

RECORD VERSION

STATEMENT BY

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CRITICAL MAJOR WEAPON SYSTEMS**

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Chairman DesJarlais, Ranking Member Moulton, and distinguished members of the committee, on behalf of the Secretary of War, the Honorable Pete Hegseth, and the Deputy Secretary of War, the Honorable Steve Feinberg, I thank you for the opportunity to testify on the vital work of the Direct Reporting Portfolio Manager for Critical Major Weapon Systems (DRPM/CMWS).

Secretary Hegseth, when he created this office, identified a select few weapon systems with scope and impact requiring immediate, urgent, and unified focus across the entire Department to ensure timely delivery for the Nation's defense. These programs, the Sentinel Intercontinental Ballistic Missile (ICBM) system (Sentinel), the Minuteman III ICBM (Minuteman III), the B-21 Raider, the F-47 and its family of systems, and the VC-25B programs, require a higher-level of attention and leadership, a greater sense of operational urgency, and full support from all Department components through program execution and fielding.

In direct alignment with the National Defense Strategy (NDS), my role is twofold: first, to relentlessly prioritize these critical programs within my portfolio that are most consequential to the security, freedom, and prosperity of the American people; and second, to drive the transformation of our acquisition process. The ultimate goal is to ensure the United States military is equipped with the most decisive and lethal warfighting capabilities in the world.

I want to be clear from the outset: we cannot afford to do business as usual. Success demands we institute an outcome focused culture and processes that serve the singular goal of delivering decisive capabilities to the warfighter at the speed of relevance.

I do not take this responsibility lightly. It is imperative for us, as acquisition warfighters, to deliver capability to our operational communities at an accelerated pace, and to do so in a spirit of transparent partnership with the Defense Industrial Base.

View on Roles and Responsibilities

The purpose of the DRPM is to enable warfighters to deliver decisive capability to the operators with speed and efficiency. To achieve this purpose, I am focused on three “Golden Rules”: empowered execution, integration over independence, and a revitalized relationship with industry.

First, the foundation of our approach is empowered execution. The Department’s Program Executive Offices (PEOs) are fully enabled through the new Portfolio Acquisition Executive (PAE) structure, and my expectation is that they will accelerate and execute with urgency. I will actively champion their success by using my authorities to resolve difficult cross-departmental challenges, remove bureaucratic obstacles within the Pentagon, and flatten the aggregated layers of oversight. My role is one of strategic execution, deliberately structured with the requisite decision-making authority to drive progress.

Second, we will prioritize integration over independence. I hold partnership and collaboration in the highest regard as we focus collectively on delivery. To that end, and in keeping with the goal of streamlined decision-making, I have deliberately not replicated the traditional Service Acquisition Executive (SAE) to Defense Acquisition Executive (DAE) relationship. Instead, I function as the direct Milestone Decision Authority (MDA) for the critical programs within my portfolio, including the F-47/CCA, B-21, Sentinel, Minuteman III, and Presidential Airlift. Our integration with the Department of the Air Force (DAF) and other organizations across the Department of War will be frictionless and absolute.

Finally, we require a revitalized relationship with industry. Under the new paradigm, we require a different level of partnership with our industry partners. We are moving away from a

transactional relationship to one built on transparency, collaboration, and shared accountability. We expect our industry partners to embrace modular open system architecture and agile development methodologies. I will continue to ensure the critical major weapon systems in my portfolio, leverage open standards such as the Autonomy Government Reference Architecture (A-GRA). This approach creates vital opportunities for smaller, innovative companies to rapidly integrate their capabilities, ultimately delivering superior performance at a lower acquisition cost. In concert with the Defense Industrial Base, I am wholly committed to delivering these vital national programs with the speed and agility our mission demands.

Posture Overview

The Department of War's Presidential Budget Request for FY27 reflects its commitment to Defending the U.S. Homeland, Deterring China in the Indo-Pacific, Increasing Burden-Sharing with U.S. Allies and Partners, and Supercharging the U.S. Defense Industrial Base (DIB). The DRPM-CMWS portfolio includes the critical capabilities that require a national level effort for strategic deterrence. Two of the CMWS programs (B-21 and Sentinel) are dedicated to modernizing the Nuclear Triad, while the third (Minuteman III) is focused on sustaining it until the replacement is fielded.

Defending the U.S. Homeland

Our paramount responsibility is the defense of the United States homeland and America's interests throughout the Western hemisphere. The bedrock of this defense is a robust and modern nuclear deterrent, meticulously postured to counter the strategic threats to our nation. In an era where both China and Russia are aggressively modernizing their nuclear forces, it is an absolute imperative that our own modernization programs proceed with urgency. The National Defense

Strategy (NDS) is unequivocal: "The United States should never—will never—be left vulnerable to nuclear blackmail." The **B-21 Raider** and the **LGM-35A Sentinel** are not merely upgrades; they are the essential guarantors of a credible U.S. nuclear deterrent for future generations. Concurrently, we must continue our investment to sustain the **LGM-30 Minuteman III** fleet. This force remains on high alert 24/7, providing the prompt and highly responsive retaliatory capability that is fundamental to our strategic stability.

B-21 Raider: The Backbone of the Future Bomber Force

The **B-21 Raider** is the cornerstone of our nation's future bomber force and is demonstrating tangible progress as it executes its flight test campaign. Physical production is advancing, with our industry partners delivering hardware to the line. This progress was further evidenced by the award of two additional Low-Rate Initial Production (LRIP) lots, one in December 2025 and another in March 2026.

We have made progress in delivering a vital capability to the warfighter, we plan to deliver the B-21 on schedule, and we remain on track for the first aircraft to be on the ramp at Ellsworth Air Force Base in 2027, with Ellsworth, Whiteman, and Dyess, slated to be the main operating bases of the future. With three LRIP lots now awarded, our plan to field a fleet of at least one hundred B-21s is firmly on course.

In FY26, we are making additional investment through disciplined use of the One Big Beautiful Bill Act (OBBBA), accelerating our production capacity with the \$4.5B provided to the B-21 program. A recent agreement with Northrop Grumman will increase annual B-21 production capacity by 25%. This strategic expansion compresses delivery timelines while maintaining stringent discipline on cost and performance and establishes the industrial base

capacity for future fleet expansion, should the nation require it. The FY27 Budget Request for the B-21 program is \$7B spanning Personnel, Operations and Maintenance (O&M), Research, Development, Test, and Evaluation (RDT&E), Procurement and Military Construction (MILCON).

Minuteman III: Sustaining the Strategic Foundation

The **Minuteman III** Intercontinental Ballistic Missile constitutes the land-based foundation of our nation's nuclear triad and serves as our most responsive strategic deterrent. The Department is steadfastly committed to ensuring the Minuteman III force remains safe, secure, and unequivocally effective. We are executing a deliberate strategy of targeted investments to provide a critical bridge until the next-generation Sentinel ICBM is fully fielded.

This commitment is resourced accordingly. The budget allocates over \$2B annually for the Minuteman III weapon system, spanning RDT&E, Procurement, and O&M appropriations. This funding underwrites the comprehensive suite of actions required to sustain the fleet's viability. The portfolio includes ten active investment programs of ~\$1B annually designed to ensure the weapon system continues to meet and exceed all warfighter requirements until its honorable retirement.

Specifically, the Fiscal Year 2027 funding request continues crucial investments at the Little Mountain Test Facility. These funds will modernize essential, ICBM-specific equipment required for vital aging, surveillance, and nuclear hardness testing. This is a forward-looking investment; these modernized capabilities will not only ensure the continued reliability of the Minuteman III but will also transition directly to support the Sentinel program, ensuring a seamless handover of mission-critical infrastructure.

Sentinel: Executing with Purpose and Momentum

The **Sentinel** program is advancing with clear purpose and tangible momentum. Our strategy is sound, the technology is being proven, and we are steadfast in our commitment to deliver a modern, credible, and effective strategic deterrent to our Nation. The program is on a clear path to its Milestone B decision by the end of 2026, with an initial operational capability scheduled for the early 2030s.

We are translating strategy into reality through a series of critical accomplishments that demonstrate tangible progress. The entire transition was visibly marked in the summer of 2025 when Air Force Global Strike Command took the first Minuteman III silo offline, providing a historic start to the changeover to Sentinel. Building on this, in the fall of 2025, the program assembled the first complete three-stage ground test missile, enabling crucial pathfinder activities for transportation and emplacement. More recently, on February 13, 2026, we broke ground on a prototype launch silo in Promontory, Utah, a key step in tackling one of the program's most significant engineering challenges. These foundational achievements are paving the way for the program's first flight, a missile pad launch scheduled for 2027, which will mark a pivotal moment in our flight test campaign.

To manage this complex national endeavor, the Air Force Global Strike Command (AFGSC) has formally established Sentinel Site Activation Task Force detachments at each missile wing, test site, and acquisition location. These units are essential for managing the intricate transition from Minuteman III to the deployment of Sentinel. Furthermore, we have embraced an incremental and adaptable approach to modernization. Our acquisition strategy is

evolving with key decisions already implemented, such as the construction of new silos and the use of pad launches for initial flight tests to help de-risk the program. We anticipate further refinement of this strategy as we drive toward the Milestone B decision.

To maintain this momentum, the Fiscal Year 2027 budget request is \$6B which includes: \$4.5B in RDT&E to fund critical Engineering and Manufacturing Development (EMD) activities. This includes air vehicle development, prototyping for the new launch silos and launch centers, and the execution of the first flight test. It also includes \$1.3B in MILCON for the construction of essential Sentinel operations and maintenance facilities at F.E. Warren, Malmstrom, and Minot Air Force Bases, as well as the third increment of the crucial utility corridor at F.E. Warren.

Conclusion

The programs within the CMWS portfolio—the steadfast sustainment of Minuteman III, the accelerated delivery of the B-21 Raider, and the deliberate execution of the Sentinel program—represent more than just the modernization of our nuclear arsenal. They are the bedrock of our nation's nuclear deterrent and the ultimate guarantors of our sovereignty. The successful and timely execution of these efforts sends a clear and unmistakable message to our adversaries and provides a steadfast promise to the American people and our allies: the United States' commitment to strategic deterrence is absolute. The strength of our nation is forged in this resolve, and through these critical programs, we will ensure that our warfighters possess the decisive capabilities needed to defend our freedom and secure peace for generations to come. Thank you.