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## **Priorities for the Intelligence Community and Intelligence Committee in the Face of Worldwide Threats**

Chairman Turner, Ranking Member Himes, Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to share my views on what ought to be priorities for the Intelligence Community and Intelligence Committee in the face of worldwide threats.

The scope of my remarks is limited to the threats posed by China and Russia due to their capacity to carry out the greatest harm. Both nations pose an acute and chronic threat to the United States and aim to supplant the U.S.-led international order -- an order that protects the American people and our way of life. Each expansionist power is engaged in hostilities in multiple geographic theaters and across domains from the seabed to outer space.

And, despite U.S. efforts to decrease the role nuclear weapons play in its national defense strategy, to pursue disarmament objectives, increase the role of arms control and risk reduction, and to impose some unilateral restrictions, China and Russia have increased the role nuclear weapons play in their strategies.

In 2020, the United States, with China and Russia, agreed to a statement that said, “A nuclear war cannot be won and must never be fought.” But China’s and Russia’s nuclear investments, the increased size and variety of their forces, nuclear infrastructure, and Russia’s nuclear saber-rattling demonstrate that they may believe such a war could be fought and won.

Deterring adversaries from going down a path that could lead to nuclear employment must be the top priority for our nation. It is not one of several equal priorities, *it must be the priority*. And because it is our nation’s priority, it must place a demand on our political leaders to ensure the intelligence community is giving urgent due attention to it and that the United States is allocating optimal resources and personnel to this mission so that decision makers are given the clearest and most accurate understanding of our top adversaries.



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I'll offer three areas of focus for the IC:

1. Chinese and Russian decision making surrounding nuclear weapons planning, acquisitions, and possible use.
2. Cooperation between China and Russia in key areas of research development and in hybrid activity.
3. The degree to which Chinese and Russian nationals continue to operate inside U.S. research labs to the benefit of U.S. adversaries.

The United States must devote significant IC focus on China's and Russia's decision-making.

China rejects transparency measures and its security decisions, especially its nuclear weapons decisions, are opaque. It is imperative the IC work to better understand the decisions inside the PRC, and the motives that drive its investments in and the posture of its nuclear forces. The United States risks underestimating the capabilities of its adversaries and, if assumptions are not interrogated, utterly missing adversaries' intent for their nuclear weapons.

To give a snapshot of how fast the PRC is moving in its nuclear expansion, observe two public IC assessments, only 3 years apart.

“Over the next decade, China's nuclear warhead stockpile—currently estimated to be in the low200s—is projected to at least double in size as China expands and modernizes its nuclear forces.” – 2020 DoD Report.<sup>1</sup>

And then this one: “DoD estimates that the PRC possessed more than 500 operational nuclear warheads as of May 2023—on track to exceed previous projections. —2023 DoD Report.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> “Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China Annual Report to Congress.” U.S. Department of Defense, 2020. <https://media.defense.gov/2020/Sep/01/2002488689/-1/-1/1/2020-DOD-CHINA-MILITARY-POWER-REPORT-FINAL.PDF>.

<sup>2</sup> “Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China Annual Report to Congress.” U.S. Department of Defense, 2023 <https://media.defense.gov/2023/Oct/19/2003323409/-1/-1/1/2023-MILITARY-AND-SECURITY-DEVELOPMENTS-INVOLVING-THE-PEOPLES-REPUBLIC-OF-CHINA.PDF>.

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Russia is also refusing stability talks with the United States and is no longer complying with the last nuclear arms control treaty, the New START Treaty.<sup>3</sup> Understanding Russian leadership's thinking about its nuclear strategy and possible use in service of its expansionist aims is imperative.

The IC should also reassess the premises of its analytical framework. And if I can flag one area for the Committee, it would be to interrogate the IC's assessment of motivations, or primary drivers, of various PRC and Russian nuclear acquisition decisions.

The U.S. Strategic Posture Commission, on which Matthew and ten other professionals and I served, concluded "that America's defense strategy and strategic posture must change in order to properly defend its vital interests and improve strategic stability with China and Russia."<sup>4</sup> One common criticism from this is that our report will precipitate an "arms race." This is a deeply unhelpful label that confuses more than clarifies and could have the dangerous effect of dissuading decision makers from adapting the U.S. force as needed.

We know from the Cold War that, despite the insistence of some, U.S. efforts to improve the credibility of its strategic deterrent is not the primary motivator for adversaries to invest in and deploy various nuclear weapons. Adversaries in fact make investment decisions based on their strategic culture and perceptions of what they require for their military and national objectives.<sup>5</sup>

China and Russia are collaborating in military development and engaging in increasingly aggressive hybrid warfare.

China and Russia are collaborating in key sectors with direct military applications. Russian and Chinese officials offer public support for one another's aggression and erroneous territorial claims. And Putin has said he hopes to expand their cooperation.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> "Russian Noncompliance With and Invalid Suspension of the New START Treaty," US State Department, June 1, 2023, <https://www.state.gov/russian-noncompliance-with-and-invalid-suspension-of-the-new-start-treaty/>.

<sup>4</sup> "America's Strategic Posture: The Final Report of the Congressional Commission on the Strategic Posture of the United States." The Congressional Commission on the Strategic Posture of the United States, October 2023. <https://www.ida.org/-/media/feature/publications/a/am/americas-strategic-posture/strategic-posture-commission-report.ashx>.

<sup>5</sup> For further information on the myth of an arms race, please see Kyle Balzer, Matthew Costlow, and Robert Peters, "A Misleading Metaphor: The Nuclear 'Arms Race,'" War on the Rocks, November 20, 2023, <https://warontherocks.com/2023/11/a-misleading-metaphor-the-nuclear-arms-race/>.

<sup>6</sup> "Putin calls for closer Russia-China cooperation on military satellites and prospective weapons," AP News, November 8, 2023, <https://apnews.com/article/russia-china-military-cooperation-d4fedabf86d88e2cc0074159294026f9>.

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In a DoD public report, which covered military developments involving the PRC until the end of 2022, concluded, “The PRC probably will use its new fast breeder reactors and reprocessing facilities to produce plutonium for its nuclear weapons program, despite publicly maintaining these technologies are intended for peaceful purposes.”<sup>7</sup>

In March 2023, DoD publicly confirmed media reporting that Russian nuclear energy company Rosatom is supplying China with enriched uranium. “It’s very troubling to see Russia and China cooperating on this,” said John F. Plumb, assistant secretary of defense for space policy.<sup>8</sup>

He went on, “They may have talking points around it, but there’s no getting around the fact that breeder reactors are plutonium, and plutonium is for weapons. So I think the [Defense] Department is concerned. And of course, it matches our concerns about China’s increased expansion of its nuclear forces as well, because you need more plutonium for more weapons.”<sup>9</sup>

Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine and China’s materiel, diplomatic, and economic support continues to receive the most public attention and understandably so. But Russia and China are engaging in aggression on the conflict continuum and increasing the intensity and boldness of it from cutting gas pipelines on the seabed,<sup>10</sup> to using sonar pulses<sup>11</sup> and water cannons against U.S. allies operating lawfully and peacefully in international waters. The PRC and Russia are choosing to behave confrontationally and dangerously.

Americans should become better informed about the nature of the hostilities and so the Committee might encourage the IC to declassify more, especially regarding events related to what we might consider hybrid warfare but is becoming more intense and regular.

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<sup>7</sup> “Military and Security Developments Involving the People’s Republic of China Annual Report to Congress.” U.S. Department of Defense.

<sup>8</sup> David Vergun, “Russia Reportedly Supplying Enriched Uranium to China,” DOD News, March 8, 2023, <https://www.defense.gov/News/News-Stories/Article/Article/3323381/russia-reportedly-supplying-enriched-uranium-to-china/>.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Claudia Chiappa and Pierre Emmanuel Ngendakumana, “‘Everything indicates’ Chinese ship damaged Baltic pipeline on purpose, Finland says,” Politico, December 1, 2023, <https://www.politico.eu/article/balticconnector-damage-likely-to-be-intentional-finnish-minister-says-china-estonia/>.

<sup>11</sup> Andrew Greene, “Australia’s navy chief confronts Chinese counterpart over ‘unsafe’ sonar attack against HMAS Toowoomba,” MSN, February 5, 2024, <https://www.msn.com/en-au/news/other/australia-s-navy-chief-confronts-chinese-counterpart-over-unsafe-sonar-attack-against-hmas-toowoomba/ar-AA1o3a7V?ocid=BingNewsSerp>.

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Contesting China and Russia in this hybrid band of the conflict continuum is necessary so that each do not increase the intensity of their aggression and thereby misjudge U.S. and ally resolve.

## China's Exploitation of the U.S. Commitment to Science and Technology Advances

My last point will be brief. Our national laboratories and nuclear enterprise must be secure and utterly free of exploitation. Threats to our national laboratories and across the nuclear enterprise can come from external adversaries or from "insiders," including employees or "visitors with trusted access."<sup>12</sup> According to one prominent study, "Between 1987 and 2021, at least 162 scientists who had worked at Los Alamos [National Laboratory] returned to the PRC to support a variety of domestic research and development (R&D) programs."<sup>13</sup>

And, according to a May 2023 Government Accountability Office report, which was mandated by the 2022 National Defense Authorization Act, the Department of Energy has not yet implemented its recommendations to protect against the "insider threat."<sup>14</sup>

In conclusion, four decades since the Cold War, and with two decades of focus on the Global War on Terror and not on major power confrontation and conflict, the United States must rebuild and reorient the IC and relearn the lessons from the first Cold War—and with urgency.

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<sup>12</sup> Government Accountability Office. "Nuclear Security: DOE Should Take Actions to Fully Implement Insider Threat Program." GAO Reports and Testimonies. Published May 23, 2023. Accessed May 13, 2024. <https://www.gao.gov/products/gao-23-105576>.

<sup>13</sup> "The Los Alamos Club: How the People's Republic of China Recruited Leading Scientists from Los Alamos National Laboratory to Advance Its Military Programs." Strider Technologies, Inc., September 22, 2022, <https://content.striderintel.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/Strider-Los-Alamos-Report.pdf>.

<sup>14</sup> GAO, "Nuclear Security."