

# 2022 Carnegie International Nuclear Policy Conference

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## Parsing the 2022 U.S. Nuclear Posture Review

### Speakers

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### Moderator

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**James Acton:** Ladies and gentlemen, good evening, good afternoon. Welcome to the final session of this year's Carnegie International Nuclear Policy Conference. I can assure you I am more glad than you are that it's the final session.

[laughter]

I couldn't think of a better final session to end with. It's an honor to have administration officials here discussing the newly released NPR, three particularly distinguished public servants, and on a personal level, three people I regard as friends. We're delighted to see them all in the administration in these positions.

On my far right from the Department of Energy, the Honorable Corey Hinderstein who is the Deputy Administrator for Defense Nuclear Non-Proliferation within the National Nuclear Security Administration. Next to her, from the State Department is Alex Bell, the Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary in the Bureau of Arms Control Verification and Compliance.

Then right next to me, from the Department of Defense, Richard Johnson who's the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Nuclear Encountering Weapons of Mass Destruction policy.

Unusually, for this conference, Richard is going to make a five-minute success of opening remarks before we launch into Q&A. As with every other session, you can put questions on the app, which I will put to them. Richard, by the way, your slide is ready and they're waiting for you to verb and cue it whenever you want it.

**Richard Johnson:** They can put it up now if they'd like. Great. Well, good afternoon everybody. I have to say it's a real honor to be able to speak again here at the Carnegie Conference. It's been a life goal of mine to be able to speak at this

conference, and I get to do it twice in one day. That will never happen again, I'm sure, but thanks again, and thanks to all of you for your attention to this important topic.

I'll give a very quick introduction to the NPR, which, as we've been saying for some time, and I'll be happy to say again, the 2022 Nuclear Posture Review takes what we would say is a comprehensive and balanced approach to defending vital national security interests. It strikes a balance between maintaining a safe, secure, and effective nuclear deterrent, strong, incredible extended deterrents, but also taking those steps needed to reduce the risk of nuclear war and the global salience of nuclear weapons.

The NPR recognizes that the international security environment has deteriorated since 2018 as shown by the growing salience of nuclear weapons in the strategies of our competitors. Russia's invasion of Ukraine is a stark reminder of nuclear risk in contemporary conflict, and the PRC's nuclear modernization and expansion presents us with new risks and uncertainties.

These developments mean that in the coming years, we will, for the first time, need to deter two major nuclear-armed competitors, presenting new dilemmas for both strategic deterrents and regional warfighting. At the same time, both North Korea and Iran continue to present deterrence challenges of their own. With this backdrop, the NPR concluded that the fundamental role of nuclear weapons is to deter nuclear attack.

The document also affirms three broader sets of roles. Number one, deterring strategic attack, two, assuring allies and partners, and three, achieving US objectives if deterrence fails. To enable these roles, the NPR establishes a strategy that relies on nuclear weapons to deter all forms of strategic attacks to include nuclear employment of any scale, as well as high-consequence attacks of a strategic nature using non-nuclear means.

Any adversary use of nuclear weapons would fundamentally alter the nature of a conflict. While this NPR retains a very high bar for nuclear employment, the approach described in the document also complicates adversary decision-making, and it reflects a sensible and stabilizing approach in a dynamic threat environment. Our declaratory policy states, as you all have memorized by now, as long as nuclear weapons exist, the fundamental role of nuclear weapons is to deter nuclear attack on the United States, our allies, and partners.

The United States would only consider the use of nuclear weapons in extreme circumstances to defend the vital interests of the United States, or allies, or its partners. As you know, the NPR, for the first time ever, is nested within our national defense strategy and recognizes that nuclear weapons undergird all of our national defense priorities and that no other element of US military power can replace the unique deterrent effects that nuclear weapons provide.

We think the NPR's approach to integrated deterrents is pragmatic and based on a clear-eyed understanding of the attributes of nuclear weapons and shaping an adversaries decision calculus. It recognizes that for the foreseeable future, nuclear weapons will continue to provide unique deterrent effects that no other element of

US military power can provide. Other non-nuclear capabilities may have the potential to complement but not replace nuclear deterrents in specific circumstances.

Now, the NPR also recognizes that deterrence alone will not reduce nuclear dangers. As part of our commitment to reducing the role of nuclear weapons globally, the NPR renews the US commitment to arms control and non-proliferation as vital elements of our balanced approach. US leadership in these areas is critical. Development in the security environment make arm control and non-proliferation both more challenging and more pressing, though we understand that we cannot pursue arms control without a willing partner operating in good faith.

As many of you know, the NPR also announced the retirement of the B83-1 nuclear gravity bomb, and the cancellation of the nuclear sea-launched cruise missile or SLCMN because they are no longer required to meet our deterrents needs. The NPR recognizes that both our nuclear triad and our nuclear command control and communication systems are operating beyond their original design life, risking system effectiveness, reliability, and availability.

We are committed to modernizing the nuclear triad and having nuclear capabilities that are tailored to regional nuclear deterrents and to modernizing our NC3 systems. As a key element of the NDS goal of building enduring advantages, we are also committed to working with the Department of Energies, National Nuclear Security Administration to field modern nuclear infrastructure enabled by a world-class workforce and equipped with modern tools that are capable of pacing current and emerging threats.

The US Global Alliance Network is a military center of gravity. The NDS requires strengthening security architectures in key regions to fully leverage allied and partner capabilities to deter, and if necessary, defeat aggression. Extended deterrence is foundational to this approach, and allies and partners can be confident that the United States is willing and able to deter the full range of strategic threats that they face, whether in crisis or conflict.

In closing, we fully recognize the enduring importance of a nuclear policy that balances the evolving demands of deterrents with our goal of taking steps to reduce the role of nuclear weapons in our national security strategies, and thereby reduce the salience of nuclear weapons globally. We will work with a sense of urgency to reduce the dangers of nuclear war, which would have catastrophic consequences for the United States and for the world. Development in the security environment make these goals both more challenging and more pressing to pursue. Thank you.

**Acton:** Thanks, Richard. I read the Nuclear Posture Review last night and this morning, and I have to say, firstly, thank you for writing a document that it was possible to read while organizing a 400-person conference over the course of 24 hours. One of the things that struck me the most was it was a document in which I think the fundamental tension in US nuclear strategy really came to the fore.

For me, the basic question of US nuclear strategy has always been, should the United States posture itself to try to undermine Russia's and China's nuclear arsenals, or do we not accept mutual vulnerability, not just as a condition, but

something we're actually not going to try and escape. This is a long-running tension, but it seemed to me to really emerge in this document.

There was language that really did seem to accept mutual vulnerability with both Russia and China. The document says that a nuclear war could not be won and must never be fought, and that's applied to both Russia as well as China. The document talks about strengthening strategic stability with Russia and China. That was certainly in the Obama administration, NPR's officials said that was code for mutual vulnerability.

The document also says that, in a nuclear war, and I quote, "The United States would seek to end any conflict at the lowest level of damage possible and on the best achievable terms." I cannot interpret that statement any other way than that the war plans have the option of large-scale counter-full strikes against Russia and China to attract their nuclear forces as much as possible. My question is this, does the US accept mutual vulnerability with Russia and China, or do we actually seek to try to escape that in the worst possible scenario by trying to attract their nuclear forces?

**Johnson:** That's an easy question. Now, in all seriousness, look, the document does not use the term mutual vulnerability as in regard to the PRC. We've talked about this for many, many years when it comes to Russia. I think the reality though is that the PRC nuclear expansion and the changes that this bring with us a lot of complexities that you've pointed out to us. In the near term, we're going to have to factor this into a lot of different things, including, frankly, into our arms control approaches with Russia.

We are looking at this, we recognize that as the security environment evolves we may need to consider a nuclear strategy and force adjustments that would help us to assure our ability to achieve deterrent objectives for the PRC. Now, even as we continue to do so for Russia, we're not going to use the term mutual vulnerability. We're not using it. We're not saying that that's the case. We are saying, though, however, we're extremely concerned at the expansion that we're seeing.

I will say that I'm extremely concerned about the potential unconstrained growth of facade material production in the PRC, particularly with the development of fast breeder reactors and reprocessing plants, and the lack of transparency and the lack of reporting that we see in plutonium from the PRC, unlike any of the other P5. At the end of the day, and I think senior leaders have said this already, we're not saying that we need necessarily pace numerically to a PRC and a Russia together.

That's not the approach that we're taking. We are recognizing that we are in a different moment. We're in a moment where we are, for the first time, dealing with two nuclear competitors in the near term, maybe not immediately, but in the near term. We're going to have to figure out how to deal with that. I do think that as we move forward in NPR implementation, including the development of new nuclear employment guidance, we're going to have to address some of these issues head on, but I don't think it's as clear as a numbers issue. I think it has to do with a lot more than that.

**Acton:** Let me ask you a bit more then about-- You said the NPR doesn't recognize mutual vulnerability with China. It doesn't, the term mutual vulnerability is not used in that document. Equally, it's much more noticeable to me compared to other documents how Russia and China are treated together in this document. There's a long-running debate about-- I'm quoting Jeffrey Lewis here, I don't see him in the room, so his head won't explode.

Jeffrey has often framed this as, do we think about China as a big North Korea or a little Russia? In this document, it's a partner of Russia. The phrase nuclear war must not be one and can never be fought applies to Russia and China. You talk about strengthening strategic stability with Russia and China. In that sense, you treat Russia and China together as a group. I'm sure that there will be some people in China who end up watching this panel. Do you want Chinese leaders to think that you are now treating them as a peer competitor like Russia and that the US has been willing to talk about the mutual vulnerability before?

**Johnson:** Maybe I'll say a few things, and I actually would love to have my colleagues weigh in on this as well. Again, I think that the demonstrative technical development in the Chinese nuclear expansion is something that, yes, we are highlighting in this document, and it's not just something we're highlighting in the Nuclear Posture Review. We're concerned about this.

The National Defense Strategy talks about China as a pasting challenge for the Department of Defense, period. It also says that Russia is an acute threat. We do have to deal with some of these things together at the same time. I think we're very clear that the approaches in terms of how to address this are going to be different with Russia than they're going to be with China.

With Russia, we have many, many decades of experience of doing arms control discussions with them, negotiations, and the development of verifiable treaties. We do not have that experience with Beijing. Our approach that has been laid out in the document, and I can even note some of the things that we say about it, is that we're looking at things like talking about military deconfliction, crisis communication, information sharing, mutual restraint, and of course, risk reduction.

These are all things that are frankly the foundational elements of arms and coal that we have to get there. To round a way to answer your question, I would say, yes, I think there's many places in the document where we talk about this issue of Russia and China together and what that means for us in terms of a broader deterrence approach, but the actual approaches that we take with them bilaterally are going to be slightly, perhaps, quite different. I don't know, Alex, if you had anything you wanted to add to that.

**Alexandra Bell:** Other than to agree with you furiously, we know China's a problem. We see this buildup coming at a precipitous rate. We'll have the CNPR coming out shortly with revised numbers of increasing concerns about the direction that China's heading in but you don't need me to tell that. We had a great **[unintelligible 00:14:50]** panel here yesterday. You can find these new silo fields using open-source information and commercially available satellite imagery. They're not windmills. They are clearly silos and we have questions about that.

We want to talk to the Chinese about where they're going, and how this buildup conflicts with their own stated policies and doctrines. We understand that there's a longer road to go down. We've been working on these issues with Russians for 60 years, and as everyone can see for themselves, it's still very difficult all the time. We're going to have to build to a place where we're having the kinds of levels of conversation that we need to talk about the future of mutually beneficial understandings that can build predictability and stability in the Indo-Pacific.

We think that starts with risk reduction. We think it starts with crisis communication. We also want to make it clear that China has an obligation to be in this conversation. There's no asterisks in the NPT in Article 6 that says China doesn't have to do anything until China feels like it. They have the same obligations that we do to engage in this conversation but there's work we can be doing internally, continue to build up the capacity that we have in the Department of Defense and NNSA and the Department of State to deal with this problem.

We need more China expertise as we go forward. We also need to familiarize Asia regionalists with an issue that they haven't really had to deal with or focus on all that much, which means a broader conversation here, a broader conversation with our allies going to the region, talking about the threats that we see from this space, which is something that we're actively doing. There's work to be done, but I think what you see in the NPR is a reflection of a growing challenge that has to be met.

**Acton:** Well, let's dig into the reasons then why China is expanding its nuclear arsenal. There's a debate within the non-governmental community about, is China expanding its long-range forces. Let's put the regional forces aside for a moment, though they're extremely important. Is China expanding its long-range forces because it's genuinely afraid of a first strike from the US or does it have more offensive aims?

US officials in private dialogues, and sometimes publicly, have said to China, "No, you don't need to worry. We're not going after your nuclear forces. Homeland ballistic missile defenses aren't against you." I'm not Chinese, but if I were a Chinese leader, when I would read a statement in the Nuclear Posture Review, like the United States would seek to end any conflict at the lowest level of damage possible, on the best achievable terms, I'm thinking, you guys are planning to counterforce first strike me with everything you got. Do you think that's an unreasonable conclusion for Chinese leaders to draw?

**Johnson:** I think if the statement stands is what it says, and it's frankly reflective of longstanding US policy, which is that we are not-- the fundamental role of nuclear weapons is to deter nuclear attacks. We're only talking about nuclear employment in those necessary circumstances where we have to restore deterrents. That's what that phrase is really referring to is nobody wants to use nuclear weapons, or employ nuclear weapons in ways that are unnecessary. That lowest level of violence is exactly what that phrase means.

We have been communicating to Beijing through these diplomatic channels, through military channels if we ever have the opportunity to do so, and sometimes we do, and certainly, through things like track 1 and F and track 2s, that, "Look, we are--" also fundamentally, as the NDS talks about, we are interested in making sure that

we protect the homeland and that we deter strategic attacks not only on the United States but from our allies and partners.

When we see some of the activities that are taking place in the region right now from the PRC, not just their nuclear activities, by the way, but the activities that take place, for example, in the South China Sea, the developments that we see in their Navy and the like, things that are somewhat outside of my portfolio.

You put all this together and you have to raise some concerns about whether or not this is necessarily just a response to concerns about US missile defense. It doesn't seem like that is the case. I can tell you, without getting into a lot of detail, that we spent a lot of time in the Nuclear Posture Review working group. Alex and I spent many, many hours together in a lovely conference room getting a lot of information from all of our analysts about why we think the Chinese are doing this and what they're up to.

At the end of the day, it appears to us that this is not just about missile defense. This is not just about certain perceptions about the US. Obviously, if there are areas where we can, through risk reduction channels and the like, to be able to communicate that, to explain that, and to alleviate those concerns, of course, that's the thing that we would seek to do. We would like for Beijing to pick up the phone and to be able to talk to us about those things. Unfortunately, we haven't really seen that happen in the past, and we hope that that will change. I should also say, James, you've mentioned several times the statement about a nuclear war must never be won and can never be fought. Well, the Chinese also signed up to that statement. There was a P5 statement on this. They agree as does Russia, as does France, as does the United Kingdom. I could ask the same question back to the PRC of, "If you agree with that statement, why are you doing the developments that you're doing in terms of your ICBMs? Why are we seeing the development of a nascent nuclear triad? Please explain to us."

One of the things that we pride ourselves on, and I know that this community appropriately so prides us to be even more transparent, but we're the most transparent of any of the nuclear powers about what we're doing. We publish a nuclear posture review. We have these very detailed discussions. We've got stockpile numbers out there. We have big budgetary discussions in Congress about what does our program look like. I think that our colleagues in these other communities and in these other countries have a pretty good understanding of the things that we're trying to do.

We just do not have that understanding from the PRC. To a certain extent, we don't have it from Russia either, though, at least, we do have a history of discussions in arms control and in treaty implementation where we have some better understandings.

**Action:** You are entirely right, of course, about the degree of US transparency. That brings us onto programmatics, and I want to bring Corey into the discussion. The W93 warhead for Trident ballistic missiles is going to be the biggest warhead program that the NNSA has taken on in a while. It gets literally one mention in the NPR even though it's a multimillion-dollar program, and that's in a graphic, so it's not even searchable.

[laughter]

**Johnson:** Sorry.

**Acton:** The US already has two warheads for Trident missiles. There's the 76 and the 88. The former has been life extended, the latter's being life extended. Most of the discussion around the new warhead, the W93, has been about the way in which it supports the UK Replacement Warhead program.

There was a pretty unusual UK government lobbying effort around that on the Hill. My question to you is this, Corey, is the W93 basically an act of strategic charity that the UK can't get its act together with its warhead, so we're basically going to help it build a new one, or if the UK was like France and could do warhead itself, does the W93 make enough of a direct improvement to US security that we would be building the W93 anyway, even if the UK didn't need them?

**Corey Hinderstein:** First of all, James, thank you for the invitation to be here and to represent NNSA on this panel. I appreciate your efforts to draw me into the conversation. I was hoping to just hide on the side for most of this discussion, and I'd be happy to do so. Don't feel the stress to bring me in.

In fact, with that, I'm actually going to turn some of your question back to Richard.

[laughter]

Smart, right? This is why they invited me. Fundamentally, we contribute on the Nuclear Weapons Council to the planning and programmatic planning, and we have a voice and a presence and a large one. In the end, decisions are made by the Department of Defense, and our job at NNSA is to deliver on the programmatic requirements, which is where you started this conversation.

As far as how the W93 fits into the overall strategic environment and how it may complement, or supplement the existing 76 and the 88, I think I'm going to let Richard talk about that in a little bit more detail, but I will just say that this is, in fact, the first new program that n NNSA has launched in a long time. We have muscles that have not been exercised in this way in a while. We have infrastructure that we need to support it.

That being said, and the fact that over its lifetime, it is a multi-billion dollar program, we're also approaching this in a phased approach. I think we have folks from defense programs here as well. The idea is to make sure that if we're going to be able to do this, A, we need to be able to do it. B, we need to be able to do it right, and C, we need to be able to do it in a way that meets requirements. We are doing that in a phased approach, and if and when the DoD assesses our overall sea leg and determines that this is not a program that we need to continue, we'll adjust accordingly.

**Johnson:** Just to add to that, and thank you, Corey. No, this is not an act of strategic charity though when I leave the Department of Defense, I might be looking for a strategic charity to work at. I look forward to doing so. As you said, the NPR does

talk about the W93, and maybe this is a moment to quickly say, to acknowledge that, look, this NPR in page length is a little bit shorter than previous ones.

I'm glad we're having discussions like this because, yes, we did capture this into, and apologies, a non-searchable table. It is a program of record. It is something that we're continuing and pursuing. I think not to now speak for the NNSA, but I think administrative Ruby has said on multiple occasions in public settings that the era of life extension is over.

We are in an era where we're looking at having to do new programs now.

We are not doing what the Russians are doing which is to do new and novel systems expanding into areas that are frankly much more escalatory and concerning in those regards, we're talking about basically replacing existing systems moving forward. We know how long that takes. We know how much effort that takes. We know how difficult that can be from a technological perspective. What we're doing here is proceeding with the W93 as well as the Mark 7 [unintelligible 00:25:03] that's not going to get deployed until the 2030s.

We've got time here. We really have to make sure that this is actually going to happen. In the meantime, as you said, we have the W76, we have the W88, but those continue to age. We think the W93 with the Mark 7 represents the next important step in addressing risks in our triad. It's going to improve operational effectiveness. It'll have enhanced flexibility and adaptability, and it deals with some of the technical and programmatic risks that we would not want to have as we get into the 2040s. If the question you're asking me is, are we going to have two SLBM warheads or three SLBM warheads? The answer is, I'm not sure.

At the moment, the important part here is to say, "We know that we need to plan for a new warhead." We're proceeding with that. We would always need to do that, whether or not the UK was doing its actions. As Corey mentioned, the Nuclear Weapons Council will do its job. As the NPR talks about having a responsive and flexible nuclear enterprise to be able to gap for these things is part of how do we make sure that we have the right optimized size of the stockpile and of the enterprise. Maybe we don't need three warhead programs, but to be able to plan for the current moment, we're moving forward with the W93.

**Acton:** Let me bring in-- Thanks for that. Let me bring in Alex to ask her a bit about arms control. The Nuclear Posture Review expresses concern about the expiration of New START that's coming up in 2026. It supports expeditiously negotiating a new arms control framework to replace it. Obviously, the outcome to that framework has to be a negotiation between the US and Russia.

In an ideal world, what would the US like to see? What specific kinds of arms control, what specific measures would serve US interests? What's your position going into that negotiation?

**Bell:** Yes, happy to talk about that. Thanks for the question. I also want to thank Carnegie for providing this venue. I was a little concerned when you said people would be telling their grandchildren about this. I was starting to think we have to do some interpretive demonstration of the NPR, act out Dr. Strange Love on stage. It

was such an important opportunity for us to be able to actually talk with the community that's interested in this, but is also going to help us carry this message about the challenges that we face, but also the opportunities we see in the arms control space.

We're in difficult times, but when the president said in advance of the NPT RevCon that we needed to move forward on arms control, not in spite of what is happening, but because of what is happening, that's really what's driving the conversation internally. We've done a lot of work over the course of the administration to prepare for the idea that everything in the security environment seems to have changed except for the fact that New START will expire in 2026, and there's nothing we can do to stop that. A world without constraints over the Russian strategic arsenal is not a safer world.

A world in which the United States and Russia are operating based on misperceptions and miscalculations that can come from the lack of data, and onsite inspections is also not a safer world. Thinking through what we'd like to do next, the objectives haven't really changed over the course of the administration. We want to make sure we maintain controls over intercontinental range systems as we do under New START, to have that verification mechanism, that data exchange that gives us a real-time view into the Russian strategic arsenal.

We also want to make sure we pull in inter-continental systems that don't necessarily fit under New START. Think of Putin's presentation of those as a Steve Jobs with nuclear weapons thing. Glad to know that they agree that Sarmat and Avangard do count under the limits of New START. We have to make sure that systems like **[unintelligible 00:29:04]** and Poseidon and **[unintelligible 00:29:05]** also have controls.

It's the range. It's the capability that we want to make sure that we've got controls over. How many iterations of these capabilities is less important than the constraint over the overall type of system. We also want to address Russia's overall nuclear stockpiles. That includes non-deployed nuclear weapons and most importantly, theater range or non-strategic nuclear weapons.

We've been very, very clear with the Russians that we don't love the term non-strategic because it implies that, in some way, it would be a less severe use of a nuclear weapon. We made it clear to them that any use of a nuclear weapon, we would consider to be strategic in nature and fundamentally alter the nature of a conflict. We've said this over and over again publicly. We've said it to them directly during the SSDs that we did have. We'll continue to say it to them. We've made it clear that a future of arms control has to include the entire arsenal on either side. It's not to say that everything necessarily right now lends itself to verifiable treaties, but there are things that we can do in terms of transparency, confidence building, establishment of norms, that can get us there, that can help build us. That's why the verification issue continues to be so important.

There are technical restraints in terms of future agreements. We don't know how to do effective verification on warheads themselves separate from delivery systems that we can see from space. It's not to say that we can't do it. In fact, I do think we're capable of it, and I think we can get there, but it's going to take some time. We're

very clear that it's not a grand bargain that we're envisioning. We want to take the tools necessary to maintain constraints that we have, expand from there, and develop the capabilities that will help us have effective verification over the entire Russian arsenal.

**Hinderstein:** James, could I just please build on that, because I wanted to come back to your comment about strategic charity. That's how some people have described arms control in the past. I think one of the things that this NPR does is it really highlights the fact that arms control and non-proliferation are our tools that are in our benefit to increase predictability, increased stability, decrease risk, reduce strategic surprise.

To that end, that it is absolutely not only in our interest but in our control to be able to build the tools to move us forward. A lot of the things that Alex said, and she helpfully transitioned to this at the end of her comments, we actually don't know how to do yet. For a lot of the questions about why would we and when should we actually invest in developing these capabilities, we know that, just as these programmatic nuclear weapons programs take a long time, a lot of the tools that we're talking about are going to take a long time.

If we want them to be off the shelf when we need them, we need to figure out how to get them on the shelf. Some of those things like warheads as treaty-limited items like production caps and limits, we need to be working on that. For those of you who are able to hear Administrator Ruby yesterday talk about it, we're doubling in the next year doubling our investment in the core capabilities to support arms control verification, monitoring, and other detection capabilities.

Most of that is going into our national laboratory complex because the labs remain the technical backbone for us to be able to do this, but really investing in the research and development and technology and engineering that's going to actually underpin, gives credibility to the statements that we make about what we want and what we want to accomplish.

That's the other thing I wanted to say, which is, these are not just rhetorical statements that we make. We have to show that we are investing in the systems and the capabilities that we're talking about, otherwise, they are hollow. What we're saying on the arms control nonproliferation sides we're making real.

**Acton:** Nobody's asked any questions, so I get to fill up the whole hour we're asking. One last very short question to Alex before I go to the many questions from the audience. If the US brings up non-strategic warheads or all warheads with Russia, Russia's going to immediately bring up the fact that there's US warheads in Europe. Now, let's stipulate as if immediately that there's no prospect of withdrawing those warheads time in the future.

If we want transparency over Russian warheads and accountability over numbers, they're going to ask for the same over those warheads stored at six undisclosed locations published by Hans Christianson in Europe. Have you had conversations with European allies that may or may not host these warheads about whether they're willing to grant Russia transparency under certain circumstances to their facilities?

**Bell:** What we're focusing on right now is what we want. The process that we're going through and have gone through since the beginning in the administration is what do we envision as necessary for enhancing US and allied security? It's not to say that we don't know the things that Russia will talk about or want to talk about. We're well aware, and it's not that those aren't being discussed, but I think we don't want to negotiate with ourselves. We want think about what it is that we want to constrain, and we want to be prepared for the arguments and the conversations that could happen when and if we are at the table again.

Suffice it to say that anything going forward in terms of what we'd want to do in the arms control space is being measured by our primary objective, which is, does this improve us and allied security? If the answer is no, we're not interested, we've also said that to the Russians. It seems like a pretty obvious stipulation, but we think it bears repeating over and over again. I think in terms of how we advance the conversation, allies are going to be a part of that conversation.

**Acton:** Let's go to some questions from the audience. At least two people have asked the same question, which makes me somewhat compelled to ask it, but it's a good one. Both Chase Enright and Kylie Jones point out that President Biden, when he was candidate Biden on the campaign trail explicitly supported adopting a sole-purpose policy. Why was that not adopted? I have a feeling that Richard would like to take this, but any of you are welcome to do so.

**Johnson:** I am happy to take that question. The issue of declaratory policy is one that we spent a lot of time on in the Nuclear Posture Review. We spent a lot of time, a lot of discussions, we talked a lot with allies. I think one of the important things to note when you mention, yes, the president, when he was a candidate did talk about a goal of seeking a sole purpose declaration.

He also said that he would only make that decision in consultation with US allies and with the US military. That is what he asked us to do, is to talk to our US allies and to talk to our military leadership. Upon doing quite a bit of consultation, Alex and I spent at least one December week in Brussels doing what I possibly inappropriately called nuclear speed dating with about 17 allies, not only with our Euro-Atlantic allies but also with our Indo-Pacific allies. It became very clear.

I think the NPR makes very clear that, after doing that analysis, it was not just possible for us to be able to take that step. The risk was too high to move to a sole-purpose approach. It doesn't mean that the president doesn't continue to have a goal of seeking the sole purpose declaration, and the NPR says that explicitly. It also says that we will need to find concrete steps that we would take and that would we have to work with our allies and partners to be able to do so.

Let me just be very clear, because there were lots of, frankly, ridiculous newspaper articles out there saying that the Pentagon had already said there was no way we would ever do this, or the Pentagon has been overruled and we're definitely going to do this. We had a very, very analytical, very, very technical discussion informed by our true experts on all the ranges of options. No first use, sole purpose, the approach that we ended up taking in this document.

What we did is we provided analysis on that. We took a general sense of where various folks were on this, but because we didn't want to unnecessarily influence this in ways because we don't want to take a vote based on number of people in the room, we didn't just say, "Here's one recommendation, Mr. President, you should do this." We forwarded him our options, and we let the president decide, because that's his job, and that's what he did.

The president decided on this approach. I guess, at the end of the day, my response is, if you have any additional questions 202-456-1414, that's the White House  
**[inaudible 00:37:52]**

[laughter]

**Acton:** Thanks, Richard. Incidentally, I'm delighted to announce that the 2025 Carnegie International Nuclear Policy Conference is going to feature nuclear speed dating. Let me turn to Alex, because we've had questions about arms control. Nancy Nicholas asks, "Is there a concern the Russians might pull out of New START before 2026?" Let me tag on a part B question there, which is, if the Russians don't resume inspections in a timely manner, is there a chance that we may pull out of New START because they're violating the treaty?

**Bell:** We'll just start out, Russia is in compliance with New START, we continue to assess that. As people probably know, we suspended inspections in March, 2020, because of COVID and are in the process of getting back to inspections. It's more technical problems than we had to deal with, even though the treaty in its very lengthy annexes do deal with things like, what if an inspector gets sick?

It didn't necessarily account for what if an inspector gets sick with an infectious disease that can take out the entire inspecting party all at the same time, issues related to how do we do testing in country. These things are issues, but they're workable issues. We're talking with the Russians about that. That's our primary goal is getting back to inspections, back to regularized implementation of New START going forward. Glad to report that the data exchanges, the notifications that we exchange through the National Nuclear Risk Reduction Center, that continues to happen.

We have a very fulsome picture of each other's strategic forces based on those data exchanges, but that information is backed up. It's enhanced by the ability to get on the ground and do those inspections. That's our priority going forward. My concern is about that short-term issue as far as what the future holds. I think the full five-year extension of New START demonstrates the commitment to the treaty in both Washington and Moscow. The extension was roundly praised by our allies. This came up a lot during the NPR, the interest in maintaining the controls in Neustar, the interest in expanding our conversations about the future of arms control. Those are things that we're thinking about. Like I said, inspection is first, and all fixable problems, doable issues, and we look forward to getting boots back on the ground.

**Acton:** I don't want my opportunistic question to trounce Nancy's original question which was, is there a concern that the Russians might pull out a new start?

**Bell:** I think the Russians have publicly stated their commitment to the treaty and their interest in continuing it, and the future of arms control with that. I probably would direct that. I don't know the Kremlin's number.

[laughter]

I will direct you to Mr. Putin for that particular answer.

**Acton:** Question for you, Corey, from Dave Wishart who asks, what do you see as the most important and urgent technical challenge in monitoring and verification that the US would like to have ready for the post-2026 world?

**Hinderstein:** I think that I can answer the question in two ways. One is that there are a number of very specific questions that we have already started grappling with that we're really investing further in. Primarily for us, that really has to do with monitoring warheads versus delivery vehicles. When you're talking about warheads it brings in questions that have to do everything from size and scale to numbers. When we talk about total warheads, it gets even more complicated. I think from a technical perspective, we have a number of issues that can really be boiled down into those that are related to measurement, authentication, and certification of measurements.

Because at the warhead level, you're needing to do things like confirmation that something declared to be a warhead is actually a warhead. We're good at, if somebody says it's not, confirming that it's not. That part's easy, the absence measurement. The presence, and then again because we haven't scoped what the treaty looks like, there are a lot of different options. We're big on multiverses now. There are a lot of multiverses on what directions this could go. Our job at NNSA is to actually build the tools that can apply to a lot of those situations. For example, some have suggested we actually would want to get down to declared warhead types and numbers associated with types.

That again brings into a whole lot of questions about what you measure, how you measure, and how you measure with confidence and with information that's actually not only specific enough, but not so specific that it reveals sensitive information. The other way I want to answer the question though is we have one very, very big technical challenge, and that's workforce. I know this is something a lot of folks are dealing with, you heard Administrator Ruby talks about the arms control advancement initiative. One of the four pillars is about the next-generation arms control experts, next-gen ACE program.

We take that very seriously because we need to have the people who are not only engaged, available, interested, but prepared to play this role in the long-term, because just as in our nuclear weapons complex, these are decadal commitments that we're making. One of the things that I can say is that by investing in our infrastructure, the infrastructure that we share with defense programs in a lot of ways, we are also investing in an arms control capability. More than that dual use, if I can use it that way, dual-use capability, we also need people who are very specifically trained, engaged, and prepared to support arms control and the technical arms control measures of the future, and right now, we're short.

**Acton:** Thank you. It's probably not going to surprise you we've got some questions about SLCM-N. Let me divide these into two halves. Firstly, and I'm assuming Rich is going to take this, but again, anyone's welcome to, in terms of whether the US should counsel the nuclear arms sea-launched cruise missile, Admiral Richard has said he gave, and my remarkable stopped working, he gave a list of adjectives about things that the sea-launched cruise missile had, including the fact that it was non-ballistic and non-treaty accountable.

The Nuclear Posture Review points to the W672, the low-yield Trident warhead, and says we don't need the sea-launched cruise missile because we have the W76-2. Going back to what Admiral Richard has said, the W76-2 is treaty accountable, the sea-launched cruise missile is not. The W76-2 is ballistic. The Slick-em is not. Given those advantages as STRATCOM sees them, why did you decide those advantages were not big enough to keep this program?

**Johnson:** Is there a second question? Great. The short answer is, I will just say, first of all to quote my boss, Secretary Austin, who spoke to this yesterday, who said it much more bluntly than I could, which is, we have a lot of capabilities. He was asked this by a reporter yesterday during the NDS, NPR, and MDR rolled out. We'd looked at this program, and we were asked by the president to look at this program, to look at the W76-2, and to look at the B83-1. We looked at this in great detail. I know some people in the room I see who were part of that process, and they can validate that we looked at this in great detail.

What we found is there were a number of reasons that were put forward for why we would need a sea-launched cruise missile. What we found was when you look at all the other capabilities that we have, not just this 76-2, but our existing outcomes, our existing air-launched cruise missiles to be replaced by a new long-range standoff warhead, and the fact that we have the new B61-12 gravity bombs coming in. First production units already been announced. By the way, based upon reporting in politico, then you should not believe nothing has changed on the timeline.

There is no speeding up because of any Ukraine crisis, the B61-12 is on the same schedule it's always been on. The new F35s and other fifth-generation aircraft coming online, we have quite a few different kinds of capabilities to deliver a low-yield nuclear warhead if necessary, and that are available to deter limited nuclear use, which is what the NPR has validated, that we need to continue to deter limited nuclear use in various scenarios because of concerns we have in specific regions, most predominantly, of course, in the Russian periphery, and frankly also in the Indo-Pacific as well.

Now you couple that, again with the fact that the SLCM-N would not have come online until at least the mid-2030s. It would have cost tens of billion dollars to produce. It wouldn't have been useful at all in deterring what we have in the current situation here with Ukraine, for example, which is an example that's often used. Recall that in the previous NPR, that when this concept was footed, it was often discussed as a way to have leverage in arms control with Russia. When we looked at this, we determined that ultimately, it would not yield very much leverage in arms control with Russia.

Maybe you could get a one-for-one trade, maybe the Russians would give up their Slick-em our Slick-em, but you're not going to open up the treasure trove of the things that Bell has talked about, and that Corey has talked about. I'm sorry, I always forget your title. Deputy Administrator, yes. In terms of non-strategic nuclear weapons. Not to mention the fact, and we've talked about this here for some time, about the fact that we have a lot of other things going on in the nuclear enterprise right now that we need to keep on schedule. Frankly, we always have production challenges.

We always have timeline issues, we always have supply chain issues, especially in this current moment. There were a lot of questions as well as to the operational fitness of putting this back on to SSNs, on to tech submarines. When you put all that together, it just was very clear to us. As the secretary has said, we saw that it had marginal utility, and we think we have a lot of capabilities to be able to deter limited nuclear use. We feel very comfortable with that. By the way, that was validated by the President of the United States supported by the Secretary of Defense.

What we did do though, and I want to make sure that we answer this is, because I haven't guessed the question, but the STRATCOM commander said this, the chairman said this, and we have a lot of respect for what their views are, and frankly they're doing their job. They're doing their job to provide us the views from their perspective and the job that they have before them. We took those into account as we did to other combatant commanders, services, et cetera. We put them all together. We get it up to the leadership, and that's their job to make a decision. This is a decision that they made.

**Acton:** The second part of the Slick-em question from Jordan Smith asks about the budgetary implications if Congress decides to fund the Slick-em any way against the administration's wishes. What are the implications of that going to be for DOD, for the rest of the nuclear enterprise? Where's that money going to come from? You're just simply going to do everything, or are you going to have to cut some programs to make room if Congress decides to fund the Slick-em anyway.

**Johnson:** Here, I'll obviously ask if any NSA wants to add in here a bit as well because it's a shared enterprise and the nuclear weapons council plays an important role. First of all, I don't want to prejudge the decisions of Congress. We've been very clear, and the Biden-Harris administration statement of administration policy on this has been extremely clear. Basically, what I just said about why we have canceled the SLCM-N and we don't think that there should be any funding for it. If you look at the various bills that are out there, they all have slightly different language in them.

Some of them have no money. Some of them have money, but they're connected to certain conditions. Some of them have more money than less. None of them, I think, have the amount of money that would normally have been required if the SLCM-N program were to be continued in terms of moving full-scale ahead and full-scale production, it's a much smaller number. The short answer is I don't know, we'll have to see what comes out of the budget process, and how it is ring-fenced if at all in any way, and what it asks us to do.

At the end of the day, what will have to happen is it will have to be balanced with all of the other priorities that we put forward in the nuclear enterprise budget both for the

Department of Defense and for NNSA on all the other things that we think we absolutely must do, whether that's sentinel, whether that's the work that we talked about in W93, whether that's all the upgrades we have to do in the nuclear enterprise. We do have scarce resources. We think that the best use of those resources is not to continue with the SLCM-N, but at the end of the day they're going to have to figure out how to balance that. The nuclear weapons council will-- My time is up.

[laughter]

The nuclear weapons council will look at that.

**Acton:** Corey, do you want to come in on that issue?

**Hinderstein:** Yes, I'd just like to add one thing, which is I think Richard made a very good point, especially to really go forward on a full-scale program for SLCM-N or frankly a full-scale life extension for B83 which has been brought up in some of these same conversations for very different reasons, there is going to have to be an investment of the scale that I have not heard Congress prepared to make. We're not asking for it, we would rather use our resources in other ways. We think that the mission that we've been given as exemplified from the NPR to recapitalize, reinvest in a flexible and responsive production infrastructure is where we need to be focusing.

The warhead, the life extension and modernization program is where we need to be focusing. We're not prepared to make that trade-off based on the-- again, it's fundamentally the guidance and the requirements that come from DOD. If there is another feeling on that, then that's going to have to be a major investment, and there are going to be consequences to the complex. It's not just a question of more money means we can deliver yet another thing in parallel. There is always going to have to be an offset. I have not heard and I don't know if my DP program colleagues have heard, what they'd like us to not be doing in order to do that.

Because this is not a situation where you can do everything. I'd like to just take this opportunity though, if I could, to point out a section of the NPR that's really important to us at NNSA. It's really the talk about that complex. The reason is because it is related to these questions about what programs move forward and what programs don't move forward, and what the requirements are, and how we meet them. NNSA has really thought through our ability to meet these requirements which over time we haven't invested in certain things because, whether it was geopolitical trends or budget trends or others, had pushed us to make certain choices.

Right now we feel like we have this three-pillar approach that will enable us to actually meet the requirements that we get from DOD, and that has to do with a real production-based focus. That means everything from bridging strategies, supply chains, trying to assess where we have single points of failure, which in a complex that is nearing on 80 years, we have some of those. We have some capabilities that really are limited on what we can do and whether and how we could speed up, if at all, even if we were asked to do so. We also are going to work very closely with DOD on what's being called the nuclear deterrent risk management strategy.

Which is really looking at how is the deterrent as a whole assessed, and where are the risks. Because so often we've looked at these things from what is happening on the warhead program, what is happening on the delivery system program, and then they get connected at some later point. We really need to look at these things as a whole. Then finally we're at NNSA, we have the laboratory complex. We really need to invest in the science and technology infrastructure which supports both. Fundamentally, all of these things are related to meeting our deterrent requirements, but also related to making sure that we have that flexible infrastructure that will actually allow us to go down.

I'm now talking as the non-pro person, that arms control person. A lot of the resistance to going down in the past has been because we have an infrastructure that only allowed a one-way street because we didn't have the capability to go back up. Now, we never want to go back up. It's not our plan to go back up. We should be driving for a world in which that's never required. If we have an infrastructure that enables it, it actually will allow us to get the support we need to keep moving down that path towards arms control and towards greater reductions because we won't need to invest at a moment's notice in something that we no longer have the capability to do.

**Acton:** This actually brings up a question that Lindsay Rand raised. I was going to come to Alex next, but that teased so nicely into Lindsay's question.

**Hinderstein:** You're welcome.

**Acton:** Let's go there. She noted that in your remarks you said the NNSA has "muscles that need to be stretched". You've just talked more there about the capability to go up even if no plan, which brings up the question about do you think there is a strategic benefit to having a hot production line? I'm assuming this in particular means pit production capabilities, but everything else as well. If there is that strategic benefit to that, how is it possible to restrain arms racing?

**Hinderstein:** I'll leave the arms racing question to Alex. I will say that yes, there is a benefit to redeveloping our pit production capability. This does have to do with the fact that many of our systems are now beyond or reaching not just their planned life but some of their extensions as we've seen through these life extension programs. We need to be able to have confidence that the deterrent is safe, secure, and effective as long as these weapons exist while we also work in parallel to make sure that we can move away as is our international commitment and our national commitment.

One of the things that I would say is that we have looked across, whether it's primary, secondary, it's tridium, high explosive, non-nuclear components, and we've seen gaps. We think it's not responsible as those who not only are responsible for building these systems but for the three National Laboratory directors who have to certify to the president every year that the stockpile remains safe, secure, and effective, and by the way, without nuclear testing.

A lot of the investment that we make in our complex, these big machines, these big scientific capabilities, our human capacity, is because we have made that commitment to doing this without testing. That makes a huge difference in how we

have to invest in that infrastructure, and the production capability is part of that assurance.

**Acton:** Alex let me put two questions to you at once since the big red five-minute warning just flashed up. The first one is the second part of the question I asked to Corey. If the US has increased capability to manufacture weapons even if we don't have a plan to expand the arsenal, how can we ensure that we don't end up in an arms race with China and Russia? The second question is from somebody, I don't recognize the name. I think he must be very new in the field, Daryl Kimball?

[laughter]

He says, "At this conference, we've heard about the value of dialogue and arms control with Russia and China, but China so far has declined to have a bilateral dialogue on risk reduction. Where do we go from here, and in particular with the US as the chair of the P5 process at the moment? What are the Biden administration's plans for making the P5 process more effective as a tool?"

**Bell:** I just want to quickly note, the NPR talks about the infrastructure for the nuclear weapons complex. It also talks about infrastructure for arms control. Please read that section, because it was very important to us as we were going through, we need people, we need scientists and defense officials, but we also need lawyers and diplomats, and just straight-up walks working on this and developing. Our problems are increasing, that's a challenge but it's also an opportunity. This is a rich environment for creative thinking where we're seeing a lot of obstacles in the space.

It also means new ideas can infuse into the system. I think that applies to the idea of arms racing. The NPR talks about wanting to avoid this. The National Security Strategy makes it clear that that is not where we want to go, that is not a safer world for anyone, but the US is going to do what is necessary to defend this country, to defend our allies. We'll make that clear first and foremost. We'll make our choices based on what is good for American security, what is good for allied security. We think part of that and part of integrated deterrence is arms control, it is non-proliferation, it is nuclear security efforts.

We have to be doing all of these things at the same time. It does mean pushing forward and not necessarily taking no for an answer. I think the persistence of American diplomats and the American system to keep advancing these issues even in the face of obstruction at times is almost an expectation of the world that people assume the US will just keep pushing the rock up a hill. I think we will because we know what happens when we stop. That rock is going to roll right over us. We persist and labor on even in the face of these challenges.

In terms of the P5, I was thinking earlier in terms of getting China into a conversation, we want to have a bilateral conversation. We tell Beijing, we want to have a bilateral conversation with you. We think it starts with risk reduction, we think it starts with crisis communication. As the chair of the P5, you will not escape us on this. We will talk to you in the P5 context, or we can have this conversation bilaterally, but we have to have this conversation. We do continue to push forward the P5. We have big plans for our chairmanship of the P5.

We have not limited our ambition, but we are having to alter what we are focusing on given the security condition. The US will continue to use this forum to advance conversations, to keep lines of communication open, and to demonstrate to other MPT parties that it is not for Russia to decide and choose for the rest of us how we try to advance our obligations under the MPT. We will continue to move ahead and drag them along with us as we have to.

**Johnson:** It's just a 10-second two finger to say all of what was just said, including we also need all the help from all of you in this room, because track twos are really essential, especially with Beijing. I know some folks are doing that right now. It's really helpful for us. I really appreciate those that do that, and they give us those readouts. It helps us to do what I think we need to be doing, which is our homework in this time, not only for China, but frankly for Russia as well, to be able to, when we do have that moment to move forward, that we can move forward expeditiously and with a good amount of preparedness based upon a lot of good work that's done by a lot of folks in this community. Of which I deem myself a part of. Thank you.

**Acton:** Let me ask one quick final question, which I can't resist asking. Alex--

**Johnson:** You are in charge.

**Bell:** Yes, it's your party.

**Acton:** I know. I asked the conference organizer if I could fit in one question and he said yes. Alex Ward asks, "Is it time," this is very easy question, "to accept North Korea as a nuclear state?" The reason I asked that question is because yesterday, Alex's boss under Secretary Jenkins said very explicitly, she said, "Kim Jong-un doesn't want to talk to us right now, but if he were willing to pick up the phone, we would talk arms control with him."

In my view, we only talk arms control with countries that we have accepted as nuclear arm state. We don't talk about it as countries where we believe they should just give up their nuclear weapons. To give Alex Ward's question again, and I'll leave this to anybody who wants to answer it, "Is it time to accept North Korea as a nuclear state?"

**Bell:** The US position here hasn't changed, wording aside. We are committed to the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula. We do not accept North Korea with that status, but we are interested in having a conversation with the North Koreans. The White House has made that clear repeatedly. Unfortunately, that has not been taken up by the North Koreans. Again, our primary focus here is going to be the defense of the United States, defense of the allies in the region. The North Korean nuclear program presents a threat to the region, to the world. That continues to be a problem, but this president is committed to looking for diplomatic solutions. That's in the National Security Strategy, that this is our first move, is diplomacy. That's available to the North Korean, should they choose to accept it.

**Acton:** Alex, thank you very much. Corey, thank you. Richard, thank you. This was a huge honor to have the opportunity to host this first public discussion of the NPR. Would you all join me, please, in thanking our panel?

[applause]

Now, speaking of bosses, before we close the conference, here's mine. Thanks, Richard.

**Johnson:** Thank you so much.

**Acton:** Thanks, Alex.

**Bell:** Thanks, James.

**[01:10:16] [END OF AUDIO]**