



PROCEEDINGS

ASSESSING U.S. NUCLEAR REQUIREMENTS FOR DETERRENCE

The remarks below were delivered at a symposium on “Assessing U.S. Nuclear Requirements for Deterrence” hosted by the National Institute for Public Policy on June 17, 2026. The symposium highlighted the bipartisan conclusions and recommendations regarding U.S. nuclear posture expressed in a joint article by five former senior officials responsible for U.S. nuclear policy in successive Democratic and Republican administrations. The symposium highlighted a recent Information Series article that considered the implications for extended deterrence of U.S. nuclear policy decisions.

David J. Trachtenberg (moderator)

David J. Trachtenberg is Senior Scholar at the National Institute for Public Policy and previously served as Deputy Under Secretary of Defense for Policy.

I would like to offer some introductory comments and context in an effort to set the table for today’s discussion.

First, I think it’s worth highlighting that in today’s politically polarized environment, it’s rare to find bipartisan agreement on almost anything, especially when it comes to nuclear weapons and nuclear policy. So, to have senior level nuclear policy officials who served in the Clinton, Bush, Obama, Trump, and Biden Administrations agree on fundamental principles of U.S. nuclear strategy is powerful and its impact should not be discounted. I commend our panelists for putting forth a cogent analysis of the need for the United States to possess a nuclear deterrent force that is adaptable to the dynamic and uncertain strategic environment we face today.

Second, they note several principles, which should serve as “guideposts” that the Trump Administration should keep in mind as it assesses what to do about U.S. nuclear posture. These include avoiding “mirror imaging”; basing any modifications to long-standing U.S. deterrence policy on facts and articulating a “truly compelling rationale”; procuring a nuclear force sufficient to effectively implement U.S. deterrence strategy; and deploying additional regional force capabilities to credibly convince adversaries that nuclear coercion or nuclear attack would be fruitless.

On the latter point, they argue that U.S. theater deterrence forces should be flexible, diverse, and sufficiently numerous to deter regional nuclear strikes, but without the need to match the nuclear force levels of either Russia or China separately or together.

Third, they note that a decline in the credibility of the U.S. extended nuclear deterrent may lead allies to consider acquiring their own nuclear weapons for security—a point also addressed by Keith Payne in his recent *Information Series* article.

Fourth, they cite the lessons of history to note that without such a realistic nuclear force posture, meaningful arms control is unlikely.

Fifth, they note that the Pentagon is currently conducting a “close-hold mini review of U.S. nuclear strategy” and conclude that such a review must provide the president with “the



widest possible range of options” necessary to deter adversary aggression—regardless of what Pentagon strategists may believe is appropriate or inappropriate.

Finally, as the Soviets might say, it is no accident, comrade, that many of the principles embedded in the joint article align nicely with the bipartisan conclusions and recommendations of the congressional Strategic Posture Commission, which did a remarkable job forging a truly bipartisan consensus on this important issue.

Now, of course even though there is a remarkable bipartisan consistency to the conclusions and recommendations proposed by our panelists, there are some nuances that may deserve additional explanation or clarification. For example, they propose “finding ways to promote strategic stability” with Russia and China, without defining what strategic stability is or considering that Moscow and Beijing may have their own views of strategic stability that are diametrically at odds with ours. Indeed, one could argue (as I have) that both Russia and China are interested in undermining strategic stability as we define it as part of their efforts to overturn the existing U.S.-led world order and create a new world order more favorable to their own interests.

Moreover, according to a recent article by the former chief negotiator of the New START Treaty, strategic stability is characterized by the ability to threaten “nuclear retribution,”¹ which seems a bit like the old Mutual Assured Destruction theory. But our panelists have noted that some allies believe extended deterrence may be weakened unless we “immunize” the U.S. homeland from such threats. Perhaps the “strategic stability” point can be clarified during the discussion period.

Now, with this backdrop, the issue of how best to posture U.S. nuclear forces in order to ensure the continued effective functioning of deterrence is the subject of today’s discussion. While it is not at all certain that the results of the ongoing review of U.S. nuclear strategy will produce an outcome consistent with the urgency required, one can only hope that the powers that be take these bipartisan recommendations seriously and act accordingly.

Franklin C. Miller

Franklin C. Miller is former Special Assistant to the President, Senior Director for Defense Policy and Arms Control on the National Security Council staff, and Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Strategy and Threat Reduction.

I appreciate the opportunity to share some brief thoughts on this important issue. Our joint article does parallel some of the conclusions and recommendations of the Strategic Posture Commission, which Madelyn chaired and on which I was honored to serve.

¹ Rose Gottemoeller, “The Strange Defeat of Nuclear Deterrence And the Coming Crisis in Strategic Stability,” *Foreign Affairs*, July/August 2026, https://www.foreignaffairs.com/ukraine/strange-defeat-nuclear-deterrence-rose-gottemoeller?mc_cid=b100ff9ba4&mc_eid=46ef2d16d1#.

The Commission's report provided a general view of what U.S. deterrence policy should be and where it should be going. It acknowledged that the United States now faces not one but two major nuclear adversaries that need to be deterred simultaneously and that our deterrent must also guard against the prospect of opportunistic aggression whereby an adversary in one theater seeks to take advantage of a breakdown of deterrence in another theater.

This is not a major change from the policy expressed in the first Trump Administration's 2018 *Nuclear Posture Review* (NPR); therefore, I don't believe it's necessary for the current Trump Administration to issue another full-blown NPR now, which would be time-consuming and provide little value added. That said, every administration should review existing nuclear policy and derive its own judgments about what requirements are necessary for deterrence based on changes in the international strategic environment. Indeed, Madelyn and I recommended this, and it appears the administration is now engaged in its own mini review of U.S. nuclear policy.

Our joint article represents the views of a bipartisan group of experts with decades-long experience in undertaking Pentagon nuclear policy reviews. Our experience spans multiple Republican and Democratic administrations, and I think reflects a prudent approach to U.S. nuclear policy if the United States is serious about maintaining an effective nuclear deterrent.

There are a number of key elements that the administration's nuclear review should consider, so let me mention a few. First, it's important to include all the key players. This includes those within the Office of the Secretary of Defense, the Joint Staff, USSTRATCOM, and NNSA. The views of the key players should be well vetted, and the administration should cast a wide net to solicit expert views. Engaging all the appropriate stakeholders on the front end will help ensure buy-in on the back end.

Importantly, the administration should not engage in "mirror-imaging," which assumes that adversaries will necessarily be deterred by what would deter us. Indeed, our view of what constitutes "rational" behavior in the nuclear sphere may be fundamentally different than the views of opponents whose goals and objectives may be strikingly at odds from ours. In fact, for deterrence to function effectively, the United States must be able to hold at risk those assets which an adversary values most; therefore, we must be able to answer the question, "what does the enemy leadership value most?" Without a thorough consideration of this issue, it will be difficult to have confidence in the credibility of the U.S. nuclear deterrent force.

In addition, as our joint article notes, any major change to U.S. nuclear policy must be based on a compelling rationale and must be defensible publicly. The American people must be told clearly and logically what is changing and why. Without such a clear explanation, public and congressional support for any major changes will be lacking. Beyond this, it is absolutely critical that any changes to U.S. force structure must clearly and visibly support U.S. nuclear strategy. If called upon, our forces must be capable of executing the strategy. Any disconnect between U.S. nuclear strategy and the force levels needed to implement the strategy will likely be seen by friends and foes alike as a lack of American will and may actually encourage adversary aggression or nuclear coercion rather than deter it.

A credible and effective nuclear strategy must present the president with the widest range of possible options to deter a spectrum of potential adversary actions. Our enemies may not feel similarly constrained in their exercise of nuclear or conventional threats and may seek to exploit perceived advantages at various levels of potential conflict. Such a situation would undermine rather than reinforce deterrence.

Finally, let me mention a few areas of concern regarding the ongoing mini review of U.S. nuclear strategy:

- First, there are disturbing indications that not all the necessary players are involved in the strategy review process. This does not bode well for a positive outcome that is supported by all communities of interest.
- Second, rumors of possible additional cuts to U.S. conventional deployments in Europe are likely to undermine the credibility of U.S. extended deterrence and create potential proliferation problems as allies seek alternative means to ensure their own security.
- Third, evidence is lacking that the recommendations of the Strategic Posture Commission are being seriously considered or acted upon. For example, the Commission's urgent recommendation involving the upload of nuclear warheads on existing platforms seems to have fallen on deaf ears.
- Fourth, test flight delays and cancellations of the Army's Dark Eagle hypersonic program along with cancellation of plans to deploy Tomahawk cruise missiles to Germany—a deployment decision supported by NATO in 2024—further strain the credibility of the U.S. extended deterrent.
- Finally, official statements from senior U.S. policy makers cast doubt on the assumption that the administration plans to take the steps necessary to strengthen the efficacy and credibility of the overall U.S. nuclear posture. A failure to do so would have significant, long-term, negative repercussions.

In conclusion, we will see what the ongoing mini review of U.S. nuclear strategy produces. I hope its results will invalidate my concerns and make U.S. nuclear posture sufficiently robust, so the efficacy of our deterrent is preserved as the threats to U.S. national security interests grow.

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Keith B. Payne*

Keith B. Payne is President and co-founder of the National Institute for Public Policy and former Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Forces Policy.

Alliances can be both risky commitment traps and enormous advantages. There is no enduring objective answer to the question of whether the benefits of alliances outweigh the risks and costs because the answer depends on the prevailing security context.

The conclusion that alliances are a net benefit has dominated U.S. national security policy since the end of World War II. However, the U.S. post-war system of alliances is now confronting a crisis of confidence that follows from four interrelated developments that have emerged over the course of the past three decades:

- First, was Washington's badly mistaken, post-Cold War expectation of a cooperative "new world order," and America's related generation-long "holiday from history." The late Alan Greenspan's 1996 description of America's "irrational exuberance" of the dot-com "bubble" fully applies to Washington's simultaneous embrace of a "new world order." Only doughty realists warned that a new cooperative world order was a pipe dream.
- Second, are the aggressive geopolitical agendas of Russia, China, North Korea, and Iran, their threats, increasing cooperation, and expansive nuclear and conventional forces aspirations. These want to change the world order in their image and are arming to do so.
- Third, are Washington's excessively blunt expressions of dissatisfaction with allies' contributions to collective security and the costs and risks of being their ultimate security provider. These have continued even after NATO members agreed to much higher levels of defense spending.
- Fourth, are the allies' generally inadequate investments in their own defense and their corresponding deep concern with America's apparent rejection of its past "ironclad" commitments to their security.

In 2011, then-Defense Secretary Robert Gates anticipated this situation when he warned: "...if current trends in the decline of European defense capabilities are not halted and reversed, future U.S. political leaders—those for whom the Cold War was not the formative experience that it was for me—may not consider the return on America's investment in NATO worth the cost." We appear to be there.

The convergence of these four interrelated factors has had profound consequences. For example, it has led foes to increased investment in nuclear weapons, and friends to increasing interest in their own national nuclear capabilities or a new multinational nuclear

* These comments are adapted from "A Fading Western Alliance System? Who Is to Blame and Why Should We Care," *Information Series*, No. 662 (Fairfax, VA: National Institute Press, June 8, 2026), https://nipp.org/information_series/keith-b-payne-a-fading-western-alliance-system-who-is-to-blame-and-why-should-we-care-no-662-june-8-2026/).

capability independent of Washington. This interest is evident in Germany, Poland, Turkey, Japan, and South Korea. We could as a result see a cascade of proliferation.

This contemporary nuclear emphasis by foes and friends has come as a surprise to many in Washington who wrongly presumed that, with the coming happy “new world order,” the need for nuclear deterrence and weapons was ending. The reality now unfortunately is opposite that naive expectation.

The foreboding future combination of deeply frayed U.S. alliances, expansive nuclear proliferation, and unprecedented threats is not far-fetched given the contemporary trajectory of history.

It is convenient to blame the West’s current security dilemma on “free-riding” allies, and they certainly engaged in the same credulous post-Cold War thinking that captured Washington. They happily relied on Washington’s grudging willingness to pay heavily for their defense and thereby freed up their own resources for more socially pleasing purposes.

However, Washington also carries considerable culpability for its self-serving imagining of a cooperative new world order—which it adopted with what one clear-eyed academic rightly described as an “ideological certitude bordering on geostrategic arrogance.”²

Secretary of State John Kerry misinformed us that, in the 21st century, great powers just wouldn’t invade their neighbors. This type of fanciful imagining drove America’s premature elimination of key military capabilities, and naive arms control enthusiasms. For example, President George H. W. Bush unilaterally nearly eliminated U.S. theater nuclear weapons. These follies were not foisted on us by allies; they were of Washington’s own bipartisan making.

Following the Cold War, both allies and Washington foolishly proceeded to enjoy a prolonged “peace dividend,” and failed to hedge realistically against the current harsh threat reality—based on wishful, self-serving thinking.

Acknowledging the shared culpability for the West’s current security dilemma is of some value because it suggests where change is needed. The most important question now, however, is how can the West best respond to the real, growing threat presented by the “axis of autocracies”?

A united West fully committed to collective security surely is needed to meet this emerging existential threat. Indeed, the incomparable potential combined strength of a united West is the only barrier to the aggressive aspirations of Russia, China, Iran, and North Korea. They will not moderate themselves; continued Western infighting will instead encourage their aggressive agendas.

A new direction toward greater Western unity and collective power will likely demand at least the increase in defense spending agreed to by NATO, and a common willingness to set aside tit-for-tat reproaches that poison the atmosphere. Continuing intra-alliance griping and sniping would be passé were it not for the fact that we face common threats that now

² Andrew A. Michta, “The Next U.S. National Security Strategy Risks Misreading History Again,” *RealClear Defense*, September 22, 2025, https://www.realcleardefense.com/articles/2025/09/22/the_next_us_national_security_strategy_risks_misreading_history_again_1136169.html.

demand Herculean joint efforts. Germany, as the potentially most powerful continental ally, has a special responsibility to focus on the realities of countering real military threats—which it appears to have recognized very recently with its first-ever published military strategy.

In conclusion, the contemporary reality is far from President Bush's supposed "new world order"—which was a profound misreading of history with truly harmful consequences. But both sides of the Atlantic have contributed to the West's contemporary problematic capability to counter emerging existential threats and also to the desperate need to mend internal alliance fissures.

The tendency in some American political circles to blame allies alone for NATO's current security dilemma is as historically ungrounded as is the popular European sport of blaming Trump alone. This type of finger pointing is harmful and ignores history. The fault has been two-sided, and the recovery must be two-sided.

If adapted to meet the unprecedented threats of the 21st century, NATO will have continuing great net value for the United States and allies. If not, the West's collective security system could collapse—to the great satisfaction and further animation of a consortium of extremely hostile autocratic powers. The choice is now before us. As Benjamin Franklin said at the signing of the Declaration of Independence in 1776: "We must all hang together, or most assuredly we shall all hang separately."

Gregory Weaver

Gregory Weaver is former Deputy Director for Strategic Stability on the Joint Chiefs of Staff Directorate for Strategic Plans and Policy (J5).

Thanks for asking me to participate today.

First, let me say that the article is one of the best indications yet of the emerging bipartisan consensus on what constitutes an appropriate U.S. nuclear strategy for the future, and the U.S. nuclear force necessary to implement that strategy effectively. Like the congressional Strategic Posture Commission report, it makes clear why emerging threats require continuity in nuclear strategy, and augmentation of our nuclear forces as we modernize them.

I applaud the authors for their clear, concise set of recommendations for those conducting the administration's review. If the review underway follows the advice given in the article, we'll be fine. But I'm concerned that it won't follow this advice.

In my brief comments, I want to focus on one point of related advice I would have added, and then quickly address the potential consequences of the administration's review.

First, the article does an excellent job of making clear that U.S. nuclear strategy must be tightly linked to the rest of U.S. military and national security strategy for all three to be effective in preventing war with nuclear-armed adversaries, and winning such a war without the catastrophe of uncontrolled nuclear escalation. But it did leave out discussion of one of

the key findings of the congressional Strategic Posture Commission: that in a two nuclear peer threat environment the United States must consider once again relying on nuclear weapons to compensate for conventional inferiority in theater wars with nuclear peers if the United States and its allies are unable, or unwilling, to maintain conventional superiority in two theaters simultaneously.

The Trump Administration has taken multiple actions that have raised doubts about our willingness to come to the conventional defense of our NATO allies, and recent reports indicate a significant reduction in the size of the conventional U.S. military forces committed to NATO—reductions apparently made without careful consultations with our European allies about their scope and timing.

These actions indicate that this administration's strategy is not likely rooted in collaboratively maintaining conventional superiority in two theaters simultaneously. They seem willing to risk that the European NATO allies will not effectively rearm sufficiently, or sufficiently quickly, to maintain NATO conventional superiority, and I've seen no indications that they intend to work closely with those allies to enable them to do so.

Despite this risk, the administration has stated that the United States will continue to extend nuclear deterrence to NATO. Yet the administration's actions arguably undermine the credibility of our extended deterrent pledge to NATO. Why would the Russian leadership believe we would be willing to fight a nuclear war to defend NATO if we are unwilling to commit large conventional forces to do so?

The administration's actions also show no sign that it recognizes the potential need to compensate for conventional inferiority in Europe. Thus, the nuclear review risks failing to build the theater nuclear forces necessary to compensate for conventional inferiority, while the broader *National Defense Strategy* is arguably creating the very conditions in Europe that would make such theater nuclear forces necessary.

A theater nuclear force capable of credibly and effectively compensating for conventional inferiority would need to be significantly larger and more diverse than the augmented theater nuclear force required to simultaneously deter or counter Russian and Chinese limited nuclear escalation under conditions of U.S./Allied conventional superiority.

If the review fails to address this mismatch, it will produce a strategy that increases the likelihood of a war with Russia and the risk that such a war will involve nuclear escalation that creates an existential threat to the United States.

Finally, let me say that I'm concerned the ongoing review will make another dire mistake which would be avoided if they follow the recommendations in the article. They may conclude that maintaining the ability to limit damage by fielding nuclear forces capable of comprehensive counterforce operations against the nuclear forces of both Russia and China is both unnecessary and too costly. They would be wrong on both accounts.

Abandoning comprehensive counterforce capability would be a drastic change in the U.S. nuclear strategy that has arguably prevented nuclear war for over 80 years despite intense military competition with dangerous adversaries. U.S. counterforce capability enhances deterrence of both conventional aggression and nuclear escalation by casting a long shadow over an adversary's calculus regarding going to war with the United States and its allies, and

regarding escalating to the use of nuclear weapons in such a war. Such counterforce capability instills additional caution in those calculations that would not exist without it.

How does it have this effect? Providing the U.S. president a capability *in extremis* to reduce the damage the United States would sustain in a large-scale nuclear exchange does three key things:

- First, it makes U.S. persistence in the face of conventional aggression and limited nuclear escalation more likely. That enhances extended deterrence of both.
- Second, it arguably creates a firebreak between large-scale counterforce strikes and the large-scale countervalue strikes that pose an existential threat to the nation.
- Third, it provides a means of actually limiting the damage done to the United States should deterrence fail. Whether such damage limitation is “meaningful” is in the eye of the beholder. But this beholder believes that reducing the damage done to the United States by at least an order of magnitude is indeed meaningful, even if the outcome is still horrific to contemplate.

The bottom line is the strategic impact of having the option to limit the damage an adversary can do is not dependent on the views of anyone engaged in this debate in the United States. Rather, it is dependent on whether adversary leaders might believe that, *in extremis*, the president of the United States may perceive the difference in damage the United States will incur between striking first and striking second as “meaningful” to him or her, and to the American people.

They would be wrong about the cost of maintaining such a capability as well. The existing U.S. strategic nuclear force could meet this requirement simply through uploading non-deployed warheads on existing strategic delivery systems. That is not expensive. The future strategic force would require more delivery systems than are currently planned in the modernization Program of Record—but not drastically more.

The combination of an uploaded Sentinel ICBM force, a moderately expanded Columbia SSBN force (3-4 boats), and a larger B21 force (already being considered for conventional purposes) would likely meet the requirement. That is a relatively modest increase in cost, but as Defense Secretary Mattis said, “America can afford survival.”

In conclusion, the nuclear strategy the United States chooses to address the impending two nuclear-peer threat is one of the most momentous strategic choices the nation has faced. While correlation is not causation, there have been no major wars between nuclear-armed major powers since the advent of nuclear weapons, no global conflagrations like the First and Second World Wars.

The very least that can be said about American nuclear strategy is that it has not failed to deter attacks on the United States and its allies by a nuclear-armed major power since the advent of nuclear weapons in 1945. A decision to abandon one of the core tenets of that American nuclear strategy, comprehensive counterforce targeting for deterrence, assurance, escalation management, and damage limitation, would constitute a high-risk choice in the face of two nuclear peer adversaries who will have large-scale nuclear counterforce capabilities of their own. There is no sufficient reason to take this gamble.

Thanks for letting me comment on the article, and thanks again to the authors for putting it out there.

Kyle Balzer

Kyle Balzer is a fellow at the American Enterprise Institute.

Thank you, David. And thank you to the National Institute for inviting me. It's a real pleasure to speak alongside this distinguished group of panelists. To my mind, they have written an important and obviously timely piece—and I hope those working the issue take their suggestions and run with them.

As I suspected, the panelists have given us a lot to think about. So, I want to keep my comments brief and focus on three aspects of their recent piece that are too often overlooked in public discussions.

The first is that whatever comes out of the reported nuclear review, any changes in policy should be communicated clearly to not just the American public, but to our allies and adversaries. The rumors about the review have generated a great deal of interest, and maybe even some anxiety, in our allies. And as we learned the hard way in the neutron bomb crisis and Euromissile crisis in the late 1970s, poor communication could lead to a softening of alliance cohesion today, if not an outright existential crisis in transatlantic and transpacific relations.

I think the same goes for communicating clearly our deterrence to potential enemies. Beginning in the mid-1960s, U.S. defense officials spoke openly about building “strategic stability” with the Soviets. And they began to air in public their hope that such a relationship would be built on reciprocal nuclear restraint, or mutual assured vulnerability between the superpower homelands. This rhetoric only served to unnerve our NATO allies and embolden the Soviets.

It's worth remembering today that these errors in declaratory rhetoric were only partially mitigated in the mid-1970s when defense officials devoted significant time to public messaging. They began speaking openly about more credible nuclear options below the threshold of large-scale nuclear attack. They declared in public that they would build a heavier ICBM, and they explained to ally and adversary alike that this would help the United States adjust to changes in the nuclear threat environment. And as we now know, all of these pronouncements complicated Soviet defense planning and had a positive deterrence effect.

This, of course, isn't to say that U.S. officials were perfect in the second half of the Cold War. I've already mentioned the neutron bomb crisis in 1977-78. But U.S. officials certainly came to recognize that deterring and assuring is more than just hardware alone; sound declaratory policy and consistent messaging from public officials are a prerequisite for deterrence and assurance. So, I'm glad the panelists raised this important point in their piece, just as talk of “strategic stability” has become a focal point in the Trump Administration's public messaging.

The second point I want to emphasize is the negative consequences that would flow from a failure to upload warheads on ICBMs and SLBMs. Those new Chinese silos place pressure on our targeting coverage. Those silos are highly valued by the Chinese leadership. And by holding those silos at risk, as the panelists suggest, the United States can limit damage to the homeland—which is of utmost importance to our allies. In my engagement with allies, they are acutely aware that our ability to limit damage to the continental United States makes our theater nuclear options credible. So, our allies are watching closely to see if we upload, and a failure to follow through would demonstrate a clear lack of national will on our part.

The panelists referenced the 1983 Scowcroft Commission in their piece. And on the subject of national will, that Commission—on a bipartisan basis, people like Harold Brown and James Schlesinger—recognized how nuclear modernization was an expression of our national resolve to which adversaries paid close attention. In fact, concerns about Soviet perceptions of America's national will were among the main reasons the Commission recommended deploying the MX ICBM. The Commissioners insisted that canceling the MX, foregoing improvements in damage-limitation capability, would signal to the Soviets that we are not serious about deterrence.

So, with that in mind, one doesn't have to guess what we'd be communicating to the Chinese if we decided to forego uploads on our ICBM fleet. Beijing has made major investments in heavier ICBMs, and a U.S. failure to make just marginal investments in our ICBM fleet by uploading would send the wrong signal.

My final point concerns the panel's emphasis on theater nuclear forces and our paucity of theater options relative to Russia and China. I believe that rightsizing the theater nuclear imbalance in Europe and East Asia is our most pressing challenge when it comes to nuclear deterrence. And, in my judgement, our dearth of theater options has already opened up space that Beijing is exploiting by pressuring our allies in the gray zone, nearly every single day. The U.S. alliance system is America's greatest competitive advantage. Our adversaries have nothing like it, and they therefore aim to break our global alliance system through nuclear-backed coercion. Allies have taken notice and some of them—especially in Europe—openly question the U.S. nuclear security guarantee.

There was a recent piece in *War on the Rocks* that rejected the whole idea of a deterrence gap in Europe and East Asia. But this assertion was made without any reference to the perceptions of our allies, who don't reject the concept. Quite the opposite. In East Asia, especially, they have identified one in the theater nuclear balance, and they believe that the SLCM-N would help close it and recouple U.S. strategic forces to the region. We need not "scour" the strategic environment in search of deterrence gaps. We need only to listen to what our allies say and what our adversaries do.

To shore up our global alliance system, we should get serious about accelerating SLCM-N. Moreover, we should think seriously about a ground-launched missile that could be deployed in Guam and Europe.

I'll end my comments here and turn it back over to David. Thank you.
