

**Written Testimony for the Senate Armed Services Committee**

**“Findings of the Congressional Commission on the Strategic Posture of the United States”**

Honorable Madelyn R. Creedon

Chair, Congressional Commission on the Strategic Posture of the United States

Honorable Jon L. Kyl

Vice Chair, Congressional Commission on the Strategic Posture of the United States

October 19, 2023

## Preface to the Final Report

The militarily troubling and increasingly aggressive behaviors of Russia and China over the past decade led Congress to direct a review of the strategic posture of the United States, including nuclear weapons policy, strategy, and force structure.<sup>1</sup> We have the privilege to serve as the chair and vice chair of this second Strategic Posture Commission (SPC).

Much has happened since the first SPC released its report in 2009.<sup>2</sup> China's rapid military build-up, including the unprecedented growth of its nuclear forces, Russia's diversification and expansion of its theater-based nuclear systems, the invasion of Ukraine in 2014 and subsequent full-scale invasion in February 2022, have all fundamentally altered the geopolitical landscape. As a result of China's and Russia's growing competition with the United States and its Allies and partners, and the increasing risk of military conflict with one or both, as well as concerns about whether the United States would be prepared to deter two nuclear peers, Congress determined it was time for a new look at U.S. strategic policy, strategy, and force structure.

The first SPC had a charge like ours: "to conduct a review of the strategic posture of the United States and to make a recommendation on how to move forward."<sup>3</sup> The vision of a world without nuclear weapons, aspirational even in 2009, is more improbable now than ever. The new global environment is fundamentally different than anything experienced in the past, even in the darkest days of the Cold War. Today the United States is on the cusp of having not one, but two nuclear peer adversaries, each with ambitions to change the international status quo, by force, if necessary: a situation which the United States did not anticipate and for which it is not prepared. While the risk of a major nuclear conflict remains low, the risk of military conflict with either or both Russia and China, while not inevitable, has grown, and with it the risk of nuclear use, possibly against the U.S. homeland.

We started our work with extensive intelligence briefings to understand this new, rapidly changing security environment. These briefings underpin our conclusion that as a nation we need to urgently prepare for the new reality, and that measures need to be taken now to deal with these new threats. We believe that prompt actions are needed to provide future decision-makers viable options to credibly deter conflict. Being unprepared for the reality of two nuclear peers, who are dedicated to and focused on undermining the post-Cold War international order that has served the United States and its Allies and partners so well, is, in our view, not an option.

We had extensive discussions and briefings on the problems we face as a nation, including workforce shortages, supply chain limitations, and inadequate physical, scientific, technical, and experimental infrastructure at the Department of Defense (DOD) and Department of Energy/National Nuclear Security Administration (DOE/NNSA). These shortcomings resulted from

---

<sup>1</sup> Congress established the parameters of the review and a Strategic Posture Commission to carry it out in the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2022, Pub. L. 117-81, 135 Stat. 2126, 117th Cong.

<sup>2</sup> William J. Perry and James R. Schlesinger, *America's Strategic Posture: The Final Report of Congressional Commission on the Strategic Posture of the United States*, (United States Institute of Peace, 2009).

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid*, Chairman's Preface.

years of inattention and if not addressed promptly, will continue to limit the U.S. ability to prepare and respond to the new challenges.

As we discussed this new normal, we also concluded that the United States does not truly have, but must commit to, a “whole-of-government” approach to be more efficient and effective.

Keeping up with technology is also a challenge. Whereas in the past, when U.S. government research was uniformly on the cutting edge, that role has shifted to the private sector in many areas. As a result, the DOD and DOE/NNSA will have to change traditional procurement practices to work effectively with the private sector to rapidly develop and deploy new cutting-edge technology.

Allies and partners are important as together we are stronger. Greater cooperation, coordination and integration with our Allies and partners is essential to deter conflict and prosper economically. National leaders must communicate to U.S. citizens the benefits and importance of U.S. global leadership, Allies and partners and extended deterrence, if they are to gain the support of the American people for the associated policy and costs.

Our review sought to address and respond to this new, more dangerous, and more competitive environment, while looking for ways to improve strategic stability and reduce the risk of conflict. We know that this will be difficult on many levels, but we believe that our recommendations can help shape needed future strategy and posture decisions.

For the most part the Commission deliberately avoided making specific force structure recommendations; instead, we identified capabilities beyond the existing program of record (POR) that will be needed. We believe it is appropriate to leave specific material solution decisions to the Executive Branch and Congress. We were clear, however, that the nuclear force modernization POR is absolutely essential, although not sufficient to meet the new threats posed by Russia and China, and that the elements of the POR should be completed on time, expedited wherever possible, and expanded as needed.

We also found that adopting new technologies faster, and working with smaller innovative companies will be necessary to support a modern, flexible, force structure and infrastructure in the future.

While we did not conduct a cost analysis of our recommendations, it is obvious they will cost money. We do recognize budget realities, but we also believe the nation must make these new investments and U.S. leaders must communicate to U.S. citizens both the need and urgency to rebuild the nuclear infrastructure and modernize the nuclear forces. These investments in the nuclear enterprise are a relatively small portion of the overall defense budget but provide the backbone and foundation of deterrence and are the nation’s highest defense priority. The investments the Commission recommends in both nuclear and conventional capabilities will provide a safe, secure, reliable, effective, and credible deterrent, which is essential to reduce the risk of conflict, most importantly nuclear conflict.

From the outset the Commissioners understood that our most valuable contribution to U.S. national security would be a consensus report. There were certainly differences of opinion and a

multitude of views expressed amongst our members during our many robust debates and discussions. No doubt some commissioners might have stated some things differently. For example, a number of commissioners believe it is inevitable that the size of the U.S. nuclear stockpile and the number of delivery systems should increase. We all agreed, however, on the findings and recommendations in this report and the need for actions now to better position the United States for the future and ensure a safe, secure, reliable, and credible deterrent.

We believe that sustained bipartisan consensus is possible and necessary to secure a strong future and credible deterrent for the United States. Moreover, we hope this report illustrates to policy- and decision-makers that even with different opinions, people of good faith can work together for the common good on fundamentally important matters.

This report would not have been possible without the excellent work of the Institute for Defense Analyses (IDA) leadership and staff. We extend a sincere thank you to our Executive Director, Maj. Gen. William Chambers (USAF retired) and the IDA staff.

## **Executive Summary of the Final Report**

The United States faces a strategic challenge requiring urgent action. Given current threat trajectories, our nation will soon encounter a fundamentally different global setting than it has ever experienced: we will face a world where two nations possess nuclear arsenals on par with our own. In addition, the risk of conflict with these two nuclear peers is increasing. It is an existential challenge for which the United States is ill-prepared, unless its leaders make decisions now to adjust the U.S. strategic posture.

The Congressional Commission on the Strategic Posture of the United States was established by the Fiscal Year (FY) 2022 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA), and concludes that America's defense strategy and strategic posture must change in order to properly defend its vital interests and improve strategic stability with China and Russia. Decisions need to be made now in order for the nation to be prepared to address the threats from these two nuclear-armed adversaries arising during the 2027-2035 timeframe. Moreover, these threats are such that the United States and its Allies and partners must be ready to deter and defeat both adversaries simultaneously.

We arrive at these conclusions following a comprehensive year-long review of the threats America faces and its strategy and planned capabilities to address those threats. The evidence demonstrates that the U.S.-led international order and the values it upholds are at risk from the Chinese and Russian authoritarian regimes. The risk of military conflict with those major powers has grown and carries the potential for nuclear war. Therefore, the Commission reached the unanimous, non-partisan conclusion that today's strategic outlook requires an urgent national focus and a series of concerted actions not currently planned. In sum, we find that the United States lacks a comprehensive strategy to address the looming two nuclear-peer threat environment and lacks the force structure such a strategy will require.

In reaching that overall conclusion, we make clear that the fundamentals of America's deterrence strategy remain sound, but the application of that strategy must change to address the 2027-2035 threat environment. Those changes drive necessary adjustments to the posture of U.S. nuclear capabilities – in size and/or composition. A full spectrum of non-nuclear capabilities is also essential to the nation's strategic posture. Such adjustments, in turn, drive the need to strengthen and expand the capacity of the infrastructure required to sustain and enhance U.S. strategic capabilities. In addition, Allies and partners are central to our findings regarding strategy and posture. We also emphasize the need for robust risk reduction efforts as fundamental to the U.S. approach in the new threat environment.

Adhering to the stipulations of our mandate, the report that follows delineates 131 findings and makes 81 recommendations. Those findings and recommendations are found at the beginning and end, respectively, of each chapter that follows; a complete list is also included following the report's conclusion. Our most important recommendations are summarized here:

## **STRATEGY**

To achieve the most effective strategy for stability in light of the 2027-2035 threat environment, the Commission identifies three necessary changes:

- The United States must develop and effectively implement a truly integrated, whole-of-government strategy to address the 2027-2035 threat environment.
- The objectives of U.S. strategy must include effective deterrence and defeat of simultaneous Russian and Chinese aggression in Europe and Asia using conventional forces. If the United States and its Allies and partners do not field sufficient conventional forces to achieve this objective, U.S. strategy would need to be altered to increase reliance on nuclear weapons to deter or counter opportunistic or collaborative aggression in the other theater.
- The size and composition of the nuclear force must account for the possibility of combined aggression from Russia and China. U.S. strategy should no longer treat China's nuclear forces as a "lesser included" threat. The United States needs a nuclear posture capable of simultaneously deterring both countries.

The Commission recommends the United States maintain a nuclear strategy consistent with the Law of Armed Conflict (LOAC), based on six fundamental tenets—assured second strike, flexible response, tailored deterrence, extended deterrence and assurance, calculated ambiguity in declaratory policy, hedge against risk—and apply these tenets to address the 2027-2035 threat.

## **STRATEGIC POSTURE**

In the context of a strategic posture deploying both conventional and nuclear capability, the Commission believes the traditional role of nuclear weapons in U.S. defense strategy remains valid and of continuing importance: deterrence of adversaries; assurance of Allies; achieving U.S. objectives should deterrence fail; and hedging against adverse events.

The current modernization program should be supplemented to ensure U.S. nuclear strategy remains effective in a two-nuclear-peer environment.

Comprehensive risk-mitigating actions across U.S. nuclear forces must be executed to ensure that delays in modernization programs or early age-out of currently deployed systems do not result in militarily significant shortfalls in deployed nuclear capability.

The U.S. strategic nuclear force posture should be modified to:

- Address the larger number of targets due to the growing Chinese nuclear threat.
- Address the possibility that China will field large-scale, counterforce-capable missile forces that pose a threat to U.S. strategic nuclear forces on par with the threat Russia poses to those forces today.
- Assure the United States continues to avoid reliance on executing Intercontinental Ballistic Missile (ICBM) launch under attack to retain an effective deterrent.
- Account for advances in Russian and Chinese integrated air and missile defenses (IAMD).

The U.S. theater nuclear force posture should be urgently modified to:

- Provide the President a range of militarily effective nuclear response options to deter or counter Russian or Chinese limited nuclear use in theater.
- Address the need for U.S. theater nuclear forces deployed or based in the Asia-Pacific theater.
- Compensate for any shortfall in U.S. and allied non-nuclear capabilities in a sequential or simultaneous two-theater conflict against Russia and China.
- Address advances in Russian and Chinese IAMD.

## **NUCLEAR SECURITY ENTERPRISE INFRASTRUCTURE AND ORGANIZATION**

The Commission recommends the DOD and DOE/NNSA strategic infrastructure be expanded to have sufficient capacity to:

- Meet the capability and schedule requirements of the current nuclear modernization POR and the requirements of the force posture modifications recommended by the Commission in time to address the two-peer threat.
- Provide an effective hedge against four forms of risk: technical failure of a warhead or delivery system, programmatic delays, operational loss of delivery systems, and further deterioration of the geopolitical environment.
- Flex to respond to emerging requirements in a timely fashion.

To support the proposed strategy, the Commission recommends Congress fund an overhaul and expansion of the capacity of the U.S. nuclear weapons defense industrial base and the DOE/NNSA nuclear security enterprise, including weapons science, design, and production infrastructure. Specifically:

- Congress should fund the full range of NNSA's recapitalization efforts, such as pit production and all operations related to critical materials.
- Congress should forge and sustain bipartisan consensus and year-to-year funding stability to enable the defense industry to respond to innovative DOD contracting approaches and invest with more certainty.
- Congress should enact annual DOD and DOE authorization and appropriation bills before the beginning of each fiscal year.
- Congress should place the purview of all "050" programs (President's Budget line item for "national security") that are in NNSA under Defense appropriations subcommittees (House Appropriations
- Cabinet Secretaries, working with states and union leaders, should establish and increase the technical education and vocational training programs required to create the nation's necessary skilled-trades workforce for the nuclear enterprise. Committee-Defense (HAC-D), Senate Appropriations Committee Defense (SAC-D).

The Commission recommends a number of specific actions to expand the capacity and effectiveness of the nation's infrastructure and supply chain for its strategic capabilities.

## NON-NUCLEAR CAPABILITIES

The Commission recommends:

- The United States urgently deploy a more resilient space architecture and adopt a strategy that includes both offensive and defensive elements to ensure U.S. access to and operations in space.
- The United States and its Allies take steps to ensure they are at the cutting edge of emerging technologies – such as big data analytics, quantum computing, and artificial intelligence (AI) – to avoid strategic surprise and potentially enhance the U.S. strategic posture.
- The United States prioritize funding and accelerate long-range non-nuclear precision strike programs to meet the operational need and in greater quantities than currently planned.
- The United States develop and field homeland IAMD that can deter and defeat coercive attacks by Russia and China, and determine the capabilities needed to stay ahead of the North Korean threat.<sup>4</sup>
- The Secretary of Defense direct research, development, test and evaluation into advanced IAMD capabilities leveraging all domains, including land, sea, air, and space. These activities should focus on sensor architectures, integrated command and control, interceptors, cruise and hypersonic missile defenses, and area or point defenses. The DOD should urgently pursue deployment of any capabilities that prove feasible.
- The Secretary of Defense and the Military Departments transfer operations and sustainment responsibility for missile defense to the appropriate Military Departments by 1 October 2024. This will allow the Missile Defense Agency (MDA) to focus on research, development, prototyping and testing.

## ALLIES AND PARTNERS

The Commission believes it is in the U.S. national interest to maintain, strengthen, and when appropriate, expand its network of alliances and partnerships. These relationships strengthen American security by deterring aggression regionally, before it can reach the U.S. homeland, while also enabling U.S. economic prosperity through access to international markets. Withdrawing from U.S. alliances and partnerships would directly benefit adversaries, invite aggression that the United States might later have to reverse, and ultimately decrease American, allied, and partner security and economic prosperity. Further, the Commission believes that our defense and the defense of the current international order is strengthened when Allies can directly contribute to the broader strategic posture, and the United States should seek to incorporate those contributions as much as possible.

- The Executive branch should recognize that any major change to U.S. strategic posture, policies, or capabilities will have great effect on Allies' perceptions and their deterrence

---

<sup>4</sup> A “coercive” attack consists of limited conventional or nuclear strikes intended to convince U.S. leadership that the costs of intervening or persevering in a conflict involving the attacker are too high.



and assurance requirements. As a result, any changes should be predicated on meaningful consultations.

## **RISK REDUCTION**

The Commission believes it is of paramount importance for the United States to work to reduce strategic risks. This involves activities and programs across the U.S. government, including in nonproliferation and arms control, as well as maintaining strong, viable, and resilient military forces.

- The Commission recommends that a strategy to address the two-nuclear-peer threat environment be a prerequisite for developing U.S. nuclear arms control limits for the 2027-2035 timeframe. The Commission recommends that once a strategy and its related force requirements are established, the U.S. government determine whether and how nuclear arms control limits continue to enhance U.S. security.
- The Commission recommends that the United States continue to explore nuclear arms control opportunities and conduct research into potential verification technologies in order to support or enable future negotiations in the U.S. national interest that seek to limit all nuclear weapon types, should the geopolitical environment change.
- Where formal nuclear arms control agreements are not possible, the Commission recommends pursuing nuclear risk reduction measures to increase predictability and reduce uncertainty and the chances for misperception and miscalculation.

The 2009 Congressional Commission on the Strategic Posture of the United States reported that the United States was at “a moment of opportunity, . . .but also a moment of urgency” – because the security environment had improved and the threat of nuclear proliferation was the principal concern. Since 2009, the security environment has dramatically worsened and new existential threats have emerged. This Commission concludes that the United States now faces a high stakes challenge that requires urgent action. Nevertheless, the Commission has not seen the U.S. government demonstrate the urgency and creativity required to meet the challenge. Nothing other than synchronized steps taken by the Executive and Legislative Branches will craft the strategy and build the posture the nation requires.

The challenges are unmistakable; the problems are urgent; the steps are needed now.