Hearing before the Senate Armed Services Committee Concerning strategic competition in an unconstrained, Post-New START Treaty environment

Testimony of
Rose Gottemoeller, William J. Perry Lecturer
Center for International Security and Cooperation
Freeman Spogli Institute
Hoover Institution Research Fellow
Stanford University

3 February 2026

Good morning, Chairman Wicker, Senator Reed, and distinguished members of the Senate Armed Services Committee, I am honored to have this opportunity to testify to you regarding strategic competition in an unconstrained, post-New START Treaty environment. Thank you for the invitation. I am also pleased to appear before you with Admiral Charles Richard and Mr. Timothy Morrison. Although our opinions may differ on how to proceed at this moment in our nuclear history, I have the greatest respect for these gentlemen. It is good that you can hear and consider our views in equal measure.

I have prepared full testimony for this morning's hearing; if I may, I would like to make just a few points as we begin and place the rest of my testimony on the record. Would that be acceptable? Thank you.

The Deterrence-Arms Control Relationship

I would like to start with a vital point: too often deterrence and arms control are set up in opposition to each other: if nuclear deterrence is the top necessity, then nuclear arms control has to be dead. If nuclear arms control is thriving, then nuclear deterrence must be suffering.

I would like to stress that instead, the two enjoy a symbiotic relationship—the strength of one feeds the strength of the other, and vice versa. The symbiosis comes about because stable deterrence is driven by predictability, and nuclear negotiations, done right, deliver predictability. The effect comes about because restraints on our opponents reached through agreement bolster predictability, which in turn supports our nuclear forces in their drive for reliable, stable and effective deterrence. Lack of predictability, by contrast, feeds uncertainty about the status of nuclear forces among our adversaries, which means we may end up spending more than we have

to on nuclear weapons and their delivery systems. This outcome is a problem when we have so many requirements facing us for a strong and modern conventional force posture.

It goes without saying that we have to be alert to any cheating going on, and the Russians have violated treaties in an egregious way, including the Short- and Intermediate-Range Nuclear Missiles Treaty (INF), which President Trump withdrew from in response in 2019, during his first term in office. That action conveyed an important message: we are alert to treaty noncompliance by the Russians or by any other country, and we will respond with every legal tool available to us as well as take military action, nuclear or conventional, as warranted.

Here too, treaties provide us tools beyond our own national technical means of verification, which include the satellites, aircraft, radars and other systems that enable us to keep an eye on other countries. The treaty-based measures are essentially additional tools to monitor and verify compliance. They include regular exchanges of data on our strategic nuclear forces, routine notifications of force posture changes, and intrusive on-site inspections. When these treaty measures are in force, we can demand explanations from the Russian Federation or any other treaty party about suspected violations, and the treaty requires them to respond. Of course, the treaties are reciprocal; they have the same right to demand explanations from us.

President Putin's decision to pull the plug on New START Treaty implementation in February 2023 was not permitted by the treaty and we determined quickly that Russia was therefore in violation of it. That was the right decision, but it does not belie the fact that New START has kept the Russian nuclear force posture to the limits of the treaty despite this violation—1,550 operationally deployed warheads, 700 deployed delivery vehicles, and 800 deployed and non-deployed launchers. We have been able to confirm the deployments through our national technical means; as a result, some essential predictability has remained despite the violation.

Before I leave this topic, I would like to say that the communications inherent in a treaty relationship have a deterrent value in themselves. If we are demanding explanations from the Russians for actions that they are taking with their strategic nuclear forces, we are saying to them, "we have your number, you cannot hide misbehavior from us." We can also use such communications to convey that, "if you do that, we will do this in response." Looking the other guy in the eye and delivering a tough message has its own deterrence value. That is one more reason why I stress that deterrence and arms control are two sides of the same coin. They have a symbiotic relationship.

Finally, I wanted to draw the Committee's attention to some interesting research that has just been published by a consortium of young nuclear scholars. They too have found that nuclear deterrence and arms control are wedded together, this time in the minds of the public. They have analyzed a mass of survey information from public opinion research around the world and discovered that the public, including in the United States, sees no contradiction in embracing

both nuclear deterrence and nuclear arms control and disarmament. Instinctively, the public seems to embrace the notion that the two can and do exist in harmony.[1]

Role of New START Treaty Limits

Turning to my next topic, I testified to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee in December that I support a one-year extension of the limits of the New START Treaty.[2] As proposed by President Putin in September, such a one-year extension would not prejudice any of the vital steps that the United States is taking to respond to the Chinese nuclear build-up. We *must* continue to plan against it and work carefully to determine what capabilities will be needed, including in the realm of uploading warheads. Indeed, the period will buy extra time for preparation without the added challenge of a Russian Federation, newly released from New START limitations, embarking on a rapid upload campaign. That would not be in the U.S. interest.

The concern about a rapid upload campaign was a finding of the Strategic Posture Commission, of which I was a member. As our 2023 report stated, "The Commission concludes that Russia's active nuclear warhead and missile production lines provide the capability, should Russia decide to discard the limits of New START, to expand its strategic nuclear forces."[3] The reasoning behind this finding was twofold:

- Russia's current modernization program added substantial warhead upload capacity to its ICBMs and Submarine Launched Ballistic Missiles (SLBMs).
- Russia's modernized nuclear warhead design and production infrastructure have significant surplus capacity to implement a decision to upload.[4]

My bottom line is that it does not serve U.S. national security interests to have to address the Chinese nuclear build-up while simultaneously facing a rapid Russian upload campaign. The Russians have the capacity and experience to succeed in such a campaign. It will be much better for us to keep them limited for at least another year while we continue to plan and prepare for the Chinese threat. Again, remaining under New START limits for a year does not prejudice our planning and preparation to upload.

---

[1] Lauren Sukin, Luis Rodriguez, and Stephen Herzog. "Rethinking the Deterrence-Disarmament Dichotomy: The Complex Landscape of Global Nuclear Preferences." *Perspectives on Politics*. (2026): 1-21. https://doi.org/10.1017/S1537592725103666.

[2] Rose Gottemoeller, "Testimony before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on an 'Arms Race 2.0,'" Senate Committee on Foreign Relations , December 10, 2025, https://www.foreign.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/f44409cc-cc99-f286-066b-1283777d682b/121025_Gottemoeller_Testimony.pdf

[3] Congressional Commission on the Strategic Posture of the United States, America's Strategic Posture (Washington, DC: October 2023), 45, https://www.ida.org/-/media/feature/publications/A/Am/Americas%20Strategic%20Posture/Strategic-Posture-Commission-Report.pdf.

[4] Ibid.

The new National Security Strategy of the United States makes two other points that are relevant to sustaining New START limits. First, it states that "it is a core interest of the United States…to reestablish strategic stability with Russia." Second, it underscores that our President is the "President of Peace," with a readiness to pursue presidential diplomacy.[5]

It should be Donald Trump who gets to be the President of Nuclear Peace in this case, not Vladimir Putin. A continuation of New START limits for one year would give President Trump time to pursue his instinct to reestablish strategic stability with Russia and control nuclear weapons at the negotiating table. Refusing the one-year extension on New START limits gives Putin an easy diplomatic win that should have been the President's.

But I do not insist that New START is the be-all and end-all of nuclear treaties. President Trump told the *New York Times* in mid-January that he wants to negotiate better treaty.[6] That is good: I fully applaud that goal and will do everything I can to support it. Furthermore, I know that there have been plenty of complaints that New START does not limit nonstrategic nuclear weapons, nor does it limit so-called Russian exotic systems.[7] It was not designed to do so. Our goal has always been to take up NSNW in the next negotiations, as called for in the resolution of ratification of New START. And the exotic systems have appeared on the scene since New START entered into force, so of course they must be accounted for.

Priorities for Reducing Nuclear Risks

The United States, moreover, *must* address the Chinese nuclear buildup; it will be a long-running challenge in the 21st century. The Chinese are fiercely reluctant to engage the issue, not wanting to limit or reduce their nuclear forces until an uncertain point in the future. Either they want to build up to the levels of the United States and Russia—thus creating the two-nuclear-peer problem that so worries Washington—or they want to wait until the United States and Russia come down to their level—their canonical talking point.

But although the Chinese refuse to discuss limits or reductions, they seem more open to conversations about constraining nuclear risks. That is why, if I could get to the table tomorrow with Russia and China, indeed with the P 5 as a whole,[8] I would have two immediate priorities.

---

[5] National Security Strategy of the United States of America, November 2025, pp. 25, 8, 13, https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/2025-National-Security-Strategy.pdf.
[6] "Two Hours, Scores of Questions, 23,000 Words: Our Interview with President Trump ," The New York Times, January 11, 2026, https://www.nytimes.com/2026/01/11/us/politics/trump-interview-transcript.html.

[7] Eric S. Edelman and Franklin C. Miller, "No New Start," Foreign Affairs, June 3, 2025, https://www.foreignaffairs.com/united-states/no-new-start; Greg Weaver, "Is Extending the New Start Limits in the US National Security Interest?," Atlantic Council, December 22, 2025, https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/in-depth-research-reports/issue-brief/is-extending-the-new-start-limits-in-the-us-national-security-interest/.
[8] The P 5, the nuclear weapon states under the Nonproliferation Treaty are the United States, Russia, China, the United Kingdom and France.

The first would be to begin a serious discussion of permitted activities under the nuclear testing moratorium. We may have different conceptions of what is permitted, and we should discuss these differences in a technical and professional way, out of the public spotlight, in the interest of achieving the reciprocal understanding that is so important to President Trump.[9] And we should work on a new joint verification experiment (JVE), drawing on the legacy of the 1988 JVE, in order to bolster mutual understanding of and predictability about permitted activities under the moratorium.[10]

In 1988, the United States and USSR visited each other's test sites to cooperate in instrumenting and conducting explosive nuclear tests. The goal was to clarify monitoring methods for the Threshold Test Ban Treaty (TTBT). A new joint experiment would not involve explosive nuclear tests, but it could allow the two sides together to instrument and conduct subcritical nuclear experiments. In this case, China could also be involved, and that would allow the three largest nuclear weapon states under the Nonproliferation Treaty to develop better reciprocal understanding of the nuclear testing moratorium. The other nuclear weapon states, France and the United Kingdom, and eventually, other states possessing nuclear weapons, prominently India and Pakistan, could engage as well. Such joint activities would be a big step toward reducing nuclear risk.

The second priority would be to get down to business talking about the integrated air and missile defense (IAMD) requirements that we all will have, given the wide missile proliferation that is evident in the Ukraine war and other current conflicts—even among non-state actors, the Houthis, in the Red Sea.[11] We must think hard about how to build defenses against drones and missiles in multiple ranges, while ensuring that our strategic nuclear forces remain a viable means to deter nuclear attack on our homelands. This is a common problem that affects all states deploying strategic offensive forces, not just the United States and Russia.

I am not talking about negotiating a new ABM Treaty, I am talking about how to sustain the viability of strategic offensive deterrence while deploying capable IAMD. Perhaps it is new technologies that will help us here; perhaps it is clarity and information-sharing about the nature of the defensive systems being deployed—but speaking candidly about what is needed to defend will be important to all states deploying strategic nuclear deterrent forces.

As the Strategic Posture Commission report recommended, I support building integrated air and missile defenses against a limited conventional or nuclear coercive attack.[12] I do not support expending our national resources attempting to build for the United States a comprehensive strategic defense system

---

[9] Donald Trump (@realDonaldTrump), "The United States has more Nuclear Weapons than any other country," Truth Social, October 29, 2025, https://truthsocial.com/@realDonaldTrump/posts/115460423936412555

[10] "Joint Verification Experiment," James Martin Center for Nonproliferation Studies, accessed January 26, 2026, https://nonproliferation.org/lab-to-lab-joint-verification-experiment/

[11] Another important discussion should be about banning nuclear weapons on short- and intermediate-range missile systems, but that discussion is a longer-term prospect that should extend to countries well beyond the P 5. Rose Gottemoeller, "The US and Russia can lead the way in banning nuclear-armed drones," *Financial Times*, October 30, 2025, https://as.ft.com/r/b7a78776-07ed-4c5b-81ea-c57e518309d3.

[12] Congressional Commission on the Strategic Posture of the United States, 72-73.

such as the “Star Wars” program that President Reagan launched in the 1980s. It would be a resource sink and destabilizing, fueling a nuclear arms race.

By focusing in the immediate period on reducing nuclear risks, I am by no means ignoring the necessity of preparing for new negotiations to address the Russian non-strategic nuclear warheads and exotic missile systems as well as, separately, the Chinese nuclear build-up. But I am talking about launching into discussions about practical projects that would go a long way toward rebuilding the mutual trust and confidence that will help such new negotiations to succeed. We will have long-running nuclear challenges in the 21st century, and they will not only involve the Chinese nuclear build-up. We have not yet understood the role that new technologies will play in either disrupting or sustaining nuclear stability in the years to come. These too will be vital topics to take up with our potential adversaries. We will need not only patience, creativity and knowledge, but also enough confidence to talk with them at the negotiating table, thereby strengthening mutual predictability and the stability and strength of our nuclear deterrent.