



DOCUMENTATION

The Documentation Section includes Former Deputy Under Secretary of Defense for Policy and Senior Scholar at the National Institute for Public Policy David J. Trachtenberg's prepared statement from a September 2026 Senate Armed Services Subcommittee on Strategic Forces hearing on the Golden Dome for America. In it, he considered the increasing missile threat to the U.S. homeland and the value that missile defense provides in such an environment. He argues that Congress must provide the necessary resources to advance U.S. missile defense efforts. The second document offers select excerpts from Under Secretary of War for Policy Elbridge Colby's remarks to the North Atlantic Council. Under Secretary Colby discussed the requirement for North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) members to increase their defense spending and commented on the ongoing reassessment of the U.S. posture in Europe. Third, this *Journal* issue provides select excerpts from Under Secretary Colby's remarks at the 2026 United States Strategic Command Deterrence Symposium in August 2026. Under Secretary Colby elaborated on the Administration's approach to nuclear deterrence, the ongoing mini-review of U.S. nuclear posture, and the types of capabilities the United States might pursue to strengthen deterrence in a regional context, given negative developments in the threat landscape, including China's nuclear buildup. Fourth are select excerpts from Secretary of War Pete Hegseth's remarks at the 2026 NATO Defense Ministerial in Brussels. Secretary Hegseth discussed the Administration's vision for a stronger NATO focused on territorial defense and the necessity for allies to invest in their conventional defense to achieve that objective.

Document No. 1: Prepared Statement of The Honorable David J. Trachtenberg, Senior Scholar, National Institute for Public Policy, Former Deputy Under Secretary of Defense for Policy Before the Subcommittee on Strategic Forces, Committee on Armed Services, United States Senate, Second Session, 119th Congress, Hearing on the Golden Dome for America Initiative, September 29, 2026.

(As prepared for delivery)

Chairperson Fischer, Ranking Member King, and members of the Strategic Forces Subcommittee, thank you for the invitation to participate in this hearing on President Trump's Golden Dome for America initiative. It is an honor to testify before you today. Madam Chairperson, I would ask that my full statement be submitted for the record.

I have been asked to comment on the strategic threat environment facing the United States and the larger policy issues relating to the Golden Dome effort. My views on this are a matter of public record and some of my testimony today will reflect what I wrote in an *Occasional Paper* published last year by the National Institute for Public Policy titled, *Next Steps in Homeland Missile Defense*.¹ I would also like to submit that paper for the record.

¹ David J. Trachtenberg, *Next Steps in Homeland Missile Defense*, Occasional Paper, Vol. 5, No. 1 (Fairfax, VA: National Institute Press, January 2025), <https://nipp.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/Vol.-5-No.-1.pdf>.



I would like to focus on three issues: First, does the strategic threat to the homeland justify the Golden Dome effort? Second, what impediments exist that may stifle progress on Golden Dome? And third, what should be done to overcome these impediments and how might this committee, and Congress more generally, help accomplish this?

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Regarding the strategic threat to the homeland, there is no question that the United States is increasingly vulnerable to attack by a variety of missile threats, including ballistic, cruise, and hypersonic missiles, as well as from unmanned aerial systems or drones.² Major adversaries such as China and Russia are expanding their strategic missile capabilities with ever greater numbers of sophisticated nuclear and conventional missile systems. China possesses what has been described as the largest and most sophisticated ballistic missile arsenal in Asia and is “conducting the most significant expansion of its missile systems in its history.”³

Since the end of the Cold War, the missile threat to the United States has evolved in ways that complicate defense of the homeland. Ballistic missiles have been seen as the weapon of choice for states seeking to reign terror upon an adversary, as they are difficult to counter. Today, more than 30 countries possess ballistic missiles of varying ranges and capabilities.⁴ Moreover, the ballistic missile threat has been augmented by newer, more sophisticated, types of missiles that are even more difficult to counter. These include hypersonic missiles, cruise missiles, and other types of unmanned aerial systems like drones.

As the director of the Golden Dome for America initiative, General Michael Guetlein, has testified, “A new generation of advanced air and missile threats, unprecedented in their speed, numbers, and lethality, now holds the American homeland at risk.”⁵ As even the Biden Administration’s *2022 Missile Defense Review* noted, “missile-related threats have rapidly expanded in quantity, diversity and sophistication. U.S. national security interests are increasingly at risk from wide-ranging missile arsenals that include offensive ballistic, cruise, and hypersonic weapons....”⁶ And as one former Biden Administration official put it more starkly in congressional testimony, “Offensive missiles are increasingly weapons of choice for

² Glen VanHerck, “Why the Golden Dome Is Essential for Homeland Defense,” *The National Interest*, August 24, 2026, <https://nationalinterest.org/feature/why-the-golden-dome-is-essential-for-homeland-defense>.

³ Statement by General Michael A. Guetlein before the Subcommittee on Strategic Forces, Senate Armed Services Committee, April 27, 2026, p. 3, https://www.armed-services.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/guetlein_opening_statement.pdf.

⁴ Kelsey Davenport, “Worldwide Ballistic Missile Inventories,” *Arms Control Association Fact Sheet*, August 2023, <https://www.armscontrol.org/factsheets/worldwide-ballistic-missileinventories>.

⁵ Cited in Sana Pashankar, “Pentagon Sets Funds, Dates for Secret Golden Dome Space Program,” *Bloomberg News*, August 7, 2026, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2026-08-07/pentagon-sets-funds-dates-for-secret-golden-dome-space-program>.

⁶ Department of Defense, *2022 Missile Defense Review*, p. 1, <https://media.defense.gov/2022/Oct/27/2003103845/-1/-1/1/2022-NATIONAL-DEFENSE-STRATEGY-NPR-MDR.pdf>.

Russia, China, North Korea, and Iran, for use in conflict and to coerce and intimidate their neighbors.”⁷

The utility of ballistic, cruise, and other types of missiles in combat has been demonstrated by their effective use in recent conflicts. For example, Azerbaijan’s extensive use of unmanned aerial vehicles or drones in the second war over Nagorno-Karabakh in 2020 led to an impressive victory over Armenian forces. In addition, in the first two years since its full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, Russia launched more than 11,000 missiles at Ukraine, including ballistic, cruise, unmanned aerial vehicles (drones), and hypersonic missiles.⁸ By some reports, Russia has fired more than 2,000 cruise missiles against Ukrainian targets,⁹ including launching more than 100 cruise missiles and drones in a single attack in December 2023 and again in November 2024.¹⁰ In July of this year, Ukraine reported some 265 cruise missile attacks and more than 8,600 drone strikes.¹¹ In May, Russia targeted Ukraine with nuclear-capable “Oreshnik” intermediate-range ballistic missiles with hypersonic capabilities.¹²

The growing threat of faster, longer-range, and more deadly ballistic, cruise, hypersonic, and other unmanned missiles and systems means that the United States is increasingly at risk of more complex missile attacks, including those employing sophisticated countermeasures. Consequently, missile defense of the U.S. homeland must address these multiple types of threats, either singly or in combination, on an urgent basis.

Importantly, the growth and sophistication of adversary missile systems complicate overall U.S. force planning and may discourage U.S. military action in theaters where the risk of enemy responses against American and allied personnel, bases, and infrastructure may be considered too great. In this way, adversary offensive missile systems can dissuade U.S. leaders from taking necessary actions in support of U.S. interests abroad. This dynamic may have a chilling effect on U.S. decision making and freedom of action. As missile threats to the

⁷ Testimony of Dr. John Plumb before the Senate Armed Services Committee Strategic Forces Subcommittee, May 18, 2022, https://www.armed-services.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/ASD%20Plumb%20SASC%20SF%20Missile%20Defense%20Written%20Statement%20-%20May,18%202022_FINAL.pdf.

⁸ Benjamin Jensen and Yasir Atalan, “Assessing Russian Firepower Strikes in Ukraine,” Center for Strategic and International Studies, October 23, 2024, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/assessing-russian-firepower-strikesukraine>.

⁹ Valentyna Romanenko, “Russia has launched 2,437 cruise missiles since February 2022 – Ukraine’s Air Force spokesperson,” *Ukrainska Pravda*, June 3, 2025, <https://www.pravda.com.ua/eng/news/2025/06/03/7515375/>.

¹⁰ See Victoria Butenko, Maria Kostenko, Mariya Knight, Svitlana Vlasova and Christian Edwards, “Russia unleashes biggest air attack on Ukraine since start of full-scale invasion,” *CNN*, December 30, 2023,

<https://edition.cnn.com/2023/12/29/europe/ukrainerussia-airstrikes-intl-hnk/index.html>; David Brennan, “Russia launches ‘massive’ drone and missile energy blitz across Ukraine,” *ABC News*, November 28, 2024, <https://abcnews.go.com/International/russia-launches-massivedrone-missile-energy-blitz-ukraine/story?id=116299874>.

¹¹ Cited at <https://www.facebook.com/themilitarychannelusa/posts/read-ukraines-ministry-of-defense-reported-that-russian-forces-launched-265-crui/122225686334902462/>.

¹² Tetyana Oliynyk, “Putin says Oreshnik missile was fired against Ukraine to ‘conveniently observe impact,’” *Ukrainska Pravda*, June 4, 2026, <https://www.pravda.com.ua/eng/news/2026/06/04/8037802/>; Yuliia Dysa and Max Hunder, “Russia hits Ukraine with Oreshnik missile in one of war’s biggest attacks on Kyiv,” *Reuters*, May 23, 2026, <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/ukraines-capital-kyiv-hit-by-massive-missile-drone-attack-2026-05-23/>.

homeland grow, the United States may be deterred by adversary coercive nuclear or conventional threats, unwilling to risk the potential consequences of an opponent's response to U.S. military action—even when such action is justified. In this way, missile systems need not be employed in combat to have a significant dissuasive effect on U.S. actions. An effective missile defense system can help to mitigate the dissuasive effect of enemy missile threats. Moreover, as long as the U.S. homeland remains vulnerable to expanding missile threats and the proclivities of opponents to threaten actual nuclear use, the United States may be increasingly reluctant to take military action in support of threatened allies and friends. This would undermine longstanding U.S. extended deterrence policy.

In 2023, the congressionally mandated, bipartisan Strategic Posture Commission noted that “to date the United States has chosen to not build homeland missile defenses against major powers” and that U.S. homeland defense capabilities “do not adequately protect the critical infrastructure necessary to project power and avoid coercion in light of growing Russian and Chinese nuclear and conventional strike threats.”¹³ Consequently, the Commission recommended that the United States “develop and field homeland IAMD [integrated air and missile defense] capabilities that can deter and defeat coercive attacks by Russia and China.”¹⁴ The Trump Administration should publicly endorse the bipartisan conclusions of the Strategic Posture Commission and accelerate efforts to enhance U.S. missile defense capabilities in light of the growing missile threat to the homeland.

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Second, what are the most significant impediments to Golden Dome's success? I believe they reflect more political, bureaucratic, and institutional biases rather than technological or fiscal challenges.

Progress in homeland missile defense has been stymied by outdated Cold War nostrums, anemic funding, lack of prioritization, organizational and bureaucratic roadblocks, and ideologically based political opposition. Political opposition to Golden Dome is rooted in the Cold War notion that defending the nation from missile attacks is unnecessary and destabilizing – unnecessary because deterrence is and will remain reliable, and destabilizing because it will spark an arms race as others seek to build even more offensive capabilities to overwhelm the defense. Both notions are seriously flawed and based on dubious assumptions or demonstrably false.

The notion that deterrence can be relied on to succeed indefinitely is a comforting but likely unrealistic proposition, especially in light of Moscow's extensive nuclear building program, its belligerent actions—including its full-scale invasion of Ukraine—and its numerous bellicose nuclear threats against the West. In addition, China's massive expansion of its own nuclear arsenal, its increasingly aggressive posturing over Taiwan, and its growing

¹³ Madelyn R. Creedon, Jon L. Kyl, et al., *America's Strategic Posture: The Final Report of the Congressional Commission on the Strategic Posture of the United States*, October 2023, p. 28, <https://www.ida.org/assets/2026/06/18084611/Strategic-Posture-Commission-Report.pdf>.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. X, 72, 105.

military collaboration with Russia as part of what has been called the “Axis of Authoritarians” suggest that the prospect of coercive nuclear threats and opportunistic aggression in a two-nuclear-peer environment is a growing and realistic concern.

Moreover, the notion that Golden Dome will spark a U.S.-driven “action-reaction” offensive arms race as adversaries seek to counter it is belied by the fact that adversaries have been developing more sophisticated nuclear-capable offensive missiles for years while the United States has not. Indeed, the oft-cited notion that U.S. actions are the primary driver of adversary reactions and the corollary notion that U.S. restraint will engender adversary restraint have been disproven by history.¹⁵

In addition, some opponents argue that Golden Dome can never be 100 percent effective against large, sophisticated missile threats. But perfection, of course, is not the objective. Heightening the uncertainty of success in an adversary’s calculation of whether to launch an attack in the first place strengthens deterrence. And providing some protection against the possible failure of deterrence is, in my view, the only morally acceptable course of action for a government whose primary constitutional duty is to protect the safety and security of Americans. In light of the growing threats to U.S. security from both peer nuclear adversaries and rogue states, the time has come to abandon the outdated thinking that American vulnerability to missile attack is a stabilizing feature of the international environment.

There is also an institutional bias within the Pentagon and the defense establishment that has worked against progress on improved missile defenses. This bias is the result of many factors, including a lack of understanding of deterrence issues, a belief that nuclear use by adversaries against the homeland is a far-fetched possibility, a focus on speculative and often inflated cost estimates, the desire to spend limited resources on what are perceived to be other more urgent priorities, a culture of risk avoidance, and concerns over technological feasibility, especially defenses in space.

Experts who understand the technical aspects of missile defense, including former directors of the Missile Defense Agency, have stated that Golden Dome is both cost-effective and technologically feasible. As one noted, “Moving to space is the only way to defeat a growing quantity and quality of adversary threats. It is the only means to provide an effective boost/ascent phase missile defense capability essential to defeat current and future threats. There is simply no other technically feasible option....”¹⁶ And General Guetlein noted recently that two Golden Dome tests were “phenomenally successful.”¹⁷

With respect to cost issues, I would like to comment on the various cost estimates for Golden Dome that have been circulating in the media. The CBO, for example, has estimated

¹⁵ See, for example, Hon. David J. Trachtenberg, Study Director, Dr. Michaela Dodge, and Dr. Keith B. Payne, *The “Action-Reaction” Arms Race Narrative vs. Historical Realities* (Fairfax, VA: National Institute Press, March 2021), <https://nipp.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/Action-Reaction-pub.pdf>.

¹⁶ Lt. Gen. Henry “Trey” Obering, III (Ret.), Remarks at symposium on “Overcoming the Roadblocks to Homeland Missile Defense,” hosted by National Institute for Public Policy, July 20, 2022, printed in *Journal of Policy & Strategy*, Vol. 3, No. 1, p. 104, <https://nipp.org/wpcontent/uploads/2023/03/Proceedings-July-2022.pdf>.

¹⁷ Thomas Novelly, “‘There is no Golden Dome’ unless Congress prioritizes funding, general warns,” *Defense One*, August 11, 2026, https://www.defenseone.com/policy/2026/08/golden-dome-congress-general/415355/?utm_campaign=dfn-ebb&utm_medium=email&utm_source=sailthru.

that the cost of Golden Dome could top \$1.2 trillion over 20 years.¹⁸ Others have estimated the cost could reach as much as \$3.6 trillion over 20 years.¹⁹ There are several points that need to be made, however, to put all such cost estimates in proper context.

First, estimating the cost of any system over a 20-year period is fraught with uncertainty and likely to be wrong, perhaps wildly so. It is based on certain assumptions regarding technology development, programmatic architecture, industrial base support, and other variables that are not necessarily valid. Indeed, some may be unknown and unknowable at present.²⁰ General Guetlein has stated that the CBO estimate is an uninformed “myth” and does not accurately portray the planned Golden Dome architecture, noting that “sensational cost estimates” are “all false.”²¹ Of course, it is not unusual for the cost of any program to look exorbitant and prohibitive to the average person if extended over a period of two decades. Indeed, the cost of conventional force modernization may be in the trillions of dollars if estimated over a period of several decades, but that is not a valid argument for forgoing necessary conventional force enhancements. The publicly postulated cost estimates for Golden Dome may be right or wrong, but allowing such speculative, crystal ball-like estimates to drive policy decisions, regardless of the methodology used, is shortsighted and unwise.

Second, there is an unfortunate tendency by many to confuse *cost* with *value*. The two are not synonymous. The cost of Golden Dome may indeed be high in monetary terms, but that cost may pale in significance to the value Golden Dome provides in defending the nation from the growing threat of missile attack. Indeed, Golden Dome is intended not only to protect the United States against possible missile attack but also to strengthen deterrence of such an attack in the first place by diminishing the odds that an aggressor can count on successfully achieving his military objectives. And in weighing cost, it is important to consider the cost of rebuilding a major American city should deterrence fail, for whatever reason. In this regard, Golden Dome is the nation’s ultimate insurance policy, and, in my view, its value as both a deterrent to missile attack and a defense against such an attack far exceeds its cost. If we are not willing to pay the premium for the protection it promises, then we must shoulder the potentially catastrophic consequences that may flow from accepting the risk of deterrence failure.

Finally, those who assert that Golden Dome is “unaffordable” are confusing the issue of affordability with spending preferences. In other words, it is not that Golden Dome is

¹⁸ David Arthur and Christopher Martin, et. al., “Potential Costs of a National Missile Defense System,” Congressional Budget Office, May 2026, <https://www.cbo.gov/system/files/2026-05/62379-golden-dome.pdf>.

¹⁹ Todd Harrison, *Build Your Own Golden Dome: A Framework for Understanding Costs, Choices, and Tradeoffs*, AEI Foreign & Defense Policy Working Paper 2025-20, September 2025, <https://www.aei.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/09/WP-Estimating-the-Cost-of-Golden-Dome.pdf?x68881>.

²⁰ For a critical assessment of the CBO methodology, see Christopher Stone, “A Response to the Opponents of Space-Based Interceptors in Golden Dome,” *RealClear Defense*, June 23, 2026, https://www.realcleardefense.com/articles/2026/06/23/a_response_to_the_opponents_of_space-based_interceptors_in_golden_dome_1190312.html.

²¹ Novelly, op. cit.; Also see Rachel S. Cohen, “Golden Dome cost estimate draws Pentagon pushback,” *Federal News Network*, August 20, 2026, <https://federalnewsnetwork.com/defense-main/2026/08/golden-dome-cost-estimate-draws-pentagon-pushback/>.

unaffordable, but rather that critics believe the fiscal resources it requires would be better spent on other priorities.²² Let me be clear: There is a legitimate debate to be had over the proper prioritization of limited defense resources, but suggesting that speculative and extreme cost estimates make the Golden Dome effort unaffordable is misleading at best and disingenuous at worst.

Ultimately, it is a question of whether the nation is willing to accept the risk of remaining relatively defenseless in perpetuity against emerging, more sophisticated, and more capable adversary missile threats to the homeland, including those posed by major nuclear adversaries like Russia and China. I would hope the Congress' answer to this question would be a resounding no.

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Finally, there is the question of what should be done to overcome these impediments and how this committee, and Congress more generally, might help accomplish this. On this question, I would make several observations.

First, it is important for the Congress to reaffirm its clear and unequivocal support for Golden Dome in the NDAA and to codify as a matter of policy that the United States shall be defended against all types of missile threats, of any range, launched from any location. Over the years, congressional language has been schizophrenic on this issue, sometimes expressing support for a more robust missile defense capability, other times favoring a missile defense system that can counter only limited missile threats to the homeland and stating that it is U.S. policy to rely on strategic deterrence and the threat of nuclear retaliation rather than active defenses to protect the nation against more sophisticated long-range missile threats from peer adversaries.

I commend the Congress for modifying U.S. missile defense policy in the FY2026 NDAA by declaring that it is the policy of the United States to defend against “the threat of foreign attack by increasingly complex ballistic, hypersonic glide, and cruise missiles, and other advanced aerial threats,” without restricting this effort to limited missile threats or rogue state actors only.²³ While the language also recognizes that our nuclear deterrent remains an essential component of our deterrent posture, it should be augmented by active defensive measures to guard against the risk of deterrence failure. Golden Dome promises just that.

Second, Congress needs to exercise fully its oversight role to ensure the administration moves out swiftly and smartly to make the promise of Golden Dome a reality. This includes support for, and greater investment in, space-based sensors that can provide early warning, tracking, and discrimination capabilities, as well as kinetic and non-kinetic defensive intercept capabilities, including directed energy systems. In this regard, Israel's experience

²² For a discussion of this issue as it relates to spending on nuclear weapons programs, see Dr. Keith B. Payne and Dr. John S. Foster, Jr., et. al., *A New Nuclear Review for a New Age* (Fairfax, VA: National Institute Press, April 2017), pp. 185-198, <https://nipp.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/A-New-Nuclear-Review-final.pdf>.

²³ Section 1651 of the *National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2026* (Public Law 119-60), December 18, 2025, <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/PLAW-119publ60/pdf/PLAW-119publ60.pdf>.

with its “Iron Beam” system may be instructive. Directed energy technology can potentially change the offense-defense cost curve significantly in favor of the defense, nullifying one of the most frequently cited arguments against missile defense, namely, that defensive interceptors are significantly more costly than the offensive missiles they are intended to counter.

As adversary missile threats grow and become increasingly capable, the role of space-based assets takes on greater significance and should be pursued with all due urgency. The benefits of developing a space-based intercept capability are numerous. It would allow longer-range missiles to be countered in their boost-phase, when they are most vulnerable due to highly visible signatures while their engines are burning, or in their ascent-phase prior to payload separation. A boost- or ascent-phase defense would also allow the destruction of missiles over enemy territory rather than over U.S. soil. This, in itself, could serve as a powerful deterrent to missile attack. And it would also help mitigate the technical challenges faced by terrestrial mid-course and terminal missile defense systems that face geographic, trajectory, and other limitations and are likely to encounter enemy decoys and countermeasures.²⁴ Cold War-era platitudes that space-based defenses will result in the “militarization of space” or the “weaponization of space” ignore decades of adversary efforts to develop and improve anti-satellite (ASAT) capabilities, fractional orbital bombardment systems (FOBS), and other counter-space activities. In short, the time to debate the value of space for the missile defense mission is over.

Third, a “business-as-usual” approach to missile defense is inadequate. To its credit, the Trump Administration is seeking to accelerate the acquisition of critical military capabilities, reduce production timelines, and rebuild the necessary defense infrastructure to stay ahead of the threat curve.²⁵ But this will require greater congressional support and commensurate, long-term funding. While there are those inside the defense establishment who will object to the Golden Dome effort as syphoning off needed funds for other priority defense projects, the potentially catastrophic consequences of failing to implement Golden Dome successfully make overcoming the critics’ objections imperative. Indeed, Executive Order 14186 makes clear that this initiative is a presidential priority,²⁶ and the administration must communicate forcefully the rationale for and importance of Golden Dome at every opportunity.

²⁴ Ian Williams and Masao Dahlgren, et al, *Boost-Phase Missile Defense: Interrogating the Assumptions*, Center for Strategic and International Studies, June 2022, p. 1, https://csis-websiteprod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fspublic/publication/220624_Karako_BoostPhase_MissileDefense.pdf?VersionId=WjJxINM58oru1LK21LC9untewoK_UAQD.

²⁵ See, for example, Pranshu Verma, “Pentagon presses defense firms to build weapons as Iran war depletes stocks,” *The Washington Post*, August 8, 2026, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/technology/2026/08/08/pentagon-presses-defense-firms-build-weapons-iran-war-depletes-stocks/>; Filip Timotija, “Pentagon pushing defense contractors to speed up weapons production,” *The Hill*, August 10, 2026, <https://thehill.com/policy/defense/6020032-pentagon-demands-faster-weapons-production/>; Department of War, “Department of War Launches the ‘Golden Dome for America Hub’ To Accelerate Industry Engagement, Revolutionize Homeland Missile Defense Partnerships,” *News Release*, August 11, 2026, <https://www.war.gov/News/Releases/Release/Article/4568639/departments-of-war-launches-the-golden-dome-for-america-hub-to-accelerate-indust/>.

²⁶ The White House, “The Iron Dome for America,” Executive Order 14186, January 27, 2025, <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/executive-order-14186-the-iron-dome-for-america>.

Although Program Managers are generally risk averse given that failure is seldom rewarded, true progress is only possible through bold action. Indeed, we often learn more from our failures than our successes, and Congress should encourage boldness in this endeavor. The stakes are too high to do otherwise.

Finally, Congress must provide the necessary fiscal resources to implement Golden Dome over the long term. This means committing to a regular and steady appropriations funding stream that is not subject to the uncertain vagaries of reconciliation bills, continuing resolutions, ill-advised programmatic trade-offs, or partisan hostage-taking. The defense of the American people requires nothing less.

In the past, Congress authorized multiyear advance appropriations to protect the nation against national security threats deemed particularly dangerous.²⁷ While such an approach for Golden Dome may be considered extraordinary and may not engender the requisite bipartisan support, I cite this example to indicate that where Congress has the will, it can surely find innovative ways to ensure that Golden Dome is adequately funded over the long term.

With these initial comments, I appreciate the opportunity to offer my views to the subcommittee and look forward to your questions. Thank you.

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Document No. 2. U.S. Department of War, *Remarks by Under Secretary of War for Policy Elbridge Colby to NATO's North Atlantic Council (As Prepared)*, August 27, 2026, (select excerpts).²⁸

[...] My purpose today is to give you, our allies, a clear sense of our strategic and overall approach in this important initiative and then invite your feedback, building on conversations already underway among many of our teams. [...] Fundamentally, we believe that in order to survive and indeed thrive, NATO must change. [...]

We term this NATO 3.0: restoring an alliance grounded in flexible realism; focused on warfighting readiness; and designed to deter, defend, and sustain peace in the North Atlantic area—even under conditions of simultaneity, with our allies taking primary responsibility for Europe's conventional defense.

To be sure, not everyone agreed with this need for change and that approach. [...] both the United States and Europe essentially now agree on this critical point: we must make NATO more focused on warfighting readiness, more balanced, and more pragmatic. This is not a transient view, but rather a structural and strategic necessity, particularly in light of the

²⁷ "Project BioShield" was one example of a 10-year advance appropriation to defend the nation against the threat of bioterrorism and is discussed in David J. Trachtenberg, *The Lawgivers' Struggle: How Congress Wields Power in National Security Decision Making* (Fairfax, VA: National Institute Press, 2020), pp. 242-246.

²⁸ The full text of these remarks can be found at <https://www.war.gov/News/Speeches/Speech/Article/4584638/remarks-by-under-secretary-of-war-for-policy-elbridge-colby-to-natos-north-atla/>.

simultaneity problem. Moreover, it not only benefits the American people by making NATO more balanced, it is also to Europe's benefit because it will make the alliance more sustainable and durable.

Among almost all NATO allies, the conversation has now turned from whether this needs to happen to how best to make NATO 3.0 a reality and how to do so most rapidly and effectively. This is exactly where the conversation should be, concentrating in matters of timing, force development, budget allocation, and managing risk. This is the kind of pragmatic, strategic, realistic conversation that needs to happen, and represents a fundamental and welcome shift from the almost-theological focus that characterized the transatlantic relationship until very recently. [...] Coming to a shared perception that NATO needs to adapt to the NATO 3.0 model is vital, but this is only a beginning. It represents a recognition of our need to adapt — but is not the adaptation itself.

It is in that spirit that we have embarked on a review of U.S. force posture and basing in Europe [...]

First and foremost, we are proceeding in a spirit of flexible realism and strategic rigor, as you will have seen in the Terms of Reference distributed to your capitals at the beginning of this effort.

Second, we are doing so to advance and accelerate NATO 3.0, to make the alliance more fit for the times and for the strategic requirements that the United States as well as our allies face.

In this vein, over the last few weeks, our teams have been working hard to think strategically, broadly, and rigorously about how to adapt America's strategic posture in Europe for the age in which we find ourselves and going forward. This is not a narrow review about places and bases alone, although those are of course important. Rather, it is a look at our strategic posture here in the broader sense, designed to enable our Joint Force to meet the priorities laid out in the National Security Strategy and the National Defense Strategy. It will encourage, enable, and impel a transition to a more durable and powerful European-led conventional defense of the continent, consistent with NATO's original and noble purpose. That is, the goal is for Europeans to be partners, not dependencies—not just, I stress, for our sake but for yours as well, so that NATO can always reliably defend Europe effectively, even in the most stressing scenarios.

In this effort, we have no preconceived fixed goal or outcome. There are several starting points from which we proceeded, however: the priorities of our nation as laid out in our canonical Strategies are on the Western Hemisphere and the First Island Chain, even as Europe remains a critical area for the United States and the NATO alliance a key part of European and Atlantic security. We also know that our European allies can step up to assume primary responsibility for their own conventional defense and have made historic commitments to make that a reality, which will enable the Alliance to defend Europe effectively even in the case of simultaneous contingencies. We also know that our allies can and will lead in supporting Ukraine's self-defense, and that this is highly consonant with Ukraine's own battlefield successes. At the same time, we know that a significant portion of U.S. force posture in Europe derives from the Cold War era. Further, we know that Europe is

not only important but also provides a critical node for the projection of U.S. military power on all our behalf, both in this theater and beyond, and helps contribute to the defense of the U.S. homeland. These are the kinds of factors which we are incorporating into our analysis.

Allow me to stress another critical point: consultations and engagement are a vital part of this review. [...]

I simply cannot stress enough how significant this shift is, and candidly, I do not believe we pay enough attention to how dramatic our progress so far has been. While we should not slip into a false sense of complacency on this point – indeed, a great deal of the real work still lies ahead of us – I also believe we should recognize the significance of what has happened and the historic opportunity it provides. After a generation of disarmament and functional demilitarization, many countries in Europe, including several of Europe's largest and most advanced economies, are rebuilding their military strength for collective defense. They are making real sacrifices, some even going so far as to change their constitutions and raising their retirement age. That is extraordinary.

Accordingly, we must not waste this opportunity. Now is the time, when the concrete is still wet, to set the trajectory for the coming decade and beyond, to make the best use of that extraordinary shift brought about by President Trump and key European leaders.

Our approach, and this review, are designed to accelerate and build on this. To be clear, this does not mean a return to an idle reassurance of the past. Rather, it means looking with clear eyes and strategic realism at the geopolitical and military situation that we face here in the North Atlantic and European areas, but also for us Americans around the globe, especially in our own hemisphere and along the First Island Chain. [...]

Document No. 3. U.S. Department of War, *Remarks by Under Secretary of War for Policy Elbridge Colby at the 2026 United States Strategic Command Deterrence Symposium, August 5, 2026 (select excerpts)*²⁹

UNDER SECRETARY COLBY: [...] nuclear strategy and nuclear forces are absolutely essential part [sic] of the national defense strategy. [...] The nuclear forces, the modernization of our nuclear deterrent is the single most important initiative for the American military. At the end of the day, we have to have a survivable, diversified triad. We have to have secure second-strike forces. We have to be able to provide strategic deterrence and a capable and credible extended deterrent that's coupled with our conventional forces as part of an integrated, broader, sensible strategy. [...]

²⁹ The full text of these remarks can be found at <https://www.war.gov/News/Transcripts/Transcript/Article/4567089/remarks-by-under-secretary-of-war-for-policy-elbridge-colby-at-the-2026-united/>.

We looked back at the first term's nuclear posture review for 2018. We said, look, a lot of the really excellent work on things like declaratory policy have already been done on the importance of the deterrent, and for instance, today I have no announcement to make on change on declaratory policy. There's nothing to improve on what we've said on extreme circumstances and so forth. [...]

[...] the fact that we didn't do a nuclear posture review is actually, if anything, the opposite of saying it's unimportant. It's saying this is so important, we know where we're going...now it's about execution. And so what we did do, we decided, and there's been some reporting about this recently, is that if you look at the statutory responsibilities of the undersecretary for policy, there's a review or sort of relook at the employment guidance. [...] we need to have a military strategy and that includes at the nuclear level, in which the ends, ways, means correlate. [...] in some quarters or in a period of unipolarity in some ways the civilian guidance could get pushed over into the world of ends. And in a world of nuclear armed states in which you might find yourselves in a fight with you have to be able to say that the ways and means to achieve those ends are all correlated [...] we have to have a nuclear strategy to use [Henry] Kissinger's line of thought that's connected to our conventional force strategy that is rationally correlated to the United States interests at stake and a rational conception of the risks they therefore are willing to run. That is the acme of skill. That is the metric by which we judge not only our conventional force posture but also our nuclear force posture. [...] We need to look at them together. [...]

[...] we're making those alliances and partners work. We're making sure that it's correlated, that our allies and partners, as in the Cold War, as in NATO 1.0, are capable of fielding combat credible forces to make sure that we have that ends, ways, means connection. But everything we're doing at the nuclear level as well is designed to make sure that we expand the president's options to make sure that the president has those options as part, if you will, it's almost downstream of flexible response [...].

AMBASSADOR MICHAEL FROMAN: How do you expect that to differ from what came out of the prior administration?

UNDER SECRETARY COLBY: So it's a bit difficult because this is not designed to be a public-facing review. [...] I wouldn't contrast it specifically so much with the last administration as I would say that it's an attempt to go back and again to use this NATO 1.0 kind of framework would be used to go back to a level of thinking about nuclear weapons and their connection to potential large-scale conflict. God forbid, of course, the goal here being very much to deter and avoid such a conflict. [...] You couple military strengthening and a rational military strategy that includes the allies, along with their willingness to engage on arms control of whatever type. [...]

AMBASSADOR FROMAN: [...] How do you think about the impact of having two potential nuclear peers? Is there strategic stability in a world where you have a three-body problem, or are we destined to have a numerical arms race?

UNDER SECRETARY COLBY: [...] I think it is an unprecedented problem in the sense that during the Cold War, the Chinese obviously did have nuclear weapons, but they were far, far smaller and more primitive force at the time than the United States and the Soviet Union. So

I think it is a dramatically different capability. I remain cautiously optimistic about the ability for us to maintain effective deterrence in the context of three sort of great power nuclear states. I'm not sanguine about that. I think there's a lot of thinking, including this audience, that could productively be done along those lines.

[...] We are trying to obviously deter and if necessary defeat or retaliate against attacks on the United States homeland, which of course would be a massive dramatic escalation. But also we want to sustain favorable regional balances of power in the world's key theaters, you know including preeminently Asia, the Asia-Pacific, the Indo-Pacific, and specifically as National Security Strategy says about, you know, provide deterrence by denial along the first island chain. [...] That is a problem that can be solved. [...]

AMBASSADOR FROMAN: Is it realistic to expect China to participate in any sort of arms control negotiation per se, or given where we are in arms control, morality, are they likely to be building up all that force?

UNDER SECRETARY COLBY: [...] Arms control really is not necessarily a formal structure, like a legal treaty-bound structure. [...] So the real function of, a lot of the function of arms control can be providing implicit barriers or thresholds or something [...] But you know, it's not necessarily all or nothing. If you're having productive discussions, and also if those discussions make it more difficult for [...] the other side to potentially do dramatic things that might put them in a stronger military position, that can be productive. And also, the goal of arms control is not elimination, which is unrealistic. The goal of arms control is to mitigate pressures towards conflict or unnecessary products, pressures towards arms racing, that kind of thing.

AMBASSADOR FROMAN: [...] What does the administration want to see as a successor to New Start [Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty]? If it's not a formal treaty, what kind of mechanisms in place would like to see this in Russia, given the changing nature of great power competition there as well?

UNDER SECRETARY COLBY: [...] I'd say, from the department's perspective, you know, we obviously need to be ready, postured. [...] we have a lot of national technical means and a couple ways of keeping a close eye. [...] Whether you have a treaty or not, I think we stand postured to support diplomacy in whichever direction the president decides to take it. But I think our job, both on the civilian side and the uniformed side, is to make sure that we go ahead, we develop, we deploy the capabilities that we need. [...]

AMBASSADOR FROMAN: We've seen in the context of Ukraine, Russia allowing weapons and doing a lot more nuclear saber rattling. Is that just coercive theatre, or has the threshold for the use of nuclear weapons been effectively lowered?

UNDER SECRETARY COLBY: [...] I think it's highly in the mind of the eyes of the beholder. [...] I think we have to take seriously [...] when a nuclear armed power starts talking about those things. Obviously, taking it seriously also means not just backing down. To the contrary, you do not want to create that perception that you can be advantaged by nuclear blackmail which the Chinese used to accuse us of.

[...] firstly, we are actively trying to support the president's objective, obviously we are not in the lead, but through diplomacy, through the special envoys, State Department to

support an end of what is a very tragic war. [...] We've structured a mechanism, the PURL [Prioritised Ukraine Requirements List] mechanism, to continue to provide weaponry to Ukraine in its self-defense and a very admirable self-defense, stout self-defense. At the same time [...], we view this as having moved in the direction this administration, the president, others, the vice president, Secretary Hegseth have pointed to, which is our point was never we're going to you know skedaddle from Europe. The point was the Europeans have greater interest here. We have global responsibilities and priorities. The Europeans can and should take a leading role in, A), their own defense, which is NATO 3.0 which is happening, and I think cannot be stressed enough, and secondly, that they can and will take the lead in the support of Ukraine, and that that support will be consistent with Ukraine doing at least reasonably well in the battle. [...]

One, the Europeans are now essentially providing financial support for Ukraine, and they and the Ukrainians are increasingly producing their own military equipment, which is good also because it's more sustainable. And that has been consistent with the Ukrainians probably improving their position on the battlefield, without being too sanguine about the future, I think that is also putting you know globally again in that same ends, ways, means rational correlation. We're basically moving to a situation where, and I can't stress this enough, where thanks to the president's leadership, we are being put in a position where our alliance and partnership network is going to be put on firmer ground, on stouter ground, where the Europeans are providing a greater share of the effort and the skin of the game and the weaponry and the military risk, and that's happening in other theaters as well: South Korea, Australia. We're hoping to see big announcements from Japan this year under the Takaichi government [...] Obviously, we're trying to see if there's a peace that can be made, but also we have to prepare for the long haul.

[...] Well, I think you know it's not a mistake that the National Security Strategy, the National Defense Strategy, call for a national mobilization of our defense industrial base because the president, vice president, secretary have all been very consistent over the years and saying we need to step up our defense industrial base capability, and that's something that we've been working on since this administration started.

And the historic 1.5 trillion-dollar budget request is an essential part of that. One of the points that I made clearly, if you want to provide munitions to allies and partners like Ukraine or Israel or whoever, those weapons are going to be concentrated in what is now, I think, Reconciliation 4.0. I mean, that is a critical, a critical step, and that's where a lot of framework agreements are going to be funded. So you know whether you're a Republican, you're a Democrat, you're an Independent, whatever. Everybody has been talking for several years about the need to get this defense industrial base up, you know, and to take it to the next level. [...] I think we have the capabilities that we need to back up the president, not only in Iran, elsewhere, to support deterrence by denial along the first island chain, so we feel very confident about that. But we all recognize that there's, we need to bring the defense industrial base up, and of course, also part of that is you know new entrants and cheaper options. [...] we do not want to fight like the Ukrainians. [...] Clearly, drones are important. I think there's over \$70 billion in drone and drone dominance and counter UAS [unmanned aerial systems]

in the budget. [...] You can't underestimate the importance of B-21 long-range bombers. And if you look at the capabilities that were delivered very, very effectively against Iran, the heavy bombers played an absolutely critical role. If you look at Operation Midnight Hammer, which was the incredibly successful operation last year, that was done by attack submarines firing Tomahawks, by heavy bombers and aircraft that were fifth gen aircraft that were escorting them. [...]

The second part of this is allies and partners [...] Yes, we have the world's largest economies, or not all of them, but the most advanced economies as part of our alliance network. But we need to turn that into military effectiveness and industrial effectiveness, and that's what's happening now. And I want to give special credit to the Germans. [...] But in the space of about the last year and a half, [...] going to 4% by 2029, I believe maybe even higher. Extraordinary. That's the world's fourth largest economy. South Korea has committed to 3.5 percent to take primary responsibility for its own defense on the peninsula. Also very significant. We see other countries in Scandinavia, Norway, Sweden, Finland. Denmark is doing well. The Netherlands. So we see a real momentum, of course, Poland. So what's going to happen here is obviously that's going to lead to military readiness [...]

But the goal here is to make sure those investments are effective. [...] We encourage countries to do more. We encourage countries to indigenize their capabilities. That makes sense. It's totally reasonable. But let's do it together, and that's going to be another part of that industrial base strategy. [...] They can help us a lot, you know. And that's a win-win. That's a mutually beneficial relationship that isn't based on platitudes, but it's based on mutual self-interest. And the hallmark of this administration is if we get our relationship in a one that's more based on mutual self-interest, it's going to be more durable. It's going to be more resilient. It's going to be more stable. It's going to involve a lot less of allies kind of asking for theological commitments [...]

[...] Our position is still very much to discourage and oppose friendly nuclear proliferation. [...] absolutely, the most important thing that we can do on the Department of War side to make sure that there are not such pressures for friendly nuclear proliferation is to make sure that we have credible, rational nuclear options that a President of the United States adopting the simple principle of being a normal human being with common sense would actually implement. [...] we are trying to make sure that we expand those options so that we give the president options, including counterforce options, strategic counterforce options [...] support denial defense, favoring managing escalation. [...] So we have to make sure that we can give the president a cost-benefit rational option that would benefit the American people [...]

[...] let's look at where this is going, where it could go, and say, okay, how do we avoid that? Well, some of it is the diplomacy [...] But our part is to say we're going to have a military strategy that could make sense to actually put into practice. [...] At the end of the day, something happening halfway around the world, and when you kind of face that, if the president, God forbid, were to be faced with that kind of decision, it's got to be worth it. And we can we can see that problem, so we should anticipate it.

That's the mindset. And so when we're going about this review. It's not because we say, "Oh, we need this weapon or that weapon.["] Again, from a force development point of view, we pretty much know largely, and it's not about tactical weapons or strategic weapons. It's about giving a set of options that are consistent with the strategy, that contribute to denial defense, that contribute to favorably managing escalation, that are cost-benefit rational to a normal person, and so on.

AMBASSADOR FROMAN: [...] What's the one thing European powers or NATO allies can do to increase an alliance nuclear deterrence, and should, given the security situation in Europe should there be a movement towards more of a nuclear triad?

UNDER SECRETARY COLBY: So I would actually say the best thing the Europeans can do for nuclear deterrence is to invest in their conventional forces [...] we continue to extend nuclear deterrence to NATO. The biggest problem there would be if there are conventional gaps that could be exploited, and then a kind of brinkmanship approach by the opponent to put us in a very just a very unfavorable position. And so the key thing there, in light of all the requirements we face globally, is for European allies to dramatically move, to increase spending in line with the Hague summit [...] It's not about everybody doing 5% and buying their own, you know, indigenously developed fifth gen fighter. It's about meeting General [Alexus] Grynkeiwich's requirements as Supreme Allied Commander. He's obviously also the EUCOM commander, but at the end of the day, he is the one responsible for fighting NATO as a force together, as an international force, he has a clear sense. We are very aligned. [...] What we want to do is make sure that we're as effective as possible in generating readiness, combat-credible readiness, and deployments as quickly as possible, in line with that theory, and then the industrial capacity to back that up.

[...] We had a meeting in Bergen, Norway, U.S. organized and hosted by the Norwegians, which we brought together about half a dozen kind of key allies who are really moving and meeting an objective set of standards and amount of their spending, they're on clear track to meet 3.5% as rapidly as possible. They have industrial scale, and they're looking at getting down to business. And they're consistent with the strong and clear but quiet approach that the administration generally pursues. [...] And the idea there is to form kind of smaller coalitions. [...] Whereas I think we look at multilateral as let's try and solve a particular problem. You know, FOMO diplomacy is a real thing I've learned over the last year and a half – fear of missing out diplomacy. People care, and they should because we're going to get moving out. We're going to the countries that are moving out most quickly. We're going to look to network them together. We're going to look to give them the best kind of access to American industry and so forth, and build and collaborate. And so, you know, I think countries like Germany, countries like Poland, there's a tremendous opportunity, especially if they scale together. That is the best thing. If you have a strong European denial defense that can rapidly deploy to the Eastern front or flank, depending on which side you are on that debate, then the United States still has, still... will have very modern capability, strategic level, theater capability, limited options, etc. as well as our own conventional forces and the global capabilities that our armed forces provide, that is going to be a very effective deterrent that's consistent. [...]

[...] I mean, again, the way we look at things in the Department of War is results-oriented. So you know there's a lot of work and effort and political capital that's necessary to build up these kind of multilateral structures, and it's not always clear you know how much payoff there is, especially at the military level. So we're you know it's we're flexible realists, as the National Security Strategy says. So we look at military reality, we look at geography, we look at interests, and we try to align based on that. [...] So get them to concentrate where their interests are most engaged. Likewise, in the Indo-Pacific, you've got our allies and partners are arrayed across a vast territory. They have different histories. They are not historically bound together. So we're open to working together in a minilateral way. [...] Are the soldiers ready? Are they relevant to the plan? So the way we look at it with our allies and partners, where we put our capital, is to say, let's move forward. [...] in the case of South Korea [...] on the defense issues, we're saying they want to take more responsibility. They have universal conscription. They have a large standing military. They're committing to 3.5 (percent). Check. They're willing to take primary responsibility for conventional defense of South Korea against the North. Check. Right. Okay. There's a lot. Then we can work together. There's a lot we can do together.

Japan. Japan is the fourth or fifth largest country in the world by economic scale. It forms an absolutely essential part of the first island chain. It currently stands by 1.6 percent GDP on defense. Prime Minister Takaichi has a historic majority in the Diet, Japan itself talks very openly about facing an unprecedented situation. Something doesn't compute here. But we're working very closely with our good friends and colleagues in Tokyo to help advance this. But we are anxiously looking for Japan. This is shared across the administration. I stress that we are anxiously looking for Japan to step up [...] we understand they have a history. Germany has a history. It went from about 1.5 percent, maybe one to 1.5 percent, to a four to 5 percent commitment in the space of about a year. They changed their constitution. Obviously, debt carries a lot of fraught memories in Germany. They relaxed the debt break on it. Change is possible. Change is necessary.

You know, with the Australians, we're doing well. We did an AUKUS review in 2025. [...] We came out stronger. We have clearer expectations. [...] Everybody understands how important our submarines are. [...] We have no better ally than the Australians. [...]

We're going to have deterrence by denial. But the goal is stability. The goal is not to change the status quo [...] We have great respect for the Chinese nation and trying to understand their goals to become once again a great power in the world. We can deal with that from a position of a favorable balance of power. Our job is to make sure that's absolutely clear from the military point of view. [...]

AMBASSADOR FROMAN: You've emphasized the importance of conventional deterrence in the Indo-Pacific, but as China invests more in tactical nuclear weapons, where do you think the balance of investments you can afford for us between conventional and nuclear capabilities?

UNDER SECRETARY COLBY: [...] you know nuclear weapons are incredibly important. They are more difficult than they first appear to turn to coercive or compellent purposes. [...] we and China both have nuclear weapons, so nobody's going to be in a position where they

can absolutely dominate. [...] Obviously, the Chinese are very clear that they have very profound stakes. We always remind them that we have been a Pacific power for 200 years. [...] The Indo-Pacific is also the world's largest market [...] So we're going to be there, but we're going to have a strategy and force posture that is rationally tied to that interest is very important. [...]

[...] a critical point is we sort of have a strategy of denial at the geopolitical level, which is about balance of power. So we are against anybody being hegemonic. [...] we're not trying to dominate everybody in the Western Hemisphere. We want countries that can step up and take responsibility on their own. [...]

But also at the military level, our goal is on denial. So China is undertaking a historic military buildup that is incredibly impressive and a reflection of the enormous industrial capacity and economic power that they've accumulated. That is one thing. On the other hand, if we are talking about military contingencies, God forbid, our purpose here is to avoid them. But they face a very, very challenging military problem [...] They would be trying to project military power across air and water, which, in the face of determined, capable, highly developed opponents [...] All we have to do is prevent anybody from crossing a body of water and sustaining operations in the face of determined resistance. That is a very practical objective. [...] We see this is a tractable objective that is militarily viable and would result in hopefully in peace. And it's totally consistent with having a respectful, balanced power relationship, decent peace with China, in which China can continue to grow, can continue to expand its economic activities, etc. And then we can find that balance peacefully.

AMBASSADOR FROMAN: Can you speak to the relationship between strategic defenses like Golden Dome and deterrence in a trilateral great power nuclear environment?

UNDER SECRETARY COLBY: [...] As we go through this nuclear strategy review, this is not something where we are unconscious about the effects on red, as we call it. In fact, to the contrary, we are, I would say, very, very attuned to how the other side will perceive, could potentially perceive both force developments and postures, rhetoric, but also you know employment capabilities and options. Again, not to say we would rule them out, but this is you know I think one of the hallmarks of good thinking and good strategy is that you should contemplate that your opponent or potential opponent will react to what you do, especially over time, is you know kind of an iterative game, and you need to make sure that your step is framed in a way that's going to leave you in a better position. [...]

If you're deploying Pershing, if you're if you're going through Able Archer, you need to understand how that's going to...and then just calculate that risk balance. And I can say that this administration is very attuned to those balances. I mean, you have historic military, you know, budget, historic attempt to mobilize our national defense industrial base, but at the same time, a realistic attunement to the reactions not only of our allies and others but also to red.

AMBASSADOR FROMAN: [...] How confident are you that we are dealing with the threats of emerging technologies to our capability of delivering on that deterrence mission?

UNDER SECRETARY COLBY: Well, I'm confident that the people who are responsible for it are approaching it with the requisite sense of urgency and seriousness. [...] Technology is

essential, but technology is only part – also posture, force employment, you know, best practices, these kinds of things. [...] But at the macro level, I think this has been a real, in a sense, proof that we needed to prepare for limited war. [...] Ukrainians are, you know, conducting operations deep in Russian territory that also affect their strategic capacities, and then we see Russia's response, and both sides are very much calibrating their responses. You look at the strikes at shipping, for instance, in the Black Sea, or you look at the campaign, the mutual very tragic, obviously air and missile, largely missile and drone campaign. I think the main takeaway for us is again, not to be a hammer and a nail, but as we need to have a plausible plan that doesn't... 'well if we get to that point we blow up the world or you know, we take them out you know, problem solved.' No, no, no because realistically, God forbid, if, if we found ourselves in such a situation with the great power on nuclear weapons, what we're seeing in Ukraine is that things can actually get quite high up that ladder and still be quite calibrated. [...]

But I think that's what I take away is that as vital as the strategic deterrent is, and having that fundamental second strike, that assured destruction capacity, we also need to have things, whether it's theater capabilities or strategic capabilities, that's an arms control thing that goes back to the, you know, definitions. What we're focused on is less about the range of the weapons and more about rationally employable, limited options that advantage us and stand the chance of favorably managing escalation and not getting us into an inexorable spiral.

AMBASSADOR FROMAN: So, last question, an easy one for you: What is the nuclear threat you're most worried about if peace (inaudible)

UNDER SECRETARY COLBY: [...] What I would fear more is a regional war. [...] a kind of local war, conventional war that might have local employment, God forbid, of nuclear weapons that could escalate from there as it, as it expanded outward. [...] this is where it is really necessary to see how red is thinking about things, not to be kind of stopped in our tracks by it, but to say the decision space [...] could be very tight. So one of the things where we see ourselves again as really expanding the president's decision space is there are things that we might posture ourselves to do where we don't think it would necessarily be a total attack, the other side might think it would be total attack, and their reaction would be far greater than we anticipate, and that would lead very rapidly to an incredibly pressurized situation that would be almost by definition not in our interests.

[...] Again, it's not taking away options for the president. It's adding credible options. Is to say, given all that, how do we effectively prepare to fight a war again to avoid it to uphold our alliance commitments in a rational way that will not, at that vital moment, either result in a catastrophe whose costs are way out of proportion to whatever we're fighting about, or more plausibly cause the political leadership to say "no, I don't want to do that," and then you have strategic catastrophe because people say, I was calibrated to something else. [...] We need to keep that fundamental strategic assured destruction capability obviously always ready, but we need to have something that will connect down. [...]

Document No. 4. U.S. Department of War, *Remarks by Secretary of War Pete Hegseth at the 2026 NATO Defense Ministerial in Brussels (As Delivered)*, June 18, 2026 (select excerpts).³⁰

[...] And as I said, my first NATO Defense Ministerial last February, and as the Trump administration has said again and again in the last year and a half, our allies must step up. President Trump has been very clear on this point for many years, and over two administrations, and for too long, NATO has been a paper tiger and a one-way street. No more, and that's what the Hague Summit is all about.

That's what defense spending commitments are all about, transforming NATO back into a real military alliance that's focused on hard power and real deterrence, a NATO 3.0 modeled on the NATO 1.0 that won the Cold War, with our allies actually taking the lead in Europe's conventional defense, and that's what NATO was always supposed to be, and what its framers, like President Eisenhower, always expected. Europe was not supposed to be a dependency of the United States. That's not what Winston Churchill or Charles de Gaulle or Konrad Adenauer wanted or expected. No, Europe was supposed to be a military power allied with a strong America.

[...] [A]s Dwight Eisenhower himself said, as early as 1951 if in 10 years all American troops stationed in Europe for national defense purposes have not been returned to the United States, then this whole process will have failed. [...] he and his allied counterparts, all of them still living in the shadow of World War Two, understood that NATO's power did not come from committees or from meetings or from small flags on fancy tables, it came from warriors, and for Europe's defense, it had come from NATO allies. That was NATO 1.0, a hard-edged war fighting organization, [...] but that spirit faded after the Cold War ended.

[...] NATO 2.0 drifted toward out-of-area operations and things that had nothing to do with war fighting at all. Instead of tanks and fighters and air defenses, the focus had been on gender equity and climate change and defense austerity. Europe's borders flew wide open, welfare states expanded, defense budgets cratered, along with Europe's belief in itself and its civilization. NATO lost its way. NATO 2.0 was an era of distraction, deindustrialization, and demilitarization. It was an era of free riding and those were lost years that we're not going back to.

And that's why at the Department of War we've been so clear and so candid to restore NATO's core military role and character, and that's why we've returned US troop levels in Europe to pre-2022 levels with the redeployment of a brigade combat team last year and further reduction of 5,000 forces earlier this year. At the same time, it's why we've engaged with our allies so consistently, and it's why we've grown our own defense industrial base and encouraged to turn NATO 3.0 into reality, to return the alliance to its roots as a military

³⁰ The full text of these remarks can be found at <https://www.war.gov/News/Speeches/Speech/Article/4539593/remarks-by-secretary-of-war-pete-hegseth-at-the-2026-nato-defense-ministerial-i/>.

alliance, and ensure that it has the European strength required to sustainably deter aggression, and if need be, make good on Article Five.

Some of our allies have gotten the message and stepped up, you know who you are, and we very much appreciate it. Last year, under President Trump's leadership, NATO set the new global standard for allied defense spending, 5% of GDP all in on defense. It's historic and it's transformational, and some allies are already well on their way to meeting this ambitious target, and in some cases ahead of schedule. [...]

Some allies are also getting serious about how they're spending on their defense, in May, the Department of War told allies that we're reducing our contributions to the NATO force model. We also explained how allies can and should backfill those changes. General Grynkewich reports that some allies have stepped up accordingly, and it's a good start. At the same time, just last month, a small group of strong allies gathered at Bergen for a conversation about focused allied defense spending on the capabilities required to defend Europe, even in the event of simultaneous conflicts worldwide. Again, more serious progress on Ukraine as well, progress through President Trump's PURL Initiative, allies have taken the lead in funding support for Ukraine's defense. Ukrainians are holding their lines even in the face of sustained Russian assaults. We said it could be done, that our allies could lead, and that it would be consistent with Ukraine's defense. It is happening, and it's a validation of President Trump's approach, an approach that will set the table for peace.

[...] For all of our clarity, too many allied capitals seem to still miss something in translation. Too many allies still don't recognize the historic need that President Trump has made clear to them and to NATO itself to reforge a relevant, powerful military alliance.

[...] These allies, they put America's sons and daughters, our sons and daughters, at risk by denying them the predictable access facing an overflight that never should have been in question at all. In some cases, we had to shift capabilities from one country to another out of NATO allied countries altogether. There's no excuse for that, and that's not to mention the fact that some countries have yet to show a credible path to meeting their Hague commitments. Too much talk, some of NATO's largest economies, some of the richest countries, allies that are happiest to go on about the rules-based international order and middle powers banding together, still seem to think the era of free riding is here. Eisenhower and Trump disagree. [...]

And so, we're doubling down on our effort to make NATO what it always was supposed to be, a balanced alliance with Europe in the lead for its own defense, NATO 3.0 and to make that a reality. I'm announcing today a six-month Department of War review that will examine America's force posture and basing in Europe. [...] This review will be conducted with the benefit of inputs from the United States military, from European command, it will involve consultations with the U. S. Congress and with our allies [...] It will be designed to ensure that NATO is moving fast and irreversibly toward Europe leading, stepping up to take primary responsibility for the defense of Europe, stepping up to ensure our forces are postured for America's global needs, and stepping up to make sure that our access, basing, and overflight are clearly delineated and assured any other country would do the same at the same time.

Going forward, our annual NATO dues will be contingent on other countries meeting their defense spending targets. [...] America cannot care for or pay more for Europe's defense than our allies do. And this review will think outside the box. Our national defense strategy states clearly that we're going to incentivize and enable our allies to step up and do their part, so we're going to keep a close ally, close eye on allies who are not doing that, and who say no, or maybe, or wait and see when it matters most. It's a review that some countries will fail, and others will pass with flying colors. In the end, the review is intended to both improve U.S. force posture and basing and strengthen NATO 3.0. It's intended to be constructive, as we have always been. There are no strategic surprises here. [...]

Our direction of travel is and has been clear. This is the right thing to do by the American people. It's the right thing to do by this alliance. Europe can and must take primary responsibility for its conventional defense as it pledged at the Hague Summit, and in the process safeguarding Europe's defense for generations to come. [...]