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Defense Primer: U.S. Strategic Command (STRATCOM)

U.S. Strategic Command (USSTRATCOM or STRATCOM) is a Department of Defense (DOD) functional (as opposed to geographic) combatant command (CCMD) whose stated mission is to “conduct operations to deter strategic attack and employ forces, as directed, to guarantee the security of the nation and our allies.” (DOD is “using a secondary Department of War designation,” under Executive Order 14347 dated September 5, 2025.) The department’s 2024 Report on the Nuclear Employment Strategy of the United States defined *strategic attack* as any nuclear attack or a “significant, high-consequence non-nuclear attack” with “strategic-level effect.”

In various parts of the DOD budget, Congress authorizes and appropriates funding for personnel, operations, and capabilities provided by military services for STRATCOM to execute its mission. Such capabilities include the U.S. nuclear triad, which consists of intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs), submarine-launched ballistic missiles (SLBMs) on ballistic missile submarines (SSBNs), and bomber aircraft capable of delivering nuclear weapons. The Senate has confirmed individuals appointed to the grade of general or admiral and assigned to the position of STRATCOM commander under 10 U.S.C. §601.

Background

STRATCOM history dates to the U.S. Air Force’s Strategic Air Command (SAC), created in 1946. SAC was responsible for managing two of three legs of the U.S. nuclear triad—bombers and ICBMs—while the U.S. Navy was responsible for managing SSBNs. In the 1950s, the Navy began the deployment of Polaris SLBMs, prompting Navy and Air Force leaders to create a Joint Strategic Target Planning Staff (JSTPS). In 1961, the JSTPS produced the Single Integrated Operational Plan (SIOP), a master plan that integrated the services’ plans and capabilities against a target set. STRATCOM was originally created in 1992 when SAC was deactivated after the end of the Cold War. As part of this new arrangement that emphasized jointness and centralized command and control over U.S. strategic nuclear forces, an Air Force general or a Navy admiral alternated in leading the new command.

STRATCOM previously performed missions of what is now the U.S. Space Command (SPACECOM). In 2018, the first Trump Administration established SPACECOM as a unified CCMD, independent of STRATCOM. Between 2009 and 2017, the U.S. Cyber Command (CYBERCOM) also operated as a subordinate command of STRATCOM until President Donald Trump elevated CYBERCOM to unified CCMD status.

Mission and Leadership

According to STRATCOM, the CCMD’s mission set involves U.S. “Strategic Deterrence; Nuclear Operations; Nuclear Command, Control, and Communications (NC3) Enterprise Operations; Joint Electromagnetic Spectrum Operations; Global Strike; [and] Global Strike and Missile Threat Assessment.”

The current STRATCOM Commander is Navy Admiral Richard Correll, who assumed his current duties in December 2025. The STRATCOM commander develops operational and planning requirements for U.S. nuclear forces and the NC3 system. The commander also is a participant in U.S. nuclear command and control and a member of the Nuclear Weapons Council, a joint DOD-Department of Energy body that facilitates interagency coordination on nuclear weapons issues.

Staffing and Organization

STRATCOM is headquartered at Offutt Air Force Base, Nebraska. The CCMD, staffed by 41,000 personnel, is organized into two functional component commands and three service component commands. The functional component commands are responsible for the daily execution of the STRATCOM mission. The service component commands are responsible for organizing, training, and equipping forces presented to the CCMD for use.

- The Joint Forces Air Component Command (JFACC), located at Barksdale Air Force Base, Louisiana, is a functional component responsible for delivering nuclear and conventional strikes and nonkinetic effects. Air Force Global Strike Command (AFGSC) is a service component responsible for providing bomber and ICBM forces, and NC3 elements. The Senate-confirmed AFGSC commander also serves (i.e., is “dual-hatted”) as the JFACC commander.
- The Joint Force Maritime Component Command (JFMCC), located at Naval Station Norfolk, Virginia, is a functional component responsible for executing maritime aspects of strategic deterrence. U.S. Fleet Forces Command (USFFC) is a service component that provides naval forces.
- The U.S. Army Space and Missile Defense Command (USASMD) is a service component that provides certain space and missile defense capabilities.
- The U.S. Marine Corps is represented by a Marine Liaison Element that advises the STRATCOM commander.

Budget

DOD budget documentation does not generally delineate total funding by CCMD. Forces and operations assigned to the commands are, in general, funded by the military departments. CCMD funding is, with certain exceptions, limited to Operation and Maintenance (O&M) accounts for headquarters and mission support activities. In the case of STRATCOM, in its FY2026 budget request, the Department of the Air Force requested \$593.5 million for STRATCOM headquarters operations. The Department of Defense Appropriations Act, 2026 (P.L. 119-75, Division A), provided \$593.8 million for such operations—\$250,000 (0.4%) more than requested, according to the accompanying explanatory statement. Other parts of the FY2026 DOD budget requested funding for nuclear and other capabilities operated at the service levels on behalf of STRATCOM (see “CRS Products” below).

Potential Issues for Congress

Strategic Nuclear Modernization

The United States is modernizing its nuclear forces—a process that requires the Air Force and the Navy to sustain legacy ICBMs, SSBNs, bombers, and NC3 systems while developing and deploying new ones. The Congressional Budget Office in 2025 estimated the 10-year cost of plans to operate, sustain, modernize, and purchase nuclear forces at \$946 billion. In March 2026, Admiral Correll stated that DOD and STRATCOM were seeking to “expedite” aspects of the Sentinel ICBM program and that “any further delay” to the Sentinel would have “cascading negative impacts across the triad, driving increased risk to strategic deterrence.” He also stated that DOD and STRATCOM were “actively pursuing risk mitigation options” with regard to the transition from the Ohio-class to the Columbia-class SSBN. He further stated that the “demand for bomber support continues to strain the fleet” and that DOD, the Air Force, and STRATCOM were assessing the “final procurement quantity” of B-21 bombers. Congress may continue to authorize and appropriate funding as well as oversee executive branch efforts to sustain and modernize U.S. strategic nuclear forces.

Future Deterrence Requirements

The 2023 report of the Congressional Commission on the Strategic Posture of the United States argued that the United States would soon enter a world with two nuclear peers, Russia and the People’s Republic of China (PRC), and that then-plans to modernize U.S. nuclear forces were “necessary, but not sufficient.” DOD’s 2024 Report on the Nuclear Employment Strategy of the United States stated that the United States “confronts multiple nuclear competitors” and required that planning account for “new deterrence challenges.” In March 2026 testimony, Admiral Correll discussed nuclear threats from Russia, the PRC, and North Korea, and the challenges posed to the United States by the growing relationships between these countries.

March 2026 testimony by DOD officials stated that, while DOD would not be conducting a formal Nuclear Posture Review, the department was assessing potential future

deterrence requirements. Following the February 2026 expiration of the 2010 U.S.-Russian New START treaty that limited the numbers of U.S.- and Russian-deployed strategic nuclear weapons, prospects for follow-on nuclear arms control remain unclear. Some experts have debated whether and when the United States should consider adding (or uploading) warheads to existing ICBMs, SLBMs, and bombers.

Some past STRATCOM Commanders have advocated for new regional nuclear capabilities intended for U.S. extended deterrence to allies. Admiral Correll has supported the nuclear sea-launched cruise missile (SLCM-N), mandated by Congress in Section 1640 of P.L. 118-31. In March 2026, he also stated that the United States was seeking to “accelerate the development and deployment of additional theater nuclear capabilities.”

Congress may continue to track evolving requirements for STRATCOM capabilities and the implications of such requirements for U.S. nuclear modernization. Congress may also continue to oversee the evolution of the second Trump Administration’s strategy on nuclear arms control.

Implementation of Operational Plans

Some Members of Congress have raised concerns over a reported Trump Administration proposal to restructure CCMDs in part by having the head of U.S. European Command (EUCOM) relinquish the position of NATO’s Supreme Allied Commander Europe (SACEUR), and the implications of this potential change for control of U.S. nuclear weapons that are part of the U.S. extended deterrence commitment to NATO. In March 2025 testimony, then-STRATCOM Commander U.S. Air Force General Anthony Cotton suggested that the STRATCOM commander’s relationship with SACEUR is “important in the execution of operational plans” and would “change ... if that commander was not a U.S. commander.” Congress may continue to monitor the evolution of this issue.

CRS Products

CRS In Focus IF11697, *Defense Primer: Nuclear Command, Control, and Communications (NC3)*

CRS In Focus IF12735, *U.S. Extended Deterrence and Regional Nuclear Capabilities*

CRS In Focus IF11681, *Defense Primer: LGM-35A Sentinel Intercontinental Ballistic Missile*

CRS In Focus IF12945, *U.S. Strategic Bombers*

CRS Report R41129, *Navy Columbia (SSBN-826) Class Ballistic Missile Submarine Program: Background and Issues for Congress*

CRS In Focus IF12084, *Nuclear-Armed Sea-Launched Cruise Missile (SLCM-N)*

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