General John E. Hyten on Progress and Challenges Implementing the National Defense Strategy

TRANSCRIPT

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Rebeccah Heinrichs:

Good afternoon and thank you for joining us virtually for this Hudson Institute event with General John E. Hyten. Those watching know well that General Hyten serves as the 11th vice chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and before his current role, he was commander of U.S. Strategic Command, and before that Air Force Space Command and we could go on and on down your resume, but we won’t do that right now. Some of our viewers might remember that General Hyten joined me at Hudson in our pre-COVID days back when he was commander of Strategic Command. Thank you for joining us for a second conversation, this one in your new role, General Hyten, and I’m going to turn over the floor over to you for some initial remarks and then we will just jump into a conversation after that. So with that, sir, the floor is yours.

General John E. Hyten:

All right, thanks very much, Rebecca. It was a little, I’ll say better, when we could actually sit across from each other at the Hudson Institute and have a conversation in front of a crowd and interact with the audience, but in the COVID days this is the way we do things and I’m looking forward to the conversation today. So, let me just say a few things to open up.

I’ve been the vice chairman just a little less than nine months now, and it isn’t the nine months I expected when I started, but I started off with a certain set of priorities and it's a good place to start the conversation because my priorities when I came in were number one, is to make sure that the chairman General Milley and the secretary, Secretary Esper were successful in the jobs that they had to do. When it comes right down to it, the primary job of the vice chairman and the chairman is an advisor. So, our job is to give the best military advice to our political leadership and that is the highest priority, make them successful in what they're doing.

And, my second priority was to try to insert speed into every process that I touched in the Pentagon because my biggest concern looking at the Pentagon for a while now as a commander on the outside looking in was we had lost the ability to go fast on anything that we did. And so, I wanted to put speed back into our processes, and then the third priority was to make sure that I always focused on taking care of our people, our soldiers, sailors, and the marines, and their families because despite all the amazing equipment that the tax payers have purchased for the United States Military, we are nothing without the men and women who choose to serve, and so I wanted to make sure that I always had a focus on them.

So, as I started off for a couple of months, we were able to balance those three priorities and as February started rolling around, we had a good rhythm, but then March everything changed and the first priority, making sure that we did what we needed to do to make the chairman successful, make the department successful, give the best military advice, that became the big issue because I was assigned as the co-lead with the deputy secretary for the Department of Defense COVID Task Force that met with the White House Task Force every day, Monday through Sunday for weeks and weeks and weeks.

And then, as we transitioned in the summer, that let up a little bit, but that still became a focal point and then in early June we had the murder of George Floyd and the social unrest that rightly responded in this country, and we had to make sure we focused on that. And so, it became a little bit more challenging to put a priority on number two and to always remember number three as we went
through. But nonetheless, having those priorities as I started allowed me to remember what we're trying

to get accomplished and we can talk about those in a number of different ways.

We can talk about the coronavirus if we want to talk about that, we can talk about speed, we can talk

about the J. Rock. I look forward to any number of conversations, but I tell you though, the last six

months have been a challenge I think for everybody in this country, everybody in the world, and
certainly everybody who serves and wears the uniform, and it's amazing what we have done and I think
the country has seen a lot of it, but a lot of the things that happen behind the scenes to maintain our
readiness, to maintain our focus a lot of people don't see. So, over to you for questions and to start the
conversation, so thanks for the time to open.

**Rebeccah Heinrichs:**

Well, thank you, General Hyten. I think what we'd like to do today is talk about some of the subjects that
maybe haven't gotten as much news coverage because rightly, coronavirus is the topic that has been the
predominant topic in the news media and also with this social unrest and so I want to talk about ... The
threats are still there and the United States still has to make sure that we're keeping the country safe
and fulfilling our obligations to allies and our primary interests overseas, and so if we can, I'd like to start
talking about the Germany issue and relocating some troops out of Germany and how this fits with the
National Defense Strategy. President Trump has emphasized burden sharing as part of the reason or the
lack thereof of sufficient burden sharing and then you and Secretary Esper have talked about some of
the strategies behind it.

**Rebeccah Heinrichs:**

I don't necessarily see those two reasons in conflict, although sometimes they're characterized that way.
Can you talk about how things have changed from our initial deployments of why they're deployed there
and why it might make sense to make some adjustments?

**General John E. Hyten:**

Sure, so we were going down the path of restructuring our forces in Europe from the very beginning of
Secretary Esper’s term as the Secretary of Defense. He tasked us early on to look at each of the
combatant commanders and Africa was the first, but Europe was an early one, and look at the structure
and figure out how we should be structured to deal with the current threat as defined in the National
Defense Strategy and the great thing about the National Defense Strategy, it is a strategy based on a
threat

And so, when we looked at Europe, he had a series of priorities they gave us. Number one, whatever we
do in Europe should improve our deterrent posture for Russia. Number two is that we need to better
engage with all our allies across the European continent. Number three, we need to improve our
partnership with NATO. Number four, make sure our forces were ready and we could give him more
flexible options for deploying that force. And Number five, make sure we're true to our commitment to
our service members and their families that are deployed in Europe.

So, he told us that right from the beginning. When the president talked about restructuring in Germany,
that accelerated our decision timeline, but we were already going down that path, and so when you look
at Europe, very simply put, to understand what we're doing, just pull out a map of Europe and look at
how Europe has changed over just my time in service. When I joined in 1981, it was all about the Soviet Union and if you looked at where the boundary was in Eastern Europe, the boundary was Germany.

Germany was Eastern Europe and Germany was Western Germany and you had to look across the wall to Eastern Germany, and then there was the Soviet Union, of all the Soviet republics right there on that border. Now if you look at the map, it is a much different ... NATO was completely different. NATO was nine countries when it started, now it's 30 countries. The eastern side of NATO is not Germany, the eastern side of NATO is down by the Black Sea and up in the Baltics. That's where the eastern border is now, so it's important that we restructure the force.

And so, those five priorities that Secretary Esper gave with us, even with the president's direction to Germany, those priorities never changed. And so, we are moving forces, some back to the United States, so that we can improve readiness and then deploys them back into Europe on a rotational basis and some other places in Europe to allow us to better be postured for the threat. So, you'll see Poland be a more active partner, you'll see Romania be a more active partner, you'll see the Black Sea area be more active because that's where we improve our deterrent, be it Russia, which was the secretary's number one priority.

In order to do that, we have to structure forces and our largest forces are in Germany. After we're done with this restructure, the largest number of forces will still be in Germany. So, that is still a critical ally. I've talked to my German counterparts, the secretary has talked to his. They're obviously disappointed because of a number of obvious reasons, but I think all of our allies in NATO understand the structure that we're trying to do because it is important that we look at NATO through a 2020 vision, not a 1981 vision.

Rebeccah Heinrichs:

And then, would you say that ... I appreciate you saying that you might have some members of NATO that are disappointed with the decision, but then there's other members of NATO that are very pleased with the decision, I would imagine the Poles, the Romanians who are much closer to what's going on in the Black Sea with Russia's militarization I think is a fair characterization of the Black Sea. Is it your assessment then that NATO is better off on net over the last several years of trying to implement the NDS?

General John E. Hyten:

I think NATO understands the threat very well. I think Secretary General Stoltenberg understands the threat very well. He visited with me when I was the STRATCOM commander a couple of years ago, but that in itself should tell you that Secretary General Stoltenberg understands what the threat is. So, I think that NATO is moving in good direction on the nuclear side and a good direction on the military side and this is part of that.

Now, what we've defined, what Secretary Esper rolled out last week is really a concept that has been worked with General Walters and the leadership of European command to define the concept for how we actually work in new structure in NATO and that's a good concept. Now, we have to work with the services to do the detailed planning, which means we're going to have to work with Congress to figure out exactly where the force moves happen, which means we're going to have to be very tied to the White House, but what we've committed to all of those partners that we'll be transparent as we go
through this process to make sure that everybody understands what it is that we're trying to do, but I think that first priority strengthen our deterrent with Russia is the driving issue.

And, I tell you what, I was in Romania in January before COVID began and if you stand in Romania, it's a whole lot different than standing in Washington D.C. The Romanians' view of the world is completely different than our view of the world because you just look straight to the east and there is Crimea and there is Russia. Everything is different if you actually look at the world from the coast of the Black Sea.

Rebecca Heinrichs:

I would agree. I had the opportunity to speak in Bucharest a couple of years ago and I would just stomp that point and I know that the Romanians have been eager to play a positive role in the overall security of NATO and that they see the threat very poignantly, I think, from where they are. Sir, you've talked a lot about the concept of all domain operations and you mentioned ... There's this wonderful interview you did where you talked about the global integrated exercises that you participated in to see where those areas where we can shore up some gaps that might be there. Can you talk about those in the context of the major power competition?

General John E. Hyten:

So, when you look at the world today, you understand that in order for us to effectively compete with the other great powers, China and Russia in particular, we have to be able to compete in all domains and it's not all domains singularly, you have to compete all domains at the same time, which means you have to figure out how to integrate operations in each of those domains. And so, a couple of years ago when we started looking at that problem, we realized we actually understood how to say it, but we didn't understand what it really meant.

And so, the best way to do that is to put together globally integrated exercises and explore what it really means, and so we've done a few of those now. The coronavirus has impacted a little bit this spring. We've had to push back some things that we wanted to do this spring into the fall and into early next spring, but nonetheless, when you actually exercise, you find out that a lot of your assumptions about how things would work actually aren't true. You learn by exercising, which is why you do it.

So, one of the things that Secretary Esper asked us to build was a new joint war fighting concept and to have that first version of that joint war fighting concept defined by the end of this year and he told us that early on and we've been going down that path to integrate what we've learned from the globally integrated exercises, integrate what we've learned from the Army, focus on multi-domain operation, and the Air Force focus on multi-domain command and control, the Navy focus on fleet operations.

As we've looked at each of those, we've started to build a joint war fighting concept and the secretary has asked me multiple times, "You have to be able to tell me simply, how is it fundamentally different than what we've been doing in the past?" Because we've been trying to integrate all these domains multiple times. Over the last month I've come to a basic understanding and I'm starting to talk about it now because I feel like the team has done a really good job of putting it onto paper for the first time where we can see it and what I notice is that as opposed to everything I've done my entire career, the biggest difference is that in the future there will be no lines on the battlefield.
What I mean by that is, if you look at our joint doctrine now and you look at how we fight wherever we go, wherever we go if we have to fight, we establish the forward edge of the battle area. We establish the fire support coordination line, the forward line of troops and we say, okay, Army can operate here, Air Force can operate here. That's transitioned into the desert into defining kill boxes where we assign areas of operation in order to operate into there, but naval forces can go here, air forces can go here, naval air forces go here, allies can go here. Everything is about lines.

In the future, those lines are eliminated, which means an army capability can have on its own platform, the ability to defend itself or the ability to strike deep into an adversary area of operations. A naval force can defend itself or strike deep. An air force can defend itself or strike deep. Marines can defend itself or strike deep, everybody, and in order to do that, the key piece to do that altogether is an integrated version of command and control which is called Joint All-Domain Command and Control, but it's really combined in Joint All-Domain Command and Control because we have to be able to do it with our allies and partners too because if we figure out how to do it in the United States, but then since we do everything as a coalition, when we bring a coalition together, they have to understand how to fit in it because we have to draw the line for them.

We've now defeated the whole advantage we get, but if we can do this altogether, we create such a huge advantage for the future joint combined force that it will create huge challenges for our competitors around the world to try to figure out how to do it. So, that's the path we've been going down for a while and it's starting to actually mature and come to fruition now, so it's pretty exciting to see.

Rebeccah Heinrichs:

And, on that theme about there not being lines, as you've conducted these global integrated exercises, have you also considered a scenario in which the great powers are not presenting a problem one at a time, but are cooperating together?

General John E. Hyten:

So, one of the things we always watch is how China and Russia deal with each other. So, I won't get into the detailed scenarios that we do in classified exercises, but I'll just say that we always look at worst case situations and make sure we understand them and make sure that we have the ability to respond to a worst case situation.

Rebeccah Heinrichs:

Which then is a nice segue into my next question, as part of great power competition is that ... And, this is in the NDS too is the role of allies and how we're really going to need allies, not just on the deterrent side of things, but on the other side of deterrence if deterrence should break down. You just talked about some integration, but can you talk about what's different now as we've really gotten serious about the National Defense Strategy, some successes we've seen in being better prepared in that regard?

General John E. Hyten:

When we talk about allies and partners we always talk about how they're our greatest advantage over our competitors, and they are, over every adversary that we can think of, the fact that when we get in a
scrape we have a lot of friends that come with us. That's probably our biggest advantage in the world today and will be as far as I can see in the future. But as we've worked with our allies in the past, we've tried to have combined interoperability is the catchphrase. We want to make sure that when our allies come with us, whether they come with us in the air, at sea, on the land, that they have capabilities to allow them to interoperate with the tactical units they're falling in with.

So, if they're flying a fighter, you want to make sure the fighters can communicate. If they're falling in on the ground, you want to make sure that this platoon can talk to this platoon and you don't have to come up with a different structure, but what we see as we look into the future is that the real challenge is going to be integrating at a command and control level above the tactical level, so when you get to the operational and even the strategic level.

So, when we as a joint and combined force give direction to the force, the entire force has to understand it, so they can respond quickly. It's actually one of the basic tenets of how you operate as a military. It's what we learn when we're lieutenants is how to execute with mission-type orders when you're young and when you're taught centralized control, decentralized execution, but because we've been in a fight against violent extremism for the last 20 years, we haven't actually practiced that as much as you would think.

In many ways, it's going back to the basics, but going back to the basics with new capabilities that really change the battlefield completely, which means our allies now, it's not just at the capability level, they have to be able to understand at the operational level, which means we have to share information at that level, which we haven't been able to do. So, that command and control relationship is going to be critically important to build as we go forward.

Rebeccah Heinrichs:

And then, Japan just as a critical ally as we deter China and Australia, you can see on the State Department side too making a lot of muscle movements in that direction to strengthen those alliances. Can you give us some specific changes that you've seen specifically related to Japan and Australia as we start working towards thinking about how we're going to reposition or re-posture ourselves in the INDOPACOM theater to deter China?

General John E. Hyten:

So, I think first we have to talk from a global perspective and then I'll talk specifically about Japan and Australia to answer your question directly, but when you look at a global perspective, there's not much good that has come from the coronavirus. It is a horrible disease and it has impacted everybody's way of life. We've all lost friends, loved ones, it's a horrible thing, but I think the one thing that became clear the first six months of this year is that I'll just say that the world understands more of what China is now than maybe a year ago just because of the way China acts, the way they act in Hong Kong, the way they act with transparency about the virus itself, the way they act in terms of reaching out to help those that need help.

All of a sudden you see China for the actor as the Chinese Communist Party. So, it has separated the Chinese Communist Party from the people of China because that is who acts on the international stage and when you see that, everybody understands that you have to act. So now, you act about Japan and Australia and what I see are our allies and they're two of our greatest friends in the world. You see them
stepping up to more aggressively deal with the challenges of China and that creates challenges in terms of their countries and they're much closer to China than we are and they want to be partners with China.

They don't want China to be an adversary. For gosh sakes, nobody wants war in the Indo-Pacific, but they do understand they have to be able to confront China in a number of different ways and I see both Japan and Australia doing that. So, we have a lot of friends in the Indo-Pacific now that are stepping up in more significant ways and I think Japan and Australia count in that category.

**Rebeccah Heinrichs:**

And then, I would add Taiwan has also, I think, really showcased what a contributor it is in a positive way to try to maintain peace and defend the sovereignty of other nations as well. Sir, since we're talking about China, what about ... And then, I want to move into strategic deterrents in the nuclear category, but the last time you and I spoke and you mentioned that part of you mission is to help the department move faster, and one of the things you and I talked about before was the importance of missile defense, an integrated air and missile defense and the importance of the space component of that and the HBTSS.

**Rebeccah Heinrichs:**

Yet, the department still hasn't put a lot of money into that. Congress has been willing to support it, but the Pentagon still hasn't put the money there in terms of requesting it from Congress. Can you talk about that, the status of that, the importance of that and what your thinking is on that particular program in that mission more generally if you want to go that direction?

**General John E. Hyten:**

So, I think you have to look at the capabilities that you would get from a space layer from a couple of perspectives. You have to look at it from a deterrent perspective and then you have to look at it from a missile defense perspective. From a deterrent perspective, you actually have to see a threat before you can deter the threat. If you don't know the threat's coming at you, you're vulnerable and we have spent enormous amounts of money building giant radars in the Pacific to allow us to effectively see the threat and deal with the threat, but now we have desires for more radars in the Pacific because by definition, a radar provides a limited area defense.

When you move to space, you have the ability to see the entire globe, and if you can see the entire globe, you can understand the threat, which means you can deter the threat. That's the most important thing, but in order to defend yourself, you can't shoot something unless you can see it and if you have blind spots, it's not hard for an adversary to figure out where your blind spots are and go there. So, you want to eliminate your blind spots. That's the other reason you want to go to space and the other piece that I think is overlooked many times is that when you build a multi-billion dollar radar and you build another multi-billion dollar radar and another multi-billion dollar radar, pretty soon you've spent a lot of money and you still have holes in your center architecture.

If you build a space layer, you eliminate the holes and in the long-term that will actually save you money. It looks expensive when you look at the price tag when you start off, but in the long-term it saves you enormous amounts of money and most importantly, it cuts off the holes. That enables you to
defend something you want. If now you want to defend a certain point, if you want to defend Guam, I can see the threats that were coming to Guam. I don't have to build a special sensor in order to do that.

So, my desire and I won't share the internal budget deliberations inside the Pentagon because we're going through those right now, but my desire is to advocate strongly from the position of the vice chairman in making sure that we get a space layer funded in the future, so that we can actually see and characterize these threats on a global perspective.

**Rebeccah Heinrichs:**

And, those threats I think you and I have talked about before too, we're worried about the hypersonic threats coming out of those great powers as well. If I can ... Well, we'll do one more missile defense question because I can't help myself here, but one of the things I've been trying to track is even though we are shifting to a focus of great power competition, we still have real threats that are coming from rogue state actors, that are coming from violent extremists that we still have to cover down on. Can you give us an update on how confident you are and what your best military advice moving forward on homeland missile defense to handle the threat that we do have today, which is coming from North Korea's ICBM force and the importance of making sure that we don't want to deal with that problem, but that means we also have to defend against it, so what is the status, to your mind, of our homeland missile defense system to handle those threats?

**General John E. Hyten:**

So, I think our homeland missile defense with respect to Korea is strong, with respect to North Korea. The interceptors we have, mostly in Alaska, but also at Vandenberg are very effective against that threat. They're not effective against other threats and we have to make sure we continue to advance and to take care of advancing threats in North Korea, potential threats in Iran, and threats that might come from other places as well.

So, we have to continue to modernize those capabilities, so it was disappointing when we had the new kill vehicle program that basically failed and has to be started again, so making sure we get a next generation kill vehicle on board and moving quickly is critically important. So, the Missile Defense Agency has a special dispensation to go fast when it comes to requirements, but my predecessor asked for it and I continued to ask that the J. Rock take a hard look at what those requirements are and when we looked at those requirements, we felt like in a number of areas, without getting into the classified details, we had overspecified what was really needed, and we were going to put risk into the program that could push the date out for the capability.

So, one of the things that we're trying to do in the J. Rock and the service vice chiefs and I who comprise the J. Rock are working together to make sure we put realistic requirements on the table and also demands to schedule that tell the developers that we need capabilities sooner rather than later and sooner in some cases and more important and explicit in the long-term. We have to be able to build incrementally as we go along. We can't just wait and have this magic capability developed in 15 years that's going to last for 20 years because that does not work with the adversaries we face and it will not work anymore.
We have to be much more nimble, and so we’re trying to help the Missile Defense Agency with more specific, realistic requirements that they can adjust and meet and having that next generation kill vehicle delivered on time is very critical.

Rebeccah Heinrichs:

Thank you, sir, and if I can, I do want to, since we’re still talking about rogue state actors and the terrorist threat, can you tell us, what is your assessment of how well we’re still doing at mitigating the problem and terminating the problem from ISIS, Al-Qaeda, of violent extremists and especially since the killing of Soleimani, the Iranian general who was in Iraq when we killed him, what is the status of that, and what’s your competence that even as we start moving down, drawing down troop levels that we still are able to carry out that mission to make sure that we’re not increasing into an unacceptable risk level for the American people?

General John E. Hyten:

The president and the Secretary of Defense have made it clear to us. The Secretary of Defense has given us specific guidance that we have to watch and make sure that we don't allow a violent extremist organization, a terrorist, to develop the ability to once again attack the homeland. That's basically the red line that we have to watch for, which means we have to have partners in that part of the world, we have to have very good intelligence in that part of the world to tell us exactly how things are playing out and then we have to have a certain presence that matches what the threat is going to be.

That's the question right now, so we’re coming down out of Afghanistan, the Iraq posture will continue to change as we go into the future as well and that's because the physical threat is not there. The solution to Afghanistan is going to be a peaceful negotiation between the Taliban and the government of Afghanistan, everybody knows that. Our job is to encourage that and at the same time make sure that there’s no safe haven for a terrorist to go.

Same way with Iraq, we understand that that has to be the government of Iraq and the people of Iraq that take care of that situation. So, we want to make sure that we’re helpful in that. I think we’re properly postured right now. We’re coming down at a very logical rate and the president has told us, the secretary has told us it’s conditions based. As long as the conditions continue the way they are, we’ll continue to come down. If conditions change, then we’ll go back to the secretary and the president and we may have a different recommendation, but our goal is to make sure that we continue on the path we’re on.

Rebeccah Heinrichs:

Great, and then just shifting now to nuclear deterrence, Vic Mercado is the Assistant Secretary of Defense for strategy, plans, and capabilities, and he’s performing the duties of the deputy and the Secretary of Defense policy and he just had an op-ed a week ago in Defense News where he made the case for continuing to stay on task and on target for implementing the Nuclear Posture Review and some of the changes in the Nuclear Posture Review, which complement the National Defense Strategy and in particular the nuclear sea-launched cruise missile. General, can you tell us the importance of that and the status of that and is it moving fast enough for what you think is necessary for carrying out the president's direction for the Nuclear Posture Review?
**General John E. Hyten:**

So, when you look at the Nuclear Posture Review, it has something very much in common with the National Defense Strategy that's critically important and that is it's a threat-based document. The previous NPR was a capability-based document. The previous defense strategies for the last 20 years, multiple administrations, Democrat and Republican, all capabilities-based documents, now are threat-based documents again. And so, if you look at the capabilities required in the Nuclear Posture Review, they're based on the threats that we face around the world, the threats that exist and the threats that are coming.

And so, the nuclear posture review is amazing for a couple of things. Number one, it's fairly consistent over the years because it is based on the triad and as we talked about sea-launched cruise missiles and the low-yield nuclear weapon, which are the two adjunct capabilities that are advocated for in the Nuclear Posture Review, they were based on the existence of a fully healthy triad that would provide the basis of deterrence for any nuclear adversary in the world.

So, when you start with a Nuclear Posture Review, you'll always have to start with a triad. The Columbia has to stay on schedule, B-21, long range standoff weapon, LRSO, TBSD, the new ICBM, and the weapons that go with those, all those have to stay on schedule because that's the basis. Now, because of the threat that exists, especially with Russia building large numbers of low-yield nuclear weapons, we didn't want to put ourself in a position where a low-yield nuclear weapon could be looked at as a logical employment on the battlefield without the United States being able to respond.

So, the president recommended the Nuclear Posture Review that we build some of those weapons, we have. They're available, it's a very small number, but it is a deterrent weapon to make sure that an adversary, Russia in this cases, doesn't think that they can get away with employing a nuclear weapon.

Secretary Mattis, when I interviewed for the ... I met him the first time as a STRATCOM commander. I had been the STRATCOM commander for a couple of months. After a long discussion of nuclear doctrine and nuclear weapons he looks at me and says, "Just explain to me in plain English, why do we have nuclear weapons?" And I said, "It's real simple, to make sure nobody uses a nuclear weapon on us." So, the two adjunct capabilities, the SLCM Navy, sea-launched cruise missile is there to respond to a Russian threat. The low-yield nuclear weapon is there to respond to a Russian nuclear threat. I hope that we can sit down with Russia and China and figure out a world where the nuclear threshold can continue to come down as it has over the last 40 years that I've served, but it has to happen with the other nuclear nations. We can't do it by ourselves.

**Rebeccah Heinrichs:**

And then, you mentioned LRSO, and you started off this conversation talking about speed, if the president were to say, "I want the LRSO to come online faster," would we be able to do that?

**General John E. Hyten:**

I think we should be able to, but here's the two challenges, and they're challenges that we have to address. Challenge number one and it's been exacerbated by COVID, is that we have a fragile industrial base, especially when you get below the prime contractors in America. I think the country has seen that our supply chain in many cases goes back to Asia, goes back to China, it does for our medical equipment, it does for materials, it does for a number of different things. We have a fragile supply chain.
We should not have a fragile industrial base. We have to make sure we take action to have a strong industrial base because if we have a strong industrial base then that will allow us to go faster. The second piece of the puzzle is we have a nuclear certification process that was developed when we first developed nuclear capabilities in the 1950s and 1960s. It's basically the same certification process we have today and the good part about it is it's structured, so that we will never make a mistake and I would hope that everybody in America when it's in process it'll never make a mistake, but in the year 2020, I don't know if you know this, but our computing capabilities have advanced slightly over the 1960s and we have the opportunity to actually look at how we certify a different way and to be able to actually move faster.

The secretary has asked us to take a hard look at that because ask Ellen Lord, the undersecretary for Acquisitions and Sustainment to take a hard look at the industrial base. If we can strengthen our industrial base, we can take a fresh look at nuclear certification, then that would enable us to move faster. That's the limiting factors right now that we have to think about as we go forward because you have to be realistic too. If you don't have somebody that can build it, if you don't have somebody that can test it, if you don't have a way to certify it, then you can't go faster. So, you have to look at the entire enterprise before you just say, hey, go faster. Everybody wants to go faster, but you have to look at the pieces.

Rebeccah Heinrichs:

And, you mentioned Russia as the country that we've got a better understanding on maybe some of their intent and some of their nuclear capabilities, but China's a problem too and part of the problem with China is that they are opaque. They're not transparent, but we know the trajectory, the Defense Intelligence Agency director said at Hudson that they were concerned about the direction that they're going with their nuclear capabilities in numbers and in kind, such that we're not confident that their explicit no first use policy is valid. Can you talk to us a little bit about that and how we're thinking about not just deterring Russia from thinking that a nuclear use would be conducive of carrying out their own political objectives that's worth the cost, but also in the context of China as well?

General John E. Hyten:

So, I'll repeat what General Ashley said. I thought he said it really well. When I look at China, I see rapid development in nuclear delivery platforms. If you're not building a large nuclear force, why are you building a large number of nuclear delivery platforms? We see changes in their posture, all the things that General Ashley talked about. You talk about a nation who wants to advance and increase their nuclear capabilities. So, as the nation, who employed a nuclear weapon on 1945 and last week was the anniversary of that day, the 75th anniversary, we understand the challenge of operating and caring for nuclear weapons.

I would hope that the Chinese when they look at that would want to sit down with the other nuclear nations in the world, especially the large nuclear nations which are Russia and the United States, and sit down at a table and talk about how to make sure that the world never crosses that threshold. Russia and the United States and the Soviet Union and the United States, despite all our enormous differences over the years and goodness gracious, the Cold War was significant, but even at the height of the Cold
War, a commander of Strategic Command and the head of the Soviet Rocket Forces could always sit down and talk and would always talk about, how do we avoid the day we ever cross that line?

Still, we're having conversations with the Russians right now in Vienna and I hope those conversations continue to go well, but we need to have those conversations with China. It's important for the world, it's important for our country, it's important for Russia, it's important for China. I hope that they will someday soon understand the importance of that and sit down and have a conversation.

Rebeccah Heinrichs:

And, you mentioned, sir, that there has been quite a bit of continuity across administrations in our nuclear posture, and from the Obama administration to the Trump administration that there are some adaptations in the Trump Nuclear Posture Review. Some of the things are the same, one of which was that the United States, once again, decided not to adopt a no first use policy. President Obama decided not to do it, that it wasn't wise, the risk was too high and the Trump administration has done the same. What is your best military advice on that particular issue in not pursuing a no first use policy?

General John E. Hyten:

I've testified on that subject multiple times. I've given that advice to the secretary and the president and my advice is that a no first use policy is bad policy for the United States of America and it's bad because we can't predict the future. We can't predict how somebody would challenge the United States and there's a certain element in nuclear weapons where a bit of ambiguity is actually good in deterring our adversaries and in this case, that's a good thing.

So, I continue to advise that I don't agree with a no first use policy. I like the way our policy is right now. I think it's accurate for the world that we live in and I think it's going to be accurate for some time to come.

Rebeccah Heinrichs:

Thank you, sir, and just the last question, one that you've emphasized again and again, and I noticed there's a theme that you and Secretary Esper hit on again and again in the context of moving troops from Germany or doing some kind of troop movements is the care and concern that we have for our forces and their families. And, these are trying times between a global pandemic and we're going through some growing pains as a military as we shift towards great power competition. What is the morale of our troops? How do you think they're doing, but not just our troops, but their families too?

General John E. Hyten:

On a whole, the morale is actually amazingly high and it sometimes surprises me when I go out because like you described, there is enormous stresses on the force right now, but the morale is high and people are excited when we go out. They're excited to see us, they're excited to talk to us. I thought about the question you asked and in different ways over the last couple of months in particular and I see some relations to a force I grew up in because remember, well, I joined the service in 1981, there was significant stress in the 1980s.
It was the Cold War, we had racial challenges still in the force, and that carried on for a long time, but the interesting comparison I have to the 1980s is that it seemed like nobody talked about the problems back then. Leadership said, "We're going to eliminate this from the force." And, we started down that path, but the force itself never really talked about it. The cool part right now is if I go out, and the secretary has done this, I've done this, the chairman has done this, if we go out and we just grab a bunch of soldiers, or grab a bunch of sailors, or airmen, or Marines and we just sit down and have a conversation, the cool part is they'll tell us exactly what is bugging them.

I think that's healthy. All that being said, there's unique stresses on the force right now. Right now today, we have over 30,000 members of the military in a quarantine environment because they're getting ready to deploy, they're getting ready to go on a ship, they're getting ready to go onto basic training, they're getting ready to go onto an environment where in order to stay safe and make sure we don't infect large numbers, we put them in quarantine.

Just the impact on the force of 30,000 people in quarantine, that's like an entire Army corps in quarantine for two weeks, that's huge, and then you think about what that does to the families who are going to have to ... If you're deploying, you're going to be gone for six months, nine months, 12 months. Well, then you add two weeks on the front of that and maybe two weeks on the back of that, that adds again to those [inaudible 00:46:14]. So, we watch the metrics and I watch a number of metrics and actually the first two weeks or two months of COVID, it wasn't too bad and it actually was pretty good, but some of those metrics are going the wrong direction right now and we don't have enough information to tell exactly why, but I watch those really close.

I know the deputy does as well and we want to make sure that we understand what's going on, but really the best way is just sitting down and talk to our folks and I think it's really healthy that people will tell us exactly what is bothering them and they won't hesitate. So, there's stress on the force, there's no doubt about it, but the morale is still positive, which when you look at the security of our country is probably one of the top jobs in America. We still get the best and brightest people that want to serve and the best part about still serving is I get to wake up every morning and put on our uniform and come into work with those people. That is the best part of this job by a mile.

Rebecca Heinrichs:

Well, thank you, sir, so much. I think that is a great note to end our conversation today. I thank you for your leadership and your continued work on the Joint Staff and maybe there'll be another opportunity for us to have another follow up conversation as time goes on, so thank you very much, sir, and thank you for those of you who joined us for this virtual event and I hope everybody stays safe.

General John E. Hyten:

Thank you, Rebecca. Thank you very much, always good to talk to you.