

Strategic Deterrent Coalition

U.S. National Security First Principle: An Effective Nuclear Deterrent Force

The first principle of United States national security policy must be maintaining a robust, effective nuclear deterrent force to assure our safety and security.

For more than seven decades, nuclear weapons and multiple means to deliver them worldwide with immediacy have been the successful cornerstone of U.S. national security strategy. Today, more than ever, enforcing deterrence with nuclear weapons is necessary to counter increasing nuclear weapons of peer competitors and the growing risks of others seeking nuclear status.

Nuclear-based deterrence succeeds when a potential attacker knows we have both the capability and the will to respond with such overwhelming force that an attack would be unthinkable.

Enforcing deterrence today requires modern, discriminate nuclear weapons and modern, effective strategic bombers, ICBMs and SLBMs, underpinned by a robust and resilient nuclear command and control system. Together, this triad of delivery systems continues to be the best combination to provide us with multiple attack options and greatly complicate the attack plans of any adversary, making their success impossible.

Existential threats are growing. Russia and China are modernizing their nuclear arsenals and developing new capabilities to deliver nuclear weapons. Russia holds a tenfold advantage in non-strategic nuclear weapons and repeatedly threatens to employ nuclear weapons against NATO in support of its aggression in Ukraine. China's development of nuclear long-range bombers and silo-based ICBMs along with its regional belligerence has increased tensions within and beyond the Indo Pacific. North Korea provokes the West with nuclear threats and the unrestrained expansion of its nuclear program. Iran continues to intimidate and threaten the Middle East and beyond and seeks nuclear weapons over time.

Our nuclear-based deterrence has been effective in providing extended deterrence to our allies and friends, creating an umbrella of deterrence for their security. But extended deterrence will only work if we possess an effective nuclear arsenal and the triad of delivery systems supplemented with dual-capable fighter aircraft. Without our credible security commitment, some of our allies and more of our potential adversaries could contemplate building their own nuclear force. Our extended deterrence supports non-proliferation thus slowing the spread of nuclear weapons.

We face a dangerous and uncertain security landscape as never before. The durability of strategic deterrence in a tri-polar world is untested. Consequently, we must continue to modernize our strategic forces to ensure our nuclear enterprise is effective, resilient and adaptable to meet whatever existential challenges emerge in the coming decades. Any reduction of nuclear weapons or delivery systems based on substituting conventional capabilities or other means of deterrence greatly increases risks to our national security.

For the foreseeable future our nuclear weapons and delivery systems must remain the foundation of our national security strategy.