

Undersecretary Affirms Need for Low-Yield Nuclear Weapons to Counter Russian, Chinese Arsenals



Undersecretary of Defense for Policy John Rood at a Defense Writers Group breakfast on Dec. 4. Defense Writers Group
A senior defense official reaffirmed the importance of the nuclear deterrent triad and the need for new sea-based, low-yield nuclear weapons to counter increased nuclear arsenals by Russia and China and Russia's professed doctrine of early use of low-yield weapons to prevent a U.S. nuclear response.

Undersecretary of Defense for Policy John Rood noted the findings by last year's Nuclear Posture Review (NPR) that "the United States was reducing our reliance on nuclear weapons, reducing the size of our nuclear stockpile, while at the same time Russia and China are moving in the opposite direction, increasing their reliance on nuclear weapons ... and increasing the numbers and types of nuclear weapons."

While the NPR endorsed the need to recapitalize the existing nuclear triad of land-based Minuteman III and submarine-launched Trident D-5 ballistic missiles and nuclear-capable U.S. Air Force bombers, it also "recommended pursue of some complementary capabilities," Rood told a

Defense Writers'

breakfast Dec. 4. President Trump then supported development of "a sea-launched cruise missile and a submarine-launched ballistic missile" with low-yield nuclear capability, he added.

"The ballistic missile is more advanced, utilizing the existing submarine-launched ballistic missile, the D-5, with a modified warhead for low yield. That program, we think, is going well. But for the [ship-launched] cruise missile, we are not as advanced," and were still going through an analysis of alternatives, Rood said.

Rood said the need for the new low-yield weapons came from intelligence reports of Russian emphasis on use of nuclear weapons earlier in a conflict, "and the mistaken belief that they have the ability to use a low-yield nuclear weapon earlier in the conflict in a way to deter response."

He cited Russian President Vladimir Putin's public statements advocating the early use of low-yield nuclear weapons "as a way of deterring an adversary."

"We saw the need of aggressive action to restore deterrence, which had gotten weaker than we would like ... with these supplemental capabilities" that would show "we had a variety of capabilities that were more survivable than the existing low-yield weapons" that are aircraft delivered.

"We see this as very stabilizing" and in no way supporting the concept of early use of low-yield nuclear weapons, Rood said, countering the

warnings from
arms-control advocates.

Rood also supported the administration's withdrawal from the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Missile Treaty because Russia fielded land-based missiles with a range beyond the INF limits, and the subsequent U.S. work to develop similar weapons. He said there has been some testing of a possible medium-range cruise missile but none for a ballistic missile. He avoided answering a question about whether any European ally has indicated willingness to host such a weapon by saying there had been no decision yet on developing any specific system.

And he restated the administration's adamant position that Turkey's possession of the Russian-built S-400 air- and missile-defense system "could never be compatible" with NATO, but added that Turkey remains an ally and member of the alliance. He did not answer a question of what Turkey could do to regain access to the F-35 program, for which it had been a component producer and intended buyer.