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Issue brief A five-pillar plan to deter strategic attacks

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As its highest priority, the Department of Defense must deter strategic attacks on the United States. A five-pillar strategy could guide efforts to prevent nuclear and nonnuclear threats while ensuring resilience and readiness against large-scale nuclear attacks on the US homeland.

Bottom lines up front

- The Department of Defense (DoD) must deter strategic attacks against the United States as its highest-priority mission. Failure to do so would severely undermine every other national security objective.
- Deterring strategic attacks requires more than preventing a large-scale nuclear strike on the US homeland. The Pentagon must also be prepared to prevent limited nuclear escalation elsewhere in the world and to deter non-nuclear threats, such as cyberattacks or bioweapons, that could have catastrophic consequences on the United States.
- DoD investments and war plans must strike a balance between the goal of winning conventional wars quickly and with minimal losses and recognizing that adversaries' robust and growing nuclear arsenals demand strategies that deter and manage escalation risks.

Introduction

To achieve the likely objectives of the National Defense Strategy (NDS)—defending the US homeland and deterring China—the United States must address the risk of strategic attacks on the homeland. This imperative includes both preventing such attacks and ensuring that the Department of Defense (DoD) has both the strategy and capabilities to restore deterrence at the lowest possible level of damage if prevention fails.[1] Doing so is essential because a strategic attack by an adversary could potentially coerce the United States into ceasing its support for allies and partners, or inflict military disruption severe enough to prevent such support altogether, thus frustrating the objective of deterring China. Moreover, US adversaries can inflict a level of damage to US society that far exceeds the

1. According to public reporting, these goals have been spelled out in a classified interim strategic guidance on national defense. Alex Horton and Hannah Natanson, "Secret Pentagon Memo on China, Homeland Has Heritage Fingerprints," *Washington Post*, March 29, 2025, https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/2025/03/29/secret-pentagon-memo-hegseth-heritage-foundation-china/.

gains that the United States seeks through its foreign policy, further undermining the objective of defending the homeland.

The success of a strategy to address the risk of strategic attack on the US homeland relies on several overlapping pillars. The United States should

1. deter a large-scale nuclear attack on the US homeland;
2. seek to prevent nuclear escalation in conventional regional conflicts because a nuclear escalation might be difficult to stop once it has begun;
3. field US and allied forces sufficient to deter major-power conventional conflict from emerging in the first place—but not at the cost of the backstop offered by US nuclear forces;
4. maintain a flexible declaratory policy and deploy flexible strategic forces to enhance its ability to deter high-consequence, nonnuclear strategic attacks; and
5. enhance its ability to maintain its warfighting capacity, societal functioning, and national will, even while under strategic attack.

The next NDS should affirm the importance of addressing the risk of strategic attack on the United States and assign this goal as the highest priority. While the goals laid out here reflect long-standing pillars of US nuclear strategy, the program of record for modernizing the US nuclear is "necessary but not sufficient," in the words of the Congressional Strategic Posture Commission.[2] With the NDS establishing an appropriate level of priority, necessary resourcing must follow.

The threat environment

The United States faces a deteriorating global security environment in which US adversaries are expanding their strategic nuclear forces, threatening limited nuclear attack in regional contingencies, and supporting each other in their efforts to overturn the US-led international system. Together, these factors elevate the risk of a strategic attack on the US homeland, while simultaneously making such an attack more difficult to mitigate. This growing danger stems from several converging trends. Chief among them is China's rapid nuclear expansion, putting it well on its way to achieving nuclear parity with the United States by the 2030s. At the same time, limited nuclear attack is gaining prominence in the defense strategies of several US nuclear-armed adversaries, increasing the likelihood that a regional conflict could escalate in dangerous and unpredictable ways.[3] Finally, compounding these risks is the expanding suite of nonnuclear strategic attack options increasingly available to US adversaries, including cyber, space, and precision-guided conventional munitions, which enable these adversaries to achieve attacks with strategic consequences against the US homeland without resorting to nuclear weapons use. Often enabled by emerging technologies, these developments demand a more comprehensive and adaptive approach to homeland defense and strategic deterrence.

China's rapid nuclear expansion represents the most significant shift in the strategic threat environment facing the United States. As former US Strategic Command (STRATCOM) Commander General John Hyten stated in 2021, China is currently engaged in an "unprecedented nuclear modernization" and is expected to be a nuclear peer of the United States by the mid 2030s.[4] China has significantly improved the survivability of its nuclear retaliatory force and is fielding more flexible, shorter-range, and dual-capable forces, all of which are suitable

2. Madelyn R. Creedon, et al., "America's Strategic Posture: The Final Report of the Congressional Commission on the Strategic Posture of the United States," Institute for Defense Analyses, October 2023, 51, https://www.ida.org/research-and-publications/publications/all/a/am/americas-strategic-posture.
3. According to the US Department of Defense, "The PRC probably seeks lower yield nuclear warhead capabilities for proportional response options that its high-yield warheads cannot deliver." See: "Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China," US Department of Defense, 2024, 110, https://media.defense.gov/2024/Dec/18/2003615520/-1/-1/0/MILITARY-AND-SECURITY-DEVELOPMENTS-INVOLVING-THE-PEOPLES-REPUBLIC-OF-CHINA-2024.PDF. According to the 2022 US Nuclear Posture Review, "The current and growing salience of nuclear weapons in the strategies and forces of our competitors heightens the risks associated with strategic competition . . . Russia presents the most acute example of this problem today . . ." See: "2022 Nuclear Posture Review," US Department of Defense, October 2022, 5, https://media.defense.gov/2022/Oct/27/2003103845/-1/-1/1/2022-NATIONAL-DEFENSE-STRATEGY-NPR-MDR.pdf. According to the US Defense Intelligence Agency: North Korean "regime statements suggest that as its force size increases and capabilities improve, North Korea's nuclear weapons rationale is shifting from a sole focus on deterrence with limited battlefield effect to limited/discretionary nuclear use on the Korean peninsula with the goal of managing escalation and ending a conflict quickly." See: "Nuclear Challenges: The Growing Capabilities of Strategic Competitors and Regional Rivals," US Defense Intelligence Agency, 2024, 21, https://www.dia.mil/Portals/110/Images/News/Military_Powers_Publications/Nuclear_Challenges_2024.pdf.
4. John Grady, "Hyten: China's 'Unprecedented Nuclear Modernization' Chief Concern," USNI News, September 14, 2021, https://news.usni.org/2021/09/14/hyten-chinas-unprecedented-nuclear-modernization-chief-concern.

for regional nuclear coercion or employment. The DoD estimates that China will possess at least one thousand nuclear weapons by 2030—and might build more.[5]

Parity (or near parity) between the US and Chinese nuclear arsenals matters for two reasons. First, a more robust Chinese nuclear force could serve as a backstop to increased aggression from Beijing, which might feel emboldened to take riskier and more combative actions regionally, confident that its nuclear capabilities will limit US response options. Second, Beijing and Moscow are aligning more closely, as characterized by their so-called "no-limits" partnership, which was reaffirmed as recently as February 2025.[6] In this context, Washington must be prepared to deter—or, if necessary, defeat—possible aggression from two major powers. This condition of strategic simultaneity poses challenges across a range of possible aggression, from truly simultaneous to overlapping in timeframe, and from fully coordinated to merely opportunistic aggression. In any of these circumstances, the prospect of nuclear escalation will always be in the background of a conflict at the conventional level. Nuclear escalation could well come to the foreground if these states apply nuclear coercion or nuclear attacks to achieve their goals. Addressing this risk is made more difficult as China's nuclear force expands.[7]

The prospect of limited nuclear use appears to be gaining prominence in the strategies of all US nuclear-armed adversaries. While China continues to espouse its official policy of no first use of nuclear weapons, the structure and trajectory of its expanding nuclear capabilities seem to suggest a growing emphasis on coercion and limited employment, not just assured retaliation. Russia, for its part, has repeatedly signaled a lower formal threshold for nuclear use through both its recently modified declaratory policy and its rhetoric during the war in Ukraine, reinforcing the centrality of nuclear weapons in its political-military statecraft toolkit. Even North Korea is moving in this direction, advancing shorter-range, battlefield-capable nuclear systems alongside its growing arsenal of survivable, road-mobile, nuclear-tipped intercontinental ballistic missiles. While the recent US and Israeli air campaign against the Iranian nuclear program likely set it back to some extent, Iran has been moving closer to a nuclear weapon over the years and could attempt to reconstitute its program in the months and years ahead.[8] This trend poses immediate challenges for the United States, its deployed forces, and its allies. But the broader strategic risk, as argued below, lies in the potential for any limited nuclear use to escalate to a wider, strategic nuclear exchange between the United States and an adversary—an escalation pathway the United States must take seriously.

Finally, US adversaries are capable of a range of nonnuclear strategic attacks on the US homeland, and these capabilities have been enhanced by emerging technologies. Russia and China increasingly have the capability—and, likely, the intent—to strike a range of targets in the US homeland in the event of a war, including civilian and defense critical infrastructure, with a range of conventionally armed cruise, hypersonic, and ballistic missiles.[9] US adversaries also boast a range of counterspace weapons, including the ability to target space assets essential for civilian functions (e.g., positioning, navigation, and timing) as well as military functions up to and including nuclear command, control, and communications. Sophisticated state and non-state actors alike can hold critical infrastructure at risk through cyber means, as illustrated by recent reports of persistent Chinese pre-positioning on networks essential to critical infrastructure across key sectors of the US economy and throughout US territory.[10] The US State Department has assessed that Russia is in violation of the Biological Weapons Convention, and has expressed concerns about Chinese compliance.[11] Advancements in gene editing, synthetic biology, and artificial intelligence raise the specter of non-state

5. "Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China," US Department of Defense, 2024, https://media.defense.gov/2024/Dec/18/2003615520/-1/-1/0/MILITARY-AND-SECURITY-DEVELOPMENTS-INVOLVING-THE-PEOPLES-REPUBLIC-OF-CHINA-2024.PDF.
6. Antoni Slodkowski and Laurie Chen, "China's Xi Affirms 'No Limits' Partnership with Putin in Call on Ukraine War Anniversary," Reuters, February 24, 2025, https://www.reuters.com/world/xi-putin-hold-phone-call-ukraine-war-anniversary-state-media-says-2025-02-24/.
7. Ibid.
8. "Iran Pledges to Restore Its Nuclear Program in Wake of US, Israeli Strikes," Foundation for Defense of Democracies, June 24, 2025, https://www.fdd.org/analysis/2025/06/24/iran-pledges-to-restore-its-nuclear-program-in-wake-of-u-s-israeli-strikes.
9. Robert Soofer, et al., "'First, We Will Defend the Homeland': The Case for Homeland Missile Defense," Atlantic Council, January 4, 2025, https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/in-depth-research-reports/report/first-we-will-defend-the-homeland-the-case-for-homeland-missile-defense/.
10. "People's Republic of China Cyber Threat," US Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency, last visited July 7, 2025, https://www.cisa.gov/topics/cyber-threats-and-advisories/nation-state-cyber-actors/china.
11. "Adherence to and Compliance with Arms Control, Nonproliferation, and Disarmament Agreements and Commitments," US Department of State, April 2024, https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/2024-Arms-Control-Treaty-Compliance-Report.pdf.

malicious actors possessing frightening biological weapons capabilities.[12]

A strategy to address the risk of strategic attack on the US homeland

To prevent the most catastrophic threats to US national security, the United States must deter the only truly existential threat posed by other countries—a large-scale nuclear attack on the homeland. To do so, the United States must maintain a secure second-strike capability; a resilient nuclear command, control, and communications (NC3) system; and a plan for the continuity of government. Still, deterring a major nuclear confrontation alone is not enough; the United States must also be ready to deter or handle nuclear escalation during regional conflicts. Preventing adversaries from deploying nuclear weapons in conventional wars requires credible theater-level nuclear options, adaptable damage-limiting capabilities, resilient alliance commitments, and conventional forces capable of operating in a nuclear environment. US operational plans must also account for escalation risks and avoid unnecessarily provoking adversaries into nuclear use.

At the same time, the United States must avoid pursuing conventional deterrence at the expense of nuclear backstops. While preventing great-power war is crucial, history shows that adversaries might still opt for conflict even when facing stronger conventional forces. If a nuclear-armed adversary perceives losing a conventional war as a threat to its regime, it might escalate to nuclear use. The joint force optimally structured to deter or prevail in a conventional war is not the same force that is best suited to manage the nuclear escalation that might arise from conventional military success. Therefore, the United States must ensure its nuclear posture can support and, if needed, fill gaps in conventional deterrence, especially during simultaneous or sequential conflicts. Beyond nuclear threats, the United States must also be ready for high-impact nonnuclear strategic attacks, such as cyber, biological, or large-scale precision conventional strikes. It should keep the option to respond with nuclear weapons in extreme situations, while maintaining deliberate ambiguity about thresholds. Ultimately, even limited homeland defense and resilience against strategic attacks can reduce their impact and strengthen deterrence by complicating adversaries' calculations.

Deterring a large-scale nuclear attack on the US homeland

The only truly existential threat to US society from other nation-states is a large-scale nuclear attack. Deterring such an attack rests on three interlocking factors. First, it is crucial that the United States field a nuclear second-strike capability secure against any combination of adversaries. Second, the United States must maintain robust and resilient NC3. Third, the United States must have a well-rehearsed and realistic plan for the continuity of government, which will instill confidence that legitimate national leadership will continue in the wake of a crisis and is not vulnerable to an adversary's attempt at a decapitation strike.

Credible deterrence also hinges on stability-enhancing principles that have guided US nuclear posture for decades. This includes reliance on a diverse mix of land-, sea-, and air-based delivery systems, which prevents an adversary from believing it can neutralize the US nuclear arsenal with a single blow. Likewise, the United States must preserve the president's decision-making time in moments of crisis, rather than adopting a rigid launch-on-warning posture. Non-reliance on launch on warning reduces the risk of accidental or hasty nuclear use and strengthens international confidence in US crisis management. Together, these measures will reinforce the credibility of US guarantees to allies and discourage adversaries from gambling on the success of a first strike.

Because these deterrence foundations are only as strong as the hardware and networks that support them, the United States must complete the ongoing modernization of its aging nuclear triad and NC3 systems. Replacing legacy ballistic-missile submarines with the *Columbia* class, introducing the B-21 bomber, deploying the Long-Range Standoff Weapon, fielding a next-generation intercontinental ballistic-missile force, upgrading space- and ground-based communication links, and modernizing the nuclear warhead production and assembly infrastructure will preserve secure retaliatory capability well into the 2070s. The United States has delayed modernizing its nuclear triad and supporting infrastructure for decades—making the necessary investments in modernization now is nonnegotiable.

In the words of the Congressional Strategic Posture Commission, this nuclear modernization program of record is "necessary, but not sufficient."[13] China's nuclear breakout and the emerging two-nuclear-peer problem confront the United

12. Stewart Patrick and Josie Barton, "Mitigating Risks from Gene Editing and Synthetic Biology: Global Governance Priorities," Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, October 16, 2024, https://carnegieendowment.org/research/2024/10/mitigating-risks-from-gene-editing-and-synthetic-biology-global-governance-priorities.

13. Creedon, et al., "America's Strategic Posture," 51.

States with low-probability but high-consequence risks: the possibility of a combined attempted disarming attack from Russia and China, or a sequential conflict in which one adversary launches a disarming attack following limited exchange between the United States and the other power. As the expiration of the New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (New START) approaches in February 2026, the United States should carefully evaluate whether it might be necessary to expand its strategic force size by uploading existing warheads to the triad or adjusting future procurement of missiles, bombers, and submarines to address emerging nuclear threats.

Deter or manage nuclear escalation in regional conflicts

While deterring a large-scale nuclear exchange remains a core priority, central nuclear deterrence is comparatively more stable than the far more complex challenge of deterring regional nuclear use, particularly because escalation in regional conflicts can quickly spiral into strategic nuclear attacks on the US homeland. For that reason, the United States must be able to prevent nuclear use in a regional conflict or stop the progression of nuclear escalation on acceptable terms. Nuclear weapons derive their deterrent power, in part, from the prospect that even limited use has the potential to escalate into a full-scale exchange. Therefore, to lower the risk of a large-scale strategic attack on its homeland, the United States should seek to prevent adversary nuclear escalation in major regional conventional wars and ensure its adversaries do not believe that a nuclear strike on the US homeland is their only path to victory or even survival.

Escalation control, therefore, hinges on fielding credible tools to address every rung of the escalation ladder. In practice, this means fielding credible and flexible nuclear options, especially in the theater, which will signal resolve and prevent the president from being forced to choose between inaction and an overwhelming strategic response. Flexible options provide the ability to respond proportionally, manage escalation deliverables, and demonstrate US willingness to act without immediately triggering an uncontrolled nuclear exchange. US government bodies and outside analysts have proposed a range of characteristics that US theater nuclear forces should possess to deter and manage theater nuclear escalation (among other goals).[14] The NDS—and whatever policy coordination process takes the place of a Nuclear Posture Review in this administration—should prioritize fielding such forces.

In addition to flexible options, escalation management depends on broader strategic and operational capabilities. The United States must maintain robust alliance commitments and deny adversaries the expectation of political division in a crisis, while fielding conventional forces that are trained and equipped to operate, fight, and prevail in a nuclear-contaminated environment. Finally, the United States should maintain credible damage-limiting capabilities—such as missile defenses and resilient basing concepts—that can blunt limited nuclear use and reduce its coercive value. US strategic nuclear forces should continue to be designed, sized, and targeted in a way that provides credible damage-limiting capabilities against the subset of adversary nuclear forces that can be identified. A measure of damage limitation, in addition to directly protecting the United States in the most extreme circumstances, contributes to dissuading adversaries from going down the path of nuclear escalation in the first place.[15] The expansion of China's silo-based nuclear weapons, alongside other adversary developments, could necessitate a reassessment of the appropriate size and composition of deployed US strategic forces.

Finally, escalation management must be integrated into US war planning. Senior US defense leaders should design operational plans that, to the extent consistent with US political war aims, avoid military operations likely to provoke adversaries resorting to nuclear escalation. The United States might plan to avoid targets such as leadership, national command and control, integrated air and missile defense near regime targets, or attacks on nuclear or dual-capable forces; these actions could be interpreted as attempts to decapitate, disarm, or destabilize an adversary's regime and might accelerate its decision to escalate. Importantly, senior defense leaders must insist on such changes to conventional war plans when they meaningfully reduce the risk of nuclear war, even when doing so increases the expected costs and risks to US and allied forces.

14. See, for example: Creedon, et al., "America's Strategic Posture"; John R. Harvey and Robert Soofer, "Strengthening Deterrence with SLCM-N," Atlantic Council, November 5, 2022, https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/in-depth-research-reports/issue-brief/strengthening-deterrence-with-slcm-n/; Greg Weaver, "The Imperative of Augmenting US Theater Nuclear Forces," Atlantic Council, April 11, 2025, https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/in-depth-research-reports/issue-brief/the-imperative-of-augmenting-us-theater-nuclear-forces/.

15. For an excellent treatment of the current state of the debate as to the value of "counterforce" targeting and capabilities, see: Brad Roberts, ed., "Counterforce in Contemporary U.S. Nuclear Strategy," Center for Global Security Research, Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory, May 2025, https://cgsr.llnl.gov/sites/cgsr/files/2025-05/2025-0529-CGSR-Occasional-Paper-Counterforce-In-Contemporary-US-Nuclear-Strategy.pdf.

While the forthcoming NDS will likely emphasize protecting the US homeland, deterring or countering limited regional nuclear escalation remains essential for assuring allies. After all, the "theater" is their homeland. Allies are significantly more likely to contribute to US wartime coalitions when they feel confident that the United States can deter existential threats to their territories. Conversely, if allies lack such assurance, they might be driven to acquire their own nuclear weapons—something the United States has sought to prevent since the dawn of the nuclear age. The recent US strikes on Iranian nuclear facilities demonstrate that the current administration remains committed to nuclear nonproliferation.

Deter major-power war, but not at the cost of a nuclear backstop

Given the inherent risk that conventional wars might escalate to nuclear use, the United States should continue to prioritize deterring large-scale conventional wars with nuclear-armed powers. The latest NDS Commission affirmed the importance of enhancing US strategic forces while also "ensuring that these efforts do not come at the expense of modernizing and expanding the Navy and Air Force conventional forces."[16] Ideally, Congress would fully resource the US military. If tradeoffs must be made, however, the NDS Commission's recommendation warrants reconsideration. Disproportionate investment in conventional warfighting capabilities, especially at the expense of those suited to manage escalation, courts catastrophe. Deterrence by conventional military means is not foolproof—history is replete with examples of states initiating wars despite facing superior military forces. If the United States is successful in conventional war, this might encourage adversaries to resort to using nuclear weapons—especially if they fear that losing a war to the United States pose an existential threat to their regime or leaders. Defense strategists and conventional force planners must come to terms with the long-understood reality of defense strategy in the nuclear age: that a sufficiently sophisticated nuclear arsenal allows a state to opt out of conventional military defeat by altering the nature of the conflict to a competition of risk tolerance and willingness to absorb pain.

A force that is overly optimized for conventional deterrence and operations but lacks sufficient tools to manage escalation invites precisely this risk. Nuclear forces must remain the credible backstop to conventional deterrence, removing any illusion for adversaries that using nuclear weapons will shift the balance of a conflict in their favor. Moreover, flexible nuclear options—particularly those suited to limited use—can offset conventional military disadvantages or inferiority, which could become relevant if the United States faces simultaneous or sequential conflicts with major powers. These options will also further enhance the United States' ability to deter opportunistic aggression from one nuclear-armed adversary while engaged in conflict with another.

Maintain flexible capabilities and policy to address nonnuclear strategic attack

US adversaries today can deliver devastating effects without crossing the nuclear threshold. These nonnuclear, high-consequence attacks could include the deliberate release of a deadly pathogen, a cyberattack that disrupts critical infrastructure and large segments of the US economy, or large-scale conventional strikes on US military assets, including nuclear forces and NC3. While these attacks do not involve nuclear weapons, their consequences would nevertheless be strategic in nature and would also undermine national leadership and degrade military effectiveness. Taken together, such attacks open avenues for coercion—some of which have no clear precedent—and pose serious risks.

To deter these types of attacks, the United States should retain the option to respond with nuclear weapons in extreme cases, while maintaining a deliberate degree of ambiguity about what specific actions might warrant such a response. This flexible and opaque posture will complicate adversary calculations, making it more difficult for an adversary to assume that its forces can carry out strategic attacks without risking significant consequences.

At the same time, credible deterrence depends on the ability to rapidly and accurately attribute such attacks. Whether in the cyber, biological, or conventional domain, the United States must be able, to the greatest extent possible, to rapidly identify the perpetrator with high confidence. Investments in attribution capabilities, intelligence sharing, and infrastructure resilience are therefore essential components of an effective defense and deterrence strategy.

16. Harman, Jane, Eric S. Edelman, John M. Keane, Thomas G. Mahnken, Mara Rudman, Mariah Sixkiller, Alissa Michelle Starzak et al. *Commission on the National Defense Strategy*. Commission on the National Defense Strategy, 2024.; Paul Amato, "Many Nuclear Experts Agree That the US Needs New Capabilities. Now They Need to Convince the Pentagon," Atlantic Council, June 11, 2025, https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/new-atlanticist/many-nuclear-experts-agree-that-the-us-needs-new-capabilities-now-they-need-to-convince-the-pentagon.

Defend against and endure strategic attack

Finally, the ability to defend the homeland against strategic attacks—even in a limited manner—directly reduces the harm of such attacks and makes adversaries less likely to attempt them in the first place. Other contributors to the Atlantic Council's National Defense Strategy Project have outlined what a strategy to achieve this could look like.

Conclusion

Today's changing threat environment poses an increasing risk of a large-scale strategic attack on the US homeland (whether nuclear or nonnuclear). As adversaries grow and modernize their nuclear stockpiles, develop advanced conventional and cyber capabilities, and more frequently incorporate strategic attack options into their war plans, the United States must respond accordingly.

Addressing this threat requires a defense strategy that emphasizes deterrence and resilience at all levels of conflict. This involves modernizing the nuclear triad and NC3 systems, maintaining flexible options to deter and manage escalation, preserving the nuclear forces' backstop role even while pursuing conventional deterrence, and preparing for high-impact nonnuclear attacks with credible responses and strategic ambiguity.

As the DoD develops the next NDS, it should prioritize preventing and mitigating strategic attacks on the US homeland, making this a foundational goal that supports all other defense objectives in an era of renewed great-power competition. If the DoD fails in this mission, no other mission matters.

Author biographies

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