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Adapting U.S. Nuclear Strategy and Posture to a More Contested and Competitive World

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Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Cooper, and distinguished members of the committee, thank you for inviting me to testify today on the future of America's nuclear deterrent. It is an honor to speak to you today on this matter of the greatest importance to our nation's security.

We are entering a period of significant and possibly dramatic change in both the geopolitical and military-technological spheres. In brief, the United States is likely to confront more significant challenges to its interests from countries like China in Asia and Russia in and around Europe. At the same time, U.S. conventional military advantages over its plausible opponents will likely narrow.

This will have major implications for U.S. defense strategy writ large, but also for our nuclear deterrent. Accordingly, the United States needs to adapt its nuclear policy and posture.

What in particular should change?

If the United States continues to want to extend deterrence effectively – as it should – U.S. nuclear weapons need to do more than threaten unhindered devastation. Thus, while the ultimate source of U.S. deterrence should remain the threat of overwhelming devastation, the United States should also prepare for and make clear that it would, as appropriate, use its nuclear forces in more limited fashion for more focused effect. In particular, the United States should adapt its nuclear forces to be able to fight a limited nuclear war more effectively than plausible adversaries. Such superiority would give the United States important and possibly crucial coercive leverage.

The U.S. nuclear force of today is not, however, optimally designed for this demanding set of criteria. To optimize its nuclear force, the United States should:

- Invest appropriately in an improved nuclear command and control system such that U.S. nuclear forces can perform their missions reliably under any plausible conditions and do so in sufficiently controlled and deliberate fashions.
- Maintain the nuclear triad to ensure a resilient, redundant, and highly capable nuclear deterrent.

Bold.

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- In addition to fully funding the SSBN replacement and replacing the Minuteman III, the United States should maintain and modernize its fleet of nuclear-armed bombers. This modernization effort is particularly important in light of the unique attack capabilities found in the bomber force and the growing challenges to stealth.
- This effort should include procuring the LRS-B in sufficient numbers, maintaining the B-52H and B-2A, buying sufficient dual-capable F-35s for regional deterrence and assurance, and acquiring the LRSO.
- The United States should move in the direction of providing all its nuclear forces with variable yield warheads/weapons that can provide a variety of types of effects (such as electromagnetic pulse, different height of burst, use at sea, and so forth) so that the United States can more effectively tailor strikes from the full range of its available platforms.
 - The United States should in particular focus on making the ballistic missile force more capable of discriminate strikes. The United States should accordingly render at least some portion of the Trident II D5 SLBM arsenal capable of lower yield strikes, for instance by using primary-only warheads.
 - The United States should also ensure that the LRSO is capable of discriminate employment by arming it with a variable yield warhead.
- Given the proliferation of hardened and deeply buried targets (HDBTs), earth penetration should be a special focus of long-term research and development and, ultimately, procurement. This is vital for deterrence and stability.
- The size and composition of the nuclear force should be determined based on strategic considerations. Arms control should be pursued where it contributes to stability, not for the sake of reductions.

The world is changing in ways that dictate that U.S. nuclear policy and posture should also change. The United States should grasp the opportunity to do so while unfavorable trends are still nascent and susceptible to counteraction. I believe a modernization program along these lines would add to a favorable stability and ultimately to the kind of peace we and our allies seek.

I look forward to any questions you might have. Thank you very much.