



## Arming for Deterrence: A Nuclear Posture for the Next Decade

By

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The United States needs a nuclear posture that supports its commitment to deterrence and averts costly wars. America's traditional nuclear deterrence strategy is ill-suited for today's accelerating threat environment and future challenges.

The current approach, developed during a period of adherence to global norms, reached its limits amid intensifying great power competition, the expansion of authoritarian nuclear arsenals, the growth of regional nuclear warfighting doctrines, and disruptive technological shifts. Effective deterrence demands that adversaries fear the consequences of violating the status quo.

Preventing aggression by one or more nuclear-armed adversaries requires an American nuclear strategy supported by a strong, credible force structure that can inflict devastating costs—not merely deliver minimal retaliation. To achieve this, the Trump administration and the Department of War need to embrace a culture of deterrence that values, rather than downplays, America's nuclear edge.

The 2023 report by the Strategic Posture Commission, *America's Strategic Posture*, underscores the urgency of such a shift. It calls for a revised strategy capable of protecting vital interests and maintaining stability with China and Russia, warning that critical decisions cannot be deferred any longer. The report's recommendations, particularly its insistence that the United States be prepared to deter and, if necessary, defeat China and Russia simultaneously, requires a strategy for implementation, not passive admiration.

*Peace Through Strength: Renewing America's Nuclear Deterrent, a Proposed Nuclear Posture Review for 2026*, by the [National Institute for Deterrence Studies](#), provides a decisive model of maximum deterrence. It promotes tailored, full-spectrum strategies and rejects outdated minimum-deterrence concepts that no longer reflect geopolitical reality. This framework strengthens general and immediate deterrence, addresses the nuclear threats from rivals, improves American escalation management, increases the resilience and survivability of the nuclear force, and strengthens extended deterrence through forward-based regional capabilities.

This deterrence framework is founded on six core pillars. First, it offers a national deterrence strategy that reflects the Department of War's mission, "to provide the military forces needed to deter war and ensure our nation's security," and supports a peace-through-strength doctrine that prioritizes American security, prosperity, and independence. Second, it advocates survivability enhancements that ensure a credible second-strike capability—beyond reliance on the submarine leg of the triad. Third, it seeks urgent nuclear modernization and expansion consistent with the Strategic Posture Commission's recommendations. Fourth, it advocates deployment of hedge capabilities from the nuclear stockpile. Fifth, it proposes strengthening forward-deployed regional nuclear deterrent assets. It requires deployment of robust non-strategic nuclear forces, empowering allied burden-sharing in Europe and the Indo-Pacific. Sixth, it advocates clear and credible declaratory policies as a means of deterring asymmetric non-nuclear attacks on the homeland, space assets, and critical cyber infrastructure.

Nuclear weapons provide the highest strategic leverage at the lowest expense. The Department of War is projected to spend about \$8.5 trillion on conventional military capabilities

over the next decade, while dedicating only \$946 billion to sustain and modernize the nuclear deterrent. This focus on conventional military spending long supported failed interventionism and a fragile status quo. At six to seven percent of the annual defense budget, the cost of deterrence remains relatively cheap, even if nuclear deterrence spending rises significantly.

Nuclear deterrence, like home insurance, is affordable but only seems a wise decision after a disaster strikes. A house can be rebuilt, but a devastated nation cannot. Hence, the “premium” for maximum nuclear readiness is not just affordable, it is indispensable. The cost of not having a strong nuclear deterrent might exceed \$10 trillion if an undeterred China tries to forcefully unify Taiwan. Pursuing the nuclear posture offered here will cost less than one tenth the cost of losing Taiwan and may prevent such a conflict from ever happening.

This proposed *Nuclear Posture Review* strengthens America’s deterrence by replacing outdated strategies with an approach tailored to modern nuclear competition. It emphasizes credible capabilities, improved burden-sharing, and bold new designs to deter adversaries who are rapidly modernizing and expanding their nuclear arsenals.

Their build-ups serve one purpose, coercing American foreign policy. Tolerating such destabilizing actions only encourages more. A well-prepared American nuclear deterrent is crucial to restraining autocratic ambitions. Strategies that were once focused on risk reduction and arms control are now unintentionally fostering instability. In today’s volatile environment, maximum deterrence is essential to maintaining peace.

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