

Hon Franklin C. Miller
Opening Remarks
Senate Armed Services Committee/Strategic Forces Sub Committee
April 28, 2021

Chairman King, Ranking Member Fischer, Members of the Sub-Committee:

I am honored to appear before you again to discuss US nuclear deterrence policy.

The emergence of North Korea as a full-fledged nuclear weapons state and Iran's continued lurching progress towards adding a nuclear front end to its already impressive, North Korean assisted, ballistic missile force has undoubtedly made nuclear deterrence today more complicated than was the case at the beginning of this century. Those threats notwithstanding, the principal nuclear issue the United States faces today and for the foreseeable future is to deter Russian and Chinese adventurism -- adventurism which could well result in full-scale war with the potential for nuclear use.

The United States and our allies face a major strategic challenge from a "destabilizing" RF and an "assertive" PRC – those adjectives are from the Biden "*Interim Guidance*" released last month -- two nations ruled by aggressive and bellicose leaders who have demonstrated a willingness to take risks, and in Russia's case have threatened nuclear attacks as way of intimidating our allies.

Both Vladimir Putin and Xi Jin Ping believe their nuclear arsenals have great value and consequently have been engaged in major modernization – and in

China's case expansion -- of those arsenals for at least the past decade -- fielding new nuclear systems while the United States has been debating the need for new systems.

And the difference between their view of the role of nuclear weapons and our own could not be more clear.

US nuclear deterrent policy is virtually unchanged since the Kennedy years: our nuclear weapons serve to deter nuclear attack on ourselves and our allies and as a last resort to deter major non-nuclear strategic attack. Our policy and programs seek to make clear to potential aggressor leaderships that there will be no winners in a nuclear war, and that an act of armed aggression against us or our allies risks escalation to nuclear war and the destruction of the aggressor's homeland.

The purpose of deterrence therefore is to influence how the enemy leadership thinks and assesses risk. The best and most succinct statement of this can be found in what is known as The Scowcroft Commission Report (The Report of the President's Commission On Strategic Forces, April 1983, pages 2-3)

- *“Deterrence is not, and cannot be bluff. In order for deterrence to be effective we must not merely have weapons, we must be perceived to be able, and prepared, if necessary, to use them effectively against the key elements of [an enemy's] power. Deterrence is not an abstract notion amenable to simple quantification. Still less is it a mirror of what would deter ourselves. Deterrence is the set of beliefs in the minds of the [enemy] leaders, given their own values and attitudes, about our capabilities and our will. It*

requires us to determine, as best we can, what would deter them from considering aggression, even in a crisis—not to determine what would deter us.”

Conversely, over the past decade and a half, Russian nuclear strategy has evolved into one seeking offensively to menace and intimidate Moscow’s neighbors (many of whom also happen to be our allies). As part of this, it appears that the Kremlin leadership contemplates the use of low yield weapons to consolidate aggressive gains accomplished by conventional means. Chinese nuclear strategy remains, as it always has, opaque, but there is strong and emerging intelligence that Beijing is studying and adopting the Russian model.

So the difference between the US approach to nuclear weapons as a defensive tool, and the Russian leadership’s and likely Chinese leadership’s approach of those serving as offensive tools to re-shape regional and global order is obvious.

Some analysts argue that deterrence of Chinese and Russian aggression no longer depends on nuclear weapons but rather upon cyber, space, advanced conventional forces, and technologies such as Artificial Intelligence. To be sure, both Moscow and Beijing have developed (separately) an integrated approach to warfare which incorporates new nuclear weapons and advanced conventional, space, and cyber capabilities – and we need to take account of that integrated approach. That notwithstanding, any decision either President-for-life would face to use force against the United States or our allies would have to be taken in light of the backdrop of our nuclear forces. Putin or Xi, in considering whether to commit armed aggression at any level, must weigh the risk that ultimately such aggression could lead to nuclear war – and that nuclear war could lead to the

destruction of Russia or China as they treasure it. That bedrock fact is crucial to continued effective deterrence. Our strategic nuclear forces are required to fully underwrite our national policy and to prevent potential enemies from escalating above our other military capabilities.

This requires us to have a modern and credible nuclear deterrent in order to demonstrate to Putin and Xi, and to our allies, that we have the capability and will to deter attacks

But we are at a critical moment with regard to the viability of the US strategic nuclear deterrent in the 2030's and beyond.

I hate to invoke that now-overused phrase "inflection point" but that is really where we are

Remember that the foundations of today's Triad -- the Minuteman ICBMs, the SSBN force, and the B-52s -- were laid in the last years of the Eisenhower Administration and in the early years of the Kennedy Administration. Twenty years later, the Reagan Administration picked up and expanded programs which began their gestation in the Ford and Carter Administrations to recapitalize the Triad

Twenty years after that, the Bush 43 Administration should have undertaken a similar recapitalization but did not. It did not do so for two reasons. First was a fundamental misreading of the aims and intentions of Vladimir Putin. Second was a monocular focus on the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan without regard to developments in the wider world

And so we find ourselves today relying on the fruit of the Reagan program, but that fruit is overripe. We have a force which will within the next decade require modernization or retirement: there's little ground in between.

The Triad has demonstrated its value over the past 60 years. But if we do not replace the Minuteman III with the GBSDB we will lose the Triad within a decade. The Ohio-class SSBNs which carry our sea-based strategic deterrent will have to be retired beginning in about 10 years; their replacement by a minimum of 12 new Columbia SSBNs must continue. However the Columbia program is a necessary but not sufficient modernization: the Trident II D-5 missile must be upgraded if it is to remain operational through the late 2040s as is planned. And the proposed W-93 warhead, just beginning concept development, is needed to rebalance the SLBM fleet and eliminate a looming and dangerous over-reliance on the W-76. Finally, to maintain an operationally credible bomber force facing increasingly sophisticated air defenses, the air-launched cruise missile, deployed in 1981 with a projected 10 year service life, must be replaced by the long-range stand-off weapon (LRSO) now in development.

So, the bottom line is:

- Deterrence rests on the combination of capability and will.
- If we do not have the capability to underwrite our policy by replacing our obsolescing force we will appear weak and increase the odds of our being tested.
- If we do not demonstrate that we have the will to use our capability when we or our allies are threatened, we will be tested.
- In either case, deterrence is weakened.

It's not too fine a point to make that whether we follow through on strategic modernization is a test of both capability and will:

- capability which if not modernized will be found lacking,
- and will to carry out the program on which deterrence rests in the future

Consequently, I urge the Committee to support the modernization of our nuclear forces by proceeding with the programs endorsed by the past two Administrations.

Finally, while I do not have time in these remarks to address the narcissistic, self-indulgent, dangerous, and destabilizing suggestion that the US adopt a 'no first use' policy, I would be happy to respond to a question about this.