

# **Center for Strategic and International Studies**

## **Assessing the 2018 Nuclear Posture Review**

### **“Welcoming Remarks” and “Opening Keynote and Discussion”**

#### **Featuring:**

**John C. Rood,  
Under Secretary of Defense for Policy,  
U.S. Department of Defense**

#### **Welcome and Moderator:**

**Kathleen H. Hicks  
Director, Senior Vice President;  
Henry A. Kissinger Chair; Director, International Security Program, CSIS**

**Location: CSIS Headquarters, Washington, D.C.**

**Time: 1:30 p.m. EST  
Date: Thursday, March 1, 2018**

JOHN C. ROOD: (In progress) – independently targeted reentry vehicle systems, ICBMs I should say; theater-range ballistic missiles; a new submarine-launched ballistic missile; a new ballistic missile submarine to carry that missile; and the H-6K strategic bomber.

China's lack of transparency regarding the scope and scale of its nuclear modernization leaves the United States and the international community with a lot of concerns about their future intent. I will say from my past service in government, the last time that I visited China in 2008 for strategic stability talks, one of the things that was noteworthy to me was – at that time I served as the undersecretary for arms control and international security at the State Department – was that while the purpose of the talks was to show transparency and to examine some of the practices of our respective parties as a confidence-building measure in order to lower our concerns, I think I'd characterize the views of our Chinese hosts as not being – not seeing transparency and the willingness to discuss those things as being in their interest. There is, of course, a line from Sun Tzu where he talks about concealing your strengths and concealing your weaknesses from your adversaries, and I guess I'd say I'd characterize the Chinese approach they took with us at that time as very consistent with Sun Tzu's teachings there. And so it was very difficult, I think, to achieve the purpose of that stability. And if I fast-forward now a decade later, I think that trend has continued, unfortunately.

In addition to Russia and China, then, if we talk about other countries, of course North Korea comes to the top of the list. North Korea has repeatedly made explicit nuclear threats to the United States and our allies in the region. Having watched some of the North Korean-produced animation and seen some of the other activities, it's hard to come away with the conclusion that they don't want to send a message – (chuckles) – to the United States about their intentions. Since Kim Jong-un assumed power in 2011, he has rapidly increased the pace of the development and testing of nuclear devices, and of theater, intercontinental, and submarine-launched ballistic missiles.

In addition to North Korea, Iran remains a concern. While its nuclear ambitions remain and we remain a party to the joint – to the JCPOA agreement intended to limit those capabilities, we still retain sizeable concerns about Iran's ambitions in this regard. In addition to its nuclear program, its ballistic missile program violates U.N. Security Council resolutions, and its malign activities of course are a problem for its neighbors as well as the broader Middle East due to the hegemonic nature of these intentions from Iran.

Since 2010 and the NPR that was conducted at that time, therefore, Russia, China, and North Korea have all increased the numbers, capabilities, and salience of their nuclear weapons. And rather than reducing the prospects for nuclear – and, rather, reducing the prospects for military confrontation and reassuring and stabilizing their regions, Russia, China, North Korea, and Iran have engaged in military aggression and coercive threats against their neighbors. In the United States, our attempts to reduce the numbers and salience of nuclear weapons in the world have not been reciprocated. Of course, this isn't a unique conclusion of the 2018 NPR, but it's something that's shared by our allies and friends around the world, and a number of former administration officials – including those of the last administration.

In contrast to the actions of some of these potential adversaries, the United States has built no types – no new types of nuclear weapons or delivery systems – other than the F-35 fighter, which has multiple roles – for the past two decades. We have, instead, sustained our nuclear deterrent with life-extension programs, keeping systems and platforms that were not intended to be in service this long in the service of our forces for several decades beyond their designed service life. Former Secretary of

Defense Ash Carter rightly observed that if there is an arms race underway, the United States is clearly not a participant.

The 2018 NPR responds to this environment with a number of recommendations. The 2018 NPR does not change longstanding tenets of nuclear policy that have bipartisan support, such as the triad, the modernization and recapitalization of programs of record. Our commitment to our treaty obligations remains, and our openness to further arms-control reductions with good-faith partners is also in place. Instead, the policy and posture recommendations in the NPR contribute to the effective deterrence of potential adversaries and the assurance of allies in a more challenging threat environment.

Given its extensive continuity with mainstream U.S. nuclear policy, how, then, does the 2018 NPR address the new security environment? One, we would argue it clarifies and prioritizes our – and prioritizes our nuclear posture and policy. And, secondly, it recommends those capabilities needed to enable us to have a tailored approach – a tailored set of capabilities to provide an approach to deterrence that will correct adversary miscalculations, and thereby effectively reinforce deterrence.

In terms of the roles and policy changes there, first, the 2018 NPR reaffirms that deterrence of nuclear attack against the United States and our allies and partners is the top priority of our U.S. nuclear policy. Given the dynamically changing security environment, reemphasizing deterrence as the top objective is a prudent, realistic, and necessary action.

Secondly, the NPR clarifies U.S. nuclear declaratory policy. The declaratory policy makes clear that the United States would consider the use of nuclear weapons only in response to extreme circumstances that threaten our vital interests, as stated as well in the 2010 NPR. The 2018 NPR more clearly specifies that a, quote, “significant” strategic attack could be nuclear or non-nuclear.

Of course, there’s nothing automatic about a prospective U.S. nuclear response. It will be shaped by the context; that is to say, the extreme circumstances and strategic effect of the – of the adversary attack. And that will govern our responses.

This clarification does not expand the circumstances for nuclear use, nor lower the nuclear threshold, as unfortunately some commentators have wrongly suggested. Rather, it enhances deterrence and seeks to raise the nuclear threshold by reducing the potential for adversary miscalculation. This policy is not only consistent with the 2010 NPR, which acknowledged a role for nuclear weapons in deterring select non-nuclear attacks, but is broadly consistent with the policy of every administration from President Truman forward.

Third, the 2018 NPR recommends two supplemental programs to strengthen U.S. capabilities to deter attack and assure allies. The first is a modification of a small number of existing submarine-launched ballistic missiles, to include a low-yield option. Second is the pursuit of a nuclear sea-launched cruise missile. Neither of these capabilities is new or requires nuclear testing.

The low-yield submarine-launched ballistic missiles involve a relatively low-cost modification to an existing warhead. The sea-launched cruise missile is a capability that the United States possessed for decades, until it was recently retired. Both capabilities are fully consistent with our treaty obligations.

The goal of the 2018 NPR's capability recommendations is to tailor U.S. deterrence strategy to contemporary requirements. Effective deterrence must shape potential adversaries' calculations to ensure that they do not see the employment of nuclear weapons as a useful option in any circumstance.

Given what we've observed in the doctrine, exercises, statements and threats of other nuclear states since 2010, the challenge of the 2018 NPR was to determine how best to convince potential adversaries that the United States and its allies will not be coerced or paralyzed by their threats of use of nuclear weapons. So let me talk about how these two capabilities will, we think, enhance deterrence.

The low-yield SLBM option, in that area, Russia's doctrine and military exercises involve the use of a limited amount of nuclear strikes to quickly end a conflict on terms that they believe will be favorable to them. Moscow may mistakenly believe that we lack a credible deterrent to limited low-yield nuclear weapons – limited use of low-yield nuclear weapons. The NPR recommends a low-yield ballistic missile because it will help preclude any potential adversary from believing that its use of low-yield nuclear weapons would allow it to escalate its way out of a conventional conflict.

Of course, we have low-yield nuclear weapons in the U.S. arsenal today, but they are exclusively air-delivered. A low-yield submarine-launched ballistic missile is a survivable, prompt option that enhances deterrence by holding at risk targets that may in the future be beyond the reach of our current air-delivered low-yield options. This measured modification to our deterrent will help dispel any adversary expectation of advantage via nuclear first use based on a mistaken belief that the U.S. response options are not credible. These low-yield warheads, because they would be modification to existing weapons, would not add to our overall number of strategic ballistic missiles or the number of nuclear weapons in the U.S. nuclear arsenal, both of which will stay within the New START limits.

With respect to the sea-launched cruise missile, whereas the low-yield ballistic missile launched from a submarine is a near-term economical enhancement of our deterrent, the sea-launched cruise missile would allow us broader flexibility over the longer term to tailor our activities to the deterrent effect that we needed in a particular context. The 2018 NPR calls for the study of a nuclear SLCM, or sea-launched cruise missile, because its characteristics will help us meet these emerging deterrence requirements without having to match Russian non-strategic nuclear capabilities weapon for weapon.

Of course, Russia maintains an arsenal of thousands of non-strategic nuclear weapons. And although NATO's 2012 Deterrence and Defense Review reiterated our willingness to pursue reciprocal non-strategic nuclear weapons reductions, Russia has been unwilling to do so.

The sea-launched cruise missile is also treaty compliant with the INF Treaty, and it will enhance our reassurance of our European allies in the face of the ground-launched cruise missile that Russia has recently deployed in violation of the INF Treaty.

So, in conclusion, let me just say that these two capabilities recommended by the 2018 NPR strengthen the deterrence of war and strengthen our assurance of allies, thereby helping to ensure that nuclear weapons are not employed in the future. These capabilities are tailored to the strategic environment that we now face in order to raise the threshold for nuclear use, and to do so with minimal changes to the U.S. nuclear posture.

Let me be clear here: The goal of our recommendation is to deter war, and not to fight one. If nuclear weapons are employed in conflict because deterrence failed – and the goal of the NPR is to

make sure that deterrence will not fail – we also want to make sure that we retain credible capabilities in that unlikely eventuality. Strengthening deterrents is not simply a matter of nuclear capabilities. It's also about having the ability to work with friends and allies to reassure them and to create credible options to provide for their collective defense.

So our cooperation with friends and allies will ensure that potential adversaries can have no doubt about the cohesion, determination and alliance capabilities we possess to deter and maintain our common security.

In an era of renewed great power competition, adversaries, allies, and the American people should know that the United States has the will and the flexible resilient nuclear forces needed to protect the peace.

So thank you again for giving me the chance to talk to you. I'd be happy to take any questions you have in the Q&A session. (Applause.)

**KATHLEEN H. HICKS:** Well, thank you so much. I know we have limited time so I'm going to keep myself to one question and then go two to the audience and then I think we can – we can get you on – keep you on schedule.

So as we talked about before you came on stage, obviously, President Putin came out within the last 24 hours with his own thoughts about Russian nuclear capability and I would love to just get your reflections on what he said and how the U.S. and American public should be thinking about where the Russians are going in terms of what they claim to be expanding nuclear capability.

**MR. ROOD:** Well, certainly, President Putin's remarks yesterday were very noteworthy. But they're not the only remarks that Russian officials have made in the public domain in recent years.

I mean, one of the things that I think is interesting about the information age, is at least the information age, as it pertains to the availability of information in this town, is very good. But most of our commentators don't read foreign media sources still, and so when you look through some of the Russian language media you do see a much greater prevalence of these kinds of comments. And so while President Putin certainly gave a very full-throated explanation, I think there were elements of his comments that have been present for some time in various places and different comments that he and others have made before. So I was not surprised by much of the content of that.

Nonetheless, it is concerning the direction that's going on in Russia, certainly, the direction of the country, and a number of us over the years have worked to find ways to build a closer relationship between the United States and Russia. But I think, as our national security strategy and the national defense strategy said, we're in an era of great power competition again and Russia has clearly chosen that as an approach. A number of the capabilities that President Putin talked about and an openness in talking about them being oriented at the United States and oriented at the United States and our allies is very noteworthy.

Those – that intention and that focus is not merely articulated in that speech, of course. Some of the large-scale Russian exercises that have been conducted that identify NATO and the United States as the – that which is being exercised against is certainly another indicator of concern. And then we do see capabilities being developed and maintained by the Russians that concern us as well.

And so I think we just have to take that into account in terms of the orientation of the country, the demonstrating of capabilities, seeing capabilities developed or maintained as we develop our doctrine. And Russian nuclear doctrine continues to emphasize the use of nuclear weapons in a way that U.S. doctrine in the past has not, and some of the moves that we have taken Russia has gone in the opposite direction with respect to, for instance, the size of their so-called nonstrategic nuclear forces.

So all of these things paint a picture that is of concern and that's really what animated the nuclear posture of these recommendations, that they are – in order to preserve deterrents, to have a flexible set of capabilities for this much more complex world we needed to make some adjustments to what we were doing in the United States and some of the recommendations for capabilities such as the submarine launch ballistic missile spring from that consideration.

MS. HICKS: Great. OK. I promised two audience questions, so I'll take one here and one there. So start here, and we'll do one-two and then let you answer because we are short on time.

Q: Yeah. Yeah.

MS. HICKS: Please, the microphone, your name and affiliation.

Q: Sure. Jonathan Granoff. I'm the chair of the American Bar Association's International Law Section Task Force on Nuclear Nonproliferation and the president of the Global Security Institute.

What I noted in the – in the NPR was an absence of reference to a pathway to fulfill Article 6 of the nuclear nonproliferation treaty and I wonder if you could address that since, you know, as lawyers we consider that – the value that we're defending is the rule of law.

And the second is to discuss the compliance with our – with the deployment of our arsenal with international humanitarian law, which I also noted was absent in the NPR.

MS. HICKS: Thanks. And we'll take the second question and you can answer them together. Please.

Q: Thanks. Aaron Mehta with Defense News.

MR. ROOD: Hi, Aaron.

Q: Just wanted to clarify your statement about kind of the technology that was unveiled by President Putin last night. So, obviously, the SX was in the NPR, was called out specifically, but the hypersonic weapons weren't. Certainly, the nuclear-powered cruise missile that he talked about wasn't called out in the NPR. So how aware has the Pentagon been about these technology developments which, according to President Putin, have been tested over the last several months? And how much of that directly influenced the final form the NPR took?

MS. HICKS: Great.

MR. ROOD: OK. Maybe I'll just take them in turn.

MS. HICKS: Absolutely.

MR. ROOD: You know, on the first question, the NPR reaffirms the longstanding U.S. commitment to our arms control obligations and our willingness to engage in those type of activities, going forward, in terms of new negotiations. So I wouldn't say that we see it as signaling a change in the longstanding practice that we've had in the United States.

With respect to Article 6, I would also say everything in the NPR is fully consistent with that view. Bear in mind, number one, the nuclear posture review does not increase the size of the U.S. nuclear arsenal. We have reduced the size of the U.S. nuclear arsenal by 85 percent in recent decades.

Now, I would say, as Ash Carter, former secretary of defense, brought up, other countries, like Russia and China, have gone in the other direction. North Korea has gone in the other direction. Our willingness to engage in those reductions has not been reciprocated by others in the world.

So I think – I would say we – our actions, our words have been fully consistent with the obligations in Article 6 and, as you know, Article 6 doesn't merely speak to the world of nuclear weapons. It talks about good-faith negotiations towards nuclear disarmament in the context of general and complete disarmament.

MS. HICKS: We are not going to have enough time. I'm sorry. It'll have to wait for another day for the follow-on. And to the question over here in terms of the –

MR. ROOD: Oh, Aaron's question. Well, Aaron, certainly I wouldn't characterize our intelligence in public about various things. But I would say our concern about Russia's capabilities, our concern about Russia's direction and some of the statements that have been made in the past about the role of nuclear weapons predated President Putin's speech yesterday.

And, you know, as I said, I personally was not surprised to see a number of his comments in that speech. I think it's, broadly, consistent with things that have been stated before from Russian officials. That doesn't mean I welcome it or that it was necessarily the message that we would have liked to have received. But I think it's, broadly, consistent with things that the Russian government has said in the past.

MS. HICKS: And I greatly regret we have hit your time limit. But I'm extremely appreciative, given your tight schedule today, you made the time to come over here to talk publicly about the NPR and I know the follow-on panels will dig into a lot of these issues.

Please join me in thanking Under Secretary Rood for his time today. (Applause.)

(END)