Center for Strategic and International Studies

The Future of Alliances and Extended Nuclear Deterrence

Introduction and “Panel 1: Nuclear Deterrence and the NATO Alliance: Risks of Conflict and Prospects for Cooperation”

Introduction and Panel Chaired By:
Rebecca Hersman,
Director, Project on Nuclear Issues, and Senior Adviser, International Security Program, Center for Strategic and International Studies

Kathleen H. Hicks,
Senior Vice President; Henry A. Kissinger Chair; Director, International Security Program, Center for Strategic and International Studies

Iain King CBE,
Counsellor, Defence Policy and Nuclear,
British Embassy

Frank Miller,
Principal,
The Scowcroft Group

Alexander Vershbow,
Distinguished Fellow, Brent Scowcroft Center on International Security,
Atlantic Council

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REBECCA HERSMAN: All right. Welcome to CSIS. My name is Rebecca Hersman. I am the director of the Project on Nuclear Issues and a senior adviser in the International Security Program.

And we are very happy to have you all here today. You are in our event on The Future of Alliances and Nuclear Extended Deterrence, and we’ve got a great lineup today that I will set up. If you were intending to be in another meeting at CSIS, now is your moment to – (laughter) – recheck the rooms. It does happen on occasion.

We do have – if you’ve been to our events here, you know we do have our standard announcement. We do take security seriously in this building, and we have building safety precautions that we follow. Part of that is to make sure you understand who the staff are in the room, and that they’re available in the event of any sort of emergency. We have exits out the back of either side as well as this way, and I am your designated security officer. So follow me and we will make sure we all – we do what’s necessary. ‘None of that should happen, but just be familiar and we’ll kind of then turn to the substance of our program today.

Let me also start with one other bit of housekeeping, which is to remind you all that this event is being livestreamed. It is on the record. It’s available on the CSIS website. And for those of you who just can’t resist holding your phones, we are also live tweeting this event from our CSIS Project on Nuclear Issues using the hashtag #CSISLive. So please do that, and then that way you always have an excuse if your phone is out – say “I’m live tweeting.” So that works pretty well.

So just a moment to kind of set the scene here, if I may, as we kind of get into the conversation. The Project on Nuclear Issues is a program that’s been in existence for about 13 years, and it is designed to identify, cultivate, support, encourage, and develop the next generation of nuclear experts, thinkers and policymakers. And we do that by reaching deeply into government, academia, the military community, the scientific and technical community, and create opportunities for those folks to come together to learn about issues, to meet other knowledgeable people, to engage in a robust dialogue. We do that by promoting research, where we put a big emphasis on analytic rigor. We do it, such as we’re doing today, by convening important conversations and welcoming throughout a wide perspective of – wide range of perspectives and diversity of views, and that’s something we really pride ourselves on. We think that is key to developing those new thinkers and sharing their thoughts, as well as the broader community with them. So that is our day-to-day business.

This year PONI decided that, in fact, the issue of alliances, the role of nuclear deterrence in alliances, the relationships between nations, the complexities of extended deterrence was something that would probably be more important this year than almost any other. We really are at a – you know, a transformational point for a lot of reasons. So we’ve decided to highlight this as part of our public programming. We’ve decided to highlight it in terms of our call for proposals. And I will flag for you that we do host a number of conferences, and we create opportunities for young thinkers out in the community to submit proposals and have an opportunity to present at sessions not too dissimilar from this one, although the resumes may not have built up quite to the same level at this point as the gentlemen to my right and left. So that’s an opportunity. And if you are a young scholar or young person in government and interested in presenting, please pick up one of those out front.

So today, to turn to the substance, we’ve decided to really kind of take on this question of: What is the future of our alliances? How do we look as we look towards the European theater and as we look towards the Asian theater? And what is the role of the United States in those alliances? How
are those alliances underpinned by nuclear weapons? And how do we need to further strengthen, develop, and mature those alliances to fit the frame and the issues that face all of us today?

Our first session will look at NATO and our second session will be chaired by Elaine Bunn, and will focus on the Asian theater. So I’m going to take this opportunity up here – we’ll do a swap out – to just thank Elaine for coming to mentor the other session and highlight that, in fact, we are – one of the things PONI does is we develop the next generation, and we can’t do that without all the mentors that help us. And Elaine’s been a longstanding mentor and there are many other PONI mentors in the audience, so we really want to thank you. And Elaine will be kind of coming up and introducing her participants, but we’re really gratified that she can be here to do that today. You all have bios on all the participants, but Elaine has just retired as the deputy assistant secretary of defense for nuclear and missile defense policy, and so we think this will be a great opportunity – almost a near coming out in your private capacity, I think. So I will leave some of those details aside for now.

So, as we turn to Europe and the future of the central alliance which links together so much of the transatlantic family, we then look at NATO. And thinking about this, you know, today is really – NATO is buffeted by an array of crosscurrents that call on the alliance to do more on the one hand, and yet making the doing of more particularly difficult.

We have had Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, the annexation of Crimea, the aggressive posturing along NATO’s periphery. We’ve had fairly unabated streams of nuclear threats and nuclear posturing, a bit of nuclear bravado unlike what we’ve seen in many years. Snap exercises seem a bit of something from the past that has reemerged today and raised the level of concern in Europe. We’ve had dangerous violations of airspace of Russia’s Baltic and Nordic neighbors, continued enhancements of elements of their nuclear forces. And much of this feels like a throwback to a bygone era.

But we also have some other dynamics across the transatlantic family. We have political dynamics. We have concerns within – a lack of – perhaps a lack of confidence in those security frameworks, some of the traditional structures we’ve relied on for the global security architecture, and the rise of quite a few increasingly potent nationalist or protectionist forces that are shaping the way we need to think about policy, the way we need to communicate policy, and especially the way we need to do so in terms of nuclear deterrence and extended deterrence.

So, with those ideas in mind, the question, I think, to all of our panelists is: What does that future look like? How can we strengthen this alliance? How can we better communicate the importance of the alliance? How critical are nuclear weapons in both shaping and underpinning the alliance? And how do we help to engage a public conversation here and with our partners to help make sure that those issues are well-understood?

We have a terrific panel with us today. I’ll offer a few quick introductions.

To my immediate right we have Sandy Vershbow, the former deputy secretary-general of NATO from February 2012 to October 2016. And prior to this, Sandy served for three years as the U.S. assistant secretary of defense for international security affairs. In that position, he was responsible for coordinating U.S. security and defense policies for international organizations of Europe, including NATO, the Middle East and Africa, and spent 30 years as a career member of the U.S. Foreign Service. He is currently a distinguished fellow at the Atlantic Council in the Brent Scowcroft Center on International Security.
Further to the right we have Iain King, who is counsellor for defence policy and nuclear issues in the British Embassy here in Washington. And in this role, he is responsible for defense policy, strategy and nuclear issues within the British Defence Staff. He also leads on policy engagement on regional strategy issues, operational policy, force management, and a range of U.S.-U.K. nuclear cooperation efforts. Previously, he was director of programs at the U.K.’s overseas democracy promotion agency, the Westminster Foundation for Democracy.

Coming to this side, we have Frank Miller, currently a principal at The Scowcroft Group. And in this capacity, he provides clients both strategic and tactical advice on defense, national security, foreign affairs and intelligence policy. This follows his previous service of 31 years in the U.S. government, including 21 years in the Department of Defense, in a range of senior positions both in the Department of Defense and in the White House National Security Council.

And finally, we have Kath Hicks, who is the senior vice president and Henry Kissinger Chair and director of the International Security Program here at CSIS. She previously served in DOD as the principal deputy undersecretary for policy, with responsibility for assisting in the development and oversight of global and regional defense policy, strategy, and operation efforts there. So she also served as deputy undersecretary of defense for strategy, plans and forces, and contributed to the development of the 2012 Defense Strategic Guidance and the 2010 Quadrennial Defense Review.

So I don’t think we could possibly be better-equipped for a great conversation. I’ve asked our panelists here to offer about five minutes of remarks. Then we’ll engage in a few questions, and then we’ll open up the conversation to the audience.

So, with that, Sandy, I’d like to turn to you first.

ALEXANDER VERSHBOW: OK. Thanks very much, Rebecca. It’s a pleasure to be here, and particularly with the objective of helping prepare another generation of nuclear experts. That was me once. I started my career in 1977, and one of the first things I worked on was the dual-track decision, and went to high-level group meetings at a very young age.

But let’s talk about where NATO stands now, both politically and also in terms of its efforts to rebuild its deterrence strategy. I think I would start by saying for NATO it’s both the best of times and the worst of times. NATO entered 2017 feeling very good about itself. After three years of very intense but successful adaptation at the Wales and Warsaw summits, NATO had rebuilt and really relearned deterrence. It had also launched new initiatives aimed at stabilizing its southern and eastern neighborhoods, and it forged a new partnership with the European Union. And it successfully managed tensions between the southern allies and the eastern allies, ensuring a balanced approach. And it even was able to restart dialogue with Russia, although the prospects for that are still somewhat mixed.

But of course, in the latest demonstration of the nostrum that no good deed goes unpunished, the arrival of the Trump administration has put all of this good work and NATO’s very future at least in doubt to some degree. And as everyone knows, candidate Donald Trump called NATO obsolete and seemed to make U.S. readiness to fulfill its Article 5 commitment contingent on whether allies were spending enough on defense. And President Trump has made on the one hand some encouraging appointments, and he did tell Chancellor Merkel that he sees NATO as of fundamental importance, but there are still reasons to be worried.
It’s clear that in all aspects of foreign policy the new president is not motivated so much by shared values or an appreciation for the need to maintain the international rules-based order, but rather everything will be viewed in transactional terms. And he’s, I think, clearly not convinced that allies are keeping up their end of the deal. Now, is this critique valid? Mostly no, but there are some aspects where the new president may have a point.

On defense spending, there has been some improvement in the last couple of years, but we still have only five of the 28 allies – one of them the U.S. – meeting the 2 percent of GDP goal. And 10 meet the other maybe more important target of spending 20 percent of defense budgets on modernization and R&D. So there’s clearly room for improvement on spending.

I think on defense and deterrence, NATO has done quite well, especially on the conventional side. As I said, we’ve relearned deterrence. We’ve begun to field the necessary capabilities, raise readiness, develop an approach to dealing with hybrid threats. We’re exercising a lot more, including with Article 5 scenarios. And this is good because when this all kind of became necessary in 2014, we weren’t very well-prepared with the Russian aggression against Ukraine. NATO was still in the mode of focusing mainly on crisis management, cooperative security. We were kind of searching for a moniker for the new NATO – you know, “prepared NATO,” “NATO ready for anything,” nothing particularly dynamic. But nothing like the invasion of Crimea to change the perspective.

So we scrambled, and I think the initial response was effective, but perhaps not everything we needed to do. But at the Wales Summit in 2014, we launched the Readiness Action Plan with the High Readiness Joint Task Force and other means to strengthen our capacity to reinforce our eastern flank in a hurry. And there the European allies played a big role. They’re not free riders. They did do a lot to support these new capabilities.

But it took till the Warsaw Summit last July to fill in the missing pieces, and in particular allies agreed on the most key element, which is an enhanced forward presence – battalion-sized task groups in the three Baltic states and Poland, plus some beefing up of the presence in the southeastern region as well – and took other steps to strengthen resilience, improve our cyber defense, begin to develop a strategy and the capability to counter the Russian anti-access/area-denial capability. We even agreed to set up a hub for the south, because deterrence and defense isn’t just about Russia; we have to be able to defend allies on all fronts.

So, again, on defense and deterrence, I think we’re doing pretty well. A lot of homework that has to be completed by the allies, a lot of additional investments have to be made, but at least the path is clear and allies know what they need to do.

On the nuclear side there’s been progress, although it’s a bit less dramatic. And this is obviously a very sensitive issue, still, within the alliance, but allies, I think, did the right thing as a first step, which was to do a study, which is actually not a – not a copout but a very important way for NATO to forge a consensus on what is the nature of the problem and therefore what is the response. So we did a very deliberate analysis of the implications of Russian nuclear policy and strategy, and we involved the French in some of this even though they’re not participants in NATO nuclear planning. And I think it created a common foundation for looking at how do we need to at least adjust our deterrence posture, the readiness of our – of our dual-capable aircraft and our declaratory posture, given that we have to reckon with the fact that we’re dealing with a Russia that has integrated conventional and nuclear forces, has clearly shown both through its words and through its exercises that it sees the possibility of using tactical nuclear weapons to supposedly deescalate a conflict. So the
Warsaw Summit put out very clear words warning the Russians that any use of nuclear weapons would fundamentally change the nature of conflict, and basically that was a “don’t even think about it” statement. So this work is still a work in progress, but I think we’ve managed to update our posture, keep all the allies – with their very complex domestic politics – on the same page.

Now, when it comes to threats from the south, I think the record is more mixed. President Trump says NATO’s not doing enough against terrorism or against ISIS. This isn’t an entirely fair accusation because, after all, NATO’s been dealing with terrorism as its number one mission since it went into Afghanistan more than a decade ago, and we’re still there helping to build up the Afghan security forces. And there have been specific contributions by allies to the counter-ISIS coalition, including many allies who are conducting air operations, even though that’s not a NATO operation as such. But it wouldn’t work if it weren’t for NATO interoperability and experience.

But NATO claims that its main role against terrorism is going to the root causes. And that means building the capacity of local forces in the Middle East and North Africa, helping them counter terrorism, deal with IED threats and the like. It means maritime security cooperation to help control terrorist movements, as well as illegal migration. And here we put out a whole series of initiatives under the banner of projecting stability. It’s a catchy title, but I would say that the actual content of what NATO is doing is still rather meager.

So I think there’s room for a much bigger role for NATO in the south, focusing on ramping up substantially these projecting stability programs – for example, making NATO the trainer in chief for Iraqi security forces going forward; if the conditions can finally be established in Libya, to go into Libya and help them build an integrated, national, well-run, professional armed force and end the region and factional rivalries in that country; and more generally doing much more of this training and capacity-building with our Middle Eastern partners. So I think that could be sold as something new, or at least something significantly strengthened, so that perhaps President Trump could see this as a new deal for NATO, put his stamp on it, and NATO can then get on with implementing all these important decisions, spending more and showing that it is still as relevant today as it’s been in previous eras.

The last thing I’d mention is part of NATO’s policy – and it’s a key element of keeping consensus among the allies – is continuing the dialogue that we’ve started with Russia. First of all, it’s necessary because the relationship is very unstable, prone to potential accidents. And we need to at a minimum get the Russians to agree to be more transparent, to agree to confidence-building measures and risk-reduction measures, and stop – you know, tell their pilots not to fly in such provocative ways. But over time, if they actually clean up their act on the ground in Ukraine – which is a big if – we could go back to some practical cooperation, all of which has been frozen for more than two years, and try to see if there’s some mutual areas of interest where we could work together.

So there, too, NATO, I think, has a role to play in President Trump’s interest in improving relations with Russia. But he should work with NATO rather than at cross-purposes with NATO, use the leverage of a united alliance to get a – get serious movement by Russia on the problems that it’s created, and in the process try to lower tensions and build a more stable European and global security order.

Thank you.

MS. HERSMAN: Thank you. That’s a great way to get things started.
Iain, if I could turn to you, how does some of – you know, what’s – give us some perspective, please, from the other side of the Atlantic, both from a U.K. perspective but also kind of from the broader European look.

IAIN KING: Thank you. So, first of all, thank you for having me here. It’s great to be part of such an esteemed panel, even if I’m perhaps the least-esteemed member of it.

So I think everybody here in Washington, no less than everywhere else, is fully aware of the tremendous amount of flux in politics around the world, around the developed democracies. And Britain has seen its own flux, with Brexit now being a very dominant issue in the – on the British political scene. And those of you who watch European politics will be aware that there are a number of issues to do with the European Union which are very salient in domestic politics all around the EU, and you find that many different EU countries have their own particular angle on the European issues or other international issues which have a particularly domestic perspective – each country has its own way of looking at things.

It’s useful to have a historical view on some of these topics. Looking at the future of deterrence, it’s interesting to remember the history. And we all, especially people in this room, I think, will focus naturally on the last 71 years of very effective nuclear deterrence. And that’s the system of, you know, extended deterrence through a system of alliances, which has been tremendously effective. But it’s always worth remembering other examples of extended deterrence through alliance which have been less effective. And I think of the situation leading up to 1914 where you had the Treaty of London from 1839, which led to a whole bunch of miscalculations and a network of alliances which, to put it mildly, didn’t do what they were meant to do.

So we shouldn’t take for granted the fact that we have had a very effective system of deterrence based on the extended deterrence with a nuclear component since the Second World War. And given the flux on the domestic politics and also the changing character of some of the warfare we have now, we need to be particularly aware of some of the issues which are coming in.

So just to – just to cite a few, problems of attribution, new methods of conflict between states and other actors make it sometimes less obvious where are challenges coming from. And I’m thinking of cyber here, where there’s an additional problem of not always knowing who is responsible for a cyber issue.

There are issues of stealth and separating the signal from the noise. So, if a whole bunch of maritime pleasure boats sail around the South China Sea and they seem to be depositing a bit of material on the seabed, at what point do you determine that they’re actually in breach of international law? And it’s good that we’ve had a clear ruling on that from the UNCLOS ruling. And – but the fact that it’s sometimes hard to know where to draw a line and if you do draw a line, making your adversary believe that you take that line seriously is an issue which needs to be noted.

And issues of cross-domain deterrence as well, where you have a problem in one sphere where it’s appropriate to have a retaliatory action in a different sphere. So, for example, most recently just a few weeks ago we had a – the Obama administration called out Russia quite rightly for a very serious cyberattack and then responded with a diplomatic response. So that’s a very good example of a – of a cross-domain response.
So, thinking about how we then respond to these, how we can move forward, we need to recognize the situation as it is, as the world is now. The Brexit vote, recent elections here as well, remind us just how we mustn’t take for granted the opinions of the people who vote for our elected leaders. So that’s one reason why I think that the 2-percent issue within NATO is particularly important. It’s a very visible commitment that people – that political leaders should be prepared to make throughout Europe, throughout the whole of NATO, to be fully committed to their defense.

And where we may fear or be concerned that a potential adversary is not fully committed, doesn’t take us seriously on an issue, we need to stump up and make clear that we do take it – an issue seriously. On there I’m thinking, as Sandy mentioned, EFP, enhanced forward presence. The presence of very clear NATO military soldiers in the frontline Baltic states is a very important thing that we need to stick with.

And also we need to be minded to think about developing new norms in new domains where – those domains developing as areas of conflict so that we can have a new international system where those – where there’s contestation to lead to a better place. So I’m thinking now it would be good is – if in some point in the future we had new norms on things like the information domain and the cyber domain.

But to conclude, I think the thing here is that the events of the last few months have reminded us of the degree of flux that there is in the system. There seems to be more flux now than there was before, but I think that it’s almost as if the flux is constant. Just as the tectonic plates keep moving physically, we have economic shifts, we have demographic shifts, we have technical development, which means there’s always going to be forces pushing and pulling.

And in the – in the response to those pushes and pulls and shifts, we need to make sure that the system we are defending, we are backing up adapts appropriately. And if it fails to adapt, we risk having a judder, an earthquake if you’d like, which is something we want to try and – try and avoid. I’m confident that both NATO and the special relationship will be vital, central, fundamental ingredients in the years going forward no matter how those tectonic plates change. But we need to make – do need to make sure that the international system evolves with the times.

MS. HERSMAN: All right. Thank you.

Well, Frank, as I turn to you, can you kind of reflect – I think we’ve got sort of what’s been happening in NATO here and perspective from the U.K. What’s your take?

FRANK MILLER: Well, I was – I’m going to try to be uncharacteristically precise in my answers. I was going to talk about NATO’s nuclear force planning and direction.

So let me start by simply saying that we have now come back to a point where most of the nations in the alliance acknowledge the important role that nuclear deterrence and nuclear weapons play in alliance cohesion. There was a point not so many years ago, in the 2009 through 2011 period, when that was called seriously into question despite the fact of Russian increasing alliance on nuclear weapons even then.

So we’re now at a point where on a policy level, I think, alliance leaders generally understand that nuclear weapons are critical to alliance cohesion, solidarity, and deterrence. The first step, I think, is – for the future is to continue to build on efforts begun over the last several years, which Sandy
alluded to. And that is the strengthening of our conventional capabilities in Europe. We cannot go back to the 1950s, the plate-glass window with no conventional capability. We need to build up our conventional capability in theaters so that there is at least a serious conventional counter to Russian adventurism along the NATO-Russia border. And I think that the Obama administration deserves tremendous credit for having reversed that trend and for the force buildup.

With respect to nuclear capabilities, I think that there are a series of things which NATO needs to do to be successful in the future. The first is to more seriously acknowledge the nuclear threat from Russia. I don’t think there’s a single NATO document – Sandy will know better than I – but I don’t think there’s a single NATO document which lays out in the language of all the 28 countries what the Russian nuclear buildup looks like opposite NATO, both the modernization of strategic forces, the modernization and proliferation of shorter-range forces; and which tallies the various threats made by senior Russian leaders, which revert to Khrushchev-like language.

And as democracies, the first thing that’s incumbent on governments is to inform populations as to what’s going on in the world. So I think NATO needs to as a first priority begin talking about what’s going on across the border.

The second thing that needs to be done – and the Warsaw summit language, which I will add had some significant origins here at CSIS in different for a – the Warsaw summit language of 2016 explicitly acknowledges that there is a nuclear threat from Russia and that a nuclear war cannot be won and shouldn’t be fought and that Russian leaders should not be threatening such a conflict because they can’t win it.

But again, if you look at the period 2009 through about 2014 to the Wales summit, the summit language was very weak, and the Russians knew that. So at least a new determination shown at Wales and then at Warsaw which says, no, we’re not going to allow this kind of intimidation, this obvious attempt at nuclear blackmail to occur without responding.

But education and declaratory policy are meaningless unless you have a force capability that backs those kinds of political actions up. And obviously here at home we need to continue with the modernization with our nuclear triad because it’s the nuclear forces, the strategic forces of the United States, United Kingdom and France which underpin NATO deterrence.

But within the theater, there are a series of things that need to be done. First, we need to ensure that our theater-based nuclear forces are capable and that they’re seen by the Russian leadership and the Russian military as capable of carrying out their mission. That means first of all that the air forces involved, the U.S. and allied air forces tasked with the mission, need to take that mission seriously. A few years ago, not so. More and more, we are beginning to take that mission seriously.

However, what do we need to do further? First, we need to do realistic exercises, including command post exercises. We need to have a realistic set of exercises to test the force. That means at the unit level and at the headquarters level. And we need to exercise the command-and-control links that govern the operations of those forces.

We need to place increased emphasis on practicing with the – with the military – and defense in the audience will know – is in a regional deployment where the nuclear-capable aircraft from one country deploy to a nuclear-capable base in another country and practice uploads and strike missions.
That is not a new policy. IRD was brought in in the ‘90s, but we need to exercise that capability to demonstrate that NATO’s forces are capable.

Third, we need to have those air forces practice flushing for survival. A force which is static and cannot be made survivable in a crisis is a target, not a deterrent. So we need to practice flushing for survival. And we need to examine new operational concepts that adapt to the Russian integrated air-defense systems and to their A2AD capabilities.

We also need to improve the capability of the SHAPE staff to engage in realistic nuclear planning, again, a skill set which has been lost over time and which is not only important to guide our forces but which the Russians will see and observe.

We need to modernize NATO’s dual-capable aircraft over time. The F-35 clearly is going to be the backbone of NATO’s theater-based deterrent capability. And each of the basing nations is going to have to decide whether or not they’re going to continue in the role. Indeed, the German air force needs to decide what it’s going to do as the Tornados age out, whether Germany is going to continue its role by buying nuclear-capable F-35s. And in my own judgment, I think we should accelerate the Block 4 part of the F-35 program, which gives them the nuclear wiring, get those things out into theater.

We need to upgrade the nuclear command-and-control capability of the alliance. I can’t say much more about that, but it’s necessary to do.

We need to complete – we, the United States need to – need to complete the modernization of the B61 weapon, which is going to be deployed in theater in place of older models. And just to offset the notion that this is a new step in the nuclear arms race, we have a small number of weapons in Europe. Those weapons – the existence of those weapons and the programs of cooperation under which they are there were accepted by the Soviet Union when the nonproliferation treaty was signed. So any of the Russian propaganda today that says that the deployment of those weapons and the existence of those programs of cooperation violates the NPT is simply that, propaganda, because the negotiating record from the NPT is clear. But – and the – and the new weapons, which will incorporate modern electronics, replace weapons that have vacuum tubes in them, electronics that are so old that none of you in your households have those same kinds of antiquated 1950s and 1960s capabilities.

And finally, I think what the alliance needs to also do is to think about how we can increase burden-sharing and risk-sharing. We have spread that out to some degree with the non-basing countries contributing aircraft in various different kinds of exercises. But it is – it is 2017. There are new ways of incorporating countries which are not basing countries in the nuclear mission if we put our mind to it.

So I think there are a series of challenges. The glass is not empty. It is maybe a third full. And we need to keep – we need to keep filling it up.

MS. HERSMAN: Thank you.

So, Kath, we asked you to talk about Russia and how kind of Russia plays in this, and obviously it’s central. And I can’t help but listen to this, especially to Frank’s list, and think, well, yes, we – you know, those might be essential, but at what point are they deterrents and when are we provoking? You know, are we poking the bear? Are we – what do we need to do, and how do we want to think about Russia in the context of the alliance in the next couple of years?
KATHLEEN H. HICKS: Right. Well, I can really build on a lot that’s already been said here, so hopefully I will be brief. Let me just start by saying, of all the ideas here, I’d like to most fully endorse Sandy’s view that a study is not a cop-out. As an institution, CSIS also believes they’re very important for developing innovative solutions. (Laughter.)

Look. The Russians have got to be pretty pleased right about now. They’ve created a lot of chaos, and chaos works for them. It doesn’t mean that Putin’s not strategic. I think we have to reconfigure what we think strategy means, not because strategy has changed but because our vision of strategy is often extremely linear and sort of in a – in a war school-like setting, kind of as ends to ways to means. And in fact, strategy is always much more dynamic than that. And we’re seeing that play out.

So we’re – we are being – I think the West is being out-strategized. And let me talk a little bit about that and come back to this issue of deterrence. Quite clearly, as has already been discussed, one of the major centers of gravity certainly, if not the center of gravity, in Europe is the issue of alliance cohesion and partner-and-alliance cohesion. And the Russians know that, and they’ve played that card pretty well in all of their activities.

Also, they’ve demonstrated a very broad tool set: nuclear, space and cyber as we’ve discussed here, conventional as has been discussed here, and of course the unconventional. Well, we’ve always known the Russians are good at unconventional warfare. What was news in 2014 is that they used it and they used it to violate the territory of a sovereign nation.

So what do we see since then from there and Syria and elsewhere? We see that they’re experimenting. We see that there are weaknesses. We see that they’re risk-takers. And we see that so far they seek to be avoiding, if you will, where they might cross conventional thresholds.

So what might that tell us about deterrence, coming back to deterrence? And you know, if you’ll forgive the loose analogy, deterrence isn’t dead, long live deterrence, which is to say our traditional sense of what deterrence is still matters and we need to be thinking more holistically about the frame of deterrence than we have in a little while. Again, the idea of gray area, whatever you want to call it, warfare – not new, not new for us. Frankly we’ve executed it pretty effectively over time. Other actors in the international arena have used it effectively over time, and certainly the Soviet Union used it effectively over time.

What we should take away as somewhat good news in what might otherwise appear to be a slightly dreary panel is that our thresholds – we can hope that we should read from this that we have demonstrated some thresholds that the Russians, even with the risk-taking calculus so far, have not wanted to risk. So what does that tell us? It means that our conventional nuclear and some of our other deterrent aspects are important, they are largely holding, and we need to ensure their strength for the future, their adaptation and strength for the future, part of which Frank, I think, just spoke very well about on the nuclear piece.

We also know, however, that they are finding ways to advance their interests in areas that we think violate our interests – at least to date we have as a nation and as an alliance viewed it that way – by taking this innovative tool set that they have and using those aspects of it in particular to push below those conventional or nuclear thresholds.
So what do we do? And some of this has been covered. First, as I said, I think we keep that traditional tool set strong. That includes our alliance system, which is our best asymmetric advantage against a nation like Russia, who’s playing well – punching well above its weight, by the way, internationally at the moment. We have to also keep our military strong, as I said. And I do think the alliance needs to be more vocal in its recognition of the nuclear deterrent.

But we also have to grow our tool set. And here’s where we’re not particularly well-situated in the West. We don’t tend to, particularly in the United States, like long-term approaches, integrated approaches, soft-power approaches that are all difficult to measure and to prove and to demonstrate domestic support for. So we have to have leadership that really drives us collectively to view those as important investments over time, not again to take the place of more conventional tool sets but to really complement it for full-spectrum, if you will, deterrence.

I think we also have to acknowledge that we have to shore up our own societies. Our – again, our greatest strength, our alliance cohesion, is largely about what we are to the world, how we demonstrate to our own societies and those beyond our societies that we are a successful model. And that is clearly under attack. We can talk more about the details of that in Q&A, but I think it’s pretty self-evident.

And as Sandy said, we have to keep avenues for cooperation open always with actors, but we don’t want to make, if you will, to use the parlance of the day, any bad deals. And right now the United States is not in a great leverage situation vis-à-vis Russia. And I certainly hope for this administration and for NATO overall that we take time to build that leverage before we start moving into deals that might actually undercut those interests and really play more into Russia’s hands.

So let me stop there.

MS. HERSMAN: Thank you very much. I think there’s a lot of interesting ideas on the table. I’d like to push the conversation along a little bit, and then we’ll open up to the audience.

One thing I’m struck by and wondering, you know, the system of alliances that – of which NATO is such a critical part, it’s all part of this international system in which we are pretty deeply invested and is a tremendous asymmetric advantage, but it’s – you know, many players are not persuaded of that value.

Russia on the one hand sees it as a direct threat to their view and their role in the world, and it’s – we have to both find ways – and I’m going to ask you to help, you know, fill in the toolkit a little – you know, we have to find ways to build confidence that there actually isn’t a threat from NATO, that it is a defensive alliance but it is an alliance intent on defense.

So I think – how can we do that better? How can we navigate this gray area better? Because we are getting a bit outplayed. But also I think the domestic game in each of our – you know, in our respective domestic settings, our own populations are probably not willing to play by the rules we were used to before. They are not writing blank checks to establishment elites and saying, we trust you to do what you think is best.

Certainly that’s evident in Brexit. Certainly it’s evident, I think, in the U.K. in terms of the pressure that you’re under in terms of political constituencies and in many cases specifically on nuclear policy, whether it’s from the Scots and others. I’m hoping you can talk to that a little bit, Iain, in fact,
kick this off. But certainly we’re feeling it here in the United States. I think that we are going to have to figure out how to have a broader conversation. And I’m wondering how we can do a better job of that.

But would you be willing to kick that off from the –

MR. KING: Yes –

MS. HERSMAN: I mean, you guys have been, you know, sort of the leading edge here.

MR. KING: Yes, it’s one of these questions that’s a lot easier to agree with than to answer. So – and to double down on some of your points, it’s not just a question of explaining the value of NATO and explaining how it’s a defensive alliance with a whole series of – you know, a long and proud history that does a very valuable job not just in Europe, not just in the North Atlantic, but in the wider world.

It’s explaining that in the face of what’s frankly, to call it, you know, what it is, a propaganda campaign by the enemies of NATO and given the change, the really rather rapid change, in the way people are forming their viewpoints now. And we’re looking at technological changes, thinking about social media, thinking about TV. If you look at the statistics and the way people – the average voter, for example, gets their information, their news, the changes just in a decade have absolutely been profound.

And I think people who are leading lights in the defense world and on both sides of the Atlantic have been – frankly we’ve not managed to keep up, which meant that – which has meant that some of our messages have been, you know, outflanked by the propaganda that we’re having to deal with. And say in Britain and America, we have it easier than they do in some other countries, in particular in Eastern Europe, where they have an even more virulent propaganda campaign that we have to counter.

So it’s certainly very, very difficult. I think – I’m confident that we will overcome the threat, but that’s partly because as the threat becomes more apparent, we will do the things that we need to counter it. And NATO has a history of stepping up when it needs to. It stepped up in – over 9/11 and called Article 5, and it will step in – up in the future as the threat becomes larger and more of a challenge.

But we need to recognize that the temperature is rising.

MR. MILLER: Could I comment on that?

MS. HERSMAN: Yes.

MR. MILLER: Again, I’m going to go back to the point that we as the U.S. government, British government, even the alliance to a large degree and member nations have been ashamed, embarrassed – fill in whatever word you want – to talk about the positive aspects of the NATO relationship and why does NATO exist. In your own work and some work that I published some time ago with Kori Schake points out that if you look at the percent of NATO populations who were not yet alive when the wall fell, people don’t – I mean, large parts of the population don’t understand why NATO exists.
And so what we need is a series of positive campaigns, propaganda if you will, whatever – this is what NATO is, this is why they exist, there are bad people on the other side. I’ve actually seen some videos recently that you star in. I don’t know whether you recorded them as deputy secretary general –

MR. VERSHBOW: Is that the secret weapon? (Laughter.)

MR. MILLER: If you will – or as former deputy secretary general – and also some videos by the maritime command about this is what NATO is doing. We need to do that more, and we need to do that in ways that reach out to generation X, but we need to tell our story, because if other – if we don’t tell our story, the Russians tell it in a very different way.

MR. VERSHBOW: Yeah.

MS. HICKS: If I can just choose one anecdote for that. You think about how Americans consumed information over the last 15 years on Afghanistan, I suspect that there may be polling – I haven’t seen it – that most Americans don’t really understand that that’s a NATO campaign –

MR. VERSHBOW: Oh, yeah. Sure.

MS. HICKS: – whereas if you look back at World War II, no American schoolchild would grow up thinking that the United States fought alone, you know, against the Axis powers. So –

MR. VERSHBOW: Well, they might not know enough about the Russian role.

MS. HICKS: I’m sorry?

MR. VERSHBOW: On the other side of the argument, the Russian role in World War II is probably not well-known enough either –

MS. HICKS: Well, of course that’s true as well. Yes.

MR. VERSHBOW: – which they often complain about.

MS. HICKS: Yes. Yeah.

MR. VERSHBOW: But on this issue, I agree with what has been said, although I’m not optimistic you can really have a massive public education campaign on why NATO was created and what it’s done. But we have to try. We have to kind of focus on some major events where NATO has been so decisive. And I think ending genocide in the Balkans – we should be proud of that. And the fact that NATO has been with the United States, you know, shedding a lot of lives to – you know, to help defend the United States in Afghanistan – that’s not at all appreciated.

But part of the problem is we can refute some of the Russian factual propaganda, which is basically false, whether it’s on the supposedly offensive nature of the enhanced presence in the Baltic states – I mean, that is totally ridiculous. We’re putting in one battalion in each country. I mean, there’s more behind that, but it’s defensive. It’s – we will only reinforce it if there’s a threat. The Russians are building up to a much larger degree on their western borders, yet they continue to just beat the drum that this is a strike capability, an offensive capability.
Same with missile defense. Our missile defense has zero capability to shoot down any Russian ICBMs fired from any part of the Russian Federation towards the United States. But they’re continuing to scare publics, particularly in Romania and Poland where they’re going to go in. Now it’s happening with the Chinese working with the Russians in South Korea on the THAAD deployment.

But we have to continue to put facts in the face of propaganda and not do propaganda ourselves. The hardest part is that the Russians have been very successful, including in this country, with this revisionist historical narrative, that everything that’s happened in the last 25 years was a – was a sinister plot by the United States, NATO, the West to weaken Russia, to destroy Russia, to do regime change in Russia.

And there people’s memories are short. We have to really push back very hard, making clear that we were building a Europe whole and free with a place for Russia in it; we did a lot of things with Russia, including bringing peace to the Balkans – that was not an anti-Russian move; and try to counter the notion that it’s our fault and we should blame ourselves for all this bad Russian behavior.

MS. HERSMAN: So going to a few brass tacks and picking up on the idea that – what sort of capabilities, what sort of posturing do we need in Europe, thinking – most of our nuclear posture in Europe very much predates the – structurally in terms of where are things located, which countries do we engage with very much predates the end of the Cold War. Since that time you’ve had the infusion of many countries into NATO. You’ve had this fundamental alteration of what constitutes the periphery of NATO. We’ve had fundamental East/West shifts in terms of the perspective and role of Turkey and where they sort of fit into that picture.

So, looking out today, we have incredibly nervous, you know, peripheral states but whose role on – from the nuclear perspective is rather minimal. We have traditional NATO states with a very large role but very sort of somewhat reluctant populations. And we have Turkey really struggling with many of its own political challenges and a potential – you know, the risk of some divergence in terms of the types of values that we expect to tie us together on something as important as nuclear deterrence.

Is there any way to think about that, or are these sort of structures immutable at this point? I am looking at you.

MR. MILLER: Oh, yeah, you want me to walk into that trap. Thank you very much.

MS. HERSMAN: Yeah. (Laughs.) I figured you could, you know –

MR. MILLER: Thank you. So the subtext of the question is, should we try to put nuclear units into some of the new – the newer members of NATO, to which I would answer absolutely not. It would be seen by the Russians as a huge provocation, and I don’t know that we would get any good out of it. That said, I think there are two things to talk about. One is to get governments to recognize – this is part of the discussion we had and the answer to the previous question – that an attack on one is an attack on all. And just as in the Cold War an attack on one member of the alliance meant we were all in it, that principle applies today even if the so-called frontline has shifted hundreds of miles to the east.

The second thing is to be innovative and provocative and to think about new ways of doing old business, and that is, if you’re not going to put nuclear weapons in Poland, can you have some sort of composite NATO nuclear strike squadron where trained Polish pilots are integrated into an F-16 unit in one of the other basing countries so that as we have a NATO AWACS squadron, can we have a NATO
strike squadron? And, again, I’m way out in front of my headlights, but the Norwegian position has always been there will be no nuclear weapons on our territory in peacetime. There’s nothing in Norwegian policy, to my knowledge, that says we will not have pilots engaged in a nuclear delivery role in somebody else’s main operating base. So, again, let’s think about ways to involve more allies in this mission, which affects all of us.

MS. HERSMAN: Did you want to comment on that? Does any – do we have any room to –

MR. VERSHBOW: Yeah, I mean, that’s – even that idea would be very controversial, but it’s – there’s no rule or commitment that would prevent that. When we started the process of enlarging NATO, we talked about having no intention, no plan, no reason to put the weapons on the territory of new member states, and I think that was based on a security evaluation that is probably still valid today. But I think other ways of getting nations involved, maybe just in planning and training and the command structure, I’m not sure, but the pilots might raise a lot of hackles in some allied capitals. But the key is to make sure that everybody is – feels committed, feels covered by the deterrent and that other allies feel that the risks are being shared more equitably than they are now. So I think there’s a lot of different ways, as Frank said at the beginning, to increase the participation of non-basing countries and build that greater solidarity that underpins deterrence for the alliance.

MS. HERSMAN: Great. Thank you.

Well, we have a terrific audience today, so I’d like to go ahead and bring some of you into the conversation. Do we have handheld mics at the back? OK, terrific. So if you have a question that you would like to engage in the conversation, please announce your name and your affiliation.

Q: Hi. Is this on? Yeah, I’m Tytti Erästö from the Ploughshares Fund.

And I would have a question about missile defense, although that wasn’t the main topic. But, yeah, I’m just wondering, like, if missile defense is really purely defensive, as you said, then why has the U.S. targeted the Soviet and then Russian interceptors and radars as nuclear – like high-priority nuclear targets since the Cold War? And how do you think the U.S. would react if Russia would start building such a system behind U.S. borders, and at the same – at the same time, have, like, a technological edge in the development of missile defenses?

MR. VERSHBOW: Well, I mean, actually, the only country that does have missile defense that’s aimed at countering the strategic weapons of the other side is Russia. They have the Moscow ABM system. They’ve had it for decades, and its mission is to defend against U.S. ICBMs or SLBMs targeted on Russia. So the systems that the U.S. is putting in place, particularly the ones in Europe, yes, they’re geographically close to Russia, but they are not capable of targeting Russian missiles aimed at the United States. Those go over the North Pole, over Greenland. Geography, physics makes it simply impossible for those systems to degrade the Russia offensive retaliatory force. So it has no impact on strategic stability. And the ones the U.S. is deploying in the continental United States are oriented to deal with a potential North Korean or someday Iranian threat. The numbers are so small that they couldn’t in any way have the slightest effect on the Russian retaliatory force. But this is another area where Russia confuses people by saying, well, if it’s in Poland, it must be aimed at us. But you – if you look at a globe, you look at the lines on the map where a Russian missile would fly and what a missile in Poland could actually shoot down, you’d see that it’s simply impossible for it to work. But if you trace a line from Tehran to London, or Tehran to Oslo, or Tehran to Madrid, then
having interceptors in Poland and Romania is ideal for shooting those down, and that’s why we’re putting them there. So facts are stubborn things, but they tend to prove our side of the argument.

MS. HERSHEYMAN: Anyone else on that topic? OK. Yes, right up here.

Q: Tam Julian (ph). I teach a course in the history of nuclear policy for the – for AFIT (ph).

But Mr. Miller and Ambassador Vershbow’s discussions of course highlight what Rebecca’s noted: the context has changed dramatically since the Cold War. And yet, much of your suggestions, Mr. Miller, could reflect back on things that were done in the past that are still relevant. For example, you mentioned exercises is – are the Able Archer exercises still on, or we could –

MR. VERSBOW: Could you speak a little louder?

Q: I’m sorry. Are the exercises – Able Archer, for example, the nuclear command control system exercises, which were annual – (inaudible) – which exercises the link, however tenuously, the Europeans might have viewed it, to our strategic systems and so forth? Those could be revived.

And I suppose another question perhaps for the ambassador is, to what degree is there status within the NATO community these days of the Nuclear Planning Group? Would it be perhaps a change if one could bring France into that? It’s always resisted that, I understand, because it would be an acknowledgment of central systems having a certain relevance that a lot of Europeans do not believe our strategic systems have in terms of linkage.

MS. HICKS: So I guess in part adaptation, what’s available, what means should we consider adaptation, membership in the NPG in terms of France. There’s a lot in that question to unpack.

MR. VERSHBOW: Yeah, I – yeah, I think the French seem still quite firm that they don’t want to become a participant in NATO nuclear planning, but I think they’ve become increasingly cognizant of the fact that the alliance as a whole, as it thinks of its deterrent strategy, needs to think in an integrated way about conventional and nuclear forces, even if we don’t replicate what the Russians have been doing, but we need – at least need to think about different scenarios that could escalate from conventional to nuclear and how we would respond. So the French are very keen to participate in that, while at the same time they put forward their very sort of categorical view that nuclear weapons are fundamentally political. They don’t want to get into any process that would concede the possibility of limited nuclear strikes by the alliance.

So I think this is sort of an evolving situation. But I think it’s in the alliance’s interest, since the French deterrent is, as we always say, a contributor to our overall deterrent posture, to have the French involved as much as possible, or as much as they’re willing to be involved, in the nuclear discussions at NATO. The study I mentioned had a – the main part of that study was with the French participating, even though there were follow-on things done in the high-level group at 27. And I think we managed to square the circle on that quite nicely.

MS. HERSHEYMAN: Please.

MR. MILLER: But I think the point – the point about exercises and all, an effective deterrent is some combination of will, determination, and capability. Exercises allow NATO the opportunity to demonstrate that it has capabilities and that it has the will to hold exercises, and exercises therefore
undergird the deterrent. And more exercises, selective exercises are useful in demonstrating to those who think nuclear weapons can be used as weapons of war, that that’s just not a course that they can go down.

MS. HERSMAN: Here.

Q: Hi. My name is Simone Williams. I’m a student at American University.

What the panel has discussed so far is a lot about recommendations on what should be done with regards to modernization. If anybody could speak a little bit more to what the U.S./NATO can anticipate as a Russian response to that modernization.

MR. MILLER: Yeah, let me start, let me start, because that’s a perfect question. It’s The New York Times editorial that says if we modernize our strategic forces, we’re going to start a new nuclear arms race. So today, as we’re sitting here, the Russians are putting in the field – putting in the field – two new types of ICBMS, two new types of submarine launch ballistic missiles. They’ve got three new ballistic missile submarines in the water, two of which are operational, a third of which is on the way. They’re building nuclear-capable air-launched and sea-launch cruise missiles. They’re building new bombers. And they have a host of theater nuclear weapons systems which are being fielded. The Chinese are putting two new ICBM types in the field. They’ve got four new SSBMs. They’ve got a new submarine-launched ballistic missile, and they’re working on a new air-launched cruise missile. If the United States continues to proceed with the nuclear modernization program put forward by the Obama administration, the first new system we’re going to put in the field to replace existing systems from the ‘80s will be in about 2025–2026. So if there’s a nuclear arms race underway, it’s between Russia and China. We’re not playing. And the Russians aren’t reacting to what we’re doing because we’re not doing anything yet except for the planning phases – which is essential, and we’re getting ready to bend metal, which is essential – but you’ve got to be very clear as to who’s deploying new systems and who’s planning to deploy modernized systems.

MS. HERSMAN: Kathleen, could you talk on that just a little bit also at the political level? I mean, I think in terms of the developments of capabilities and the action/reaction, but I think we can also feel confident, even if we don’t agree with the reaction, the Russians will react to almost anything we do, you know?

MS. HICKS: Well, you know, I actually completely agree with Frank. I think it’s baked in. I mean, they are – our modernization plan, as Frank said, which is – people may characterize this differently, but crassly I would say a compromised approach built across a very broad bipartisan, perhaps fragile coalition inside the United States has been planned and underway in general form for several years, certainly pre-Ukraine, Crimea invasion, that is, annexation. So I think it’s baked in, and I think the Russians would be somewhat surprised if the United States, in general terms, was not looking to modernize, generally speaking, conventionally and strategically cyberspace and nuclear. So I – you know, absolutely there is an interactive effect always underway. As I said before, what I hope the answer of that – from that is, is that we both sides continue to understand that the risks of miscalculation are extraordinarily high, that we want to keep any disagreements non-kinetic, nonmilitary-level, and that I think we actually probably have been doing that pretty well, and I would not want to sacrifice that on the assumption that we could somehow deescalate Russian rhetoric or intent.
The only other thing I will add to the general point made about the way in which the Russian presentation of information – I won’t even use the word “facts” – has been portrayed is I am constantly shocked that we never talk about the fact that we have vastly reduced U.S. forces in Europe. In all the conversations about what has occurred – you know, who shot John, if you will, in terms of the sequence of events leading up to the annexation of Crimea and follow-on concern about Ukraine and the EU, you know, much to Sandy’s dismay, people like me and others before me had argued for the decline. And in fact, the United States and its allies had greatly reduced U.S. conventional forces in and around Russia, and somehow that is never part of the discussion of what the history of the last 15 to 30 years is.

MR. VERSHBOW: Right. In fact, the commitment we made at the time of the beginning of NATO enlargement in 1997 was that we weren’t going to permanently deploy additional substantial combat forces. At the time, we had over 100,000 forces in Europe, about 20 brigades. Even with all the decisions taken at the Warsaw Summit, these additional battalions, we’re going to have about 25,000. The Russians, on the other hand, continue to – they try to portray everything as responding to us, when in fact often they’ve already made the decision and they simply re-patch it as a response to something the West is doing. For example, they have three new divisions going in on the southwestern part of Russia. That was decided more than a year ago, but now they’re portraying that as a response to the aggressive actions of NATO at the Warsaw Summit. So we just have to endure this, but put the facts out and make clear that this is largely propaganda.

MS. HERSMAN: Very good. I think we have a last couple of questions over here. Let’s see, Casey, I know I saw your hand, and then one next to you. Maybe we can take those two in order and give the panelists a chance to kind of offer a few concluding comments based on that.

Q: Sure, thanks. I’m Casey Murphy. I’m with the OPNAV staff, doing (equipment ?) policy.

So two separate but related questions. If we’re connecting deterrence, we’ve made the argument for LRSO and now we require that capability. And, you know, very pointedly, is that going to be – does that mean that the B61-12 is still going to be effective later? I know we’re doing the F-35, but, you know, are we going to run into the same issues in terms of, you know, our ability to deter Russia with that capability since we’re arguing a somewhat different argument over here in the U.S.?

And then, secondly, how are we – on the opposite note, how are we going to conduct these exercises? Because we know that when we do it, Russia’s going to come back and say, well, that’s clear that they’re being, you know, conducting offensive exercises, et cetera, et cetera, being provocative? How can we message that to make sure that they see our exercises as being defensive in order to maintain our ability to stay below that threshold of them being overprovoked in any way, shape, or form?

MS. HERSMAN: Great. And I know I saw another hand right nearby. Yes, I think it was Paul. OK.

Q: Hi. Paul Bernstein from National Defense University. I want to thank the panel for their remarks.

My question kind of builds on that a little bit. It’s for Frank, but I’d invite others to weigh in. Frank, you laid out a wide range of steps that the alliance should be taking to enhance the nuclear deterrent built around the idea of a modernized DCA force, both the aircraft and the weapons. And I
agree with you. That’s a good plan, if we can implement it. But as you know, not everybody agrees. There are arguments out there that even a modernized DCA force will not be fit for purpose in the future and I just – and that we need in fact to consider new kinds of capability for the – for the NATO force. So I would like to get your take on the arguments that you’re hearing about that argument, and whether you consider it a good idea or a bad idea, and whether it’s something the alliance should consider.

MR. MILLER: Well, so I don’t throw a hand grenade, could you explain in your terms what new capabilities you’re talking about so I don’t have to invent them?

Q: Sure. Things like cruise missiles as opposed to gravity bombs on the aircraft. Others have suggested other kinds of options as well. But moving beyond the DCA force and the modernized B-61.

MS. HICKS: I think – well, I mean, I think I’m just going to broaden out the question. I think that both questions really speak to the nature of our capabilities, both in terms of our DCA capability in the European theater and how that sort of integrates. And I think if we kind of – maybe a way to approach that is to give, you know, a chance to kind of go around. I mean, there’s the sort of technical question – and I actually will ask you to kind of respond to some of the particularities – but this becomes a pretty insular debate. I mean, this is really about the – you know, the mechanics of kind of a nuclear community talking to each other. So I’m going to ask over here how – you know, how significant is that? How does that dialogue happen between us as countries within the alliance, and how significant? And how do we do that in this type of conversation where we frankly are not dropping numbers, letters and acronyms about B61-12s and other things that I think might get lost on the broader audiences trying to understand the core issues? So let’s go after some of the specifics and I’ll turn here. But, you know, this is something we tend to do in this business, is to get very specific and very concrete. We need to. But can we translate that better for broader audiences?

MR. MILLER: Well, I think one, as I’ve been saying, we need to translate that better for broader audiences and we need to make clear within and outside the alliance how we do work together. I mean, Bob Scher’s here, who lead, you know, magnificently the NATO High Level Group, where every NATO nation except France participates in a policy development program, and that’s – that is important. We don’t talk about it. Maybe sensitivities are such that we shouldn’t talk about it in some places. But the system has worked very, very well.

I mean, as to the question of exercises, again, if we’re – if we let the Russians run our – run our public diplomacy, we’re going to get killed, right? But if we hold a NATO exercise twice a year and say, oh, by the way, you know, the Russians have held the following 15 exercises over the same period of time, we can at least reassure our populations that we are not being provocative and aggressive.

And with respect to F-35, the new fighter, the stealth fighter, everybody knows about that because President Trump’s driven the price down. (Laughter.) And the long-range cruise missile to keep the B-52 force operational and to indeed make the new bombers operational against very – a very intense air defenses, these are two different systems. I mean, we have had in the past a mix of nuclear systems. The ICBM force continues to be essential, submarine force essential, and the bomber force is essential. If the bomber – parts of the bomber force are going to survive into the future, they need a new cruise missile. Aircraft in the theater, we need a new F-35 anyway. We need a new fighter anyway. And the F-16s in theater and the Italian Tornados, German Tornados are getting pretty old. The Euro fighter does not have a nuclear capability. So, if not the F-35, what? Nothing.
To Paul’s point, you know, wouldn’t you like the F-35 and something more? What can American – what can the defense budget handle, you know? How many new systems can we create in small numbers? So if you were asking me what we need to invest in, I think the F-35 with a weapon with modern electronics stands as a pretty useful deterrent in the context in which it’s deployed.

MS. HICKS: Yeah, I mean, I think broadening out a little simply because I can’t compete with that, Frank, I – the new administration has already put out an executive order, the president has, directing a new nuclear posture review. Not a big surprise. I think everyone in this room probably expected there would be one, whether it would be so directed or not, from the president’s level. To my mind, I think the big questions that have to be positively conveyed, for all the conversation that we’ve had here, is that the United States is building and sustaining its nuclear arsenal as part of a strategic approach that it is credible, it is reliable, safe and secure, of course. And the particulars of how it puts that together, I think I’m willing to let them run the study, if you will, to see how they come out the other end to justify that. That’s the U.S. answer. But I do want to underscore this is an alliance issue, and I think, you know, certainly the U.K. has been a very positive force, if you will, along those lines. But we will have to bring along allies, as Frank said earlier, to start to speak about our strategic approaches, including nuclear, as a key component of how we are keeping the lid on, at least the moment, the worst-case existential crises – not just related to Russia but related to other threats, including nuclear threats around the world.

MS. HERSMAN: Thank you.

I’ll come to Iain and then Sandy give you the last word.

MR. VERSHBOW: OK.

MR. KING: Thank you. So, yes, I mean, it’s not my job to tell America whether it should modernize its nuclear portfolio.

MR. VERSHBOW: I thought that’s part of your job.

MR. KING: (Laughs.) But I can say that we’ve just decided to organize ours, and so just in the summer we decided to upgrade our submarines, our nuclear submarines, and the Dreadnought class will be rolling out in the decades to come, because we think you need to keep your nuclear capability up to date. I think it’s a sensible precaution. And as has already been said, given that potential adversaries are doing exactly that, we would be failing in our duty to defend the citizens of our countries if we did not make sure that we had the defensive capability that we need to do those things.

On to the provocation issue – is this a provocation, are exercises are a provocation – I think you need to separate two issues here. One is, what is the adversary really thinking? And frankly, I think they know what we’re doing. When we have – and when we have an exercise, we are having an exercise. That exercise is in line with our strategy as we – as we – as we portrayed it. And, you know, it’s all online, it’s all published, it’s all debated in Parliament and in the Senate and lots of places, and you can see what we do in the exercises. And it’s – you know, so if there’s a pretense that those exercises are in some way threatening, then it’s just that. It’s a pretense. And on this point, I’m actually – in the last few months I’ve become slightly more optimistic, because I think in countries like Germany in particular, and other countries in Europe, we have seen a realization of the disingenuousness which has come from some of our adversaries in the pretending of these threats, when everybody knows full well that they know that they’re not really threats. And because that
realization is taking place, I think – I’m hoping we are turning a corner and actually we’ll be in a better place very soon about people understanding the need and the importance of a nuclear deterrent.

MS. HERSMAN: Thank you.

Sandy.

MR. VERSHBOW: I would agree with the point that allied governments and allies’ publics I think are becoming more accepting of the fact that military exercises are necessary as part of having a serious defense and deterrence posture. And that’s heartening, you know, because people often said, you know, the U.S. was the only country that was serious about defense and everybody was just riding our coattails. I think we’ve seen a kind of change in the culture, change in the debate within NATO, and that’s good. People are taking their obligations seriously. That’s why it didn’t require some massive pressure campaign from Washington to get the U.K., Germany, and Canada to put forces into the Baltic states. This was seen as now part of their responsibility. So that’s good news.

When it comes to kind of are our exercises provocative and the Russians say that theirs aren’t, I mean, we have to again go back on the counterattack with the facts of the situation. The Russians do far more exercises than our countries and NATO combined. Shoigu, the minister of defense, just today announced they’re going to do 3,000 exercises in the coming year. That may be – some of them may be small, but still, that’s quite significant. And the size of their biggest exercises is usually two to three times bigger than the biggest exercise NATO has ever held in the last two decades, well over 100,000 several times. What the Russians do, of course, is they falsify the data. When they notify the OSCE about a future exercise, they always say that it’s under 20,000 troops so that they don’t have to invite observers, and then three days later the Ministry of Defense is saying there are 100,000 troops in this exercise. And they use loopholes to say that these are five separate exercises, but you can see that it’s – you know, they’re rehearsing a major war against NATO. This is not some random combination of counterterrorism and humanitarian relief. It’s one big exercise. So let’s push back and get the facts out.

On the modernization, all I could sort of add is, you know, of course we have to keep our deterrence up to date, which means, you know, one-for-one replacement of the B-61 bombs, urging allies to replace aging delivery systems. But I think the U.S. should be very careful not to kind of push for more than the traffic will bear. Do no harm should be – I think the Hippocratic Oath applied in this case because the NATO component of deterrence is – has to be viewed in the context of the overall U.S. strategic deterrence posture. So if we get, you know, 80 or 90 percent of what we think we need versus 100 percent, it may be good enough. We don’t want to break the consensus within the alliance, which is more robust today than it was three or four years ago, by sort of trying to go back to the drawing board and come up with a totally different posture, different footprint. I think that would be counterproductive.

MS. HERSMAN: All right. Well, thank you, and thank you to all the panelists for a great discussion. Clearly there is more to do here. I feel like we’ve just sort of gotten the tip of the iceberg. But I wanted – oh, we could bring up our next panel in just a second. They’ll be kind of taking your seats. But before we do that, join me in thanking our first here. (Applause.)

(END)