the enterprise with other stakeholders to drive the deterrent forward.

00;09;50;15 - 00;10;12;17

Drew Walter

So, to execute the imperative and the mandate we've been given, we've brought together elements of the office of Secretary War that deal with both nuclear deterrence policy and nuclear deterrence programs. Under this one assistant secretary, for anyone who's ever worked in the Pentagon or in particular in the office of the secretary, you know that these two key functions haven't traditionally been put together at that level.

00;10;12;19 - 00;10;40;26

Drew Walter

But by combining policy and program leadership at the level, we can illuminate and can turn decisions faster. We can ensure programs are following policy, and policy is informed by the by programmatic realities and programmatic possibilities. And that's a that's a healthy loop to have at whatever, the lower the better, frankly, where we can try and combine that loop.

00;10;40;28 - 00;11;12;01

Drew Walter

One advantage of our new organization is direct access to both for policy and sustainment in our unique structure reports to both in support of their respective functions. And while it involves a lot of staff meetings and coordination and conversations, that ability to inform and receive direction from both undersecretaries has and will help drive tighter integration. And so the new construct is not perfect.

00;11;12;03 - 00;11;38;05

Drew Walter

No organization chart ever is. But I believe and I have experienced over my career, regardless of where you put the boxes on an org chart, there will always be seams and gaps as a matter of where you can most tolerate those gaps and how to best mitigate them. And so while there remains some construction to us, I have said throughout this process and believe in my core that if the right people and the right positions one emission to succeed, they'll make it happen regardless of what the org chart looks like.

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Drew Walter

And I see this happening every day and I'm confident Dr. Kadlec, Under Secretary Colby, under Secretary Duffy, and with strong top cover from the deputy secretary and the Secretary are intent on this mission and our organization succeeding. And one of the great things we are currently underway is to staff out our new organization. So, I'm confident many folks that I see on, on the chat here are aware that we are in the process of hiring up to ten, a little shy of ten new policy nuclear policy professionals into our policy organization headed by doctor Rob Soofer.

00;12;27;23 - 00;13;09;02

Drew Walter

That's an opportunity to supplement the great team we already have with a lot of fresh blood from junior to mid-career to more senior, and help guide and shape what's a really dynamic

future for nuclear policy. While it's not yet formally announced, I imagine a lot of the same people I emailed last time will be broadcast email out to the community we're looking to hire another, you know, a little less than ten, approximately ten professionals into our nuclear program side of our organization and help our organization supplement the great folks we already have working these issues to drive that very dynamic space.

00;13;09;02 - 00;13;44;24

Drew Walter

So, the organization is getting stood up. But we recognize and absolutely know that nuclear deterrence is a team sport. And despite the lengthy title and heavy statutory responsibility and UCB has, our office is a small part of a much larger enterprise that actually delivers the turns for the nation. And so we've spent a lot of a lot of time working collaboratively with teammates from across the Department of Energy, the State Department, interagency stakeholders.

00;13;44;26 - 00;14;15;02

Drew Walter

We're looking to use the Nuclear Weapons Council, the NC3 Council, and various other ministries to really drive decisions, drive actions, drive understanding and informed decision making across the nuclear enterprise. Dr. Kadlec is working with closely with General White, Admiral Gaucher, as the new direct reporting program, and they've been handed supercharged responsibilities by the secretary and the deputy secretary.

00;14;15;03 - 00;14;47;02

Drew Walter

Supercharged responsibilities, supercharged authorities, and, yes, accountability as well, for driving our most critical programs forward. In the case of General White, certainly B-21, Sentinel Minuteman sustainment, Admiral Gaucher, submarines, SSBN, Virginia. These programs have to deliver and the department recognizes this and has put top officers in charge of both with direct access and reporting function to the Deputy Secretary and other senior leaders to get that done.

00;14;47;02 - 00;15;16;03

Drew Walter

And so we are working closely with them. However, we can enable champion and make them a success leads to the broader success of the nuclear deterrent. And that's what we're after from NDCBC. Similarly, counterparts and leaders at Stratcom, Indo-Paycom, and of course departmental partners where we can't deliver nuclear deterrence as a department without the Department of Energy and the National Nuclear Security Administration and what they provide.

00;15;16;10 - 00;15;47;29

Drew Walter

And so, working through the Nuclear Weapons Council and other avenues, making sure we stay in sync and we have understanding of each other and where programs and policies are headed. So, we can ultimately, jointly, together with DOE, deliver the capabilities the warfighters need to

deliver deterrence. Similarly, at the Department of State, ensuring we understand from the Department of War where arms control, strategic stability, conversations are going.

00;15;48;01 - 00;16;09;18

Drew Walter

Dr. Kadlec has regular discussions with Assistant Secretary and others at the State Department to ensure we're all rowing in the same direction, because that's ultimately what we're after. Dr. Kadlec and I and the entire team, we invest a lot of time and energy to ensure the nuclear enterprise writ large is all rowing in the same direction.

00;16;09;18 - 00;16;37;16

Drew Walter

And to maybe stretch a nautical metaphor a little bit further, I do feel the battleship that is the nuclear enterprise turning. We're turning in the right direction. Sometimes I fear it's turning a little too slowly for the environment we face. And the geopolitical nuclear security environment that is before us. But it is turning. And that's a good thing to see.

00;16;37;22 - 00;17;09;23

Drew Walter

And so talking a little bit about urgency, I know I'm not the first national security official, and I will certainly not be the last to insist that we find our collective sense of urgency again, but really, the nature of the threats we face now and for the foreseeable future are different than what has come before. As the National Defense Strategy and the acquisition transformation strategy maker, we need to quickly adjust our overall defense posture and industrial base.

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Drew Walter

And I'm not referring only to nuclear there. I'm referring writ large. And we take, given our unique nature in that we take the National Defense Strategy as the guiding light for the policy approaches were to take. And then the acquisition transformation strategy is our guiding light on the acquisition and sustainment program and capability side of how we need to get after delivering capabilities.

00;17;36;03 - 00;18;05;29

Drew Walter

I'll kind of glance on both. In some sense, in the nuclear realm, we continue to require a strong, secure, effective nuclear arsenal adapted to the nation's overall defense strategy. And we're going to modernize and adapt our nuclear forces accordingly and focus attention on deterrence and escalation management amidst the shifting global nuclear landscape. And ultimately, the Ends gives us very clear direction.

00;18;05;29 - 00;18;30;19

Drew Walter

We will ensure the US is never left vulnerable to nuclear blackmail. Our strategic deterrent

remains very robust, but I don't think I need to tell anybody who's signed into to this, this event, it is in need of recapitalization. I won't tick through the age of every system. But Minuteman 3 first fielded in 1970 for a ten-year lifespan.

00;18;30;24 - 00;19;00;17

Drew Walter

I won't do the math in public, but that system is going to be 6065 plus years old before it was replaced by Sentinel. If we could talk about Ohio and being the longest fleet of submarines that will be in the water before being replaced by Columbia and across the board, we are actively trying to manage the transition of these forces and do so with urgency.

00;19;00;18 - 00;19;36;14

Drew Walter

We are also looking at the imbalance in theater, nuclear forces in across the world to make sure that we're understanding shifts in that landscape and what we could be doing or should be doing in that regard, some of these limitations and on our side, but coupled with potential for opportunities, opportunistic aggression, and just the complexity of crises and conflicts we could face, we need to be mindful of all that and make sure our policy and posture is appropriately scoped for the strategic environment.

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Drew Walter

It really must be global and effectively back stopping, using the nuclear deterrent to backstop our conventional forces and conventional deterrent strategy to deny our adversaries the ability to achieve their objectives through aggression. We must be capable of deterring both peers and other actors simultaneously and prevent one crisis or conflict from spilling into another wherever we can.

00;20;03;25 - 00;20;40;16

Drew Walter

So, one of the reasons this is kind of the my takeaways from the National Defense Strategy and why you'll hear me emphasize urgency and have heard me emphasize urgency in the past. So how do we put a sense of urgency into practice? Clearly, we must modernize and we must continue to field a strong, secure and effective nuclear arsenal, underpinned by a supercharged defense industrial base and flexible nuclear security enterprise in both the Department of Energy and the Department of War.

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Drew Walter

This will enable agility and speed and be able to respond as appropriate in the future. So, we're going to continue investing in the long overdue replacement of Cold War era capabilities that are, as I alluded to with a couple specific examples, are operating decades beyond their intended service lives. We're also investing in critical infrastructure and nuclear warhead modernization programs at the National Nuclear Security Administration.

00;21;10;05 - 00;21;42;09

Drew Walter

And as I said before, we must proactively manage the transition from these current forces and capabilities and infrastructure that, while still robust, our legacy of the Cold War and sustain all of those very important systems and capabilities while we get after the modernization programs, we need to be looking at risks and opportunities, and there are opportunities out there.

00;21;42;11 - 00;22;07;07

Drew Walter

And I'll talk about 1 or 2 of them here, but there's also plenty of risks out there. And so, ensuring that we understand the risks and opportunities and action them appropriately at the right leadership level is one of the core functions that we feel we must carry out. I won't go into the various all the specific elements of nuclear modernization programs.

00;22;07;07 - 00;22;35;12

Drew Walter

Happy to discuss some of that in Q&A if needed. But I do want to foot stomp one thing. We must accelerate programs wherever possible to deliver capabilities into the hands of the warfighter as soon as possible due to decades of deferred modernization. We're trying to simultaneously recapitalize the nuclear deterrent in so many different ways. And, you know, time will not stop going.

00;22;35;13 - 00;23;09;00

Drew Walter

We need to move these through development and prototyping and production and fielding as soon as possible to ensure that we're capable of deterring long into the future. A few concrete examples. We've already taken steps, the Department, the Navy working with NNSA to accelerate SLCM-N program and good support from Congress on that under Dr. Kadlec's leadership.

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Drew Walter

As the staff director for the Nuclear Weapons Council, the council is considering ways to look at flexible nuclear forces and how can we enhance deterrence in the near medium term to provide the president options to manage escalation? As I said, working closely with General White, Admiral Gaucher and the in the Air Force and Navy, respectively, Dr. Kadlec continues to make the case and ensure department leaders are aware of tradeoffs as of for instance in B-21 program.

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Drew Walter

What is the ultimate number we need for STRATCOM, IndoPaCom, conventional nuclear? All the different needs for the bomber force of the future, as well as how are we going to arm and fuel this bomber force? What number of long range standoff cruise missiles, what number of

tankers, these kinds of very big national security decisions. There's an opportunity to make these decisions and drive demand signal into the industrial base.

00;24;16;16 - 00;24;41;25

Drew Walter

I think there was a post from Secretary Hegseth just recently about we at the Secretary's direction and Deputy Secretary Feinberg's direction, sending a very clear and strong demand signal to industry, including our partners, on what we think we need can get industry up on its feet and walking and running in the direction we need it to deliver.

00;24;41;28 - 00;25;10;15

Drew Walter

Secretary Hegseth made clear in his arsenal of freedom speech not too long ago. I'll read you a quick quote.

“We mean to increase acquisition risk in order to decrease operational risk. Let me say that again. We mean to increase acquisition risk in order to decrease operational risk by taking greater calculated risk and how we build by and maintain our systems, we will gain speed to more quickly provide capabilities to the battlefield.”

00;25;10;17 - 00;25;36;09

Drew Walter

Close quote. To that end, we are constantly looking for trade space and decision space that emphasizes delivering on schedule or ahead of schedule, while not sacrificing key requirements that that we absolutely need. This is not an easy shift in culture or process, and the devil is always in the details. But the department large is turning in this direction.

00;25;36;09 - 00;25;59;15

Drew Walter

And we are turning the nuclear enterprise in that direction as well. Second, our nuclear deterrent is only as effective as the command-and-control system that allows it to function the nuclear command and control and communications NC3 system. As with our nuclear forces and triad, we were slow to modernize NC3 after the conclusion of the Cold War.

00;25;59;16 - 00;26;44;21

Drew Walter

We have aggressively worked to reverse that trend. While robust today and robust every day in the world's worst environment, we know we have to get. After modernizing the key capabilities that comprise the NC3 system, we are in the process of transforming this enterprise from a federated system of systems into an integrated, resilient architecture leveraging modern tools, modern technologies to ensure the president always is connected to the force as our competitors advance their capabilities on NC3 and threats to our NC3, we will have resilient NC3 that can never be defeated.

00;26;44;23 - 00;27;37;08

Drew Walter

New programs like the Survivable Airborne Operations Center, SAOC, Looking Glass, Next Platforms, The Next Generation, TACAMO, and evolved communications in space and elsewhere are all vital to the future of the NC3 enterprise speeding up, accelerating, making sure these programs deliver while we sustain their again current counterparts that are the backbone of NC3 today is a Herculean task and is one where we're up for the current NC3 enterprise is nearly 200 different systems and proliferated sensors, communication tools, systems, decision tools sustaining each of these programs until their modernized replacements come online is a national imperative and one that we are succeeding.

00;27;37;10 - 00;28;09;07

Drew Walter

I had mentioned earlier that all of these capable capabilities and programs need to be underpinned by a supercharged defense industrial base. Obviously, following the Cold War, we have unhelpfully learned that taking risks is unacceptable. Instead of learning how to manage risks when they inevitably arrive, zeroing out risk leads to doing nothing. And so, we need to understand risk, manage it, understand opportunities and action them where we can.

00;28;09;09 - 00;28;34;12

Drew Walter

We need to recognize that in certain ways, failure is a learning opportunity. We learn through iteration and it helps us go faster. We're not going to fail at nuclear operations, but we are going to figure out how to go faster in the acquisition system. To be truly agile and ready to adapt, we need to understand previous behavior and how it was holding us back.

00;28;34;14 - 00;29;13;20

Drew Walter

So, we need to anticipate future requirements and not assume future systems will only be one for one replacements of legacy systems. We need to incorporate new technologies more quickly and iteratively. We need to iterate between operational and performance requirements, programmatic requirements, and we need to consider creative production approaches that find efficiencies and drive things to success faster. Whether the NWC or the NC3 Council or other places, we are focused on managing risks, finding opportunities wherever possible.

00;29;13;22 - 00;29;46;22

Drew Walter

It's increasingly looking to this future threat environment to inform what demand signal we need to send to the defense industrial base, to the enterprise, to our partners across the board, on the capabilities, infrastructure and the production capacity required today and long into the future. We will in our have the premier world's premier nuclear arsenal, and we're going to have the ability to keep it that way long into the future.

00;29;46;25 - 00;30;13;12

Drew Walter

Recognizing the costs of investing in our nuclear forces in capabilities infrastructure is significant. The cost of failing to make these investments a loss of deterrence, potentially in a world where adversaries could potentially believe they can engage in nuclear blackmail or limited nuclear war without consequences, that's an infinitely greater cost. So we're at a critical juncture, an inflection point.

00;30;13;13 - 00;30;39;16

Drew Walter

It's clear there is an immense amount of work to be done. But despite the challenges I mentioned and those that will come after, I am not discouraged. And frankly, I'm quite optimistic. We are Americans. We will innovate our way out of this, and we will do so at speed. We're capable of both modernizing and sustaining, as well as adapting our nuclear deterrent to meeting the challenges of today.

00;30;39;16 - 00;30;58;01

Drew Walter

In the future, we will engage allies and adversaries alike to seek strategic stability, will grow and strengthen our defense industrial base, nuclear security enterprise to support our deterrence needs. And we are capable.

00;30;58;03 - 00;31;42;17

Drew Walter

Of science, modern revolutionary engineering and manufacturing approaches to provide options to the president. We are capable of exploring new avenues of strategic thinking and policy, and planning for a future that is still coming into focus. So we cannot meet these challenges if we hesitate and we need to act with urgency toward our goals and we can't do it alone, we need the smart people in the nuclear enterprise, regardless of where you are in academia, in the services and think tanks in NNSA, across the board, in industry, we're all going to do it together and we must, because we owe it to the nation, we owe it to the warfighters and the future generations to ensure

00;31;42;22 - 00;32;04;22

Drew Walter

the nuclear component of the Arsenal of Freedom remains ready, reliable and resolute. So, I appreciate you listening to me. And I think staring at my picture for the last 20 minutes or so, looking forward to, to taking some questions. And I think I'll turn it over to Peter.

00;32;04;25 - 00;32;26;26

Peter Huessy

Thank you very much. True. We have a number of questions. Let's just walk through them. What are your current challenges to meeting the pit production requirement of 80 pits versus, for example, there was a proposal in the House Armed Services Committee last year to do no more than 20 pits and by 2050.

00;32;26;29 - 00;33;07;07

Drew Walter

Sure, this is always a topic of conversation. How do we get...t how does that NNSA get? Because it is certainly NNSA in the lead, and one of their core responsibilities to produce the nuclear explosive packages and the pits that go to the center of them. So we, the Department of War, the Nuclear Weapons Council, have recognized for quite some time that the requirement to meet 80 pits per year by 2030 was unlikely to be achieved.

00;33;07;09 - 00;33;45;19

Drew Walter

We recognized that the requirement is to go as fast as possible towards that number and meet it. If not, exceed it as soon as NNSA is able. We recognize the significant challenges of NSA's pit production enterprise facilities. This is one of those cases where we did the same thing on the Department of War side, and we just stopped building certain things for decades, frankly, and gave up the ability to produce key aspects of, of nuclear capabilities.

00;33;45;19 - 00;34;20;29

Drew Walter

And so, NNSA is coming up on speed and turning that battleship of the maybe it's a maybe it's a cruiser of the pit production enterprise as quickly as it can. Great conversations with Administrator Williams, Deputy Administrator Beck on what they're doing to go fast and accelerate. I think there's great progress. We see at the at Los Alamos to be able to get pit production going up at rate there.

00;34;21;02 - 00;34;49;11

Drew Walter

The Savannah River pit production facility has a long way to go. We're tracking closely as they head towards, I believe, a CD two critical decision to decision pretty soon where they will baseline the program I have. I will give a shout out to a dear friend and colleague, Sean McDonald at NNSA. I don't know if he's officially called the "Pit Czar", but I will call him the Pit Czar.

00;34;49;13 - 00;35;17;27

Drew Walter

The authority and responsibility to really drive the pit production enterprise to get up on, on its feet. He's doing a great job, supported by his senior leadership in the leadership ranks. And so we pay very close attention. We're obviously very interested. I will share pit production is one of several lines of effort that is working very hard to reestablish capability and capacity on.

00;35;17;27 - 00;35;45;23

Drew Walter

It's often the shiny object that we can all see, but NNSA is equally advancing the ball on lots of other lines of effort that are equally important to actually delivering nuclear explosive package on nuclear weapon to the department. So kudos then in a say I'm their biggest fan, sometimes a

knowledgeable critic, but they're getting there and they're turning in the right direction.

00;35;45;25 - 00;36;21;03

Peter Huessy

Drew, Senator Shaheen once said that relying on their legacy systems has a drawback, and that is, you don't necessarily know if one of the elements is going to stop working. And therefore, she said that gives an urgency to faster acquisition of the modernized elements of our triad. I assume you agree with that. What? Take all the elements that but submarines, the bombers, ICBMs and NC3?

00;36;21;06 - 00;36;34;07

Peter Huessy

I get an impression that we are improving quite significantly our ability to buy these things at a faster mode than previously.

00;36;34;09 - 00;37;03;23

Drew Walter

Certainly. I mean, Senator Shaheen is not wrong. The as we rely on legacy systems longer and longer and they continue to go well, well past their original intended design lives. You know, there's risk there. I won't use the unknown unknown or the known unknown moniker necessarily. But you know, we as a for instance.

00;37;03;26 - 00;37;25;18

Drew Walter

The Air Force programs in wedges of funding to support the air launch cruise missile, the AGM 86 B that it knows it will need it just doesn't know exactly what it's going to be for as that missile system gets older, things will break, things will get to a point where we feel like we need to replace them.

00;37;25;18 - 00;37;46;29

Drew Walter

And so over the over the if you look at the program plan and this isn't just unique to the outcome, but it's kind of across the board. We need to make sure we're programing in that funding because we're going to have to do small, small adjustments, buy new this or install new that, and we don't know exactly what it will be, but we know we're going to have to do something.

00;37;47;02 - 00;38;16;15

Drew Walter

And so ensuring we have that kind of funding program from the get go is important. And certainly the urgency to deliver. I will borrow a phrase from Deputy administrator for defense programs, Dave Beck. He says, you know, the best solution to pit aging is produce new pits. I say, you know, the best solution to, you know, minimizing risk from an old ICBM is a new ICBM.

00;38;16;17 - 00;38;40;13

Drew Walter

And so we recognize that we are still, you know, paying for some of the decisions that were made post-Cold War, you know, the focus on the global war on terror, which we're totally understandable decisions at the time. But given the priorities of the country and the threats we faced, but now we're dealing with all of that simultaneously.

00;38;40;13 - 00;38;54;05

Drew Walther

And it's a lot it's very complicated, interconnected set of programs and capabilities that must be delivered. But like I said, I'm quite optimistic. We know how to do this stuff and we're getting after it.

00;38;54;08 - 00;39;14;10

Peter Huessy

Another question came in from one of our attendees that you talked about the new organizational structure that you have. Can you give us any specifics today about how that's driven more cooperation between the Department of War and the Department of Energy, and particularly, of course, the NNSA?

00;39;14;13 - 00;39;43;23

Drew Walter

Sure. I mean, I can talk. Let me let me start with I've seen internal to the Department of War, several instances of the ability to kind of get together and resolve, maybe differences of opinion or slightly different understandings between the policy and the program side. Doing that at a lower level within our organization has I've seen instances of that immediately.

00;39;43;25 - 00;40;32;28

Drew Walter

Last year when I was the acting assistant secretary, where we could get this all on the table, you know. Okay, what do you think? What do you think? Let's come to a resolution and go from a and not having to elevate it to two undersecretaries or, you know, the deputy secretary or something like that. From the a perspective I guess I would share, you know, the ability for, for Dr. Kadlec to talk to NNSA counterparts about both policy and programs and try to be able to align our side, the Department of War side from both those perspectives within Insa is a powerful tool.

00;40;33;01 - 00;41;14;19

Drew Walter

Like I said, we always want programs to follow policy. We also want policy to be well informed by the what's possible and what's realistic from the program side. And NNSA is the program side for an important chunk of what we need to deliver. So I've seen of that as well, where he can kind of speak for, for the Department of War a little bit, a little bit larger than say, you know, previous instantiation of our office where we only reported on the ANS side and the program

side.

00;41;14;22 - 00;41;46;22

Peter Huessy

Another question came up here and I'm going to read part of it, Drew, is emerging technologies such as nonkinetic missile defenses, AI enabled targeting these things. How might they disrupt our assumptions about the current forces survivability, particular how much warning we may have on attack and what kind of decision timeline the president and command authorities might have to choose how to respond.

00;41;46;24 - 00;41;52;03

Drew Walter

Yeah that's a that's a great question. And the...

00;41;52;05 - 00;41;57;04

Peter Huessy

Remember I don't write these questions. These are the smart people in the audience.

00;41;57;06 - 00;42;52;14

Drew Walter

That's fine. You can take credit for it Peter, if you want. But I the breathtaking pace of technology advancement I mean we're all people of this world and we see what's going on. It's truly remarkable how we ensure the survivability of US conventional forces and US nuclear forces in the face of that is a real challenge, whether that's AI or some of these nonkinetic means that that we're obliquely referred to ensuring the survivability of the US nuclear force, including that ability of the president to detect the side and direct the force through the NC3 system, is just core to having the credible nuclear deterrent that we know is a key part

00;42;52;14 - 00;43;05;01

Drew Walter

of the equation for nuclear deterrence writ large. I will offer, you know, the kill chain to really get in and disrupt and or disable or.

00;43;05;03 - 00;43;44;25

Drew Walter

You know, take offline a system as robust as US nuclear forces. And NC3 is a really complicated matter, and we want to keep it as complicated for the adversary to be able to do that as possible. And so there whether you're talking STRATCOM and there NC3 enterprise leadership assessments done by DITRA and other organizations to ensure that we're understanding the threats and the vulnerabilities and taking steps to ensure the threats can't capitalize on a vulnerability and actually realize a risk are always ongoing.

00;43;44;27 - 00;44;13;04

Drew Walter

But this is always going to be, you know, classic cat and mouse offense, defense, equity game of technology advancement where, you know, we're just going to have to stay on top of it. And we do. But I, I share the whoever the questioners was, you know, understanding of this stuff is advancing so rapidly. It's we just have to stay on top of it.

00;44;13;07 - 00;44;46;26

Peter Huessy

Anna from CRS has written some really great things on nuclear stuff. But she has very nursing question. She says, in terms of the Department of Wars assessment of nuclear strategy, will we find out how much later about whether or not we should upload our forces does that... what she's saying is, does that depend on the current nuclear strategy assessment?

00;44;46;29 - 00;45;36;08

Drew Walter

Yeah. So I think as she certainly knows, given her role is good to get to hear from you and, and many of the rest of us, you know, the department is has the NDS from last year guidance to modernize and adapt as we've heard from Undersecretary Colby and Dr. Kadlec, there's a small nuclear strategy review going on at the moment, co-led by Undersecretary Colby and Admiral Carroll, commander of STRATCOM, to look at key nuclear strategy questions and, you know, including how to address the two peer environment and other.

00;45;36;10 - 00;46;05;03

Drew Walter

There's a lot of goodness in the in President Trump's 2018 NPR. And so the decision was not to write a whole other NPR. Part of that is nuclear posture and policy should be embedded inside the broader defense strategy. And so it is as a, as a portion of the national defense strategy, but also recognition that there are some key policy and strategy questions we still have to tease out and answer more definitively.

00;46;05;03 - 00;46;33;28

Drew Walter

That process is underway. I believe there's some timelines out there to deliver something later this summer. I can't predict what will be released to the public or what will be, you know, guidance and direction internal to the department. But certainly questions related to what our strategic forces and posture need to look like in the near term, and certainly the long term, depend upon answering strategy questions.

00;46;33;29 - 00;46;50;10

Drew Walter

First and foremost, we want the posture and the programs and the capabilities to follow policy. And while 2018 NPR gave us a great foundation, we will answer a few more of those key questions and see where we need to drive the posture and the capabilities.

00;46;50;12 - 00;47;17;01

Peter Huessy

This next question is somewhat commonly heard with particularly people commenting on this is where we are is that if you have two near peers and you have to build up to deter them, aren't you going to create a three-way arms race? And I'm not going to comment because I think the assumption of the question is wrong, but I'll let you go there and see what you think.

00;47;17;01 - 00;47;21;05

Peter Huessy

The best way to answer that is.

00;47;21;07 - 00;47;50;23

Drew Walter

Yeah, I don't want to get too far in front of the nuclear strategy review, which is understood examining exactly this question. But I, I would offer, you know, it's not clear that we need to go like for like number for number, quantity for quantity capability for capability to actually be able to achieve deterrence and achieve the objectives the president sets out for us should, God forbid, we have to employ nuclear weapons.

00;47;50;23 - 00;48;24;24

Drew Walter

And so that will all these are not easy questions. These are not straightforward. We have never faced this kind of environment before. But we recognize we need to have a deeper understanding of the environment and how our strategy addresses it. And ultimately the nuclear strategy has to be supported supporting, you know, the conventional denial strategy and what the NDS has told us is the department's overall defense strategy.

00;48;24;24 - 00;48;38;03

Drew Walter

So more to follow on all that. I don't want to get too far in front of where my leadership are looking to take that strategy conversation.

00;48;38;06 - 00;49;05;19

Peter Huessy

Steve Schwartz always has an interesting question, and today he asked us whether or not is there a finite number of delivery systems and warheads sufficient to deter adversaries and achieve our military objectives. Or one of the questions he has is, are we going back to the 1980s and early 1990s, where we had thousands of additional warheads compared to the day?

00;49;05;21 - 00;49;34;25

Drew Walter

It's always a great question. Thank you. Steven, you know, I think large scale adjustments to U.S. nuclear posture in the near and medium term are unlikely to be in the cards. I just don't see that the modernize and adapt direction we have is going to lead to tens of thousands of new delivery systems in the near and medium term.

00;49;34;28 - 00;49;43;25

Drew Walter

You know, we would like to be having street stability discussions with.

00;49;43;27 - 00;50;26;26

Drew Walter

Russia, China and ensure that we have mutual understanding of where our programs and postures may be going. I know Assistant Secretary Yeaw has been on that front quite a bit. You know, I just don't see in the near the medium term large scale increases in the US nuclear posture because I'm, I think the ability to deter and achieve objectives isn't, as I said before, dependent upon like for like number for number, quantity for quantity across all of our adversaries, all summed up at once.

00;50;26;26 - 00;50;55;16

Drew Walter

But it'll be this is one of the I think this is actually probably the strategy, nuclear strategy, nuclear deterrence policy challenge of our lifetime and certainly of my career. So, we're going to answer it. It may not be the full answer in the summer, but we're taking active steps to make sure we have a credible and rational and realistic nuclear strategy and nuclear posture.

00;50;55;18 - 00;51;35;00

Peter Huessy

This question is quite interesting. We're having a number of panels that are event in June in Shreveport with in with Louisiana State University on this issue, which is of great interest to industry. I'm not going to read it to you. It says, how is the Department of War continuing to foster K-12 interest and vocational or post-collegiate growth, or such things as pipe fitting, welding, electronics technologies and other industrial needs to support the accelerating demand for these kinds of capabilities.

00;51;35;02 - 00;52;25;13

Drew Walter

Also, a very good question, and something that the department is looking at extensively through industrial base revitalization. I would offer this the choices the nation, the country made to kind of de industrialize in some sense were national level choices. This wasn't just the Department of Defense now Department of War that made these choices. And so we do need the entire nation to understand that this kind of approach towards deindustrialization or shipping, you know, the ability to produce things to other countries, some, you know, not exactly friendly countries all the time is something we have to reverse.

00;52;25;14 - 00;53;02;23

Drew Walter

And so, the department is certainly in base looking to do that. One of the ways is by sending that very clear demand signal strongly to industry and keeping it strong for years. And industry will

help incentivize and move in the direction of getting the workforce it needs. I mean, I will share just an anecdote more than anything, but ensuring that we pay the people at shipyards and they don't have to be the nuclear shipyards, be any shipyard.

00;53;02;29 - 00;53;25;05

Drew Walter

And that's just an example. Pay them enough to incentivize them to want to do a hard job. Their pipe fitting electrical inside a ship hull like that ain't easy, and ensuring that we are paying the premium and it's going to cost a premium. Not everybody will do this just because they're patriots. Some people will, but we need a lot of people and we need them to have these skills.

00;53;25;05 - 00;53;56;04

Drew Walter

And so ensuring that we're incentivizing them financially, training wise, career progression, all the things is part of some of what I've seen through the submarine industrial base investments and the shipyard investments writ large. But ultimately, this is going to take the whole nation, and we're going to have to find ways to ensure people both want these jobs and are retained in these jobs and have all the right skills to perform the jobs that we ask of them for the for the nation.

00;53;56;07 - 00;54;17;02

Peter Huessy

Jacob from STRATCOM, that's a very interesting question. I'm just going to read it to you. Given the inherent challenges of simultaneous deterrence of two nuclear piers, what role does Golden Dome play for America? Here's the key in denying adversary nuclear coercion.

00;54;17;04 - 00;55;04;10

Drew Walter

Sure. Thanks, Jacob. The Golden Dome is intended to and will provide some pretty significant missile defense capabilities to the country. It's been long needed. It's the right initiative to deliver that defense for the country. We're going to have to sustain it and fund it and ensure it delivers. But there is you know, there is implications for Golden Dome in, you know, our nuclear deterrent, ensuring that we can detect and give the president time to decide to employ or not employ again.

00;55;04;10 - 00;55;32;12

Drew Walter

But then the Golden Dome will have implications on whether you know he or she in the future president needs to employ based on what Gold Dome is capable of. And so, I would I would kind of put this into the pretty close to that emerging technology question like missile defenses, whether cruise missile blitzing, missiles, other kinds of missile are advancing rapidly in all countries, including ours now.

00;55;32;15 - 00;55;41;16

Drew Walter

And so there will be implications for nuclear forces writ large, there's no doubt about that.

00;55;41;18 - 00;56;10;24

Peter Huessy

We were at we had a few minutes left. True. But this question is goes to the heart of why started the seminar series way back in 1981 and then big time come in 1983. And that was the late Bud McFarland who was kind of my nuclear godfather in the administration, said that our nuclear literacy IQ was not up to snuff.

00;56;10;27 - 00;56;39;03

Peter Huessy

And he said when I had proposed to him to do seminars on the Hill, he said, well, that's a good, good place to start. And as you may know, we started them when there were only members of Congress could attend. And then we had the bandwidth such as we opened it up, pretty much everybody. What's the current level of nuclear literacy with respect to our friends and allies abroad versus here at home?

00;56;39;05 - 00;56;40;24

Peter Huessy

I don't want to put you on the spot about.

00;56;40;26 - 00;56;42;02

Drew Walter

No, no.

00;56;42;04 - 00;56;50;24

Peter Huessy

Getting into what our rising lies around the world, but I get a sense that it's go ahead. You tell us where you want to go with that.

00;56;50;25 - 00;57;16;04

Drew Walter

It's rising. Actually, you just see, James just sent a link about Bud. Good to see that to you. I will say our allies and partners, you know, also took a holiday from thinking about this kind of stuff and much more so than we did, frankly, because it wasn't in their daily things they had to deal with.

00;57;16;05 - 00;58;02;09

Drew Walter

And so it has been rising rapidly since Russia and Ukraine, certainly 2014, but a absolutely by the 2022 conflict, our allies, we actually talk about nuclear IQ in NATO's high level group that I've had the pleasure of, of helping lead here and there over my tenure. Similarly with allies in the Indo-Pacific talking about, you know, nuclear concepts, nuclear deterrence, nuclear policy

and planning and capabilities, and, you know, the the IQ, the level of understanding is, is rising quite, quite rapidly.

00;58;02;09 - 00;58;32;27

Drew Walter

But it had started from a quite low level. And I think several allies have said that to me in the past. So, and as always, it will it will take us leadership here to help them understand. But we have been clear, you know, we want to be the nuclear backstop in particular for NATO, along with our the other NATO, armed and nuclear armed countries and NATO, and shift some of the conventional denial and deterrence burden to those allies.

00;58;32;27 - 00;58;45;02

Drew Walter

Well we provide the nuclear backstop, but by providing that, we do need them to have a very firm understanding of what the nuclear deterrent and nuclear force can provide.

00;58;45;05 - 00;59;08;26

Peter Huessy

We're at 10:59, Drew, and I want to say on behalf of Jim Petrosky, who's our president. And because of all the wonderful work Kimberly does, both of us, all three of us would like to thank you immensely for your extraordinary remarks. That session was very good. We will send you the questions we couldn't get to, and we'll send that Kimberly.

00;59;08;26 - 00;59;40;14

Peter Huessy

We'll send that to you. And she'll also do a transcript and the video will be available posted on the website. So, I would like to say to all our attendees who joined us today, thank you to our sponsors and friends. Thank you again very much. And Kimberly, thank you. Do wonderful work. And to you, Drew, thank you for a real good assessment of kind of where we are in the nuclear business, because that's exactly what I wanted you to take a look at.

00;59;40;14 - 00;59;56;15

Peter Huessy

And so thank you again, and we will be in touch again. And Kimberly, if you have anything you would like to add, please do. I'm sorry. We are at 11:00, but we have got a minute or so to for you to close this

00;59;56;17 - 01;00;26;14

Kimberly Cherington

Yes, sir. Thank you so much. I also want to thank you for being here with us today. If you're new to us, we are 563 nonprofit organization, supported by generous donors and dedicated to advancing peace and stability through a strong national security and nuclear deterrent. May we have designated May as Deterrence Matters month, during which NIDS will share their daily insights.

01;00;26;14 - 01;00;53;07

Kimberly Cherington

We put facts and stories highlighting on our social media, showing the importance of deterrence, force, and the people who keep our nation safe. We invite you to follow us on LinkedIn and share our content with your network to help us spread the word. And we appreciate all donations. Every dollar counts to help us in make making sure that you invest in peace through strength.

01;00;53;07 - 01;01;05;04

Kimberly Cherington

So thank you for your support and for being part of our growing community. We hope you have a peaceful day and we will see you next week, live at the Capitol Hill Club. Thank you everybody.