HEARING TO CONSIDER THE NOMINATION OF:

GENERAL ANTHONY J. COTTON, USAF FOR REAPPOINTMENT TO THE

GRADE OF GENERAL

AND TO BE COMMANDER OF UNITED STATES STRATEGIC COMMAND

Thursday, September 15, 2022

U.S. Senate
Committee on Armed Services,
Washington, D.C.

The committee met, pursuant to notice, at 10:00 a.m.,
in Room G50, Dirksen Senate Office Building, Hon. Jack
Reed, chairman of the committee, presiding.

Committee Members Present: Senators Reed [presiding],
Shaheen, Gillibrand, Blumenthal, Hirono, Kaine, King,
Warren, Peters, Rosen, Kelly, Inhofe, Fischer, Cotton,
Round, Ernst, Tillis, Sullivan, Scott, Hawley, and
Tuberville.
OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. JACK REED, U.S. SENATOR
FROM RHODE ISLAND

Chairman Reed: Good morning. The committee meets today to consider the nomination of General Anthony Cotton to be the next Commander of U.S. Strategic Command. General Cotton, thank you for your decades of service and willingness to serve in this important position.

I would like to welcome your wife, Marsha, who is with us today. Welcome, Marsha. I would also like to acknowledge your son, Russell, and daughter, Brianna, who I am sure are proudly watching. We are grateful for their continued support of your service. U.S. Strategic Command, or STRATCOM, is the principal command for ensuring our Nation's nuclear deterrent is effective, safe, and reliable.

Today, our nuclear deterrent consists of a triad of ballistic missile submarines, heavy bombers, and land based intercontinental missiles. This triad is the bedrock not only of our national defense, but also the security of our allies and partners who depend on the U.S. nuclear umbrella.

Integral to the triad as a highly secure and multilayered nuclear command, control, and communications, or NC3 system, which connects the President to the nuclear forces. Successfully maintaining this nuclear deterrent is
a mission fundamental to our long term strategic competition with China and Russia.

This mission has made especially clear throughout Russia's assault on Ukraine. Russia has conducted out-of-cycle nuclear exercises, issued inflammatory statements about tactical nuclear strikes in Ukraine, and continues to threaten nuclear power plants in the region. Vladimir Putin's behavior has been reckless to a dangerous degree. China has also made significant changes to its nuclear approach.

Not constrained by the New Start treaty, Beijing has built hundreds of new ballistic missiles and intends to have a stockpile of more than 1,000 warheads by the early 2030. In the past two years, we have also seen China develop missile fields in hardened silos throughout the country.

This development, along with China's development of air delivered weapons and ballistic missile submarines in the South China Sea, fundamentally changes the nature of Beijing's nuclear doctrine. We need to seriously consider that we are entering a new trilateral nuclear competition era.

The Cold War was essentially a bilateral rivalry between the United States and the Soviet Union, and deterrence theory and communication methods were developed
based on two competitors. Those rules now must change with
the ascendancy of China and its growing nuclear arsenal.

And General Cotton, I would like to know how you would
address this new deterrence dynamic involving not one, but
two near-peer competitors. If confirmed, you will be
responsible for not only the health of our triad and the
NC3 system, but the 150,000 military personnel who operate
them.

STRATCOM's uniformed and civilian workforce is known
to have the highest levels of personal reliability and
professionalism. It will be your responsibility to support
them and their families and ensure our nuclear deterrent
can operate effectively around the clock. Supporting your
command is the National Nuclear Security Administration, or
NNSA, which maintains and develops our nuclear warheads.

The organization has over 40,000 technicians,
engineers, and scientists working at three design
laboratories, one test site, and four production plants.
NNSA will need your support as it experiences its highest
workload since the 1980s in managing five major warhead
programs while rebuilding nuclear infrastructure.

Finally, the 2022 Nuclear Posture Review has validated
the importance of modernizing the triad, the NC3 system,
and the supporting infrastructure at NNSA. This is the
third historic cycle of modernization since the 1960s. You
will be responsible for ensuring the United States can deliver the capabilities needed to effectively deter our adversaries through 2070. General, you will be undertaking enormous responsibilities, if confirmed.

As I said earlier, the United States nuclear deterrent is the bedrock of our national defense. Some have said that this deterrent is never used, but that is a misconception. It is used 365 days a year, 24 hours a day.

You will responsible for continuing to ensure that the United States and its allies can deter not one but two near-peer nuclear adversaries, something your predecessors did not face. I look forward to hearing how you would prioritize and meet each of these critical responsibilities.

Thank you again for your willingness to serve our Nation, and I look forward to your testimony. Now let me recognize Ranking Member Inhofe.
STATEMENT OF HON. JAMES M. INHOFE, U.S. SENATOR FROM OKLAHOMA

Senator Inhofe: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I also want to welcome General Cotton. Thank him for his long service. General Cotton, your predecessor appeared before this committee several times over the past few years warning of the growing strategic threats that we face as a Nation.

I think we all understand that China's massive military investments are shifting from the balance of power in the Pacific, even as it builds the capacity to extend its reach across the globe. Putin's unprovoked invasion of Ukraine and his reckless threats of nuclear escalation remind us of some of the worst days of the Cold War.

We are -- effectively resisting China's and Russia's aggression requires that we remain resolute and deal with the world as it is, not as we would prefer it to be, which is sometimes a mistake. I was pleased that the Administration's Nuclear Posture Review declined the first many policy options that would have severely damaged our Nation's deterrence.

However, the Administration's decision to discard planned enhancements to our forces, even as China and Russia grow their arsenals, was disappointing to say the least. Your predecessor, along with the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs and other senior officers, voiced their
objection to these decisions.

And on a bipartisan basis, we have taken steps to reverse those voting choices. Moving forward, we need to accelerate the work and the right size of our forces to meet the strategic deterrence requirements of the coming decades.

I trust you will be an advocate for such efforts as the next STRAT Commander. Look forward to your testimony. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman Reed: Thank you, Senator Inhofe. General Cotton, you are recognized for your opening statement.
STATEMENT OF GENERAL ANTHONY J. COTTON, USAF, FOR
REAPPOINTMENT TO THE GRADE OF GENERAL AND TO BE COMMANDER
OF UNITED STATES STRATEGIC COMMAND

General Cotton: Good morning, Chairman Reed, Ranking
Member Inhofe, and distinguished members of the committee.
It is truly an honor to appear before you today as a
nominee to be the next Commander of U.S. Strategic Command.

I am very grateful to the President, Secretary of
Defense, and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff for
their trust and confidence in me for this nomination. I
would like to recognize the current Commander of U.S.
Strategic Command, Admiral Charles Richard, and his wife,
Lisa, for their 40 years of selfless service to this great
Nation.

Joining me today is my wife, Marsha. She has been my
best friend and biggest champion for over 33 years. A
former collegiate athlete and schoolteacher, Marsha has
been a remarkable advocate for the men and women and their
families. She is an incredible source of strength and
inspiration for me and my family.

Not with us today, but always in our hearts is our son
Russell, an intel analyst, and our daughter, Brianna, a
recent University of Michigan law school graduate. I am so
proud of my children for the path that they have taken to
serve our Nation in their own unique ways.
There are two people who are no longer with us but whose absence I feel more strongly on days like today. That is my mother, Amy, and my father, James. My father joined the Army Air Corps in 1942 and fought in the Pacific theater before the establishment of the United States Air Force, and served in both the Korean and Vietnam Wars, prior to retiring as the United States Air Force Chief Master Sergeant in 1974.

My mother, all five feet, two inches of her was fierce, full of compassion, and kept her boys, the chief and I, in line. My parents are the foundation of who I am, and I know they are looking down upon Team Cotton with great pride.

Last, I want to thank the men and women of Air Force Global Strike Command and U.S. Strategic Command for their continued professionalism and dedication. Their dedication to this mission is essential in a world where we now face two near-peer competitors.

We must deter the pacing challenge of China and address the acute threats presented by Russia. It is both our conventional and nuclear capabilities, along with a crucial support from our allies and partners, that underpins our strategic deterrence.

Our Nation's nuclear forces continue to be safe, secure, reliable, and effective. As we bring the B-21
Raider, the Columbia Class Ballistic Missile Submarine, Sentinel Intercontinental Ballistic Missile Weapon System, and Long Range Standoff Weapon online, we will continue to ensure the credibility of deterrence for decades to come.

Underpinning all of this is our nuclear command, control, and communication systems known as NC3. While the current system is secure and resilient, modernization and sustainment of this capability is just as important as the weapons system platforms themselves. If confirmed, I will use my authorities to ensure that NC3 systems continue to outpace the threat. We will always build in margin. We will always have hedge.

The mission of U.S. Strategic Command is to deter adversaries and employ force to guarantee the security of our Nation and our allies. If confirmed, I will work with relevant agencies across the U.S. Government and within DOD, collaborate closely with civilian leaders, and directly with my fellow Combatant Commanders as we monitor the global threats and execute operations in accordance with the National Defense Strategy.

I commit to commanding a resilient Joint Force capable of conducting multi-domain operations focused on deterring aggression, and if necessary, defending this Nation. I look forward to working with Congress and the members of this committee to address the strategic challenges of this
great Nation.

Chairman Reed, Ranking Member Inhofe, distinguished members of this committee, it is an honor to sit before you today, and I look forward to answering your questions.

[The prepared statement of General Cotton follows:]
Chairman Reed: Thank you very much, General. I have a series of questions that are standard for nominees. You may respond appropriately. Have you adhered to applicable laws and regulations governing conflicts of interest?

General Cotton: Yes.

Chairman Reed: Have you assumed any duties or take any actions that would appear to presume the outcome of the confirmation process?

General Cotton: No.

Chairman Reed: Exercising our legislative and oversight responsibilities makes it important that this committee, its subcommittees, and other appropriate committees of Congress receive testimony, briefings, reports, records, and other information from the Executive Branch on a timely basis. Do you agree, if confirmed, to appear and testify before this committee when requested?

General Cotton: Chairman, I do.

Chairman Reed: Do you agree, when asked before this committee, to give your personal views, even if your views differ from the Administration?

General Cotton: Chairman, I do.

Chairman Reed: Do you agree to provide records, documents, and electronic communications in a timely manner when requested by this committee, its subcommittees, or other appropriate committees of Congress, and to consult
with the requester regarding the basis for any good faith delay or denial in providing such records?

General Cotton: I do.

Chairman Reed: Will you ensure that your staff complies with deadlines established by this committee for the production of reports, records, and other information, including timely responding to hearing questions for the record?

General Cotton: I will.

Chairman Reed: Will you cooperate in providing witnesses and briefers in response to congressional requests?

General Cotton: I will.

Chairman Reed: Will those witnesses and briefers be protected from reprisal for their testimony or briefing?

General Cotton: They will be.

Chairman Reed: Thank you, General. General, the 2018 Nuclear Posture Review recommended a supplemental nuclear system to the triad, a submarine launched cruise missile, or SLCM, and the 2022 NPR did not pursue it. And what are your views on the sub -- nuclear submarine launched missile?

General Cotton: Chairman, thank you for the question. If confirmed, my job is to be able to present the decision maker, the President of the United States, with a wide
variety of options to be able to meet challenges that we
have seen to be warranted due to a requirement. In this
case, I would want to be able to present the maximum amount
-- the maximum capabilities that are available.

When it comes to SLCM, I must admit that I would like
to be able to do, like my predecessors before, to make an
assessment on that. If it meets -- if it is able to meet
that capability gap that is there, I would like to be able
to see that and assess that so I can make my best military
assessment on the specific weapon system itself because I
am not familiar with that weapon system on the specifics of
what it can do with the capabilities to close the
capability gap that we might perceive.

Chairman Reed: General, as I noted in my opening
statement, we are now facing a three way nuclear race,
which alters some of the traditional notions of deterrence
based on the bipolar world of the Cold War. If confirmed,
do you believe that you will have the sufficient forces and
capability to undertake this new and evolving mission?

General Cotton: Chairman, thanks for the question. I
would like to answer that two ways. The current force that
we have today, we are ready to execute today. What I would
say is, if confirmed, and I know this is continually
happening today, is we must evaluate what the additional
risks are and what the adversary is doing to ensure two
things.

First, to evaluate to make sure that the nuclear strategy that we have within Strategic Command can meet the objectives, the national objectives that are presented before us. So the first thing I would do, if confirmed, is to ensure -- because sir, the first time since 1945, the first time for us as a Nation, we have two near-peer adversaries.

We have always put together a nuclear defense strategy that has one nuclear power. We are going to have to roll up our sleeves to ensure that we are doing everything we are that we can strategy wise with Strategic Air Command -- excuse me, between STRATCOM to ensure that we are meeting the objectives to be able to have and take care of two near peers. First time in history that we have ever seen that.

Chairman Reed: Thank you, sir. STRATCOM is the Joint Staff lead for ensuring the Joint Force can successfully defend and prosecute electronic warfare, which is now referred to as electromagnetic spectrum operations or EMSO. Russia has successfully used EMSO in Ukraine, and China has greatly expanded their capabilities. Can you tell us this view -- your views on this subject? And if confirmed, will you ensure it receives your full attention?

General Cotton: Thank you, Chairman. Absolutely. So if confirmed, it is going to be a front burner item within...
STRATCOM. You know, I know right now that the Executive, DOD, EMS Superiority Strategic Implementation Plan has been laid out in which the Commander of STRATCOM is going to be the lead and that directs report -- the direct report to the Commander of STRATCOM.

That is something that, if confirmed, I want to be able to dive down and do a true assessment of what is going on with EMS. I agree, it has atrophied over the decades. And now with two near peers, we are going to have to understand how to attack that and how to attack it well. So it is absolutely something that I would look into, sir.

Chairman Reed: Thank you very much. Senator Inhofe, please.

Senator Inhofe: Tell us, Chairman. I do have three questions. And while you have addressed all three of these, it will give us a chance to elaborate a little bit more if that is your desire, General Cotton.

We all know how critical it is to rebuild our Nation's nuclear deterrent, but we are still years away from fielding any new systems. So in terms of your priorities, how important is it that we accelerate as much of the U.S. nuclear modernization plan as soon as possible?

General Cotton: Senator, thank you for the question. I think about it this way. So if confirmed, I think the challenge of Strategic Command is to ensure that we sustain
legacy systems as we transition to the modern -- to our modernized systems. That is going to be key for us.

In order to do that, it is going to take the full power of Government to be able to pull that together, especially when we are talking about the central weapons system and the Columbia and all of the five that I have under my purview as a current Joint Forces Air Component Commander working for the Commander of STRATCOM.

So being able to do that, sir, I think a couple of the key things are going to be required from us. We are going to need stable, predictable, and adequate, and timely funding. My job, if confirmed as the Commander of STRATCOM, is to ensure that we also have stable requirements.

Because what we are going to see, and what I think is going to be great for us with the new modernized systems, is the fact that we are by design building in a system that we know will last for decades because that is built into the system.

So the modularity that we will see will be able to keep pace with the threats that we will see in the future. What we need to do in the meantime, though, is to sustain the legacy system that still -- that is still safe, secure, and effective as we make that transition.

Senator Inhofe: Okay. That is good and I appreciate
that very much. The -- it has already been mentioned a
couple of times talking about the two peer adversaries.
This is something that we have not done before. This is
new.

And even though you did already address this, you have
been asked this question even by the chairman, I would like
to give you the opportunity to expand, if you want to, on
how we are going to handle this. What is going to be
different about two adversaries?

General Cotton: Thank you, Senator. What is
different is two near peers that actually act differently.
From a doctrines perspective, we understand Russian nuclear
theory and nuclear doctrine.

Minimal deterrence was what we thought of when we
talked of China as recent as 2018. We have seen the
incredible expansiveness of what they are doing with their
nuclear force, which does not, in my opinion, reflect
minimal deterrence.

They have a bona fide triad now. So we are going to
have to understand more deeply the Chinese nuclear
strategy.

Senator Inhofe: Okay. All right. I appreciate that.
Now, the -- while the chairman did talk about this before,
I am going to frame the question as my last question a
little bit differently, General Cotton.
A number of the senior military officers have testified to their support of continuing the sea launched cruise missile program, including the Chairman and the Vice Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, the Chief of Naval Operations, and the Commanders of the U.S. Strategic and European Command.

Do you agree with, not -- do you agree with these leaders right now and your colleagues that we should keep this program going? And I would like to have you give -- be as specific as possible, because we all know what the program is. We all expressed ourselves on it. So I would like to have your thoughts on this.

General Cotton: Yes, Senator. So the Chairman, the Vice Chairman, and the current Commander of U.S. Strategic Command absolutely understand where they are on the endorsement of continuing.

Senator Inhofe: That is correct.

General Cotton: From my perspective, I absolutely understand that they are looking at the capability gap to be able to do that. The only thing that is different between they and I is I have yet to do an assessment on the weapons system itself. But absolutely understand where they are on being able to have a capability gap that is filled that they have seen. I have seen that capability gap as well, and I endorse the fact that we need to fill
that capability gap.

Senator Inhofe: Thank you, General.

Chairman Reed: Thank you, Senator Inhofe. Senator Shaheen, please.

Senator Shaheen: Good morning. Congratulations, General Cotton, on your nomination. Thank you to you and your family for your long service. I would like to begin by following up a little bit on Senator Inhofe's question about the challenges with modernization. And you talked about a dependable budget process.

You talked about a whole of Government cooperative effort. What you didn't talk about is the supply chain and the challenges with making sure we have the critical minerals, the other requirements to modernize our nuclear arsenal.

Can you talk a little bit about what you think those challenges are, and how you see the ability to impact that, and what we should be thinking about as a committee?

General Cotton: Thank you, Senator, for the question. Absolutely correct. As we are seeing the modernization programs within the nuclear portfolio, I would venture to say that it is probably being seen across the Department of Defense, but in particular for the nuclear portfolio.

Even as we are seeing the industry partners do the Herculean efforts and work in moving the programs along at
a great pace, what we are now finding is the realities of supply chain limitations and supply chain shortfalls. We had a great discussion and a good example -- or some components that are U.S. made components with U.S. made subcomponents that are still taking what would be on average, maybe 10 days to source, that are now taking up to 90 days to source.

So by definition, if you look at what we need to do in regards to maintaining a flow and schedule to get our new modernized systems online, you know, if you introduce that into the flow, those delays right there cause me concern.

And I think it is going to take everyone to understand how we can close the gap on supply chain management and ensure that we can get the supplies to the industry partners that are trying to modernize this force.

Senator Shaheen: And are you comfortable that we have the components that we are going to need being manufactured within the United States, the materials that we need being produced in the United States?

General Cotton: Ma'am, I did. Until we start to see, you know, that kind of eat into to the schedule as being problems with supply chain.

Senator Shaheen: Thank you. There is -- can you describe how you analyze the difference between strategic deterrence and integrated deterrence, and how you see that
affecting your role, if at all, in terms of the mission of STRATCOM?

General Cotton: Yes, ma'am. Thanks for the question. It is integral. Integrated deterrence is a whole of Government opportunity. And in a way I describe that is, it is -- I remember growing up and using the dime theory when I was a young lieutenant, but it is using all instruments of power within the Government, the United States, to afford us a deterrence factor that makes it, so we never have to get to the day where I have to execute the mission, if confirmed, from U.S. Strategic Command.

Strategic deterrence to me composes more than just nuclear deterrence. Strategic deterrence to me has a conventional and a nuclear component to it. And it is the backstop, in my opinion, to ensure that we can deter forces when called upon.

Senator Shaheen: So does the focus on integrated deterrence change the role that you would have, if confirmed, as the head of STRATCOM?

General Cotton: Ma'am, I don't believe so, because I think strategic deterrence is an integral part of the overarching integrated deterrence that we all speak of.

Senator Shaheen: Thank you. One of the -- you know, as someone who remembers the Cold War very vividly and the focus on -- the concern about nuclear annihilation and the
ability to destroy the world that way, and there was a lot of attention to that that has dissipated over the years with some of the arms control agreements, and but I think as we look at the war in Ukraine and some of Vladimir Putin's statements, there is a renewed concern about what the use of nuclear weapons would mean.

Are there ways in which you think our Strategic Command, our nuclear triad are helping to constrain what Vladimir Putin does now in this war in Ukraine?

General Cotton: Senator, thanks for the question. I absolutely believe that our nuclear deterrent force held. We did not see Russia do anything with our native -- or our NATO partners. The rhetoric may have -- we may have heard the rhetoric, but I think at the end of the day, Russia and China both understand that we have a strong, resilient nuclear force that is offering deterrence to ourselves and extended deterrence to our allies.

Senator Shaheen: Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman Reed: Thank you, Senator Shahee. Senator Fischer, please.

Senator Fischer: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you, General, for being here today. And thank you for your willingness to continue your service to this country. I would like to welcome your family as well.

Madam, it is nice to see you here, and I know the
sacrifices that you and your family make on behalf of this country as well. Thank you. General Cotton, a lot of times in this committee and on the subcommittee of strategic forces, our main focus is on modernization of our triad. We also try to gain a fuller understanding of the future needs that our military must have to provide for National Security.

And we talk about things like SLCM and the need that Commanders such as yourself will have to have to provide options to the President when or if you are ever in that position. The more options you can represent, the better for the security of this country, the better for the people of this country.

But also under the duties and responsibilities of the STRATCOM Combatant Commander, we need to look at the importance of NC3. We have to look at the NNSA's supporting infrastructure as well.

So, General, I think that when we talk about nuclear modernization and we have that focus on the triad, on the weapons systems, the warheads, we shouldn't forget, we should not forget about NC3, the architecture, as well as the scientific and production infrastructure of NNSA.

Can you talk about how important these elements are to the deterrent and the modernization challenge that we are seeing in these areas as well?
General Cotton: Senator, I would love to. You know, I will start with NC3. I know there are members of the committee that say it is the fourth of the triad, right. It is the quad. I have heard folks say that. I call it the tapestry. In my opening statement, you heard me discuss and talk about, it is just as important as the platforms that we are talking about modernizing, and that is absolutely true.

The good news is it is still a -- it is a resilient system today. What I like, having over 36 years in this business, is the conversations that people like yourself, and others also see it as just as important as the -- as a weapon systems that we often talk about. If confirmed, I would use my authorities.

As everyone's aware, the NEC or the NC3 enterprise center that is located within Strategic Command and the Commander Strategic Command having kind of oversight, delegated oversight authorities to be able to kind of make sure that we as a Department are looking to ensure that we are modernizing with Next Gen technologies.

I call it NC2 over assured comms to ensure that we have the state of the art NC3 systems that we need for not only today, not only mid-term, but the future. And that is going to be absolutely critical for us, because I guarantee you that I want to ensure that we always outpace our
adversaries, who are also paying attention to our NC3 systems.

Senator Fischer: STRATCOM also has significant responsibilities for the electromagnetic spectrum operations. Can you describe some of the challenges in this mission area, and what STRATCOM is doing to help rebuild the force structure and the capabilities that we need?

General Cotton: Yes, ma'am. So from my vantage point as the Joint Forces Air Component Commander, I can only give my vantage of what I have in the Air Force side of the house. If confirmed, I would like to make an assessment on the entire portfolio. But from our vantage point, I think we are a little behind.

And I don't think -- I know we are behind. But the good news is, I know that we are working to try to close the gap on us not paying attention to EMS for decades. So if confirmed, that would be one of the things that would be on the plate that I would absolutely want to assess and be the greatest advocate that I could be as the Commander of STRATCOM in ensuring that we have the -- not the not pace our adversaries but lead our adversaries in that domain.

Senator Fischer: Thank you. I was going to ask you about also, as critics portray our nuclear deterrence as a relic of the Cold War, but I will send that to you in a
written question. Thank you.

Chairman Reed: Thank you, Senator Fischer. Senator Hirono, please.

Senator Hirono: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Welcome, General Cotton and Mrs. Cotton. As part of my responsibilities on this committee to ensure the fitness of nominees for appointment to senior positions within the Administration, I ask the following two initial questions of all nominees to all of the committees on which I serve.

Since you became a legal adult, have you ever made unwanted requests for sexual favors or committed any verbal or physical harassment or assault of a sexual nature?

General Cotton: Senator, no.

Senator Hirono: Have you ever faced discipline or entered into a settlement related to this kind of conduct?

General Cotton: No, ma'am.

Senator Hirono: General, you have been asked a number of questions about SLCM, and while some military leaders, including Chairman Millie, have expressed their support for SLCM, and several DOD officials, including Secretary Austin, have expressed their opposition to the project, I share the concerns expressed by Secretary Austin that the development of such a low yield or tactical nuclear cruise missile is unnecessary and could lead to a dangerous new nuclear arms race.
The United States should be a leader in international efforts to reduce nuclear stockpiles and prevent nuclear proliferation, while still ensuring we maintain cutting edge capabilities to protect our National Security. I know that you testified that you will make your own assessment as to SLCM.

And I do want to ask you though, do you agree that the United States has a role to play in preventing a new nuclear arms race? And if so, if confirmed, will you work with the Department of State to support the strengthening of diplomatic efforts to prevent nuclear proliferation?

General Cotton: Senator, thank you for the question. I think that that weaves into what we would call integrated deterrence, right. So as we talk about integrated deterrence, I want to take our instruments of power to ensure that we can deter. So in regards to the question that you asked, my best military advice would always be to be able to present the Commander in Chief with a variety of options and capabilities.

So that is where I would be, if confirmed as the Commander of U.S. STRATCOM, is to be able to offer as much capability and options to the Commander in Chief. But I do understand the question that you asked in regard to the Department of State, and the answer is yes, as far as integrated deterrence, I think it is key to that.
Senator Hirono: Well, I think integrated deterrence means that we have a role to play, I would say a leading role to play, in preventing a new nuclear arms race. Would you agree with that?

General Cotton: I do.

Senator Hirono: So given the importance of nonproliferation, are there other weapons or tactics that can accomplish the same strategic objectives as the Command without creating new nuclear weapons?

General Cotton: Ma'am, if confirmed, that is exactly what I meant by making the assessment to understand what would be the gap filler in the capability.

Senator Hirono: As we prepare to revamp the nuclear triad or modernize the triad, wouldn't our efforts be better utilized focusing on that important mission rather than diverting resources and attention to SLCM?

General Cotton: Ma'am, you know, I appreciate the committee and what they have done for the overarching modernization of the nuclear portfolio writ large. Once again, I think if confirmed, I still would like to be able to assess and analyze how do you broaden that portfolio to provide more options for the President of the United States.

Senator Hirono: I think one of the concerns about the SLCM is that it is going to be a highly expensive
proposition, whereas we are very clear on the need to revamp the triad and modernize. So the going on the higher class ballistic missile submarine, originally said to be in service for 30 years, will be extended by the Navy out to 42 years.

These submarines will begin to retire from the fleet as the Columbia Class comes online to replace them in the late 2020s. The warheads used on the submarines have also undergone life extension programs of their own, in some cases adding an estimate of 30 years to their service life.

What concerns you have with service life extensions as we bridge the gap between aging and new technologies?

General Cotton: Ma'am, thank you for the question. So in regards, with our incredible partners at NNSA who are doing this work for us, I think the question is we need to kind of see what aging you really see from the asset, and also does a life extension, you know, solve the problem to get the effects that you want from that asset.

So if confirmed, I think that is part of what I would assess as being a member of the Nuclear Weapons Council as well, to be able to get an assessment to see, okay, is it about re-use or is it about new, and further. So that is something that I would have to make an assessment on, if confirmed.

Senator Hirono: Thank you.
Chairman Reed: Thank you, Senator Hirono. Senator Cotton, please.

Senator Cotton: General Cotton, welcome and congratulations on your nominations and continued service. You know, we hear the term arms race a lot, especially in the nuclear context. Last time, I guess, we had a major arms race in which we actually contested. The race was in the 1980s.

And there aren't many Senators around who were there then. Pat Leahy and Chuck Grassley, maybe. I bet they took different views on it. I know what view Joe Biden took on it. He continued to criticize Ronald Reagan for an arms race that was going to destabilize the world, lead to a nuclear war.

Of course, it led to nothing but victory in the Cold War without even firing a shot. Do we get to decide whether there is an arms race or not, General Cotton, or does the enemy get a vote on that?

General Cotton: Thank you for the question, Senator. I would answer it this way, and it still goes back to the options and capabilities that we should be able to provide to the Commander in Chief. So from -- my best military advice is to provide the capability and options for the Commander in Chief, and I would like to be able to provide the most capable options that I can in this regard.
Senator Cotton: Yes. And that is why I said the last contested arms race we faced was in the 1980s during the Reagan buildup, because we have been in an arms race with China for the last 30 years, and fortunately we haven't been significantly contesting it and therefore China has been winning it. In the end, whether we enter an arms race is not really up to us. What is up to us is whether we win it or we lose it.

And if you ask me, it is much cheaper to win an arms race than it is to lose a war. It goes especially for nuclear weapons. General Cotton, I want to read to you a short excerpt from Winston Churchill's Iron Curtain speech, also known as The Sinews of Strength -- A Sinews of Peace speech.

Less than, or barely six months after VJ Day in Fulton, Missouri, Churchill says, from what I have seen of our Russian friends and allies during the war, I am convinced there is nothing they admire so much as strength, and there is nothing for which they have less respect than for weakness, especially military weakness.

Do you agree with Sir Winston that Russians have less -- there is nothing for which they have less respect than weakness, especially military weakness?

General Cotton: Senator, I agree.

Senator Cotton: Do you think that is true of the
Chinese as well?

    General Cotton:  I do.

Senator Cotton:  Do you think it is true of the Iranians?

    General Cotton:  I think of all of our adversaries.

Senator Cotton:  Okay.  Yes, I thought so too.  He continued then to say, for that reason, the old doctrine of a balance of power is unsound.  We cannot afford it, if we can help it, to work on narrow margins, offering temptations to a trial of strength.  Do you agree with Sir Winston that we should not offer temptations to a trial of strength to our adversaries by operating on narrow margins?

    General Cotton:  Senator, I think that we always should -- we always should operate from a power of strength.

Senator Cotton:  And those margins would narrow significantly, given China's nuclear buildup, if China and Russia became de facto or even de jure allies, correct?

    General Cotton:  Two near peer allies as opposed -- or adversaries, as opposed to one.

Senator Cotton:  Okay.  There has been a lot of talk over the last year that a major ground war in Europe between two nation states was unthinkable.  Even after Russia invaded Ukraine, such a war was unthinkable.  Obviously, Vladimir Putin thought it was quite
thinkable. Do you believe that a nuclear war is
unthinkable? Not in terms of the consequences it would
have for our Nation and for the world, but for the fact of
whether it might happen. Is a nuclear war unthinkable?

General Cotton: Senator, I think if confirmed, the
role that I would play as Commander is to make sure that
those 150,000 men and women that are supporting Strategic
Air Command, every -- I keep saying Strategic Air Command,
forget me -- and Strategic Command are prepared to do what
some folks might think is the unthinkable.

Senator Cotton: I think that is right. You have an
unusual and weighty job, and that I think it is your
responsibility almost every day to think what most people
believe is unthinkable and think about what a nuclear war
would look like and how it would be fought, and therefore
the best way to do what we all want, which is to deter it
from happening in the first place. So, thank you, General
Cotton. Best wishes for you in your new role.

General Cotton: Thank you.

Chairman Reed: Thank you, Senator Cotton. Senator
King, please.

Senator King: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. General
Cotton, welcome. I am sure you were briefed before this
hearing that the Russians again -- let me try it again. I
am sure you were briefed that the chairman would ask you a
series of routine questions at the beginning and you went through and answered them properly.

I just want to emphasize one of those questions. Do you agree, when asked before this committee, to give your personal views, even if your views differ from the Administration? That is a very important question, because we need to know what your best military advice is, not colored by the views of the Administration, the President. This is -- I just want to emphasize how important this question is.

You answered it properly, but I just want to have it in the back of your head in the future. And it is going to be difficult. It is not easy to say something that may be unacceptable to some other part of the Pentagon or the Administration. In looking over my notes as I make questions, I realize that all of my questions involve changes in the strategic posture.

You have mentioned several times we have gone from a bipolar world to a multipolar world in terms of our adversaries. That is a strategic change, but there are others. Just to run down a quick list, electromagnetic spectrum and electronic warfare.

You have you have touched upon, I realize there is classified information here, but I hope that you will commit to holding serious exercises on electronic warfare
and notify us of how we are doing. Because this is a new strategic challenge that I am not sure we are adequately accounted for yet.

General Cotton: So Senator, for your first question, absolutely, yes, my best military advice presented to the committee. For your second, is another absolutely, yes. We are going to have to flesh out through exercises, as you mentioned, to ensure we can find any blind spots and shortfalls and make corrections as warranted and as required. So I wholeheartedly agree with you.

Senator King: Another area of strategic change has happened in the last four or five years, and that is hypersonics. We thought of strategic forces as nuclear weapons and nuclear deterrence.

Hypersonics are a new threat that are -- is a strategic threat, particularly, for example, the Chinese putting a glide vehicle, hypersonic glide vehicle in orbit, which radically changes things like how much time we might have to react to an attack. Do you view hypersonics as a serious strategic challenge?

General Cotton: Senator, I do. And I see it as a warning challenge. I think as far as when we have a conversation, if confirmed, I think my fellow Combatant Commanders, we will have to have a discussion and understand how to give -- kind of relook missile defense,
relook missile warning, understand what a sensor layer
looks like that can achieve those effects to give time,
because I need to give decision space to the decision
maker.

Senator King: Well, I think it is safe to say that
the bullet on bullet theory of missile defense is out the
window when you are talking about hypersonics. Another
area is cyber. You have talked about it.

You have indicated how important it is, particularly
with NC3. Will you commit to red teaming and pen testing
and hackers for hire to test the security of the systems
that you are developing?

I don't think you really know how secure you are until
somebody attacks you. And I hope it is -- I want it to be
a friendly attack.

General Cotton: Senator, if confirmed, that would be
one of the first directions I would give to the NEC.

Senator King: Thank you. Final point. Again, a new
strategic challenge or a different strategic challenge, and
I don't expect really an answer, but perhaps you could
consider this for the record, that is non-state actors with
nuclear weapons.

The deterrent theory doesn't work if you don't have a
capital city and if you don't care about dying. And we
have a proliferation of nuclear weapons, and we have rogue
states developing nuclear weapons and nuclear materials.

The chances of those materials falling into the hands of a terrorist organization, it seems to me, are increasing gradually but steadily. I hope you will give this some thought because it is a major strategic challenge that doesn't fit within the ambit of what has been our historic deterrence strategy for dealing with nuclear threats.

General Cotton: Senator, you are absolutely right. And I will get back with you, if confirmed, and we can have further discussions along that.

Senator King: Thank you very much. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman Reed: Thank you, Senator King. Senator Rounds, please.

Senator Rounds: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Good morning, General Cotton. Thank you to you and to your family for your years of service to our country, and your continued service in the future. General Cotton, I share the perspective that the nuclear deterrent is the foundation of our National Security.

In the past, I have asked other leaders in the nuclear enterprise to give their views, in plain language, on the importance of our nuclear triad so that the American -- you know, our American public, who really don't think about this on a regular basis, can understand why we have
hundreds, if not thousands, of nuclear warheads.

And can you explain it in such a fashion as to why it is so important to our National Security that we not only maintain, but accelerate the investment in the modernization of this nuclear triad?

General Cotton: Senator Rounds, thank you for the question. I think if we were to do a perspective on talking about the three legs of the triad in particular, and how it is the backstop and underpins, I think if I was at a town hall meeting, how I would describe that to a local town hall is, think about the bedrock of a feature and what holds the rest of your foundation up.

You know, when we have -- when we are building a home, you know, you want to make sure you have a steady, you know, steady property to put the foundation on. For every operational plan that the Department of Defense has, it relies on the fact that strategic deterrence is going to hold to allow those other missions to accomplish. If that does not happen, that is when you see that deterrence fails.

The way that we accomplish that is through our triad of having bombers who are recordable if warranted, having submarines that can be used, or having ICBMs that are readily available for the decision maker to do that.

Our adversaries understand that and know that we can
hold them at bay. That is that bedrock and foundation that
is so critically important for us and this Nation.

Senator Rounds: I think it is sometimes we think
about the fact that we have great conventional forces, but
the reason why those conventional forces can be effective
is because everybody knows that in the back, the hammer are
the nuclear forces, which have been upgraded. And that is
what I want to talk about next.

With regard to our nuclear command and control
systems, they have got to be upgraded. We are in the
process of doing that now. What do you see as one of the
biggest challenges or what do you see as the biggest
challenges regarding the upgrading of our current command
and control structure?

General Cotton: Thanks for the question. As I said
in my opening comments, in my opening statement, I
articulated that it is a resilient system today. I think
moving forward, I see it as a continuance. You will never
close the book on a modernization of a comm node. So as I
see it, that -- I don't know if I see the challenge, but I
-- but what we are going to be able to have to do is, I say
move to a system using 21st century technologies that
allows us to have what I called NC3 over shared comms.

So being able to make it so I can -- we can message
and get data to the warfighters in any situation. So I
think that challenge is being able to link the legacy systems with the modernized systems.

But I am here to say that I am quite pleased in the work that is being done with NC3 Next Gen, if you will. So the team is really, really getting after it and I am pretty impressed on the way forward on being able to close that challenge.

Senator Rounds: Thank you, General. And one last item that I wanted to visit with today, and that is, if confirmed, you will be the lead for joint electromagnetic spectrum operations.

The growth of 5G technologies continues to add additional requests for larger parts of the band, some of which are needed for National Security. Now, recognizing the unclassified setting of this hearing, can you explain to this committee, and perhaps to other folks out there that are wondering why it isn't being made more readily available, but the Pentagon and the Department of Defense clearly is recognizing the need to protect certain areas of the spectrum for National Security purposes.

Can you share a little bit about the real necessity of working in a consultative way, really, in a cooperative way with the FCC and the NTIA in maintaining certain portions of the spectrum for National Security purposes and how absolutely critical it is.
General Cotton: Senator, it is incredibly critical that we maintain and understand, and to be frank, have others understand the necessity to protect certain bands. If confirmed, I would want to collaborate with the FCC and others so we can -- maybe we need to message better for folks to understand exactly what we are talking about here on the necessity and criticality of making sure that we can protect those bands that you mentioned.

Senator Rounds: Thank you. Thank you, General.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

General Cotton: Thank you, Senator Rounds. Senator Kaine, please.

Senator Kaine: Thank you, Mr. Chair. And General Cotton, great to see you. I enjoyed our visit yesterday. And I think this has been touched on by earlier Senators and their questions, but I really was intrigued by the discussion we were having about this multipolar nature of the threat.

So as you look at the triad, we have to always recapitalize and have it be strong, but we have thought of the triad, both in terms of our investment, but even in terms of our theory of deterrence or our theory about what the triad means to our defense. We sort of thought about it as a triad with respect to one nuclear competitor.

Okay, now we have two nuclear competitors, and
evidence demonstrates that they are increasingly working together. The U.S. policy for decades kind of said that China and Russia would never get too close because of a history of enmity and different cultures and things like that. But they are getting closer and closer every day, and often they are doing things not only just the two of them, but with Iran, North Korea, sometimes with Turkey.

So how should, you be confirmed, and I am confident you will be, how will you approach this analysis of the threat, that is not simply an analysis of the capacity of individual adversaries, but the fact that these adversaries are cooperating and that previous deterrence doctrines are really built more around a bipolar world rather than multiple competitors?

General Cotton: Senator Kaine, thank you for the for the question. You are absolutely right, and we touched upon it earlier. I think what is key -- and it is, you know, as we discussed, it is multiple approaches, too, because one, if confirmed -- and I know the work is being currently done within STRATCOM because as a JFACC Commander to STRATCOM offering input to that today.

But if confirmed, that assessment has to continue, because when we talk about -- I mean, as you said, as we talk about nuclear doctrine, nuclear doctrine is with one near-peer adversary. We are -- and what that will drive is
then that will drive on how do we meet national objectives based on the strategic doctrine within the confines of Strategic Command.

Then we have to then, from my best military advice, understand what force shaping looks like in regards to how do you meet the objectives that would be given to us from the Commander in Chief.

That is work that has to be done, and I know it is being done today. But if confirmed, that is one of the first things that we will dive into where I can get a better understanding, to your point, of what does it look like when you have two near-peer adversaries that act differently, might work -- that might work together, might not work together, but we still need to understand, you know, how do you execute against that threat.

Senator Kaine: Thank you, General. Another thing we talked about yesterday was bomber task force missions. There was just a completion of one in SOUTHCOM with Panamanian and Ecuadorian partners. We have also done bomber task force missions with European allies. These are to show unity, to test interoperability. Talk about what those missions produce for our defense capacity.

General Cotton: Thank you for that. So bomber task force, our bomber task forces that we currently do on behalf of our -- on behalf of COCOMS, of which I am the
lead as Air Force Global Strike Commander to present those forces to COCOMS through STRATCOM, it has been incredible because what it shows. It shows why we are the most powerful military on the face of the earth, and that is because we have allies and partners.

And what it shows is using conventional forces, what strategic deterrence is all about as well. And there is nothing more gratifying than seeing an ally or a partner come up on a wing of a B-52 that is doing an integrated mission over a COCOM area, and seeing the PA sentiment, if you will, Senator, come back from the adversaries on how that mission went.

So it is a win-win for ourselves, as well as our allies and partners that participate in those missions that we are doing constantly across the globe.

Senator Kaine: Thank you very much. I yield back.

Chairman Reed: Thank you, Senator Kaine. Senator Ernst, please.

Senator Ernst: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Chair. And thank you, General Cotton, for being here today, as well as Marsha. Thank you very much for joining us. And I enjoyed visiting with you in the office. We covered a lot of really great topics important to the defense of our Nation. And just a few questions here in this committee.

The 2018 National Defense Strategy Commission had
determined that the United States might struggle to win or
perhaps even lose a war with China over Taiwan. This has
been a big concern of ours, especially in recent months.

Do you agree that the President must have flexible
nuclear options to prevent conventional defeat at the hands
of our adversaries in this particular scenario?

General Cotton: I do.

Senator Ernst: Okay. And I appreciate that. And I
know that a number of my colleagues have already brought up
having a nuclear deterrence, theater nuclear forces in
Asia. So I won't go through that again, but I just want to
state that I do think it is important that we have those
capabilities abroad, especially in that region, considering
the scenario that we have seen through the 2018 National
Defense Strategy and what we see occurring just in the
daily news.

So I just want to emphasize my support for making sure
that we have the capabilities necessary, if we should ever
need those, present in INDOPACOM. Chairman Milley and Vice
Chairman Grady also wrote in June that continued
modernization and expansion of the ground based midcourse
defense system is critical to defend the homeland from
North Korean missiles. Do you agree that we must expand?

There is a lot of talk about modernization, but do you
agree that we must expand, not merely modernize, homeland
missile defense to take -- to actually make sure that we are putting in check rogue nations like North Korea?

General Cotton: Senator, thanks for the question. You know, I think when we talk about missile defense, especially with the not only rogue nations, but now with two adversaries, near-peer adversaries that have different capacities and capabilities, I would agree that for the protection of the homeland, more options is better than less.

Senator Ernst: Yes, more options are better. And I know that we do receive pushback every once in a while on this idea that we need to expand and modernize. And it is extremely costly. And just to emphasize to our fabulous American citizens that Jim Mattis, the way he phrased this in the past is, America can afford survival.

I think it is very important that we continue to look at ways that we can expand and modernize. And would you also agree that the capability to destroy hard and deeply buried targets actually enhances our deterrence by denying that our adversary doesn't have sanctuary from U.S. nuclear deterrence?

General Cotton: I would agree.

Senator Ernst: Yes. And can you think of examples where we might need to look into that further?

General Cotton: Senator, thanks for the question. I
think there is opportunities for us to understand what
technologies are available that can give us potentially
nuclear or conventional, that can get after hard and deeply
buried targets. And if confirmed, I would love to lead the
charge and be an advocate in understanding that and
advocating for it.

Senator Ernst: Thank you for that. I appreciate it.

And do you agree that we should sustain the B83 bomb until
we have a suitable replacement?

General Cotton: I think that we need to be able to
have an opportunity to provide options. And if that is
taken off the table, then we no longer have an option to
provide.

Senator Ernst: Yes. Thank you. I do appreciate that
as well. And then of course, the President extended New
Start for five years when he assumed office. In your
opinion, in your best military opinion, are U.S. strategic
arms constraints prudent given China's nuclear breakout,
which is -- they are not party to the treaty, and Russia's
arsenal of non-strategic nuclear weapons, which are
unaccounted for by the treaty?

General Cotton: Senator, I think whatever agreement
or treaty that we could do to prevent proliferation is
good, with a caveat, that it incorporates every aspect of
what the signing agreement would be.
So what I mean by that are, you know, weapons that are currently not seen as strategic weapons need to be added to that calculus. So but any agreement or treaty that would prevent proliferation across the globe, I am for.

Senator Ernst: Okay. Thank you for your answers. And I do appreciate the opportunity to sit down with you in the office the other day and look forward to hearing more from you. I as well, growing up in Southwest Iowa, I also have been known to call it Strategic Air Command, so with you. But thank you very much for your time today, General.

General Cotton: Thank you, Senator.

Chairman Reed: Thank you, Senator Ernst. Senator Scott, please.

Senator Scott: Thank you, Chairman Reed. General Cotton, first, thanks for your service. Congratulations on your nomination. Thank you for your willingness to serve. So here is what informs most of my work here on the committee. First, the United States has several enemies who have no interest other than to harm us.

They want us to be weak, independent, and without allies. And you talked about the importance of our allies. Chief among these enemies are the Chinese Communist Party and Vladimir Putin's regime. Second, our enemies wake up every day plotting to harm us. They think about it all the time.
Putin's invasion, brutal murdering, raping, and pillaging of Ukraine is, in his own words, his fight against the United States, as though anyone really need him to hear what he is up to. Jones Secretary, she contemplates the same thing for the free and democratic nation of Taiwan.

Third, most countries in the world whether they actually like us or not, they might be jealous of us, they do want America to be powerful and capable of deterring or defeating any aggressor who tries to turn the world into their own dictatorship.

Most countries know that there is really only two choices, a world where communist China, Putin, and the Ayatollah and maybe others, are making the rules for everyone, or one with a strong and independent United States that faces down aggressors, helps those who help themselves, leads alliances, and promotes state sovereignty and commerce.

So if you would agree with that, and I think most of us would agree with those, can you explain why the United States would not want to have the most modern and expensive nuclear and strategic weapons we could have?

General Cotton: Senator, I do agree with that. And to be frank, I am really happy with what this committee has done in regards to where we are on the nuclear
modernization front today. You know, are we late to need?
Yes. Are we getting after it now? Absolutely. Are we in
a position where we can ensure that we have a portfolio
that can modularize and meet the needs in the future?
I think we do, Senator. But I agree with you, I am
about the strong and not about the weak. So as -- if
confirmed, that is my position. I want to be from a
position of strength, not from a position of weakness.
Senator Scott: So would you agree we ought to
accelerate our nuclear modernization plan as much as we
can?
General Cotton: Sir, if that is possible, let's do it.
Senator Scott: Yes. After your many years of
experience, you know, who are enemies are and what they
want, what they are capable of doing. You don't live in an
ivory tower or academic bubble where you can tease out
theories of disarmament and hope it all sort of goes well.
So if you are confirmed, which I believe you will be -- and
this is not a diplomatic role, right? His role is not
being a diplomat, your role is to be a fighter.
General Cotton: If confirmed, my role is to be a
Combatant Commander.
Senator Scott: Your goal is to scare the living crap
out of everybody.
General Cotton: Yes, sir.

Senator Scott: Good. Would you agree then the U.S. President should have a variety of strategic weapons and stockpiles so large that no enemy would even think about trying to attack America?

General Cotton: I think we need to have a stockpile that is credible and capable. Absolutely.

Senator Scott: And Senator King brought this up earlier. I do appreciate the more direct and honest people can be when they are testifying. I know there is probably a lot of pressure to do whatever an Administration, whoever the Administration is, wants you to do.

But I do appreciate as much as you can to be direct, because all of us are trying to make the best decisions we can, and you are the expert. So thank you. Thanks for your service. I am glad you are going to serve -- continue to serve.

General Cotton: Thank you, Senator.

Chairman Reed: Thank you, Senator Scott. Senator Rosen, when you are ready, please.

Senator Rosen: There it is. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate that. Thank you, General Cotton, for testifying today, for your willingness to continue to serve. I really appreciate you. And so, of course, I hail from the great State of Nevada. And I want to talk a
little bit about the Nevada National Security site, the infrastructure upgrades, and how important, of course, it is to our nuclear mission.

And I have talked about this a lot in this committee, that the Nevada National Security site oversees the Stockpile Stewardship Program, principally at our U1a facility, which is, of course, an underground laboratory where scientists conduct those subcritical experiments that verify the safety and reliability of our nuclear stockpile without, and I am going to repeat this again, without explosive testing.

And so U1a is undergoing major construction. That project is soon going to hold the most weapons capable radiographic system in the world. However, the Nevada National Security Administration currently faces significant infrastructure delays, including at our Nevada National Security site.

So General Cotton, as the current Commander providing two of the three legs of the triad, can you speak about the importance of the Stockpile Stewardship Program, and if confirmed, how you would plan to, working with your fellow Nuclear Weapons Council partners, in addressing the NNSA's infrastructure modernization challenges and unfortunate delays?

Chairman Reed: Senator Rosen, thanks for the
question. There is nothing more important than the relationship that we have with DOE, and specifically NNSA. As we talked throughout the hearing in regards to the modernization programs, they are interwoven -- the platforms mean absolutely nothing if I don't have the assets available for the platforms. So to your question on infrastructure, you are absolutely -- not only the Nevada locations, but all of NNSA locations are in dire need of upgrades in their infrastructure that dates back to Manhattan Project times. We are living in a different world today. As I keep saying, two near-peer adversaries, nuclear adversaries. We are going to have to ensure that the infrastructure are upgraded and are at the capacity and capability to meet the needs of the warfighter. You mentioned I as only two legs. I have modernization programs that are going to need new systems for them. Can't do that without the credible work of the men and women that that make up the NNSA. But they are going to need infrastructure that will allow them to be able to do that type of work.

Senator Rosen: Yes. And not just bringing you up to today's standards, but really preparing them for future challenges and innovation that we so desperately are going to need to compete. So thank you for that, because we do have to think about the technological end advancements.
With those advancements also come advancements from our adversaries so that creates increased threats as well. And so the nuclear command control communication systems of the United States, we know they are connected through a network of communications, different data processing systems, and this is -- could possibly leave us vulnerable for cyber-attacks.

And in fact, in April of 2021, the Department of Energy's Inspector General audit concluded that cybersecurity weaknesses, they really do persist throughout the Department's unclassified networks, including those of the National Nuclear Security Administration.

So recent news, we have highlighted significant efforts by Huawei to build telecommunication structures right near our ICBM fields that possibly interrupt our forces, our systems. And can you talk about these potential threats, cyber threats, maybe not directly, but even nearby where some of our critical assets are located.

General Cotton: Thank you, Senator, for the question. So we are really paying attention to what we are seeing as a Chinese are taking advantage of some of the opportunities that they can have in some locations that are near our, and in particular some of our ICBM sites.

So we are absolutely looking into that. To your point on cyber security, you know, as people talk about NC3, you
know, I think your point is well taken. It is also, you
know, any other support in the architecture of us, the
nuclear community, like NNSA to ensure that they are just
as cyber safe as NC2 platform would be.

So if confirmed, as part of the Nuke Weapons Council,
as a member, I think that is something that we will
continually have to have more than a discussion about but
figure out how to get to the end state in that regard.

Senator Rosen: Yes, well there is a lot of push
points in hand-offs between agencies, information between
one another. I look forward to working on that with you.

Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

General Cotton: Thank you, Senator.

Chairman Reed: Thank you, Senator Rosen. Senator
Sullivan, please.

Senator Sullivan: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And
General Cotton, good to see you. I enjoyed our discussion
the other day. Let me follow up on some of the topics that
we talked about. First, if confirmed, you will work
closely with the U.S. Space Force, Missile Defense Agency,
Northern Command to guarantee the security of our Nation.

And as you know, Alaska has a lot of critical assets
that relate to missile defense, we are the cornerstone of
missile defense, over 100 5th generation fighters, world
class training ranges.
If confirmed, will you commit to visiting Alaska early in your tenure to see these assets, meet with the troops that are so critical to our homeland defense that you see in Alaska?

General Cotton: Senator, absolutely.

Senator Sullivan: Thank you. You know, we had a good discussion on basing. In May of 1992, the Strategic Air Command was essentially stood down and many of our bomber bases around the country, around the world were closed. We have been talking a lot about great power competition and how we need to be ready to confront two near-peer nuclear capable adversaries with very large militaries.

Given this reality, how should we be approaching the basing of our nuclear capable bomber fleet, particularly when the B-21 Raider comes online, and again, in line of some of the issues you and I discussed the other day?

General Cotton: Senator, thank you. I think initially when we talk about main operating bases, I am comfortable where we are. The conversation that we had is how do you -- you know, how do we disperse forces in the future, especially with two near peers?

And in our discussion, we talked about the agile combat employment construct that the Air Force with the Chief of Staff, General CQ Brown, is leading across the United States Air Force. I say it is a little different,
what I call big wing airplanes, as opposed to our fighter forces. But the construct holds in and works as well.

I would love to be able to make sure that we have opportunities and availability throughout the country to add dilemma to our adversaries, if you will, on where our bomber forces are in the future.

Senator Sullivan: Let me be a little more direct on that. As you know, Alaska is very strategically located, and staging options, rotational deployments, the ability to have not just 5th gen fighters but strategic global strike assets based in Alaska that are much closer to Russia, much closer to China, as you and I have discussed, a number of Air Force flag officers have seen this as a strategic concept that we can take advantage of, particularly with regard to great power competition. Do you have any thoughts on that, General, more specifically?

General Cotton: Well, I think the bases in Alaska act as great staging bases for bomber deployments. And I think that is the question that you are asking.

The point of having a main operating base, if confirmed as Commander of STRATCOM, I would like to make that assessment to see what recommendations I would make to the service. But today, I think as we move forward, I think having it as an operating staging platform is critical for us.
I mean, if you recall, we talked about even, you know, ensuring that we have right, you know, runway lengths, etcetera, moving forward.

Senator Sullivan: Great. And I am looking forward to working with you. And I look forward to support your confirmation. Let me talk about another topic we had the opportunity to discuss, and that is this idea of a strategic breakout as it relates to ICBM capability with regard to China.

The current STRATCOM Commander, Admiral Richard, called that, the recent reports on how quickly China is developing strategic missile capabilities, ICBM capabilities, he called it breathtaking. In your estimation, what is the greatest concern regarding this strategic breakout, and how should we as Armed Services committee be focused on helping you counter or be ready for that very significant threat?

General Cotton: Thank you for that question. As recent as 2018, we would describe China as having a minimal deterrence, minimal nuclear deterrence. We would have probably had a conversation stating that it was about regional hegemony. Today, they are building ground based ICBM silos. They have the H-6N, nuclear capable medium bomber, that has a strategic capable launch platform.

Senator Sullivan: And just real quick, General, not
to interrupt, but to give some context that in April of 2021, commercial satellite imagery revealed three new nuclear missile fields in Western China, each with approximately 120 missile silo. So this is incredible, is it not, in terms of the size?

General Cotton: It is. It is absolutely incredible and in such a short time, to Admiral Richard's point.

Senator Sullivan: Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman Reed: Thank you, Senator Sullivan. Senator Kelly, are you ready? Yes.

Senator Kelly: Yes, thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. General, great seeing you again this week, and congratulations on your nomination. You know, during our meeting, we briefly discussed your priorities.

And if confirmed, for your priorities for modernizing the nuclear triad, the long range standoff weapon, we talked a little bit about that. Our LRSO represents one leg of the triad and replaces the aging AGM 86-B air launched cruise missile.

And the Senate version of the defense bill put almost $1 billion towards continued development of the LRSO. And the LRSO is a unique component of our strategic deterrence in that it is an escalatory weapon, in mine and others' opinions.
And when our adversaries see or maybe hear that are long range bombers are on high alert, it gives them some pause, and tensions can be cooled without a bomber ever lifting off.

So General, can I get your thoughts on the LRSO, and can I get your commitment, if confirmed, to the continued timely development of this weapon as a vital and de-escalatory component of our nuclear triad?

General Cotton: Senator Kelly, thank you for the question. Bottom line, up front, we absolutely need LRSO. The good news is the industry partner is doing incredible work keeping that program on time and on schedule. And I am quite pleased as the Air Component Commander that is the lead MAJCOM, overseeing it now and watching it, seeing what that is doing.

So to your point, for our long range standoff bomber capability, that leg of the triad having a viable, credible weapons system is absolutely critical. And the LRSO is that viable, critical weapon that is a de-escalatory weapon, because you are absolutely right, if we are generating bombers, it can send a signal before the first bomber even lifts off.

Senator Kelly: Any TRL concerns right now? Are there any things you see that you are worried about as we go forward that you could share here?
General Cotton: I have not. I have seen the testing that has been -- that is underway has been very promising.

Senator Kelly: Thank you, General. And also during our conversation on Monday, we briefly talked about the tanker fleet. We have, you know, KC-135s in Phoenix. And so I know this is an issue you are familiar with as the head of the Global Strike Command.

And my understanding is after talking to the team at the 161st Aerial Refueling Wing, which is a National Guard unit, is that unlike the KC-46, the KC-135 is not EMP hardened. I guess they have some kind of makeshift procedures that they could use, but it is clearly not able to handle electronic magnetic pulse that it might be up against depending on, you know, the location and the mission.

A small amount of KC-135s sit on a, you know, 24 hour a day, 7 days a week alert for the strategic defense deterrence mission. How concerned are you about the potential vulnerabilities of this aging tanker?

General Cotton: Senator, thank you for the question. The fleet holds, so I am confident that it can get us there. But I am even more confident in what we are seeing in the KC-46 that is being deployed. My fellow MAJCOM Commander, General Minihan, from Air Mobility Command, I know is on top of the procurement and deliveries of the KC-
For the KC-135, its delivery -- you know, it coexists with the B-52. It was developed to tank the B-52. So it is an aging weapon system. But, Senator, it is still meeting the requirements to be able to get our bombers.

Senator Kelly: As we bring KC-46s online, would you agree that KC-135 squadrons that are participating in the deterrence mission should be given a priority to be replaced with the KC-46?

General Cotton: Sir, if confirmed, what I would like to do is make an assessment to kind of figure out what are the pros and cons of what those mission sets are doing using a legacy system as opposed to using the new modernized system.

Senator Kelly: Well, thank you, General. And thank you, Mr. Chairman.

General Cotton: Thank you, Senator Kelly. Senator Hawley, please.

Senator Hawley: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. General, good to see you. I appreciated our conversation the other day. Thank you for -- I guess it was just yesterday. Thank you for making time for me. Let's follow up, if we could, on a couple of things we talked about.

First of all, Admiral Richard, the current STRATCOM Commander, of course, has testified, and you and I talked
about this, that the U.S. needs to think very seriously about the requirements for deterring two major nuclear powers at the same time, China and Russia, of course, and you said the same thing yesterday, which I appreciated.

Here is my question, if confirmed, would you commit to having STRATCOM do an analysis of the nuclear force requirements to deter both China and Russia now and into the 2030s?

General Cotton: Senator, thanks for the question. And the answer is absolutely yes. I think that is going to be critical for us. I called it earlier. You know, it is the strategic doctrine within STRATCOM. Not necessarily policy.

I am talking about the strategic doctrine within STRATCOM to ensure that we can do exactly what you asked. The other piece of that is then the national objectives from the President to make sure we can meet the national objectives as well.

Senator Hawley: Very good. Thank you for that. I think that would be hugely, hugely helpful. I asked Admiral Richard earlier this year about China's ability to engage in limited nuclear employment and whether or not that was growing. He said that it was, and he was very emphatic on this point.

And he talked about how important it is for the United
States to maintain our own limited nuclear options if we are going to be able to deter China in what is our pacing theater. So let me just ask you, do you agree that we need to be concerned about China resorting to limited nuclear employment in a conflict, let's say, over Taiwan?

General Cotton: Senator, I think any near-peer nuclear adversary, we have to be concerned about that.

Senator Hawley: Would you agree that having our own limited nuclear options, whether that is low yield ICBMs or nuclear arms, sea launched cruise missiles, that having those, maintaining those can help us deter China's limited nuclear use?

General Cotton: You know, as I described to the committee, for me, it is about being able to give options to the Commander in Chief.

Senator Hawley: Very good. Are there other limited nuclear options that you think that we ought to be pursuing, whether that is in terms of additional capabilities, whether that is about posture changes, in order to deter Chinese and Russian limited nuclear use?

General Cotton: Senator, I think that goes along with that study that, if confirmed, you know, taking that really deep study to understand what that outcome and what -- because what I want is success at the end of that, so what that would look like. So if confirmed, that would be part
Senator Hawley: Okay, very good. Fair enough. Fair enough. You said to me yesterday, which I appreciated -- I am going to try to make sure I get you quoted correctly and then we talk about it, if we can prevent China from crossing the Taiwan Strait and they know that we have got a viable nuclear deterrent, then it is possible that Beijing might not escalate at all.

And I thought that was right on the money. I agree with that 100 percent. And I just want to give you a chance to elaborate that on that here, because it sounds to me like what you are saying is the right approach to deterring a Chinese invasion of Taiwan is denial, is to deny them the ability to do that at first instance, backed up by a very credible nuclear deterrent.

So am I, do I have that right, and would you just -- would you elaborate on why you think that is the right combination?

General Cotton: Senator, I think that the whole reason that we have the strategic deterrence that we have today and the triad that we have today, is to ensure that our adversaries understand that today shouldn't be the day for them. So as we were having that conversation, that is what I meant. I think that they would understand that if you have a credible nuclear deterrent, it would make them...
think twice before engaging with us.

Senator Hawley: And it is in those two things, the conventional denial, combined with the nuclear deterrent, those things have to sit together. Is that fair to say? I mean, they work hand in hand.

General Cotton: They work hand in hand. Conventional and nuclear works hand in hand.

Senator Hawley: Yes. Let me ask you this just on the question of our own nuclear modernization. Given the pace of China and Russia and their modernization, if confirmed, will you be looking for ways to accelerate our nuclear modernization, and identify those options for Congress so that we can work together to make sure that we push the pace like we need to?

General Cotton: If confirmed, I would do that, Senator.

Senator Hawley: Very good. Let me just ask you one final thing here in my remaining seconds. The 2018 Nuclear Posture Review, it highlighted the importance of conventional nuclear integration, which we were just touching on, which, of course, is critical for strengthening conventional deterrence against adversaries who may use nuclear force for operational or coercive effects. Has the Department, in your view, made sufficient progress on the conventional nuclear integration since the
2018 NPR?

General Cotton: I think it has, because in the past we have probably -- we didn't talk about it the way we should have. And I think the integration on being able to talk about going from conventional to nuclear as opposed to doing a pause x, if you will, and then having that conversation. We have made leaps and bounds in that regard.

Senator Hawley: Very good. Thank you, General. Thanks again for the conversation yesterday. Thanks for your testimony. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman Reed: Thank you, Senator Hawley. Senator Warren, please.

Senator Warren: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And congratulations again on your nomination, General Cotton. So if confirmed, you will head U.S. Strategic Command, which will place you in charge of our nuclear weapons. I would like to continue the conversation that we had in my office about the importance of civilian control.

Last week, eight Former Secretaries of Defense and five Former Chairmen of the Joint Chiefs of Staff released an open letter calling for a recommitment to principles of civilian control, which they called, and I want to quote them here, "the bedrock foundation of American democracy."

The letter repeatedly emphasizes that policy decisions
are ultimately up to the President, civilian political appointees, and Congress. So, General Cotton, can you start us out this morning by saying a word about your views on whether policy decisions, including ones about nuclear programs, should be made by civilians rather than Generals?

General Cotton: Policy is made by civilians, ma'am.

Senator Warren: And you are committed to that firmly?

General Cotton: And I am committed to that firmly.

Senator Warren: You know, I appreciate your emphasizing this point. It is the President's job to determine the nuclear policy of the United States. But sometimes people who are in the role that you have been nominated for seem to get confused on that.

For example, your predecessor, Admiral Richard, stated publicly that he thought the Biden Administration should adopt the Trump Administration's nuclear policy, and then he and his office actively lobbied Congress against cuts to the nuclear spending programs contained in the Biden Administration's budget, the budget the President put forward and the Secretary of Defense came to this committee to defend.

So, General Cotton, if confirmed, do you think it would be appropriate for you or your office to publicly lobby against the positions of the President and the Secretary of Defense?
General Cotton: No, ma'am. And you remember we had this conversation. The caveat that we agreed to was, you know, but I would always, especially for this committee, be allowed to offer my best military advice.

Senator Warren: And your best military advice. But policy is done by the Generals?

General Cotton: Policy is not made by Generals.

Senator Warren: All right. Thank you. You know, we are counting on you to give your best military advice to the President, to the Secretary, or to Congress whenever you are called on to do so. But it is wildly inappropriate to try to box in the Commander in Chief on nuclear policy or to try to undermine his budget.

Now, one of the big ways that military leaders lobby for more spending, even when it directly contradicts the President's priorities, is through so-called unfunded priorities lists. These are wish lists that are required by law but have grown to be tens of billions of dollars and are being used by the services and the commands to game the budget process.

And I don't think they ought to exist at all. General Cotton, do you agree that your Command's top priorities should actually be reflected in the budget you submit rather than in an extras list?

General Cotton: Senator, I think our requirements
lists that we present should be included and covers down. And if our budget is short, as the Commander, my job is to ensure that I can execute my mission with the dollars that I have been given.

Senator Warren: All right, so I want to make sure I understand you here, because you are saying your priorities should be in the budget and extras should be just that extras, not your priorities. Is that right?

General Cotton: As a MAJCOM Commander today, my priorities are in my budget.

Senator Warren: Good. I like to hear that. Look, it is no secret that both President Biden and I want to reduce the role of nuclear weapons in our National Security strategy. Spending $364 billion just on nuclear weapons over the next ten years is unaffordable.

But I think even my colleagues who disagree with me on nuclear policy would agree that we should be asking DOD to write budgets that reflect their actual priorities. And that is what it is I am driving for here and want to make sure that we do. I look forward to working with you, General.

General Cotton: Thank you, ma'am.

Senator Warren: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman Reed: Thank you very much, Senator Warren. General, thank you for your testimony, for your service,
and we look forward to rapidly bringing your nomination to
a successful conclusion. Thank you very much.

General Cotton: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman Reed: With that, I will adjourn the hearing.

[Whereupon, at 11:41 a.m., the hearing was adjourned.]