



DOCUMENTATION

Document No. 1. Selections from Hearing to Consider the Nomination of General Anthony J. Cotton, United States Air Force, for Reappointment to the Grade of General and to Be Commander of United States Strategic Command, before the Senate Armed Services Committee, September 15, 2022¹

INTRODUCTION

Good morning, Chairman Reed, Ranking Member Inhofe, and distinguished members of the committee. It is truly an honor to appear before you today as a nominee to be the next Commander of United States Strategic Command (CDRUSSTRATC). I am very grateful to the President, Secretary of Defense, and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff for their trust and confidence in me for this nomination.

We must deter the pacing challenge of China and address the acute threats presented by Russia. It is both our conventional and nuclear capabilities, along with a crucial support from our allies and partners, that underpin our strategic deterrence. Our Nation's nuclear forces continue to be safe, secure, reliable, and effective. As we bring the B-21 Raider, the Columbia Class Ballistic Missile Submarine, Sentinel Intercontinental Ballistic Missile (ICBM) Weapon System, and Long Range Standoff (LRSO) Weapon online, we will continue to ensure the credibility of deterrence for decades to come. Underpinning all of this is our nuclear command, control, and communication systems known as NC3. While the current system is secure and resilient, modernization and sustainment of this capability is just as important as the weapons system platforms themselves. If confirmed, I will use my authorities to ensure that NC3 systems continue to outpace the threat.

We will always build in margin. We will always have hedge. The mission of United States Strategic Command (USSTRATCOM) is to deter adversaries and employ force to guarantee the security of our Nation and our allies. If confirmed, I will work with relevant agencies across the U.S. government and within the Department of Defense, collaborate closely with civilian leaders, and directly with my fellow Combatant Commanders as we monitor the global threats and execute operations in accordance with the *National Defense Strategy* (NDS). I commit to commanding a resilient Joint Force capable of conducting multi-domain operations focused on deterring aggression, and if necessary, defending this Nation. I look forward to working with Congress and the members of this committee to address the strategic challenges of this great Nation.

ON THE SEA-LAUNCHED CRUISE MISSILE (SLCM)

If confirmed, my job is to be able to present the decision maker, the President of the United States, with a wide variety of options to be able to meet challenges that we have seen to be warranted due to a requirement. In this case, I would want to be able to present the

¹ The content was lightly edited for consistency and clarity. The headlines were not a part of the testimony or Advance Policy Questions.



maximum amount—the maximum capabilities that are available. When it comes to SLCM, I must admit that I would like to be able to do, like my predecessors before, to make an assessment on that. If it meets—if it is able to meet that capability gap that is there, I would like to be able to see that and assess that so I can make my best military assessment on the specific weapon system itself because I am not familiar with that weapon system on the specifics of what it can do with the capabilities to close the capability gap that we might perceive.

So, the Chairman, the Vice Chairman, and the current CDRUSSTRATC absolutely understand where they are on the endorsement of continuing. [...] From my perspective, I absolutely understand that they are looking at the capability gap to be able to do that. The only thing that is different between them and I is I have yet to do an assessment on the weapons system itself. But absolutely understand where they are on being able to have a capability gap that is filled that they have seen. I have seen that capability gap as well, and I endorse the fact that we need to fill that capability gap.

ON A TRIPOLAR NUCLEAR ENVIRONMENT

The current force that we have today, we are ready to execute today. What I would say is, if confirmed, and I know this is continually happening today, is we must evaluate what the additional risks are and what the adversary is doing to ensure two things. First, to evaluate to make sure that the nuclear strategy that we have within USSTRATCOM can meet the objectives, the national objectives that are presented before us. So the first thing I would do, if confirmed, is to ensure—because sir, the first time since 1945, the first time for us as a Nation, we have two near-peer adversaries. We have always put together a nuclear defense strategy that has one nuclear power. We are going to have to roll up our sleeves to ensure that we are doing everything we are that we can strategy wise with Strategic Air Command—excuse me, between USSTRATCOM to ensure that we are meeting the objectives to be able to have and take care of two near peers. First time in history that we have ever seen that.

What is different is two near peers that actually act differently. From a doctrines perspective, we understand Russian nuclear theory and nuclear doctrine. Minimal deterrence was what we thought of when we talked of China as recent as 2018. We have seen the incredible expansiveness of what they are doing with their nuclear force, which does not, in my opinion, reflect minimal deterrence. They have a bona fide triad now. So we are going to have to understand more deeply the Chinese nuclear strategy.

The challenges facing USSTRATCOM are unprecedented. For the first time in history, the Nation will soon face the need to deter two nuclear capable competitors who will have the capability to unilaterally escalate a conflict to any level of violence, in any domain, worldwide, at any time and with any instrument of national power. The 2022 NDS directs the Department to act urgently to sustain and strengthen deterrence, with the People's Republic of China (PRC) as our most consequential strategic competitor and the pacing challenge for the Department. Russia also poses acute threats, as illustrated by its brutal and unprovoked invasion of Ukraine. This strategic environment requires an integrated

deterrence approach from the Joint Force, working seamlessly across warfighting domains, theaters, spectrum of conflict, other instruments of U.S. national power in our network of alliances and partnerships.

The current program of record is the absolute minimum USSTRATCOM requires to provide effective strategic deterrence today. As the threats from Russia and China continue to grow, we must continuously evaluate our nuclear force structure, capacity, and capability to ensure strategic deterrence remains credible and effective. Any identified nuclear capacity and capability gaps should be addressed as soon as possible to provide the Joint Force an effective military capability able to achieve Presidential objectives and to demonstrate national resolve in response to growing threats.

This is a point of continual reevaluation. As the world becomes more diverse and threatening, we must continuously evaluate our nuclear force structure, capacity, and capability to ensure strategic deterrence remains credible. Today, with our current programs of record, we are in a good place. We are modernizing our systems and transitioning our nuclear forces and capabilities to ensure our security. I believe more frequent assessments than the current four-year cycle will be required to ensure we can identify, mitigate, and properly address any gaps in a timely manner, as necessary. If confirmed, I will make a commander's assessment on the entire strategic deterrence portfolio to ensure our requirements are sufficient to address the threat.

ON NUCLEAR WEAPONS MODERNIZATION

I think the challenge of USSTRATCOM is to ensure that we sustain legacy systems as we transition to the modern—to our modernized systems. That is going to be key for us. In order to do that, it is going to take the full power of government to be able to pull that together, especially when we are talking about the central weapons system and the Columbia and all of the five that I have under my purview as a current Joint Forces Air Component Commander working for the CDRUSSTRATCOM. So being able to do that, sir, I think a couple of the key things are going to be required from us. We are going to need stable, predictable, and adequate, and timely funding. My job, if confirmed as the CDRUSSTRATCOM, is to ensure that we also have stable requirements. Because what we are going to see, and what I think is going to be great for us with the new modernized systems, is the fact that we are by design building in a system that we know will last for decades because that is built into the system. So the modularity that we will see will be able to keep pace with the threats that we will see in the future. What we need to do in the meantime, though, is to sustain the legacy system that still—that is still safe, secure, and effective as we make that transition.

As we are seeing the modernization programs within the nuclear portfolio, I would venture to say that it is probably being seen across the Department of Defense, but in particular for the nuclear portfolio. Even as we are seeing the industry partners do the Herculean efforts and work in moving the programs along at a great pace, what we are now finding is the realities of supply chain limitations and supply chain shortfalls. We had a great discussion and a good example—or some components that are U.S. made components with

U.S. made subcomponents that are still taking what would be on average, maybe 10 days to source, that are now taking up to 90 days to source. So by definition, if you look at what we need to do in regards to maintaining a flow and schedule to get our new modernized systems online, you know, if you introduce that into the flow, those delays right there cause me concern. And I think it is going to take everyone to understand how we can close the gap on supply chain management and ensure that we can get the supplies to the industry partners that are trying to modernize this force.

I fully support modernizing our strategic nuclear deterrent capabilities across the triad, the supporting stockpile and infrastructure, Nuclear Command, Control, and Communications, and our Integrated Tactical Warning/Attack Assessment capabilities. Many of these efforts are just-in-time with little to no margin for delay.

I support the need to sustain and modernize our nuclear triad and its supporting infrastructure, along with the continued development of current and future capabilities required to deter strategic attack in all domains against the U.S., Allies, and partners.

The current program of record is the absolute minimum USSTRATCOM requires to provide effective strategic deterrence. The 2022 *Nuclear Posture Review* (NPR) affirms previous NPR findings that the nuclear triad and the associated nuclear command, control, and communications system remain the most effective way to maintain strategic deterrence against existing and future threats. Stable, consistent, and on-time funding is critical both to sustain the legacy nuclear triad and to execute nuclear modernization programs on schedule in order to deliver the future nuclear deterrence capabilities required to address rapidly expanding national security threats.

Nuclear modernization continues to be a top priority for the Department of Defense. The nuclear triad has credibly deterred adversaries and assured Allies for more than six decades. To mitigate the simultaneous transition risk, we must maintain and sustain our existing nuclear enterprise until replacement systems are fully fielded. Doing this provides needed triad flexibility and offsets risks resulting from unanticipated issues or emergent challenges. Where possible, we must pursue every opportunity to accelerate modernization.

While today's stockpile is safe, secure, and militarily effective, concerns exist as many replacement programs are just-in-time or late to need. Even though the nuclear modernization plan sequences the components in a logical and prioritized manner, stockpile and weapon system modernizations must execute on time to address this concern. Continued stable, consistent, and on-time funding is critical to delivering the future nuclear deterrence capabilities required to address rapidly expanding national security threats.

ON DETERRENCE

Integrated deterrence is a whole of government opportunity. And in a way I describe that is, it is—I remember growing up and using the dime theory when I was a young lieutenant, but it is using all instruments of power within the government, the United States, to afford us a deterrence factor that makes it, so we never have to get to the day where I have to execute the mission, if confirmed, from USSTRATCOM. Strategic deterrence to me composes more

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

I absolutely believe that our nuclear deterrent force held [after Russia's attack in Ukraine]. We did not see Russia do anything with our native—or our NATO partners. The rhetoric may have—we may have heard the rhetoric, but I think at the end of the day, Russia and China both understand that we have a strong, resilient nuclear force that is offering deterrence to ourselves and extended deterrence to our allies.

ON NC3

I will start with NC3. I know there are members of the committee that say it is the fourth of the triad, right. It is the quad. I have heard folks say that. I call it the tapestry. In my opening statement, you heard me discuss and talk about, it is just as important as the platforms that we are talking about modernizing, and that is absolutely true. The good news is it is still a—it is a resilient system today. What I like, having over 36 years in this business, is the conversations that people like yourself, and others also see it as just as important as the—as a weapon systems that we often talk about. If confirmed, I would use my authorities. As everyone's aware, the to the Nuclear Command, Control and Communications Enterprise Center or the NC3 Enterprise Center that is located within USSTRATCOM and the CDRUSSTRATCOM is having kind of oversight, delegated oversight authorities to be able to kind of make sure that we as a Department are looking to ensure that we are modernizing with Next Gen technologies. I call it NC2 over assured comms to ensure that we have the state of the art NC3 systems that we need for not only today, not only mid-term, but the future. And that is going to be absolutely critical for us, because I guarantee you that I want to ensure that we always outpace our adversaries, who are also paying attention to our NC3 systems.

ON THE IMPORTANCE OF THE NUCLEAR TRIAD

For every operational plan that the Department of Defense has, it relies on the fact that strategic deterrence is going to hold to allow those other missions to accomplish. If that does not happen, that is when you see that deterrence fails. The way that we accomplish that is through our triad of having bombers who are recordable if warranted, having submarines that can be used, or having ICBMs that are readily available for the decision maker to do that. Our adversaries understand that and know that we can hold them at bay. That is that bedrock and foundation that is so critically important for us and this Nation.

ON MISSILE DEFENSE

I think when we talk about missile defense, especially with the not only rogue nations, but now with two adversaries, near-peer adversaries that have different capacities and

capabilities, I would agree that for the protection of the homeland, more options is better than less.

Missile defense and nuclear deterrence are both critical elements of Integrated Deterrence. The nuclear deterrent is foundational to deterring strategic attack and the use of nuclear weapons against the U.S. and our Allies and partners. Missile defense diminishes adversary confidence that a missile attack against the U.S. or our Allies or partners will be successful. A robust, credible layered missile defense system, paired with our conventional and nuclear forces, enhances the ability to deter strategic attacks, deny benefits, and impose costs against any potential adversary.

Space-based interceptors may provide the opportunity to engage offensive missiles when they are most vulnerable – during the initial boost phase of flight, and before countermeasures are deployed.

Boost-phase intercept concepts have great potential, and the Department has been exploring how to resolve the challenges associated with threat system engagement at this point in the launch sequence. The need for persistent space and terrestrial sensor integration, pursuit of kill technologies like High Energy Laser/Directed Energy, non-kinetic weapons, and the policies permitting rapid engagement, are important to successful boost-phase intercept.

If confirmed, I would support the Department's efforts to examine concepts and technologies for both space-based and boost-phase intercept programs. Operational concepts, plans, and policies would be developed in parallel as space-based and boost-phased intercept programs are potentially designed and fielded.

ON HARD AND DEEPLY BURRIED TARGETS

The B61-11 gravity bomb is effective against a very specific subset of hard and deeply buried facilities. Retiring the B61-11 requires addressing these targets using other means compatible with modern delivery platforms. These means must be effective across a range of target types and scenarios, and adaptable to meet evolving adversary threats. If confirmed, I look forward to working with DoD to address the operational concerns created by the B61-11 retirement.

ON THE IMPORTANCE OF THE NUCLEAR INFRASTRUCTURE

There is nothing more important than the relationship that we have with Department of Energy, and specifically the National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA). As we talked throughout the hearing in regards to the modernization programs, they are interwoven—the platforms mean absolutely nothing if I don't have the assets available for the platforms. So to your question on infrastructure, you are absolutely—not only the Nevada locations, but all of NNSA locations are in dire need of upgrades in their infrastructure that dates back to Manhattan Project times. We are living in a different world today. As I keep saying, two near-peer adversaries, nuclear adversaries. We are going to have to ensure that the infrastructure

are upgraded and are at the capacity and capability to meet the needs of the warfighter. You mentioned I as only two legs. I have modernization programs that are going to need new systems for them. Can't do that without the credible work of the men and women that that make up the NNSA. But they are going to need infrastructure that will allow them to be able to do that type of work.

ON THE LRSO

Bottom line, up front, we absolutely need LRSO. The good news is the industry partner is doing incredible work keeping that program on time and on schedule. And I am quite pleased as the Air Component Commander that is the lead Major Command, overseeing it now and watching it, seeing what that is doing. So to your point, for our long range standoff bomber capability, that leg of the triad having a viable, credible weapons system is absolutely critical. And the LRSO is that viable, critical weapon that is a de-escalatory weapon, because you are absolutely right, if we are generating bombers, it can send a signal before the first bomber even lifts off.

Yes, development and on-time delivery of the LRSO cruise missile and its associated W80-4 warhead is essential to maintain an effective and credible air-delivered nuclear deterrent, especially as adversaries deploy advanced digital air-defense systems. The current Air-Launched Cruise Missile was deployed at the height of the Cold War to evade Soviet-era analog defenses and will be nearly 50 years old when LRSO is fielded.

ON ICBMS

No, I do not support changing our current ICBM alert level. The ICBM force provides the Nation with a responsive, highly reliable, and cost-effective deterrent capability which is crucial to the effectiveness of our nuclear triad. The 2022 NPR affirmed our ICBM alert posture is appropriate and contributes to strategic stability. Any attempt to defeat the hardened and geographically dispersed ICBM force requires an adversary to execute a complex strategic attack consisting of hundreds of weapons. An alert ICBM force reduces any incentives a potential adversary might have to execute a disarming first strike; this cost-benefit calculus enhances deterrence.