

DR. JOHN F. PLUMB
Nominee to be Assistant Secretary of Defense for Space Policy
Senate Armed Services Committee

Chairman Reed, Ranking Member Inhofe, members of the committee – thank you. I am both proud and humbled to be testifying before you today. I have always admired and respected the thoughtful, bipartisan work of this committee.

I would like to thank President Biden, Secretary Austin, and Deputy Secretary Hicks for their trust in me and in my ability to continue serving the nation if confirmed as the first Assistant Secretary of Defense for Space Policy.

Thanks also to my parents, my brother and sisters, and my wife and children for their love and support that allows me to be here before you today. And being here is indeed an honor.

I grew up in rural Western New York, in a family for whom service to country is a proud tradition. Both my grandfathers were in the Army Air Corps during World War 2. My father was in the Army for the first four years of my life, stationed at what was then Fort Richardson in Alaska. I have a brother and a sister who served in the Air Force. As for me, I joined the Navy and became a submarine officer.

Since leaving active duty, I have remained active in the Navy reserves for two decades. As a civilian, I have served in these very halls as the military advisor to Senator Ken Salazar; I have served in the Pentagon; and I've served on the National Security Council staff. If confirmed, I believe my lifetime of service has prepared me to better advance and defend US national security interests, and to work with this committee while doing so.

The Assistant Secretary of Defense for Space Policy position appropriately elevates the space portfolio within the Policy organization. If confirmed, I look forward to working with this committee to ensure space receives the attention, prioritization, and resources this critical domain demands. Space, nuclear weapons, missile defenses, cyber, and the ability to detect and stop the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction are all key to US national security. The integration of these capabilities is essential for the era of strategic competition the US must now rise to meet.

As members of this committee are well aware, the security environment facing the United States at this moment in history is a challenging one. The Secretary has articulated that China is the pacing challenge for the Department, and China's behavior with its own strategic capabilities is a matter of grave concern. From its kinetic anti-satellite weapon test in 2007 that created a persistent debris cloud, to the uncontrolled reentry of a rocket stage last May, China has not yet demonstrated that it is a responsible spacefaring nation.

In the cyber domain, the growing pace and scale of cyberattacks from China far exceeds the bounds of traditional statecraft. The Commander of US Strategic Command has expressed concern that China's nuclear forces are in the midst of a strategic breakout. Reports of a hypersonic glide vehicle test in August via a fractional orbit bombardment system, if true, are deeply troubling. Perhaps most troublesome of all is the near-total lack of transparency by China regarding its strategic capabilities, and its demonstrated unwillingness to discuss them.

Russia also continues to present a challenge on multiple fronts. Russian activities in space – including its destructive ASAT test in November- are an ongoing concern. Russia's reliance on, and integration of, nuclear weapons throughout its forces is problematic. Russian cyber activity includes state tolerance of cyber criminals and state-sponsored weaponization of social media.

Amid these growing problems, North Korea continues to expand its nuclear arsenal and delivery systems, while Iran's uranium enrichment presents both a nuclear proliferation and a security challenge.

I understand the Department is diligently working to strengthen our deterrence posture – by modernizing our nuclear deterrent and infrastructure; improving our cyber defenses and capabilities; and working to protect and defend our interests not just on earth but in space. If confirmed, I will work to continue these efforts while seeking to incorporate our allies as fully as possible. Our allies provide a mutual strategic advantage that neither China nor Russia can ever hope to match.

I believe the United States is at its strongest and best when national security is a bipartisan effort, and that – as the old adage goes – politics should stop at the water's edge. If confirmed, that is how I intend to approach the position and its attendant responsibilities, and if confirmed, I commit to working closely with this committee to ensure US national security interests are advanced and defended.

Thank you once more for inviting me to testify. I look forward to your questions.