

Stenographic Transcript
Before the

COMMITTEE ON
ARMED SERVICES

UNITED STATES SENATE

HEARING TO CONSIDER THE NOMINATION OF:
GENERAL ANTHONY J. COTTON, USAF FOR REAPPOINTMENT
TO THE GRADE OF GENERAL
AND TO BE COMMANDER OF UNITED STATES STRATEGIC
COMMAND

Thursday, September 15, 2022

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7
8 U.S. Senate
9 Committee on Armed Services,
10 Washington, D.C.

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12 The committee met, pursuant to notice, at 10:00 a.m.,
13 in Room G50, Dirksen Senate Office Building, Hon. Jack
14 Reed, chairman of the committee, presiding.

15 Committee Members Present: Senators Reed [presiding],
16 Shaheen, Gillibrand, Blumenthal, Hirono, Kaine, King,
17 Warren, Peters, Rosen, Kelly, Inhofe, Fischer, Cotton,
18 Rounds, Ernst, Tillis, Sullivan, Scott, Hawley, and
19 Tuberville.

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1 OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. JACK REED, U.S. SENATOR
2 FROM RHODE ISLAND

3 Chairman Reed: Good morning. The committee meets
4 today to consider the nomination of General Anthony Cotton
5 to be the next Commander of U.S. Strategic Command.
6 General Cotton, thank you for your decades of service and
7 willingness to serve in this important position.

8 I would like to welcome your wife, Marsha, who is with
9 us today. Welcome, Marsha. I would also like to
10 acknowledge your son, Russell, and daughter, Brianna, who I
11 am sure are proudly watching. We are grateful for their
12 continued support of your service. U.S. Strategic Command,
13 or STRATCOM, is the principal command for ensuring our
14 Nation's nuclear deterrent is effective, safe, and
15 reliable.

16 Today, our nuclear deterrent consists of a triad of
17 ballistic missile submarines, heavy bombers, and land based
18 intercontinental missiles. This triad is the bedrock not
19 only of our national defense, but also the security of our
20 allies and partners who depend on the U.S. nuclear
21 umbrella.

22 Integral to the triad as a highly secure and
23 multilayered nuclear command, control, and communications,
24 or NC3 system, which connects the President to the nuclear
25 forces. Successfully maintaining this nuclear deterrent is

1 a mission fundamental to our long term strategic
2 competition with China and Russia.

3 This mission has made especially clear throughout
4 Russia's assault on Ukraine. Russia has conducted out-of-
5 cycle nuclear exercises, issued inflammatory statements
6 about tactical nuclear strikes in Ukraine, and continues to
7 threaten nuclear power plants in the region. Vladimir
8 Putin's behavior has been reckless to a dangerous degree.
9 China has also made significant changes to its nuclear
10 approach.

11 Not constrained by the New Start treaty, Beijing has
12 built hundreds of new ballistic missiles and intends to
13 have a stockpile of more than 1,000 warheads by the early
14 2030. In the past two years, we have also seen China
15 develop missile fields in hardened silos throughout the
16 country.

17 This development, along with China's development of
18 air delivered weapons and ballistic missile submarines in
19 the South China Sea, fundamentally changes the nature of
20 Beijing's nuclear doctrine. We need to seriously consider
21 that we are entering a new trilateral nuclear competition
22 era.

23 The Cold War was essentially a bilateral rivalry
24 between the United States and the Soviet Union, and
25 deterrence theory and communication methods were developed

1 based on two competitors. Those rules now must change with
2 the ascendancy of China and its growing nuclear arsenal.

3 And General Cotton, I would like to know how you would
4 address this new deterrence dynamic involving not one, but
5 two near-peer competitors. If confirmed, you will be
6 responsible for not only the health of our triad and the
7 NC3 system, but the 150,000 military personnel who operate
8 them.

9 STRATCOM's uniformed and civilian workforce is known
10 to have the highest levels of personal reliability and
11 professionalism. It will be your responsibility to support
12 them and their families and ensure our nuclear deterrent
13 can operate effectively around the clock. Supporting your
14 command is the National Nuclear Security Administration, or
15 NNSA, which maintains and develops our nuclear warheads.

16 The organization has over 40,000 technicians,
17 engineers, and scientists working at three design
18 laboratories, one test site, and four production plants.
19 NNSA will need your support as it experiences its highest
20 workload since the 1980s in managing five major warhead
21 programs while rebuilding nuclear infrastructure.

22 Finally, the 2022 Nuclear Posture Review has validated
23 the importance of modernizing the triad, the NC3 system,
24 and the supporting infrastructure at NNSA. This is the
25 third historic cycle of modernization since the 1960s. You

1 will be responsible for ensuring the United States can
2 deliver the capabilities needed to effectively deter our
3 adversaries through 2070. General, you will be undertaking
4 enormous responsibilities, if confirmed.

5 As I said earlier, the United States nuclear deterrent
6 is the bedrock of our national defense. Some have said
7 that this deterrent is never used, but that is a
8 misconception. It is used 365 days a year, 24 hours a day.

9 You will responsible for continuing to ensure that the
10 United States and its allies can deter not one but two
11 near-peer nuclear adversaries, something your predecessors
12 did not face. I look forward to hearing how you would
13 prioritize and meet each of these critical
14 responsibilities.

15 Thank you again for your willingness to serve our
16 Nation, and I look forward to your testimony. Now let me
17 recognize Ranking Member Inhofe.

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1 STATEMENT OF HON. JAMES M. INHOFE, U.S. SENATOR FROM
2 OKLAHOMA

3 Senator Inhofe: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I also want
4 to welcome General Cotton. Thank him for his long service.
5 General Cotton, your predecessor appeared before this
6 committee several times over the past few years warning of
7 the growing strategic threats that we face as a Nation.

8 I think we all understand that China's massive
9 military investments are shifting from the balance of power
10 in the Pacific, even as it builds the capacity to extend
11 its reach across the globe. Putin's unprovoked invasion of
12 Ukraine and his reckless threats of nuclear escalation
13 remind us of some of the worst days of the Cold War.

14 We are -- effectively resisting China's and Russia's
15 aggression requires that we remain resolute and deal with
16 the world as it is, not as we would prefer it to be, which
17 is sometimes a mistake. I was pleased that the
18 Administration's Nuclear Posture Review declined the first
19 many policy options that would have severely damaged our
20 Nation's deterrence.

21 However, the Administration's decision to discard
22 planned enhancements to our forces, even as China and
23 Russia grow their arsenals, was disappointing to say the
24 least. Your predecessor, along with the Chairman of the
25 Joint Chiefs and other senior officers, voiced their

1 objection to these decisions.

2 And on a bipartisan basis, we have taken steps to
3 reverse those voting choices. Moving forward, we need to
4 accelerate the work and the right size of our forces to
5 meet the strategic deterrence requirements of the coming
6 decades.

7 I trust you will be an advocate for such efforts as
8 the next STRAT Commander. Look forward to your testimony.
9 Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

10 Chairman Reed: Thank you, Senator Inhofe. General
11 Cotton, you are recognized for your opening statement.

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1 STATEMENT OF GENERAL ANTHONY J. COTTON, USAF, FOR
2 REAPPOINTMENT TO THE GRADE OF GENERAL AND TO BE COMMANDER
3 OF UNITED STATES STRATEGIC COMMAND

4 General Cotton: Good morning, Chairman Reed, Ranking
5 Member Inhofe, and distinguished members of the committee.
6 It is truly an honor to appear before you today as a
7 nominee to be the next Commander of U.S. Strategic Command.

8 I am very grateful to the President, Secretary of
9 Defense, and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff for
10 their trust and confidence in me for this nomination. I
11 would like to recognize the current Commander of U.S.
12 Strategic Command, Admiral Charles Richard, and his wife,
13 Lisa, for their 40 years of selfless service to this great
14 Nation.

15 Joining me today is my wife, Marsha. She has been my
16 best friend and biggest champion for over 33 years. A
17 former collegiate athlete and schoolteacher, Marsha has
18 been a remarkable advocate for the men and women and their
19 families. She is an incredible source of strength and
20 inspiration for me and my family.

21 Not with us today, but always in our hearts is our son
22 Russell, an intel analyst, and our daughter, Brianna, a
23 recent University of Michigan law school graduate. I am so
24 proud of my children for the path that they have taken to
25 serve our Nation in their own unique ways.

1 There are two people who are no longer with us but
2 whose absence I feel more strongly on days like today.
3 That is my mother, Amy, and my father, James. My father
4 joined the Army Air Corps in 1942 and fought in the Pacific
5 theater before the establishment of the United States Air
6 Force, and served in both the Korean and Vietnam Wars,
7 prior to retiring as the United States Air Force Chief
8 Master Sergeant in 1974.

9 My mother, all five feet, two inches of her was
10 fierce, full of compassion, and kept her boys, the chief
11 and I, in line. My parents are the foundation of who I am,
12 and I know they are looking down upon Team Cotton with
13 great pride.

14 Last, I want to thank the men and women of Air Force
15 Global Strike Command and U.S. Strategic Command for their
16 continued professionalism and dedication. Their dedication
17 to this mission is essential in a world where we now face
18 two near-peer competitors.

19 We must deter the pacing challenge of China and
20 address the acute threats presented by Russia. It is both
21 our conventional and nuclear capabilities, along with a
22 crucial support from our allies and partners, that
23 underpins our strategic deterrence.

24 Our Nation's nuclear forces continue to be safe,
25 secure, reliable, and effective. As we bring the B-21

1 Raider, the Columbia Class Ballistic Missile Submarine,
2 Sentinel Intercontinental Ballistic Missile Weapon System,
3 and Long Range Standoff Weapon online, we will continue to
4 ensure the credibility of deterrence for decades to come.

5 Underpinning all of this is our nuclear command,
6 control, and communication systems known as NC3. While the
7 current system is secure and resilient, modernization and
8 sustainment of this capability is just as important as the
9 weapons system platforms themselves. If confirmed, I will
10 use my authorities to ensure that NC3 systems continue to
11 outpace the threat. We will always build in margin. We
12 will always have hedge.

13 The mission of U.S. Strategic Command is to deter
14 adversaries and employ force to guarantee the security of
15 our Nation and our allies. If confirmed, I will work with
16 relevant agencies across the U.S. Government and within
17 DOD, collaborate closely with civilian leaders, and
18 directly with my fellow Combatant Commanders as we monitor
19 the global threats and execute operations in accordance
20 with the National Defense Strategy.

21 I commit to commanding a resilient Joint Force capable
22 of conducting multi-domain operations focused on deterring
23 aggression, and if necessary, defending this Nation. I
24 look forward to working with Congress and the members of
25 this committee to address the strategic challenges of this

1 great Nation.

2 Chairman Reed, Ranking Member Inhofe, distinguished
3 members of this committee, it is an honor to sit before you
4 today, and I look forward to answering your questions.

5 [The prepared statement of General Cotton follows:]

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1 Chairman Reed: Thank you very much, General. I have
2 a series of questions that are standard for nominees. You
3 may respond appropriately. Have you adhered to applicable
4 laws and regulations governing conflicts of interest?

5 General Cotton: Yes.

6 Chairman Reed: Have you assumed any duties or take
7 any actions that would appear to presume the outcome of the
8 confirmation process?

9 General Cotton: No.

10 Chairman Reed: Exercising our legislative and
11 oversight responsibilities makes it important that this
12 committee, its subcommittees, and other appropriate
13 committees of Congress receive testimony, briefings,
14 reports, records, and other information from the Executive
15 Branch on a timely basis. Do you agree, if confirmed, to
16 appear and testify before this committee when requested?

17 General Cotton: Chairman, I do.

18 Chairman Reed: Do you agree, when asked before this
19 committee, to give your personal views, even if your views
20 differ from the Administration?

21 General Cotton: Chairman, I do.

22 Chairman Reed: Do you agree to provide records,
23 documents, and electronic communications in a timely manner
24 when requested by this committee, its subcommittees, or
25 other appropriate committees of Congress, and to consult

1 with the requester regarding the basis for any good faith
2 delay or denial in providing such records?

3 General Cotton: I do.

4 Chairman Reed: Will you ensure that your staff
5 complies with deadlines established by this committee for
6 the production of reports, records, and other information,
7 including timely responding to hearing questions for the
8 record?

9 General Cotton: I will.

10 Chairman Reed: Will you cooperate in providing
11 witnesses and briefers in response to congressional
12 requests?

13 General Cotton: I will.

14 Chairman Reed: Will those witnesses and briefers be
15 protected from reprisal for their testimony or briefing?

16 General Cotton: They will be.

17 Chairman Reed: Thank you, General. General, the 2018
18 Nuclear Posture Review recommended a supplemental nuclear
19 system to the triad, a submarine launched cruise missile,
20 or SLCM, and the 2022 NPR did not pursue it. And what are
21 your views on the sub -- nuclear submarine launched
22 missile?

23 General Cotton: Chairman, thank you for the question.
24 If confirmed, my job is to be able to present the decision
25 maker, the President of the United States, with a wide

1 variety of options to be able to meet challenges that we
2 have seen to be warranted due to a requirement. In this
3 case, I would want to be able to present the maximum amount
4 -- the maximum capabilities that are available.

5 When it comes to SLCM, I must admit that I would like
6 to be able to do, like my predecessors before, to make an
7 assessment on that. If it meets -- if it is able to meet
8 that capability gap that is there, I would like to be able
9 to see that and assess that so I can make my best military
10 assessment on the specific weapon system itself because I
11 am not familiar with that weapon system on the specifics of
12 what it can do with the capabilities to close the
13 capability gap that we might perceive.

14 Chairman Reed: General, as I noted in my opening
15 statement, we are now facing a three way nuclear race,
16 which alters some of the traditional notions of deterrence
17 based on the bipolar world of the Cold War. If confirmed,
18 do you believe that you will have the sufficient forces and
19 capability to undertake this new and evolving mission?

20 General Cotton: Chairman, thanks for the question. I
21 would like to answer that two ways. The current force that
22 we have today, we are ready to execute today. What I would
23 say is, if confirmed, and I know this is continually
24 happening today, is we must evaluate what the additional
25 risks are and what the adversary is doing to ensure two

1 things.

2 First, to evaluate to make sure that the nuclear
3 strategy that we have within Strategic Command can meet the
4 objectives, the national objectives that are presented
5 before us. So the first thing I would do, if confirmed, is
6 to ensure -- because sir, the first time since 1945, the
7 first time for us as a Nation, we have two near-peer
8 adversaries.

9 We have always put together a nuclear defense strategy
10 that has one nuclear power. We are going to have to roll
11 up our sleeves to ensure that we are doing everything we
12 are that we can strategy wise with Strategic Air Command --
13 excuse me, between STRATCOM to ensure that we are meeting
14 the objectives to be able to have and take care of two near
15 peers. First time in history that we have ever seen that.

16 Chairman Reed: Thank you, sir. STRATCOM is the Joint
17 Staff lead for ensuring the Joint Force can successfully
18 defend and prosecute electronic warfare, which is now
19 referred to as electromagnetic spectrum operations or EMSO.
20 Russia has successfully used EMSO in Ukraine, and China has
21 greatly expanded their capabilities. Can you tell us this
22 view -- your views on this subject? And if confirmed, will
23 you ensure it receives your full attention?

24 General Cotton: Thank you, Chairman. Absolutely. So
25 if confirmed, it is going to be a front burner item within

1 STRATCOM. You know, I know right now that the Executive,
2 DOD, EMS Superiority Strategic Implementation Plan has been
3 laid out in which the Commander of STRATCOM is going to be
4 the lead and that directs report -- the direct report to
5 the Commander of STRATCOM.

6 That is something that, if confirmed, I want to be
7 able to dive down and do a true assessment of what is going
8 on with EMS. I agree, it has atrophied over the decades.
9 And now with two near peers, we are going to have to
10 understand how to attack that and how to attack it well.
11 So it is absolutely something that I would look into, sir.

12 Chairman Reed: Thank you very much. Senator Inhofe,
13 please.

14 Senator Inhofe: Tell us, Chairman. I do have three
15 questions. And while you have addressed all three of
16 these, it will give us a chance to elaborate a little bit
17 more if that is your desire, General Cotton.

18 We all know how critical it is to rebuild our Nation's
19 nuclear deterrent, but we are still years away from
20 fielding any new systems. So in terms of your priorities,
21 how important is it that we accelerate as much of the U.S.
22 nuclear modernization plan as soon as possible?

23 General Cotton: Senator, thank you for the question.
24 I think about it this way. So if confirmed, I think the
25 challenge of Strategic Command is to ensure that we sustain

1 legacy systems as we transition to the modern -- to our
2 modernized systems. That is going to be key for us.

3 In order to do that, it is going to take the full
4 power of Government to be able to pull that together,
5 especially when we are talking about the central weapons
6 system and the Columbia and all of the five that I have
7 under my purview as a current Joint Forces Air Component
8 Commander working for the Commander of STRATCOM.

9 So being able to do that, sir, I think a couple of the
10 key things are going to be required from us. We are going
11 to need stable, predictable, and adequate, and timely
12 funding. My job, if confirmed as the Commander of
13 STRATCOM, is to ensure that we also have stable
14 requirements.

15 Because what we are going to see, and what I think is
16 going to be great for us with the new modernized systems,
17 is the fact that we are by design building in a system that
18 we know will last for decades because that is built into
19 the system.

20 So the modularity that we will see will be able to
21 keep pace with the threats that we will see in the future.
22 What we need to do in the meantime, though, is to sustain
23 the legacy system that still -- that is still safe, secure,
24 and effective as we make that transition.

25 Senator Inhofe: Okay. That is good and I appreciate

1 that very much. The -- it has already been mentioned a
2 couple of times talking about the two peer adversaries.
3 This is something that we have not done before. This is
4 new.

5 And even though you did already address this, you have
6 been asked this question even by the chairman, I would like
7 to give you the opportunity to expand, if you want to, on
8 how we are going to handle this. What is going to be
9 different about two adversaries?

10 General Cotton: Thank you, Senator. What is
11 different is two near peers that actually act differently.
12 From a doctrines perspective, we understand Russian nuclear
13 theory and nuclear doctrine.

14 Minimal deterrence was what we thought of when we
15 talked of China as recent as 2018. We have seen the
16 incredible expansiveness of what they are doing with their
17 nuclear force, which does not, in my opinion, reflect
18 minimal deterrence.

19 They have a bona fide triad now. So we are going to
20 have to understand more deeply the Chinese nuclear
21 strategy.

22 Senator Inhofe: Okay. All right. I appreciate that.
23 Now, the -- while the chairman did talk about this before,
24 I am going to frame the question as my last question a
25 little bit differently, General Cotton.

1 A number of the senior military officers have
2 testified to their support of continuing the sea launched
3 cruise missile program, including the Chairman and the Vice
4 Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, the Chief of Naval
5 Operations, and the Commanders of the U.S. Strategic and
6 European Command.

7 Do you agree with, not -- do you agree with these
8 leaders right now and your colleagues that we should keep
9 this program going? And I would like to have you give --
10 be as specific as possible, because we all know what the
11 program is. We all expressed ourselves on it. So I would
12 like to have your thoughts on this.

13 General Cotton: Yes, Senator. So the Chairman, the
14 Vice Chairman, and the current Commander of U.S. Strategic
15 Command absolutely understand where they are on the
16 endorsement of continuing.

17 Senator Inhofe: That is correct.

18 General Cotton: From my perspective, I absolutely
19 understand that they are looking at the capability gap to
20 be able to do that. The only thing that is different
21 between they and I is I have yet to do an assessment on the
22 weapons system itself. But absolutely understand where
23 they are on being able to have a capability gap that is
24 filled that they have seen. I have seen that capability
25 gap as well, and I endorse the fact that we need to fill

1 that capability gap.

2 Senator Inhofe: Thank you, General.

3 Chairman Reed: Thank you, Senator Inhofe. Senator
4 Shaheen, please.

5 Senator Shaheen: Good morning. Congratulations,
6 General Cotton, on your nomination. Thank you to you and
7 your family for your long service. I would like to begin
8 by following up a little bit on Senator Inhofe's question
9 about the challenges with modernization. And you talked
10 about a dependable budget process.

11 You talked about a whole of Government cooperative
12 effort. What you didn't talk about is the supply chain and
13 the challenges with making sure we have the critical
14 minerals, the other requirements to modernize our nuclear
15 arsenal.

16 Can you talk a little bit about what you think those
17 challenges are, and how you see the ability to impact that,
18 and what we should be thinking about as a committee?

19 General Cotton: Thank you, Senator, for the question.
20 Absolutely correct. As we are seeing the modernization
21 programs within the nuclear portfolio, I would venture to
22 say that it is probably being seen across the Department of
23 Defense, but in particular for the nuclear portfolio.

24 Even as we are seeing the industry partners do the
25 Herculean efforts and work in moving the programs along at

1 a great pace, what we are now finding is the realities of
2 supply chain limitations and supply chain shortfalls. We
3 had a great discussion and a good example -- or some
4 components that are U.S. made components with U.S. made
5 subcomponents that are still taking what would be on
6 average, maybe 10 days to source, that are now taking up to
7 90 days to source.

8 So by definition, if you look at what we need to do in
9 regards to maintaining a flow and schedule to get our new
10 modernized systems online, you know, if you introduce that
11 into the flow, those delays right there cause me concern.

12 And I think it is going to take everyone to understand
13 how we can close the gap on supply chain management and
14 ensure that we can get the supplies to the industry
15 partners that are trying to modernize this force.

16 Senator Shaheen: And are you comfortable that we have
17 the components that we are going to need being manufactured
18 within the United States, the materials that we need being
19 produced in the United States?

20 General Cotton: Ma'am, I did. Until we start to see,
21 you know, that kind of eat into to the schedule as being
22 problems with supply chain.

23 Senator Shaheen: Thank you. There is -- can you
24 describe how you analyze the difference between strategic
25 deterrence and integrated deterrence, and how you see that

1 affecting your role, if at all, in terms of the mission of
2 STRATCOM?

3 General Cotton: Yes, ma'am. Thanks for the question.
4 It is integral. Integrated deterrence is a whole of
5 Government opportunity. And in a way I describe that is,
6 it is -- I remember growing up and using the dime theory
7 when I was a young lieutenant, but it is using all
8 instruments of power within the Government, the United
9 States, to afford us a deterrence factor that makes it, so
10 we never have to get to the day where I have to execute the
11 mission, if confirmed, from U.S. Strategic Command.

12 Strategic deterrence to me composes more than just
13 nuclear deterrence. Strategic deterrence to me has a
14 conventional and a nuclear component to it. And it is the
15 backstop, in my opinion, to ensure that we can deter forces
16 when called upon.

17 Senator Shaheen: So does the focus on integrated
18 deterrence change the role that you would have, if
19 confirmed, as the head of STRATCOM?

20 General Cotton: Ma'am, I don't believe so, because I
21 think strategic deterrence is an integral part of the
22 overarching integrated deterrence that we all speak of.

23 Senator Shaheen: Thank you. One of the -- you know,
24 as someone who remembers the Cold War very vividly and the
25 focus on -- the concern about nuclear annihilation and the

1 ability to destroy the world that way, and there was a lot
2 of attention to that that has dissipated over the years
3 with some of the arms control agreements, and but I think
4 as we look at the war in Ukraine and some of Vladimir
5 Putin's statements, there is a renewed concern about what
6 the use of nuclear weapons would mean.

7 Are there ways in which you think our Strategic
8 Command, our nuclear triad are helping to constrain what
9 Vladimir Putin does now in this war in Ukraine?

10 General Cotton: Senator, thanks for the question. I
11 absolutely believe that our nuclear deterrent force held.
12 We did not see Russia do anything with our native -- or our
13 NATO partners. The rhetoric may have -- we may have heard
14 the rhetoric, but I think at the end of the day, Russia and
15 China both understand that we have a strong, resilient
16 nuclear force that is offering deterrence to ourselves and
17 extended deterrence to our allies.

18 Senator Shaheen: Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

19 Chairman Reed: Thank you, Senator Shahee. Senator
20 Fischer, please.

21 Senator Fischer: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you,
22 General, for being here today. And thank you for your
23 willingness to continue your service to this country. I
24 would like to welcome your family as well.

25 Madam, it is nice to see you here, and I know the

1 sacrifices that you and your family make on behalf of this
2 country as well. Thank you. General Cotton, a lot of
3 times in this committee and on the subcommittee of
4 strategic forces, our main focus is on modernization of our
5 triad. We also try to gain a fuller understanding of the
6 future needs that our military must have to provide for
7 National Security.

8 And we talk about things like SLCM and the need that
9 Commanders such as yourself will have to have to provide
10 options to the President when or if you are ever in that
11 position. The more options you can represent, the better
12 for the security of this country, the better for the people
13 of this country.

14 But also under the duties and responsibilities of the
15 STRATCOM Combatant Commander, we need to look at the
16 importance of NC3. We have to look at the NNSA's
17 supporting infrastructure as well.

18 So, General, I think that when we talk about nuclear
19 modernization and we have that focus on the triad, on the
20 weapons systems, the warheads, we shouldn't forget, we
21 should not forget about NC3, the architecture, as well as
22 the scientific and production infrastructure of NNSA.

23 Can you talk about how important these elements are to
24 the deterrent and the modernization challenge that we are
25 seeing in these areas as well?

1 General Cotton: Senator, I would love to. You know,
2 I will start with NC3. I know there are members of the
3 committee that say it is the fourth of the triad, right.
4 It is the quad. I have heard folks say that. I call it
5 the tapestry. In my opening statement, you heard me
6 discuss and talk about, it is just as important as the
7 platforms that we are talking about modernizing, and that
8 is absolutely true.

9 The good news is it is still a -- it is a resilient
10 system today. What I like, having over 36 years in this
11 business, is the conversations that people like yourself,
12 and others also see it as just as important as the -- as a
13 weapon systems that we often talk about. If confirmed, I
14 would use my authorities.

15 As everyone's aware, the NEC or the NC3 enterprise
16 center that is located within Strategic Command and the
17 Commander Strategic Command having kind of oversight,
18 delegated oversight authorities to be able to kind of make
19 sure that we as a Department are looking to ensure that we
20 are modernizing with Next Gen technologies.

21 I call it NC2 over assured comms to ensure that we
22 have the state of the art NC3 systems that we need for not
23 only today, not only mid-term, but the future. And that is
24 going to be absolutely critical for us, because I guarantee
25 you that I want to ensure that we always outpace our

1 adversaries, who are also paying attention to our NC3
2 systems.

3 Senator Fischer: STRATCOM also has significant
4 responsibilities for the electromagnetic spectrum
5 operations. Can you describe some of the challenges in
6 this mission area, and what STRATCOM is doing to help
7 rebuild the force structure and the capabilities that we
8 need?

9 General Cotton: Yes, ma'am. So from my vantage point
10 as the Joint Forces Air Component Commander, I can only
11 give my vantage of what I have in the Air Force side of the
12 house. If confirmed, I would like to make an assessment on
13 the entire portfolio. But from our vantage point, I think
14 we are a little behind.

15 And I don't think -- I know we are behind. But the
16 good news is, I know that we are working to try to close
17 the gap on us not paying attention to EMS for decades. So
18 if confirmed, that would be one of the things that would be
19 on the plate that I would absolutely want to assess and be
20 the greatest advocate that I could be as the Commander of
21 STRATCOM in ensuring that we have the -- not the not pace
22 our adversaries but lead our adversaries in that domain.

23 Senator Fischer: Thank you. I was going to ask you
24 about also, as critics portray our nuclear deterrence as a
25 relic of the Cold War, but I will send that to you in a

1 written question. Thank you.

2 Chairman Reed: Thank you, Senator Fischer. Senator
3 Hirono, please.

4 Senator Hirono: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Welcome,
5 General Cotton and Mrs. Cotton. As part of my
6 responsibilities on this committee to ensure the fitness of
7 nominees for appointment to senior positions within the
8 Administration, I ask the following two initial questions
9 of all nominees to all of the committees on which I serve.

10 Since you became a legal adult, have you ever made
11 unwanted requests for sexual favors or committed any verbal
12 or physical harassment or assault of a sexual nature?

13 General Cotton: Senator, no.

14 Senator Hirono: Have you ever faced discipline or
15 entered into a settlement related to this kind of conduct?

16 General Cotton: No, ma'am.

17 Senator Hirono: General, you have been asked a number
18 of questions about SLCM, and while some military leaders,
19 including Chairman Millie, have expressed their support for
20 SLCM, and several DOD officials, including Secretary
21 Austin, have expressed their opposition to the project, I
22 share the concerns expressed by Secretary Austin that the
23 development of such a low yield or tactical nuclear cruise
24 missile is unnecessary and could lead to a dangerous new
25 nuclear arms race.

1 The United States should be a leader in international
2 efforts to reduce nuclear stockpiles and prevent nuclear
3 proliferation, while still ensuring we maintain cutting
4 edge capabilities to protect our National Security. I know
5 that you testified that you will make your own assessment
6 as to SLCM.

7 And I do want to ask you though, do you agree that the
8 United States has a role to play in preventing a new
9 nuclear arms race? And if so, if confirmed, will you work
10 with the Department of State to support the strengthening
11 of diplomatic efforts to prevent nuclear proliferation?

12 General Cotton: Senator, thank you for the question.
13 I think that that weaves into what we would call integrated
14 deterrence, right. So as we talk about integrated
15 deterrence, I want to take our instruments of power to
16 ensure that we can deter. So in regards to the question
17 that you asked, my best military advice would always be to
18 be able to present the Commander in Chief with a variety of
19 options and capabilities.

20 So that is where I would be, if confirmed as the
21 Commander of U.S. STRATCOM, is to be able to offer as much
22 capability and options to the Commander in Chief. But I do
23 understand the question that you asked in regard to the
24 Department of State, and the answer is yes, as far as
25 integrated deterrence, I think it is key to that.

1 Senator Hirono: Well, I think integrated deterrence
2 means that we have a role to play, I would say a leading
3 role to play, in preventing a new nuclear arms race. Would
4 you agree with that?

5 General Cotton: I do.

6 Senator Hirono: So given the importance of
7 nonproliferation, are there other weapons or tactics that
8 can accomplish the same strategic objectives as the Command
9 without creating new nuclear weapons?

10 General Cotton: Ma'am, if confirmed, that is exactly
11 what I meant by making the assessment to understand what
12 would be the gap filler in the capability.

13 Senator Hirono: As we prepare to revamp the nuclear
14 triad or modernize the triad, wouldn't our efforts be
15 better utilized focusing on that important mission rather
16 than diverting resources and attention to SLCM?

17 General Cotton: Ma'am, you know, I appreciate the
18 committee and what they have done for the overarching
19 modernization of the nuclear portfolio writ large. Once
20 again, I think if confirmed, I still would like to be able
21 to assess and analyze how do you broaden that portfolio to
22 provide more options for the President of the United
23 States.

24 Senator Hirono: I think one of the concerns about the
25 SLCM is that it is going to be a highly expensive

1 proposition, whereas we are very clear on the need to
2 revamp the triad and modernize. So the going on the higher
3 class ballistic missile submarine, originally said to be in
4 service for 30 years, will be extended by the Navy out to
5 42 years.

6 These submarines will begin to retire from the fleet
7 as the Columbia Class comes online to replace them in the
8 late 2020s. The warheads used on the submarines have also
9 undergone life extension programs of their own, in some
10 cases adding an estimate of 30 years to their service life.

11 What concerns you have with service life extensions as
12 we bridge the gap between aging and new technologies?

13 General Cotton: Ma'am, thank you for the question.
14 So in regards, with our incredible partners at NNSA who are
15 doing this work for us, I think the question is we need to
16 kind of see what aging you really see from the asset, and
17 also does a life extension, you know, solve the problem to
18 get the effects that you want from that asset.

19 So if confirmed, I think that is part of what I would
20 assess as being a member of the Nuclear Weapons Council as
21 well, to be able to get an assessment to see, okay, is it
22 about re-use or is it about new, and further. So that is
23 something that I would have to make an assessment on, if
24 confirmed.

25 Senator Hirono: Thank you.

1 Chairman Reed: Thank you, Senator Hirono. Senator
2 Cotton, please.

3 Senator Cotton: General Cotton, welcome and
4 congratulations on your nominations and continued service.
5 You know, we hear the term arms race a lot, especially in
6 the nuclear context. Last time, I guess, we had a major
7 arms race in which we actually contested. The race was in
8 the 1980s.

9 And there aren't many Senators around who were there
10 then. Pat Leahy and Chuck Grassley, maybe. I bet they
11 took different views on it. I know what view Joe Biden
12 took on it. He continued to criticize Ronald Reagan for an
13 arms race that was going to destabilize the world, lead to
14 a nuclear war.

15 Of course, it led to nothing but victory in the Cold
16 War without even firing a shot. Do we get to decide
17 whether there is an arms race or not, General Cotton, or
18 does the enemy get a vote on that?

19 General Cotton: Thank you for the question, Senator.
20 I would answer it this way, and it still goes back to the
21 options and capabilities that we should be able to provide
22 to the Commander in Chief. So from -- my best military
23 advice is to provide the capability and options for the
24 Commander in Chief, and I would like to be able to provide
25 the most capable options that I can in this regard.

1 Senator Cotton: Yes. And that is why I said the last
2 contested arms race we faced was in the 1980s during the
3 Reagan buildup, because we have been in an arms race with
4 China for the last 30 years, and fortunately we haven't
5 been significantly contesting it and therefore China has
6 been winning it. In the end, whether we enter an arms race
7 is not really up to us. What is up to us is whether we win
8 it or we lose it.

9 And if you ask me, it is much cheaper to win an arms
10 race than it is to lose a war. It goes especially for
11 nuclear weapons. General Cotton, I want to read to you a
12 short excerpt from Winston Churchill's Iron Curtain speech,
13 also known as The Sinews of Strength -- A Sinews of Peace
14 speech.

15 Less than, or barely six months after VJ Day in
16 Fulton, Missouri, Churchill says, from what I have seen of
17 our Russian friends and allies during the war, I am
18 convinced there is nothing they admire so much as strength,
19 and there is nothing for which they have less respect than
20 for weakness, especially military weakness.

21 Do you agree with Sir Winston that Russians have less
22 -- there is nothing for which they have less respect than
23 weakness, especially military weakness?

24 General Cotton: Senator, I agree.

25 Senator Cotton: Do you think that is true of the

1 Chinese as well?

2 General Cotton: I do.

3 Senator Cotton: Do you think it is true of the
4 Iranians?

5 General Cotton: I think of all of our adversaries.

6 Senator Cotton: Okay. Yes, I thought so too. He
7 continued then to say, for that reason, the old doctrine of
8 a balance of power is unsound. We cannot afford it, if we
9 can help it, to work on narrow margins, offering
10 temptations to a trial of strength. Do you agree with Sir
11 Winston that we should not offer temptations to a trial of
12 strength to our adversaries by operating on narrow margins?

13 General Cotton: Senator, I think that we always
14 should -- we always should operate from a power of
15 strength.

16 Senator Cotton: And those margins would narrow
17 significantly, given China's nuclear buildup, if China and
18 Russia became de facto or even de jure allies, correct?

19 General Cotton: Two near peer allies as opposed -- or
20 adversaries, as opposed to one.

21 Senator Cotton: Okay. There has been a lot of talk
22 over the last year that a major ground war in Europe
23 between two nation states was unthinkable. Even after
24 Russia invaded Ukraine, such a war was unthinkable.

25 Obviously, Vladimir Putin thought it was quite

1 thinkable. Do you believe that a nuclear war is
2 unthinkable? Not in terms of the consequences it would
3 have for our Nation and for the world, but for the fact of
4 whether it might happen. Is a nuclear war unthinkable?

5 General Cotton: Senator, I think if confirmed, the
6 role that I would play as Commander is to make sure that
7 those 150,000 men and women that are supporting Strategic
8 Air Command, every -- I keep saying Strategic Air Command,
9 forgive me -- and Strategic Command are prepared to do what
10 some folks might think is the unthinkable.

11 Senator Cotton: I think that is right. You have an
12 unusual and weighty job, and that I think it is your
13 responsibility almost every day to think what most people
14 believe is unthinkable and think about what a nuclear war
15 would look like and how it would be fought, and therefore
16 the best way to do what we all want, which is to deter it
17 from happening in the first place. So, thank you, General
18 Cotton. Best wishes for you in your new role.

19 General Cotton: Thank you.

20 Chairman Reed: Thank you, Senator Cotton. Senator
21 King, please.

22 Senator King: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. General
23 Cotton, welcome. I am sure you were briefed before this
24 hearing that the Russians again -- let me try it again. I
25 am sure you were briefed that the chairman would ask you a

1 series of routine questions at the beginning and you went
2 through and answered them properly.

3 I just want to emphasize one of those questions. Do
4 you agree, when asked before this committee, to give your
5 personal views, even if your views differ from the
6 Administration? That is a very important question, because
7 we need to know what your best military advice is, not
8 colored by the views of the Administration, the President.
9 This is -- I just want to emphasize how important this
10 question is.

11 You answered it properly, but I just want to have it
12 in the back of your head in the future. And it is going to
13 be difficult. It is not easy to say something that may be
14 unacceptable to some other part of the Pentagon or the
15 Administration. In looking over my notes as I make
16 questions, I realize that all of my questions involve
17 changes in the strategic posture.

18 You have mentioned several times we have gone from a
19 bipolar world to a multipolar world in terms of our
20 adversaries. That is a strategic change, but there are
21 others. Just to run down a quick list, electromagnetic
22 spectrum and electronic warfare.

23 You have you have touched upon, I realize there is
24 classified information here, but I hope that you will
25 commit to holding serious exercises on electronic warfare

1 and notify us of how we are doing. Because this is a new
2 strategic challenge that I am not sure we are adequately
3 accounted for yet.

4 General Cotton: So Senator, for your first question,
5 absolutely, yes, my best military advice presented to the
6 committee. For your second, is another absolutely, yes.
7 We are going to have to flesh out through exercises, as you
8 mentioned, to ensure we can find any blind spots and
9 shortfalls and make corrections as warranted and as
10 required. So I wholeheartedly agree with you.

11 Senator King: Another area of strategic change has
12 happened in the last four or five years, and that is
13 hypersonics. We thought of strategic forces as nuclear
14 weapons and nuclear deterrence.

15 Hypersonics are a new threat that are -- is a
16 strategic threat, particularly, for example, the Chinese
17 putting a glide vehicle, hypersonic glide vehicle in orbit,
18 which radically changes things like how much time we might
19 have to react to an attack. Do you view hypersonics as a
20 serious strategic challenge?

21 General Cotton: Senator, I do. And I see it as a
22 warning challenge. I think as far as when we have a
23 conversation, if confirmed, I think my fellow Combatant
24 Commanders, we will have to have a discussion and
25 understand how to give -- kind of relook missile defense,

1 relook missile warning, understand what a sensor layer
2 looks like that can achieve those effects to give time,
3 because I need to give decision space to the decision
4 maker.

5 Senator King: Well, I think it is safe to say that
6 the bullet on bullet theory of missile defense is out the
7 window when you are talking about hypersonics. Another
8 area is cyber. You have talked about it.

9 You have indicated how important it is, particularly
10 with NC3. Will you commit to red teaming and pen testing
11 and hackers for hire to test the security of the systems
12 that you are developing?

13 I don't think you really know how secure you are until
14 somebody attacks you. And I hope it is -- I want it to be
15 a friendly attack.

16 General Cotton: Senator, if confirmed, that would be
17 one of the first directions I would give to the NEC.

18 Senator King: Thank you. Final point. Again, a new
19 strategic challenge or a different strategic challenge, and
20 I don't expect really an answer, but perhaps you could
21 consider this for the record, that is non-state actors with
22 nuclear weapons.

23 The deterrent theory doesn't work if you don't have a
24 capital city and if you don't care about dying. And we
25 have a proliferation of nuclear weapons, and we have rogue

1 states developing nuclear weapons and nuclear materials.

2 The chances of those materials falling into the hands
3 of a terrorist organization, it seems to me, are increasing
4 gradually but steadily. I hope you will give this some
5 thought because it is a major strategic challenge that
6 doesn't fit within the ambit of what has been our historic
7 deterrence strategy for dealing with nuclear threats.

8 General Cotton: Senator, you are absolutely right.
9 And I will get back with you, if confirmed, and we can have
10 further discussions along that.

11 Senator King: Thank you very much. Thank you, Mr.
12 Chairman.

13 Chairman Reed: Thank you, Senator King. Senator
14 Rounds, please.

15 Senator Rounds: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Good
16 morning, General Cotton. Thank you to you and to your
17 family for your years of service to our country, and your
18 continued service in the future. General Cotton, I share
19 the perspective that the nuclear deterrent is the
20 foundation of our National Security.

21 In the past, I have asked other leaders in the nuclear
22 enterprise to give their views, in plain language, on the
23 importance of our nuclear triad so that the American -- you
24 know, our American public, who really don't think about
25 this on a regular basis, can understand why we have

1 hundreds, if not thousands, of nuclear warheads.

2 And can you explain it in such a fashion as to why it
3 is so important to our National Security that we not only
4 maintain, but accelerate the investment in the
5 modernization of this nuclear triad?

6 General Cotton: Senator Rounds, thank you for the
7 question. I think if we were to do a perspective on
8 talking about the three legs of the triad in particular,
9 and how it is the backstop and underpins, I think if I was
10 at a town hall meeting, how I would describe that to a
11 local town hall is, think about the bedrock of a feature
12 and what holds the rest of your foundation up.

13 You know, when we have -- when we are building a home,
14 you know, you want to make sure you have a steady, you
15 know, steady property to put the foundation on. For every
16 operational plan that the Department of Defense has, it
17 relies on the fact that strategic deterrence is going to
18 hold to allow those other missions to accomplish. If that
19 does not happen, that is when you see that deterrence
20 fails.

21 The way that we accomplish that is through our triad
22 of having bombers who are recordable if warranted, having
23 submarines that can be used, or having ICBMs that are
24 readily available for the decision maker to do that.

25 Our adversaries understand that and know that we can

1 hold them at bay. That is that bedrock and foundation that
2 is so critically important for us and this Nation.

3 Senator Rounds: I think it is sometimes we think
4 about the fact that we have great conventional forces, but
5 the reason why those conventional forces can be effective
6 is because everybody knows that in the back, the hammer are
7 the nuclear forces, which have been upgraded. And that is
8 what I want to talk about next.

9 With regard to our nuclear command and control
10 systems, they have got to be upgraded. We are in the
11 process of doing that now. What do you see as one of the
12 biggest challenges or what do you see as the biggest
13 challenges regarding the upgrading of our current command
14 and control structure?

15 General Cotton: Thanks for the question. As I said
16 in my opening comments, in my opening statement, I
17 articulated that it is a resilient system today. I think
18 moving forward, I see it as a continuance. You will never
19 close the book on a modernization of a comm node. So as I
20 see it, that -- I don't know if I see the challenge, but I
21 -- but what we are going to be able to have to do is, I say
22 move to a system using 21st century technologies that
23 allows us to have what I called NC3 over shared comms.

24 So being able to make it so I can -- we can message
25 and get data to the warfighters in any situation. So I

1 think that challenge is being able to link the legacy
2 systems with the modernized systems.

3 But I am here to say that I am quite pleased in the
4 work that is being done with NC3 Next Gen, if you will. So
5 the team is really, really getting after it and I am pretty
6 impressed on the way forward on being able to close that
7 challenge.

8 Senator Rounds: Thank you, General. And one last
9 item that I wanted to visit with today, and that is, if
10 confirmed, you will be the lead for joint electromagnetic
11 spectrum operations.

12 The growth of 5G technologies continues to add
13 additional requests for larger parts of the band, some of
14 which are needed for National Security. Now, recognizing
15 the unclassified setting of this hearing, can you explain
16 to this committee, and perhaps to other folks out there
17 that are wondering why it isn't being made more readily
18 available, but the Pentagon and the Department of Defense
19 clearly is recognizing the need to protect certain areas of
20 the spectrum for National Security purposes.

21 Can you share a little bit about the real necessity of
22 working in a consultative way, really, in a cooperative way
23 with the FCC and the NTIA in maintaining certain portions
24 of the spectrum for National Security purposes and how
25 absolutely critical it is.

1 General Cotton: Senator, it is incredibly critical
2 that we maintain and understand, and to be frank, have
3 others understand the necessity to protect certain bands.
4 If confirmed, I would want to collaborate with the FCC and
5 others so we can -- maybe we need to message better for
6 folks to understand exactly what we are talking about here
7 on the necessity and criticality of making sure that we can
8 protect those bands that you mentioned.

9 Senator Rounds: Thank you. Thank you, General.
10 Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

11 General Cotton: Thank you, Senator Rounds. Senator
12 Kaine, please.

13 Senator Kaine: Thank you, Mr. Chair. And General
14 Cotton, great to see you. I enjoyed our visit yesterday.
15 And I think this has been touched on by earlier Senators
16 and their questions, but I really was intrigued by the
17 discussion we were having about this multipolar nature of
18 the threat.

19 So as you look at the triad, we have to always
20 recapitalize and have it be strong, but we have thought of
21 the triad, both in terms of our investment, but even in
22 terms of our theory of deterrence or our theory about what
23 the triad means to our defense. We sort of thought about
24 it as a triad with respect to one nuclear competitor.

25 Okay, now we have two nuclear competitors, and

1 evidence demonstrates that they are increasingly working
2 together. The U.S. policy for decades kind of said that
3 China and Russia would never get too close because of a
4 history of enmity and different cultures and things like
5 that. But they are getting closer and closer every day,
6 and often they are doing things not only just the two of
7 them, but with Iran, North Korea, sometimes with Turkey.

8 So how should, you be confirmed, and I am confident
9 you will be, how will you approach this analysis of the
10 threat, that is not simply an analysis of the capacity of
11 individual adversaries, but the fact that these adversaries
12 are cooperating and that previous deterrence doctrines are
13 really built more around a bipolar world rather than
14 multiple competitors?

15 General Cotton: Senator Kaine, thank you for the for
16 the question. You are absolutely right, and we touched
17 upon it earlier. I think what is key -- and it is, you
18 know, as we discussed, it is multiple approaches, too,
19 because one, if confirmed -- and I know the work is being
20 currently done within STRATCOM because as a JFACC Commander
21 to STRATCOM offering input to that today.

22 But if confirmed, that assessment has to continue,
23 because when we talk about -- I mean, as you said, as we
24 talk about nuclear doctrine, nuclear doctrine is with one
25 near-peer adversary. We are -- and what that will drive is

1 then that will drive on how do we meet national objectives
2 based on the strategic doctrine within the confines of
3 Strategic Command.

4 Then we have to then, from my best military advice,
5 understand what force shaping looks like in regards to how
6 do you meet the objectives that would be given to us from
7 the Commander in Chief.

8 That is work that has to be done, and I know it is
9 being done today. But if confirmed, that is one of the
10 first things that we will dive into where I can get a
11 better understanding, to your point, of what does it look
12 like when you have two near-peer adversaries that act
13 differently, might work -- that might work together, might
14 not work together, but we still need to understand, you
15 know, how do you execute against that threat.

16 Senator Kaine: Thank you, General. Another thing we
17 talked about yesterday was bomber task force missions.
18 There was just a completion of one in SOUTHCOM with
19 Panamanian and Ecuadorian partners. We have also done
20 bomber task force missions with European allies. These are
21 to show unity, to test interoperability. Talk about what
22 those missions produce for our defense capacity.

23 General Cotton: Thank you for that. So bomber task
24 force, our bomber task forces that we currently do on
25 behalf of our -- on behalf of COCOMS, of which I am the

1 lead as Air Force Global Strike Commander to present those
2 forces to COCOMS through STRATCOM, it has been incredible
3 because what it shows. It shows why we are the most
4 powerful military on the face of the earth, and that is
5 because we have allies and partners.

6 And what it shows is using conventional forces, what
7 strategic deterrence is all about as well. And there is
8 nothing more gratifying than seeing an ally or a partner
9 come up on a wing of a B-52 that is doing an integrated
10 mission over a COCOM area, and seeing the PA sentiment, if
11 you will, Senator, come back from the adversaries on how
12 that mission went.

13 So it is a win-win for ourselves, as well as our
14 allies and partners that participate in those missions that
15 we are doing constantly across the globe.

16 Senator Kaine: Thank you very much. I yield back.

17 Chairman Reed: Thank you, Senator Kaine. Senator
18 Ernst, please.

19 Senator Ernst: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Chair. And thank
20 you, General Cotton, for being here today, as well as
21 Marsha. Thank you very much for joining us. And I enjoyed
22 visiting with you in the office. We covered a lot of
23 really great topics important to the defense of our Nation.
24 And just a few questions here in this committee.

25 The 2018 National Defense Strategy Commission had

1 determined that the United States might struggle to win or
2 perhaps even lose a war with China over Taiwan. This has
3 been a big concern of ours, especially in recent months.

4 Do you agree that the President must have flexible
5 nuclear options to prevent conventional defeat at the hands
6 of our adversaries in this particular scenario?

7 General Cotton: I do.

8 Senator Ernst: Okay. And I appreciate that. And I
9 know that a number of my colleagues have already brought up
10 having a nuclear deterrence, theater nuclear forces in
11 Asia. So I won't go through that again, but I just want to
12 state that I do think it is important that we have those
13 capabilities abroad, especially in that region, considering
14 the scenario that we have seen through the 2018 National
15 Defense Strategy and what we see occurring just in the
16 daily news.

17 So I just want to emphasize my support for making sure
18 that we have the capabilities necessary, if we should ever
19 need those, present in INDOPACOM. Chairman Milley and Vice
20 Chairman Grady also wrote in June that continued
21 modernization and expansion of the ground based midcourse
22 defense system is critical to defend the homeland from
23 North Korean missiles. Do you agree that we must expand?

24 There is a lot of talk about modernization, but do you
25 agree that we must expand, not merely modernize, homeland

1 missile defense to take -- to actually make sure that we
2 are putting in check rogue nations like North Korea?

3 General Cotton: Senator, thanks for the question.

4 You know, I think when we talk about missile defense,
5 especially with the not only rogue nations, but now with
6 two adversaries, near-peer adversaries that have different
7 capacities and capabilities, I would agree that for the
8 protection of the homeland, more options is better than
9 less.

10 Senator Ernst: Yes, more options are better. And I
11 know that we do receive pushback every once in a while on
12 this idea that we need to expand and modernize. And it is
13 extremely costly. And just to emphasize to our fabulous
14 American citizens that Jim Mattis, the way he phrased this
15 in the past is, America can afford survival.

16 I think it is very important that we continue to look
17 at ways that we can expand and modernize. And would you
18 also agree that the capability to destroy hard and deeply
19 buried targets actually enhances our deterrence by denying
20 that our adversary doesn't have sanctuary from U.S. nuclear
21 deterrence?

22 General Cotton: I would agree.

23 Senator Ernst: Yes. And can you think of examples
24 where we might need to look into that further?

25 General Cotton: Senator, thanks for the question. I

1 think there is opportunities for us to understand what
2 technologies are available that can give us potentially
3 nuclear or conventional, that can get after hard and deeply
4 buried targets. And if confirmed, I would love to lead the
5 charge and be an advocate in understanding that and
6 advocating for it.

7 Senator Ernst: Thank you for that. I appreciate it.
8 And do you agree that we should sustain the B83 bomb until
9 we have a suitable replacement?

10 General Cotton: I think that we need to be able to
11 have an opportunity to provide options. And if that is
12 taken off the table, then we no longer have an option to
13 provide.

14 Senator Ernst: Yes. Thank you. I do appreciate that
15 as well. And then of course, the President extended New
16 Start for five years when he assumed office. In your
17 opinion, in your best military opinion, are U.S. strategic
18 arms constraints prudent given China's nuclear breakout,
19 which is -- they are not party to the treaty, and Russia's
20 arsenal of non-strategic nuclear weapons, which are
21 unaccounted for by the treaty?

22 General Cotton: Senator, I think whatever agreement
23 or treaty that we could do to prevent proliferation is
24 good, with a caveat, that it incorporates every aspect of
25 what the signing agreement would be.

1 So what I mean by that are, you know, weapons that are
2 currently not seen as strategic weapons need to be added to
3 that calculus. So but any agreement or treaty that would
4 prevent proliferation across the globe, I am for.

5 Senator Ernst: Okay. Thank you for your answers.
6 And I do appreciate the opportunity to sit down with you in
7 the office the other day and look forward to hearing more
8 from you. I as well, growing up in Southwest Iowa, I also
9 have been known to call it Strategic Air Command, so with
10 you. But thank you very much for your time today, General.

11 General Cotton: Thank you, Senator.

12 Chairman Reed: Thank you, Senator Ernst. Senator
13 Scott, please.

14 Senator Scott: Thank you, Chairman Reed. General
15 Cotton, first, thanks for your service. Congratulations on
16 your nomination. Thank you for your willingness to serve.
17 So here is what informs most of my work here on the
18 committee. First, the United States has several enemies
19 who have no interest other than to harm us.

20 They want us to be weak, independent, and without
21 allies. And you talked about the importance of our allies.
22 Chief among these enemies are the Chinese Communist Party
23 and Vladimir Putin's regime. Second, our enemies wake up
24 every day plotting to harm us. They think about it all the
25 time.

1 Putin's invasion, brutal murdering, raping, and
2 pillaging of Ukraine is, in his own words, his fight
3 against the United States, as though anyone really need him
4 to hear what he is up to. Jones Secretary, she
5 contemplates the same thing for the free and democratic
6 nation of Taiwan.

7 Third, most countries in the world whether they
8 actually like us or not, they might be jealous of us, they
9 do want America to be powerful and capable of deterring or
10 defeating any aggressor who tries to turn the world into
11 their own dictatorship.

12 Most countries know that there is really only two
13 choices, a world where communist China, Putin, and the
14 Ayatollah and maybe others, are making the rules for
15 everyone, or one with a strong and independent United
16 States that faces down aggressors, helps those who help
17 themselves, leads alliances, and promotes state sovereignty
18 and commerce.

19 So if you would agree with that, and I think most of
20 us would agree with those, can you explain why the United
21 States would not want to have the most modern and expensive
22 nuclear and strategic weapons we could have?

23 General Cotton: Senator, I do agree with that. And
24 to be frank, I am really happy with what this committee has
25 done in regards to where we are on the nuclear

1 modernization front today. You know, are we late to need?
2 Yes. Are we getting after it now? Absolutely. Are we in
3 a position where we can ensure that we have a portfolio
4 that can modularize and meet the needs in the future?

5 I think we do, Senator. But I agree with you, I am
6 about the strong and not about the weak. So as -- if
7 confirmed, that is my position. I want to be from a
8 position of strength, not from a position of weakness.

9 Senator Scott: So would you agree we ought to
10 accelerate our nuclear modernization plan as much as we
11 can?

12 General Cotton: Sir, if that is possible, let's do
13 it.

14 Senator Scott: Yes. After your many years of
15 experience, you know, who are enemies are and what they
16 want, what they are capable of doing. You don't live in an
17 ivory tower or academic bubble where you can tease out
18 theories of disarmament and hope it all sort of goes well.
19 So if you are confirmed, which I believe you will be -- and
20 this is not a diplomatic role, right? His role is not
21 being a diplomat, your role is to be a fighter.

22 General Cotton: If confirmed, my role is to be a
23 Combatant Commander.

24 Senator Scott: Your goal is to scare the living crap
25 out of everybody.

1 General Cotton: Yes, sir.

2 Senator Scott: Good. Would you agree then the U.S.
3 President should have a variety of strategic weapons and
4 stockpiles so large that no enemy would even think about
5 trying to attack America?

6 General Cotton: I think we need to have a stockpile
7 that is credible and capable. Absolutely.

8 Senator Scott: And Senator King brought this up
9 earlier. I do appreciate the more direct and honest people
10 can be when they are testifying. I know there is probably
11 a lot of pressure to do whatever an Administration, whoever
12 the Administration is, wants you to do.

13 But I do appreciate as much as you can to be direct,
14 because all of us are trying to make the best decisions we
15 can, and you are the expert. So thank you. Thanks for
16 your service. I am glad you are going to serve -- continue
17 to serve.

18 General Cotton: Thank you, Senator.

19 Chairman Reed: Thank you, Senator Scott. Senator
20 Rosen, when you are ready, please.

21 Senator Rosen: There it is. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.
22 I appreciate that. Thank you, General Cotton, for
23 testifying today, for your willingness to continue to
24 serve. I really appreciate you. And so, of course, I hail
25 from the great State of Nevada. And I want to talk a

1 little bit about the Nevada National Security site, the
2 infrastructure upgrades, and how important, of course, it
3 is to our nuclear mission.

4 And I have talked about this a lot in this committee,
5 that the Nevada National Security site oversees the
6 Stockpile Stewardship Program, principally at our Ula
7 facility, which is, of course, an underground laboratory
8 where scientists conduct those subcritical experiments that
9 verify the safety and reliability of our nuclear stockpile
10 without, and I am going to repeat this again, without
11 explosive testing.

12 And so Ula is undergoing major construction. That
13 project is soon going to hold the most weapons capable
14 radiographic system in the world. However, the Nevada
15 National Security Administration currently faces
16 significant infrastructure delays, including at our Nevada
17 National Security site.

18 So General Cotton, as the current Commander providing
19 two of the three legs of the triad, can you speak about the
20 importance of the Stockpile Stewardship Program, and if
21 confirmed, how you would plan to, working with your fellow
22 Nuclear Weapons Council partners, in addressing the NNSA's
23 infrastructure modernization challenges and unfortunate
24 delays?

25 Chairman Reed: Senator Rosen, thanks for the

1 question. There is nothing more important than the
2 relationship that we have with DOE, and specifically NNSA.
3 As we talked throughout the hearing in regards to the
4 modernization programs, they are interwoven -- the
5 platforms mean absolutely nothing if I don't have the
6 assets available for the platforms. So to your question on
7 infrastructure, you are absolutely -- not only the Nevada
8 locations, but all of NNSA locations are in dire need of
9 upgrades in their infrastructure that dates back to
10 Manhattan Project times. We are living in a different
11 world today. As I keep saying, two near-peer adversaries,
12 nuclear adversaries. We are going to have to ensure that
13 the infrastructure are upgraded and are at the capacity and
14 capability to meet the needs of the warfighter. You
15 mentioned I as only two legs. I have modernization
16 programs that are going to need new systems for them.
17 Can't do that without the credible work of the men and
18 women that that make up the NNSA. But they are going to
19 need infrastructure that will allow them to be able to do
20 that type of work.

21 Senator Rosen: Yes. And not just bringing you up to
22 today's standards, but really preparing them for future
23 challenges and innovation that we so desperately are going
24 to need to compete. So thank you for that, because we do
25 have to think about the technological end advancements.

1 With those advancements also come advancements from
2 our adversaries so that creates increased threats as well.
3 And so the nuclear command control communication systems of
4 the United States, we know they are connected through a
5 network of communications, different data processing
6 systems, and this is -- could possibly leave us vulnerable
7 for cyber-attacks.

8 And in fact, in April of 2021, the Department of
9 Energy's Inspector General audit concluded that
10 cybersecurity weaknesses, they really do persist throughout
11 the Department's unclassified networks, including those of
12 the National Nuclear Security Administration.

13 So recent news, we have highlighted significant
14 efforts by Huawei to build telecommunication structures
15 right near our ICBM fields that possibly interrupt our
16 forces, our systems. And can you talk about these
17 potential threats, cyber threats, maybe not directly, but
18 even nearby where some of our critical assets are located.

19 General Cotton: Thank you, Senator, for the question.
20 So we are really paying attention to what we are seeing as
21 a Chinese are taking advantage of some of the opportunities
22 that they can have in some locations that are near our, and
23 in particular some of our ICBM sites.

24 So we are absolutely looking into that. To your point
25 on cyber security, you know, as people talk about NC3, you

1 know, I think your point is well taken. It is also, you
2 know, any other support in the architecture of us, the
3 nuclear community, like NNSA to ensure that they are just
4 as cyber safe as NC2 platform would be.

5 So if confirmed, as part of the Nuke Weapons Council,
6 as a member, I think that is something that we will
7 continually have to have more than a discussion about but
8 figure out how to get to the end state in that regard.

9 Senator Rosen: Yes, well there is a lot of push
10 points in hand-offs between agencies, information between
11 one another. I look forward to working on that with you.
12 Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

13 General Cotton: Thank you, Senator.

14 Chairman Reed: Thank you, Senator Rosen. Senator
15 Sullivan, please.

16 Senator Sullivan: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And
17 General Cotton, good to see you. I enjoyed our discussion
18 the other day. Let me follow up on some of the topics that
19 we talked about. First, if confirmed, you will work
20 closely with the U.S. Space Force, Missile Defense Agency,
21 Northern Command to guarantee the security of our Nation.

22 And as you know, Alaska has a lot of critical assets
23 that relate to missile defense, we are the cornerstone of
24 missile defense, over 100 5th generation fighters, world
25 class training ranges.

1 If confirmed, will you commit to visiting Alaska early
2 in your tenure to see these assets, meet with the troops
3 that are so critical to our homeland defense that you see
4 in Alaska?

5 General Cotton: Senator, absolutely.

6 Senator Sullivan: Thank you. You know, we had a good
7 discussion on basing. In May of 1992, the Strategic Air
8 Command was essentially stood down and many of our bomber
9 bases around the country, around the world were closed. We
10 have been talking a lot about great power competition and
11 how we need to be ready to confront two near-peer nuclear
12 capable adversaries with very large militaries.

13 Given this reality, how should we be approaching the
14 basing of our nuclear capable bomber fleet, particularly
15 when the B-21 Raider comes online, and again, in line of
16 some of the issues you and I discussed the other day?

17 General Cotton: Senator, thank you. I think
18 initially when we talk about main operating bases, I am
19 comfortable where we are. The conversation that we had is
20 how do you -- you know, how do we disperse forces in the
21 future, especially with two near peers?

22 And in our discussion, we talked about the agile
23 combat employment construct that the Air Force with the
24 Chief of Staff, General CQ Brown, is leading across the
25 United States Air Force. I say it is a little different,

1 what I call big wing airplanes, as opposed to our fighter
2 forces. But the construct holds in and works as well.

3 I would love to be able to make sure that we have
4 opportunities and availability throughout the country to
5 add dilemma to our adversaries, if you will, on where our
6 bomber forces are in the future.

7 Senator Sullivan: Let me be a little more direct on
8 that. As you know, Alaska is very strategically located,
9 and staging options, rotational deployments, the ability to
10 have not just 5th gen fighters but strategic global strike
11 assets based in Alaska that are much closer to Russia, much
12 closer to China, as you and I have discussed, a number of
13 Air Force flag officers have seen this as a strategic
14 concept that we can take advantage of, particularly with
15 regard to great power competition. Do you have any
16 thoughts on that, General, more specifically?

17 General Cotton: Well, I think the bases in Alaska act
18 as great staging bases for bomber deployments. And I think
19 that is the question that you are asking.

20 The point of having a main operating base, if
21 confirmed as Commander of STRATCOM, I would like to make
22 that assessment to see what recommendations I would make to
23 the service. But today, I think as we move forward, I
24 think having it as an operating staging platform is
25 critical for us.

1 I mean, if you recall, we talked about even, you know,
2 ensuring that we have right, you know, runway lengths,
3 etcetera, moving forward.

4 Senator Sullivan: Great. And I am looking forward to
5 working with you. And I look forward to support your
6 confirmation. Let me talk about another topic we had the
7 opportunity to discuss, and that is this idea of a
8 strategic breakout as it relates to ICBM capability with
9 regard to China.

10 The current STRATCOM Commander, Admiral Richard,
11 called that, the recent reports on how quickly China is
12 developing strategic missile capabilities, ICBM
13 capabilities, he called it breathtaking. In your
14 estimation, what is the greatest concern regarding this
15 strategic breakout, and how should we as Armed Services
16 committee be focused on helping you counter or be ready for
17 that very significant threat?

18 General Cotton: Thank you for that question. As
19 recent as 2018, we would describe China as having a minimal
20 deterrence, minimal nuclear deterrence. We would have
21 probably had a conversation stating that it was about
22 regional hegemony. Today, they are building ground based
23 ICBM silos. They have the H-6N, nuclear capable medium
24 bomber, that has a strategic capable launch platform.

25 Senator Sullivan: And just real quick, General, not

1 to interrupt, but to give some context that in April of
2 2021, commercial satellite imagery revealed three new
3 nuclear missile fields in Western China, each with
4 approximately 120 missile silo. So this is incredible, is
5 it not, in terms of the size?

6 General Cotton: It is. It is absolutely incredible
7 and in such a short time, to Admiral Richard's point.

8 Senator Sullivan: Thank you. Thank you, Mr.
9 Chairman.

10 Chairman Reed: Thank you, Senator Sullivan. Senator
11 Kelly, are you ready? Yes.

12 Senator Kelly: Yes, thank you. Thank you, Mr.
13 Chairman. General, great seeing you again this week, and
14 congratulations on your nomination. You know, during our
15 meeting, we briefly discussed your priorities.

16 And if confirmed, for your priorities for modernizing
17 the nuclear triad, the long range standoff weapon, we
18 talked a little bit about that. Our LRSO represents one
19 leg of the triad and replaces the aging AGM 86-B air
20 launched cruise missile.

21 And the Senate version of the defense bill put almost
22 \$1 billion towards continued development of the LRSO. And
23 the LRSO is a unique component of our strategic deterrence
24 in that it is an escalatory weapon, in mine and others'
25 opinions.

1 And when our adversaries see or maybe hear that are
2 long range bombers are on high alert, it gives them some
3 pause, and tensions can be cooled without a bomber ever
4 lifting off.

5 So General, can I get your thoughts on the LRSO, and
6 can I get your commitment, if confirmed, to the continued
7 timely development of this weapon as a vital and de-
8 escalatory component of our nuclear triad?

9 General Cotton: Senator Kelly, thank you for the
10 question. Bottom line, up front, we absolutely need LRSO.
11 The good news is the industry partner is doing incredible
12 work keeping that program on time and on schedule. And I
13 am quite pleased as the Air Component Commander that is the
14 lead MAJCOM, overseeing it now and watching it, seeing what
15 that is doing.

16 So to your point, for our long range standoff bomber
17 capability, that leg of the triad having a viable, credible
18 weapons system is absolutely critical. And the LRSO is
19 that viable, critical weapon that is a de-escalatory
20 weapon, because you are absolutely right, if we are
21 generating bombers, it can send a signal before the first
22 bomber even lifts off.

23 Senator Kelly: Any TRL concerns right now? Are there
24 any things you see that you are worried about as we go
25 forward that you could share here?

1 General Cotton: I have not. I have seen the testing
2 that has been -- that is underway has been very promising.

3 Senator Kelly: Thank you, General. And also during
4 our conversation on Monday, we briefly talked about the
5 tanker fleet. We have, you know, KC-135s in Phoenix. And
6 so I know this is an issue you are familiar with as the
7 head of the Global Strike Command.

8 And my understanding is after talking to the team at
9 the 161st Aerial Refueling Wing, which is a National Guard
10 unit, is that unlike the KC-46, the KC-135 is not EMP
11 hardened. I guess they have some kind of makeshift
12 procedures that they could use, but it is clearly not able
13 to handle electronic magnetic pulse that it might be up
14 against depending on, you know, the location and the
15 mission.

16 A small amount of KC-135s sit on a, you know, 24 hour
17 a day, 7 days a week alert for the strategic defense
18 deterrence mission. How concerned are you about the
19 potential vulnerabilities of this aging tanker?

20 General Cotton: Senator, thank you for the question.
21 The fleet holds, so I am confident that it can get us
22 there. But I am even more confident in what we are seeing
23 in the KC-46 that is being deployed. My fellow MAJCOM
24 Commander, General Minihan, from Air Mobility Command, I
25 know is on top of the procurement and deliveries of the KC-

1 46.

2 For the KC-135, its delivery -- you know, it coexists
3 with the B-52. It was developed to tank the B-52. So it
4 is an aging weapon system. But, Senator, it is still
5 meeting the requirements to be able to get our bombers.

6 Senator Kelly: As we bring KC-46s online, would you
7 agree that KC-135 squadrons that are participating in the
8 deterrence mission should be given a priority to be
9 replaced with the KC-46?

10 General Cotton: Sir, if confirmed, what I would like
11 to do is make an assessment to kind of figure out what are
12 the pros and cons of what those mission sets are doing
13 using a legacy system as opposed to using the new
14 modernized system.

15 Senator Kelly: Well, thank you, General. And thank
16 you, Mr. Chairman.

17 General Cotton: Thank you, Senator Kelly. Senator
18 Hawley, please.

19 Senator Hawley: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. General,
20 good to see you. I appreciated our conversation the other
21 day. Thank you for -- I guess it was just yesterday.
22 Thank you for making time for me. Let's follow up, if we
23 could, on a couple of things we talked about.

24 First of all, Admiral Richard, the current STRATCOM
25 Commander, of course, has testified, and you and I talked

1 about this, that the U.S. needs to think very seriously
2 about the requirements for deterring two major nuclear
3 powers at the same time, China and Russia, of course, and
4 you said the same thing yesterday, which I appreciated.

5 Here is my question, if confirmed, would you commit to
6 having STRATCOM do an analysis of the nuclear force
7 requirements to deter both China and Russia now and into
8 the 2030s?

9 General Cotton: Senator, thanks for the question.
10 And the answer is absolutely yes. I think that is going to
11 be critical for us. I called it earlier. You know, it is
12 the strategic doctrine within STRATCOM. Not necessarily
13 policy.

14 I am talking about the strategic doctrine within
15 STRATCOM to ensure that we can do exactly what you asked.
16 The other piece of that is then the national objectives
17 from the President to make sure we can meet the national
18 objectives as well.

19 Senator Hawley: Very good. Thank you for that. I
20 think that would be hugely, hugely helpful. I asked
21 Admiral Richard earlier this year about China's ability to
22 engage in limited nuclear employment and whether or not
23 that was growing. He said that it was, and he was very
24 emphatic on this point.

25 And he talked about how important it is for the United

1 States to maintain our own limited nuclear options if we
2 are going to be able to deter China in what is our pacing
3 theater. So let me just ask you, do you agree that we need
4 to be concerned about China resorting to limited nuclear
5 employment in a conflict, let's say, over Taiwan?

6 General Cotton: Senator, I think any near-peer
7 nuclear adversary, we have to be concerned about that.

8 Senator Hawley: Would you agree that having our own
9 limited nuclear options, whether that is low yield ICBMs or
10 nuclear arms, sea launched cruise missiles, that having
11 those, maintaining those can help us deter China's limited
12 nuclear use?

13 General Cotton: You know, as I described to the
14 committee, for me, it is about being able to give options
15 to the Commander in Chief.

16 Senator Hawley: Very good. Are there other limited
17 nuclear options that you think that we ought to be
18 pursuing, whether that is in terms of additional
19 capabilities, whether that is about posture changes, in
20 order to deter Chinese and Russian limited nuclear use?

21 General Cotton: Senator, I think that goes along with
22 that study that, if confirmed, you know, taking that really
23 deep study to understand what that outcome and what --
24 because what I want is success at the end of that, so what
25 that would look like. So if confirmed, that would be part

1 of that study.

2 Senator Hawley: Okay, very good. Fair enough. Fair
3 enough. You said to me yesterday, which I appreciated -- I
4 am going to try to make sure I get you quoted correctly and
5 then we talk about it, if we can prevent China from
6 crossing the Taiwan Strait and they know that we have got a
7 viable nuclear deterrent, then it is possible that Beijing
8 might not escalate at all.

9 And I thought that was right on the money. I agree
10 with that 100 percent. And I just want to give you a
11 chance to elaborate that on that here, because it sounds to
12 me like what you are saying is the right approach to
13 deterring a Chinese invasion of Taiwan is denial, is to
14 deny them the ability to do that at first instance, backed
15 up by a very credible nuclear deterrent.

16 So am I, do I have that right, and would you just --
17 would you elaborate on why you think that is the right
18 combination?

19 General Cotton: Senator, I think that the whole
20 reason that we have the strategic deterrence that we have
21 today and the triad that we have today, is to ensure that
22 our adversaries understand that today shouldn't be the day
23 for them. So as we were having that conversation, that is
24 what I meant. I think that they would understand that if
25 you have a credible nuclear deterrent, it would make them

1 think twice before engaging with us.

2 Senator Hawley: And it is in those two things, the
3 conventional denial, combined with the nuclear deterrent,
4 those things have to sit together. Is that fair to say? I
5 mean, they work hand in hand.

6 General Cotton: They work hand in hand. Conventional
7 and nuclear works hand in hand.

8 Senator Hawley: Yes. Let me ask you this just on the
9 question of our own nuclear modernization. Given the pace
10 of China and Russia and their modernization, if confirmed,
11 will you be looking for ways to accelerate our nuclear
12 modernization, and identify those options for Congress so
13 that we can work together to make sure that we push the
14 pace like we need to?

15 General Cotton: If confirmed, I would do that,
16 Senator.

17 Senator Hawley: Very good. Let me just ask you one
18 final thing here in my remaining seconds. The 2018 Nuclear
19 Posture Review, it highlighted the importance of
20 conventional nuclear integration, which we were just
21 touching on, which, of course, is critical for
22 strengthening conventional deterrence against adversaries
23 who may use nuclear force for operational or coercive
24 effects. Has the Department, in your view, made sufficient
25 progress on the conventional nuclear integration since the

1 2018 NPR?

2 General Cotton: I think it has, because in the past
3 we have probably -- we didn't talk about it the way we
4 should have. And I think the integration on being able to
5 talk about going from conventional to nuclear as opposed to
6 doing a pause x, if you will, and then having that
7 conversation. We have made leaps and bounds in that
8 regard.

9 Senator Hawley: Very good. Thank you, General.
10 Thanks again for the conversation yesterday. Thanks for
11 your testimony. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

12 Chairman Reed: Thank you, Senator Hawley. Senator
13 Warren, please.

14 Senator Warren: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And
15 congratulations again on your nomination, General Cotton.
16 So if confirmed, you will head U.S. Strategic Command,
17 which will place you in charge of our nuclear weapons. I
18 would like to continue the conversation that we had in my
19 office about the importance of civilian control.

20 Last week, eight Former Secretaries of Defense and
21 five Former Chairmen of the Joint Chiefs of Staff released
22 an open letter calling for a recommitment to principles of
23 civilian control, which they called, and I want to quote
24 them here, "the bedrock foundation of American democracy."

25 The letter repeatedly emphasizes that policy decisions

1 are ultimately up to the President, civilian political
2 appointees, and Congress. So, General Cotton, can you
3 start us out this morning by saying a word about your views
4 on whether policy decisions, including ones about nuclear
5 programs, should be made by civilians rather than Generals?

6 General Cotton: Policy is made by civilians, ma'am.

7 Senator Warren: And you are committed to that firmly?

8 General Cotton: And I am committed to that firmly.

9 Senator Warren: You know, I appreciate your
10 emphasizing this point. It is the President's job to
11 determine the nuclear policy of the United States. But
12 sometimes people who are in the role that you have been
13 nominated for seem to get confused on that.

14 For example, your predecessor, Admiral Richard, stated
15 publicly that he thought the Biden Administration should
16 adopt the Trump Administration's nuclear policy, and then
17 he and his office actively lobbied Congress against cuts to
18 the nuclear spending programs contained in the Biden
19 Administration's budget, the budget the President put
20 forward and the Secretary of Defense came to this committee
21 to defend.

22 So, General Cotton, if confirmed, do you think it
23 would be appropriate for you or your office to publicly
24 lobby against the positions of the President and the
25 Secretary of Defense?

1 General Cotton: No, ma'am. And you remember we had
2 this conversation. The caveat that we agreed to was, you
3 know, but I would always, especially for this committee, be
4 allowed to offer my best military advice.

5 Senator Warren: And your best military advice. But
6 policy is done by the Generals?

7 General Cotton: Policy is not made by Generals.

8 Senator Warren: All right. Thank you. You know, we
9 are counting on you to give your best military advice to
10 the President, to the Secretary, or to Congress whenever
11 you are called on to do so. But it is wildly inappropriate
12 to try to box in the Commander in Chief on nuclear policy
13 or to try to undermine his budget.

14 Now, one of the big ways that military leaders lobby
15 for more spending, even when it directly contradicts the
16 President's priorities, is through so-called unfunded
17 priorities lists. These are wish lists that are required
18 by law but have grown to be tens of billions of dollars and
19 are being used by the services and the commands to game the
20 budget process.

21 And I don't think they ought to exist at all. General
22 Cotton, do you agree that your Command's top priorities
23 should actually be reflected in the budget you submit
24 rather than in an extras list?

25 General Cotton: Senator, I think our requirements

1 lists that we present should be included and covers down.
2 And if our budget is short, as the Commander, my job is to
3 ensure that I can execute my mission with the dollars that
4 I have been given.

5 Senator Warren: All right, so I want to make sure I
6 understand you here, because you are saying your priorities
7 should be in the budget and extras should be just that
8 extras, not your priorities. Is that right?

9 General Cotton: As a MAJCOM Commander today, my
10 priorities are in my budget.

11 Senator Warren: Good. I like to hear that. Look, it
12 is no secret that both President Biden and I want to reduce
13 the role of nuclear weapons in our National Security
14 strategy. Spending \$364 billion just on nuclear weapons
15 over the next ten years is unaffordable.

16 But I think even my colleagues who disagree with me on
17 nuclear policy would agree that we should be asking DOD to
18 write budgets that reflect their actual priorities. And
19 that is what it is I am driving for here and want to make
20 sure that we do. I look forward to working with you,
21 General.

22 General Cotton: Thank you, ma'am.

23 Senator Warren: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

24 Chairman Reed: Thank you very much, Senator Warren.
25 General, thank you for your testimony, for your service,

1 and we look forward to rapidly bringing your nomination to
2 a successful conclusion. Thank you very much.

3 General Cotton: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

4 Chairman Reed: With that, I will adjourn the hearing.

5 [Whereupon, at 11:41 a.m., the hearing was adjourned.]

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