Defense Secretary Nominee Supports Modernization of Nuclear Deterrent



Mark T. Esper answers questions from the Senate Armed Services Committee during his confirmation hearing. U.S. Army/Sgt. Amber I. Smith

WASHINGTON — President Trump's nominee for secretary of defense said he supports modernization of the nation's strategic nuclear deterrent.

"Clearly, modernization of the [strategic nuclear] triad is top priority," Mark T. Esper said June 16 during his confirmation hearing before the Senate Armed Services Committee, listing his top modernization priorities.

Nuclear deterrence "has kept the peace with regard to deterring nuclear war for 70 years now," Esper said during his testimony. "The important part is to ensure that we have a modern, effective, credible, safe and reliable deterrent."

Each leg of the triad [bombers, intercontinental ballistic missiles and submarine-launched ballistic missiles] "provides certain capabilities to complement one another," he added. "Continuing to modernize that triad is important our safety and security."

Esper said that each leg is in a

different status.

“We need to certainly modernize the GBSD [Ground-Based Strategic Deterrent],” he said. “Obviously, we have plans to recapitalize the Ohio-class [ballistic-missile] submarines, and there is a program underway to [recapitalize] our long-range stealth bombers.”

recapitalize

Esper said that two parts of deterrence are “having a capability and the will to use it.”

He stressed that the strategic deterrent force needed to be cyber-protected.

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>
> *Mark T. Esper*

There was no daylight between the priorities between Esper and the nominee for the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Army Gen. Mark Milley.

Milley, testifying June 11 in his confirmation hearing before the same committee, listed the nation’s strategic nuclear deterrent as his top modernization priority, the others being space capabilities, artificial intelligence and hypersonic weapons.

He supports modernization of all three legs of the U.S. strategic deterrent triad.

“The triad has worked,” Milley said. “There are many

reasons why there hasn’t been a great power war since 1945. Clearly one of them is nuclear deterrence and part of that is the capability of the triad. Each leg of the triad gives you different capability.”

“I think we need to develop the domain of space as a warfighting domain,” Esper said. “We need to improve our capabilities and policies with regard to cyberspace. And then of course there is a wide range of conventional capabilities we need to improve.”

Space is no longer “a place from which we support combat operations,” he said. “It is now a warfighting domain. Not because we made it that way, but because the Russians and Chinese are making it that way. To make sure we are sufficiently robust in the space warfighting domain is to have unity of command and unity of effort.”