

Center for Strategic and International Studies

## Online Event

# “International Security at the Nuclear Nexus (Day 1)” Opening Remarks and Prerecorded Keynote”

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FEATURING:

**Admiral Charles Richard**

*Commander, U.S. Strategic Command*

CSIS EXPERTS:

**Rebecca Hersman,**

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*Transcript By*

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Rebecca Hersman: Good morning, everyone. My name is Rebecca Hersman. I am the director of the Project on Nuclear Issues. And I am very, very pleased to welcome all of you to our conference – International Security at the Nuclear Nexus. We are thrilled to have you here.

I want to give a special thanks to Northrop Grumman for their generous support for this conference. Without them, it wouldn't have been possible. Now, you may know that PONI's been leading the way to develop the next generation of nuclear policy experts and building a community of nuclear analysts, operators, scientists, and practitioners since 2003. We have flagship programs, like the PONI Nuclear Scholars Initiative, the PONI Next Generation Conference Series, which gives young practitioners a chance to share their ideas and hone their speaking skills. We have the PONI mid-career cadre and other initiatives, such as our next generation arms controller initiative.

But for the last several years, with the help of some funding from Northrop Grumman, we've held one major public, on the record, now-gen event on important nuclear topics. This year's event was supposed to be at CSIS in April. You are joining us today and tomorrow, I hope, in its reimagined form online. The good news is that this gave us the opportunity to reorient to this new focus and the topic of today's conference – the nuclear nexus. This has become a priority initiative for PONI in our time of COVID programming, and an opportunity for us to work especially with our CSIS International Security Program colleagues on how to better understand the intersections between nuclear issues and nuclear policy, and a host of other defense and security issues and problems. That's the topic of our series, and that is the topic of today's conference.

So this is day one of a two-day conference. It's part of this broader effort by PONI that's seeking to explore a range of issues that sit at the seam of nuclear weapons and other international security and defense topics and challenges. These range from space, to artificial intelligence, to conventional nuclear integration issues, and even civil-military relations. In addition to this conference, we, together with our colleagues in CSIS's International Security Program, are producing a series of essays that address many of these topics in much greater depth. Some of the authors are joining us here over the next two days. You can find that series, also entitled International Security at the Nuclear Nexus, on the CSIS website. You can also access all of the articles through [Defense360.CSIS.org](https://Defense360.CSIS.org) and the PONI website, [NuclearNetwork.CSIS.org](https://NuclearNetwork.CSIS.org). I strongly encourage you to check it out, and we'll be continuing to add articles over the next several days.

Now before we get started, I want to take just a minute to talk about why we're here and why we chose this topic to be a focus area for us. First, we thought it was a conversation that was quite long overdue. The nuclear community has largely enjoyed a pretty siloed existence in terms of both governmental organizational structures, policy planning processes, as well as the communities that deal with nuclear issues outside of government. Some might say we live in an echo chamber. This autonomy has allowed nuclear policy to develop largely outside of the pretty vigorous give and take that occurs in other major policy development processes. Today, however, current and emerging challenges related to nuclear weapons cut across a range of issues, and more than ever

many of those significant and vexing national security challenges lie right at the nexus of these complex topics.

There are issues, domains, and risks, and each defy traditional analytical and organizational stovepipes, and they force experts in each of their respective areas to move beyond their comfort zones. So that's why we're here, to galvanize cross-pollination between the study of nuclear issues and other related international security topic areas, by exploring these points of intersection. Doing so is necessary for managing the current and emerging security environment. It will be the nature of – the future of our security environment for quite a time to come.

We have a fantastic set of panels and experts over the next two days to help us unpack the issues. Today we'll begin with a panel on issues surrounding conventional nuclear integration, followed by a panel on the weaponization of space and nuclear risks, and concluding with a discussion of surveillance and situational awareness, and its implications for deterrence. Tomorrow we will reconvene at 12:00 for panels on the offense and defense mix at the nuclear nexus, which looks at nuclear intersections with missile defense and hypersonics, and a final panel on artificial intelligence, automation, and NC3. Last but not least, tomorrow at 4:00 p.m. we'll be joined by the honorable Heather Wilson, former secretary of the Air Force and current president of the University of Texas at El Paso. She will share her lived experience at the nuclear nexus, from her perspective both in the Air Force, Congress, and as an educator. If you've not yet registered for tomorrow's events, there's still time. Please just follow the links.

A brief note on logistics and housekeeping. This conference, unlike many of our events, is public and on the record. It's not being livestreamed and is only open to registered participants for the live participation. However, we will make recordings available to the public on event pages after the conference. It will be up about 24 hours or so after, so anyone who couldn't join us live will be able to check out all of the panels at a later date.

Now, we really want to encourage your active participation. We'll have time in all panel sessions for your questions and want you to interact with the speakers. Please pose your questions in the Q&A function on Zoom and the PONI team will collect them and make sure we pose those to the panelists and speakers.

Now it's time to get things started. We are incredibly fortunate to be joined via prerecorded session with Commander, U.S. Strategic Command, Admiral Richard, who sends his regrets he was not able to join us in person because of his schedule, and so he couldn't participate live and take questions. But he wanted to send his remarks and encouragement for this important topic.

Now, just by way of brief introduction, as many of you know, Admiral Richard took over as STRATCOM commander in November of last year. And prior to that he served as commander of Submarine Forces in Norfolk, Virginia. Other assignments include deputy commander of STRATCOM, director of Undersea Warfare at the Pentagon, deputy commander of the Joint Functional Command for Global Strike at U.S. Strategic Command, and command of Sub Group 10 at Kings Bay, Georgia.

So with that, we're very pleased to welcome him here virtually. And, Max, I believe you have the video to get us started.

Admiral Charles  
Richard  
Commander:

Good afternoon. I want to offer a special thank-you to Ms. Hersman and the PONI team for your invitation to speak at this year's fall conference. For those of you that don't know me, I'm Chas Richard, commander of U.S. Strategic Command. I have the privilege to lead 150,000 soldiers, sailors, airmen, Marines, and civilians around the world who provide the nation's strategic deterrence.

I wish, as I'm sure all of you do, we could be there in person and under different circumstances, because one of the true values of speaking at conferences like these are the discussions and the question-and-answer sessions that follow. So I hate that I'm not available for those opportunities.

I saw the list of your planned panel discussions. I think you're hitting the mark with your focus areas, as they mirror many of the things that we're exploring here at STRATCOM. So while you're seeing my address by video, please know it's my privilege to be part of the conference. And I hope my comments help enhance your discussions.

Now, I last spoke to you all in 2018 as the deputy commander serving General Hyten. I reviewed my notes from that engagement in preparation for today's video. If you were there, you might recall that we were on the heels of the newly released Nuclear Posture Review. My comments then centered around reinventing the nuclear-deterrence discussion. While we've made progress, my views have largely remained unchanged. And so I'm going to amplify on that message today.

It's through that lens that I'll cover three main topics. First, I'll touch on the current environment and some of the challenges we face and where I focus my command. Then I'll talk about some of our modernization efforts. As I do that, though, I really want you to take away the why or the importance of why we're modernizing. Last, I'll leave you with some ideas on how we can perhaps shape the environment to our advantage.

Let me start with this assertion, that we have not seriously considered the possibility of engaging in competition through crisis or possible direct armed conflict with a nuclear-capable armed adversary in over 25 years. It is a really profound thought and it really should grab your attention.

If you visit my office here in Omaha, you will notice that I keep pictures of Xi, Putin, the ayatollah and Kim on my wall under the words Not Today. They're a constant reminder that we must remain inspection-ready and keep us intently focused on the threats we face. Given Russia and China's expanding capabilities and increasingly aggressive behavior and those posed by a nuclear North Korea and possibly Iran, we must reinvigorate the national conversation on the importance of strategic deterrence.

During the Cold War, we were keenly aware of and fully prepared for the possibility of a nuclear engagement because we knew who the threat was. We knew what capabilities they had, and we had at least some idea of what could

potentially drive them to use a nuclear weapon. We kept our focus on the threat, ensuring we possessed the necessary readiness, tactics, techniques, and procedures to deter our adversary.

Over the last 30 years, however, we modified that posture, necessarily, by focusing on capabilities-based development and planning because there was no existential threat. Our post-Cold War experiences of operating in uncontested domains are over. Our adversaries took advantage of this period – embolden and increase their aggressive behavior, expand their capabilities, and reconsider their tactics and strategies.

Russia, for instance, is still a pacing threat. They aggressively engaged in conventional and advanced development, nuclear-modernization efforts, and I'd estimate they're close to 75 percent complete. They also continue to violate international law and fail to follow through on political commitments, undermining and eroding our current rules-based order and our collective influence within that structure. Then, as articulated in the most recent Russian policy statement and their rhetoric on nuclear deterrence and employment, Russia has expanded the number of circumstances under which they would consider the employment of a nuclear weapon, or at least they're now willing to say it publicly.

Although this circumstance is distressing, it should not come as a surprise. Russia continues to wrestle with its mismatch between aggressive policies towards its neighbors and being overmatched by conventional capabilities. When coupled with their nuclear expansion and return to coercive behavior, I can only conclude the possibility of deterrence failure and crisis – particularly nuclear deterrence – is not zero. I acknowledge the likelihood is small, but it's certainly greater than zero.

China is also a growing threat, and I encourage each of you to consider the same. Please do not mistake them as some sort of a lesser included case when compared to Russia. They're on trajectory to be a strategic nuclear peer by the end of the decade. They always go faster than we think they will, and we must pay attention to what they do and not necessarily what they say.

China's investment in a nuclear triad – they're about to finish building one out – and their lack of transparency in this multidomain capability makes me question their motives. As I recently briefed our NATO allies and mentioned in my latest update to the Pentagon press corps, it seems inconsistent to me that a country claiming reliance on a minimum deterrent strategy would continue to build sophisticated command-and-control capabilities and fully develop a triad of nuclear forces. You just don't need all of that for a minimum deterrent strategy.

China also remains the most active espionage threat, as modern technology provides them and others with expanded global reach and the ability to disrupt or disable key infrastructure. They continue to invest heavily in a comprehensive and a robust array of counter-space, C4ISR, and precision navigation and timing capabilities as they pursue space parity with us. When coupled with its growing nuclear stockpile and its increasingly assertive posture over territorial boundaries, I have no choice but to view China as a threat.

Then consider Iran's efforts towards regional destabilization, continued support of violent extremism, and North Korea's continued pursuit of nuclear weapons and ballistic missile technology. These actions not only endanger our forces and our allies and partners, but also divert our attention and resources away from other efforts and should not be neglected.

Now, look, I recognize that great-power competition doesn't equal conflict or that we're on a path to war. But as the commander in charge of employing strategic deterrence capabilities for the nation and our allies, I simply don't have the luxury of assuming a crisis, conflict, or war won't happen. I know I've painted a pretty sobering picture, but I really want to highlight the reality in front of us. It's also important to understand how our modernization programs support and integrate with our efforts to rethink how we do strategic deterrence.

Our most important mission here at STRATCOM, above all else, is to deter strategic attack, both nuclear and non-nuclear, across the continuum of competition, crisis, and conflict. To be successful, I must have the capabilities necessary to deliver a decisive response and do it with a combat-ready force. These capabilities come from the combined attributes provided by each leg of our triad that, together, allow me to execute our national strategy. I want to be clear: Each piece of our triad is essential, but they're also complementary. If I lost any part of the triad, it would drive me to ask for a new strategy and could embolden an adversary to believe they can employ nuclear weapons against us.

Because our nuclear triad provides the foundation for our survival, we must prioritize the sustainment and modernization of our ICBMs/bombers/ballistic-missile submarines weapons complex and our nuclear command-and-control systems. These legacy capabilities are being maintained well past their intended service lives.

For example, we're pushing the service life of our Ohio-class submarines from 30 to 42 years, longer than any submarine in naval history. We'll have flown our B-52s for nearly 100 years before they're retired. And our Minuteman ICBMs have been on alert for 40 years past their intended service life. Now, this is a testament to the generations of professionals who originally designed, built, operated, sustained, and maintained those weapons systems, but for years we've taken additional operational risk to buy down programmatic and technical risk because at the time the consequences of more operational risk were small.

Looking forward, as I briefed Congress earlier this year, we're simply out of margin. We've delayed our replacement programs as long as possible and can no longer afford delays in our recapitalization programs. I'm focused on and fully support our efforts to maintain the development and production schedules of the ground-based strategic deterrent, the B-21 bomber, and the Columbia-class ballistic missile submarines.

These strategic capabilities, however, are only as good as our ability to integrate our communications with those systems. Much of our NC2 and NC3 nuclear command-and-control systems still utilize 1970s designs with decades-old technology, putting us at risk of losing ground to our adversaries if not addressed. So I'm excited to see your discussions on NC3, sensing and

automation. In 2018, the secretary of defense directed the commander of U.S. Strategic Command to assume additional duties at the NC3 enterprise lead. And as such, I'm committed to investing and modernizing our NC3 systems to be more robust and survivable against physical, electromagnetic, and cyberattacks.

Over the last 18 months, we've been busy. We started by establishing the NC3 enterprise center portfolio manager to act as the coordinating agency for personnel, resources, and requirements. We've aligned our acquisition and sustainment capability inputs with our service partners to ensure full funding for our NC3 next-generation efforts. We've also engaged with the S&T and systems engineers to establish technical standards for configuration control and ensure interoperability and continuity is maintained. Last and certainly not inclusive of all of our efforts, we've established an NC3 next generation division to integrate near future concepts with other developmental efforts, like joint all-domain C2. I'm convinced we must go fast by iterating our development and taking advantage of efficiencies among similar programs.

So how do we shape the strategic environment to our advantage? We need to start by facing the reality that our adversaries have blurred the lines between conventional and nuclear conflict, and have developed capabilities to directly challenge the strategy, doctrine, and advantages we've held as a nation and alliance. We can no longer expect our potential adversaries to act within our long-standing self-imposed constraints based on our rule sets or values, particularly between conventional and nuclear. To that end, I've challenged my command to revise our 21<sup>st</sup>-century strategic deterrence theory that considers our adversaries' decision calculus and behaviors and identifies threat indicators or conditions that could indicate potential actions.

Crafting this revised theory informs our action and minimizes risk inherent in competing against another nuclear-armed state. It's an exhaustive assessment to fully account for current conditions, emerging capabilities, changing norms and rule sets, and potentially unintended outcomes within a spectrum of conflict. Now, the basic equation hasn't changed. We still drive to be able to deny our adversary their aim or impose a cost that is greater than what they seek, such that the benefit of their restraint outweighs the benefit of their possible action. Within the spectrum of violence from gray zone, that level below conventional conflict, to strategic nuclear exchange, however, we need to recognize that all that is coupled. And in that spectrum they have nonlinearities and discontinuities we didn't have during the Cold War.

Today we have to account for the possibility of conflict leading conditions that could seemingly very rapidly drive an adversary to consider nuclear use as their least-bad option. We must also consider how to employ different, tailored strategies against multiple nuclear adversaries simultaneously. By the end of the decade, if not sooner, we will face two nuclear capable peer adversaries who have to be deterred differently. We've never had to face that situation in our history.

We also need to engage in the environment early to shape our potential adversaries' actions using a synchronized, whole-of-government and integrated global mindset. This is a consequence of the coupling I described earlier. Our ability for global, integrated planning, communications and execution and a

defined, shared understanding of the threat and what we do about it may be our last remaining advantage over the adversary.

We've always had something. During the world wars, we outproduced our adversary. For a short period we had a nuclear advantage and then held a technology advantage with precision-guided munitions, stealth, and many others. We were one of the first to have an integrated joint force. But all the things I just described, our potential adversaries can do pretty much all of that now just like we can. Therefore we must advance our abilities to integrate our coordination processes across the globe and across all domains. This will include rethinking how we execute our NC3.

As advanced kinetic capabilities are developed, we must have the ability to detect, identify, track, and integrate our command-and-control architecture. Our NC3 architecture is a patchwork of delivered systems that have been piecemealed over decades. It works quite well, but it needs to be updated.

We can no longer afford single mission-focused systems. We recently hosted our Space Command and Cyber Command teammates to discuss the synergies among our capabilities. I'm convinced that we can better integrate our space-sensor layer with our land-based radar and do it with better protection with our NC3 next-generation architecture.

As I close, I know I gave you a lot to unpack and painted a sobering picture, but I really wanted to highlight the reality facing all of us and give you some perspective as you go into the next couple of days. I'm confident your discussions will be highly beneficial to the nuclear and strategic-defense community.

I'm sorry I've missed you, and I look forward to hosting you here in Omaha next spring. Have a great conference.

(END)