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STATEMENT OF

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FOR NUCLEAR DETERRENCE, CHEMICAL, AND BIOLOGICAL DEFENSE POLICY AND PROGRAMS

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INTRODUCTION

Chairman DesJarlais, Ranking Member Moulton, and distinguished Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today regarding nuclear forces. It is a pleasure to join my colleagues to discuss matters relating to the U.S. nuclear deterrent, which underpins all our national defense priorities. As President Trump and Secretary of Defense Hegseth have stated, the United States will achieve peace through strength by rebuilding our military and reestablishing deterrence. Nuclear weapons provide unique deterrence effects that no other element of U.S. military power can replace. Our Nation must continue to field a flexible and modern nuclear deterrent. These capabilities are critical to the continued safety and security of the American people and our allies and partners, both now and in the future. The Department continues to prioritize nuclear modernization and sustainment of the three legs of the triad—ballistic missile submarines (SSBNs) and the strategic weapon system, intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBM), and bombers—as well as supplemental capabilities and the sustainment and modernization of our nuclear command, control, and communications (NC3) weapon system. Additionally, the Department supports the efforts of the Department of Energy/National Nuclear Security Administration (DOE/NNSA) to recapitalize, sustain, and operate the nuclear enterprise.

The Department of Defense remains staunchly committed to the viability of the U.S. nuclear deterrent in response to an unprecedented security environment with multiple nuclear challengers who have not followed our lead as responsible nuclear powers. Our Nation will soon encounter a fundamentally different global setting than it has ever experienced. DoD is acutely aware of the significant challenges that we face and recognizes that urgent action is required. The decisions that we make as a Nation today will have profound ramifications for decades to come.

The Department acknowledges the creation of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Nuclear Deterrence, Chemical, and Biological Defense Policy and Programs (ASD(ND-CBD)), and I am currently Performing the Duties of the ASD(ND-CBD). In this capacity, I serve as a senior advisor to the Secretary, Deputy Secretary of Defense, and other DoD senior leaders, and work closely with colleagues from the Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Policy and other DoD components on a broad range of issues associated with the nuclear deterrent and

chemical and biological defense. I also serve as the Staff Director for the Nuclear Weapons Council (NWC). DoD is committed to providing updates to Congress as the Department implements this position, ensuring the most effective and efficient structure for execution of the nuclear deterrence and chemical and biological defense missions.

SECURITY ENVIRONMENT

Today, the United States faces one of the most unprecedented strategic environments in our Nation's history. China and Russia are modernizing and diversifying their nuclear forces at breathtaking pace, and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) continues to demonstrate its ability to execute a strategic attack. Additionally, our adversaries are increasing their level of coordination and cooperation, which also raises the possibility of simultaneous conflicts with multiple nuclear-armed adversaries. President Trump has expressed his openness to arms control; however, our adversaries have given no indication of serious interest in arms control discussions, and with the expiration of New START in February 2026, the United States may face an historic moment in the nuclear era without a major nuclear arms limitation agreement in place.

China's nuclear modernization and opaque expansion presents new complications in an already challenging region. China is engaging in broad military modernization, including expanding its nuclear forces, that tests the United States and our Allies in new ways. DoD assesses that, if China continues its current trajectory, it will reach more than 1,000 operational nuclear warheads by 2030, supported by an increasingly capable nuclear triad that will include a range of advanced capabilities. Those weapons will enable China to take an increasingly aggressive regional posture that, understandably, alarms our allies across Asia and beyond.

Simultaneously, Russia has been modernizing its deterrent for years, including with the development of novel and potentially destabilizing new capabilities. Augmenting Russia's strategic arsenal is a large stockpile of nonstrategic nuclear and dual-capable weapons. This past year alone, Russia continued its threatening behavior by deploying nuclear weapons in Belarus and increasing its coordination with the DPRK and Iran. Currently, Russia has shown no interest in reducing its reliance on nuclear weapons to meet its geopolitical goals.

The DPRK's nuclear and missile capabilities pose a clear and grave threat to the stability of the Korean Peninsula, the wider Indo-Pacific region, and the U.S. homeland. The DPRK

views its nuclear arsenal as a means to ensure regime survival and influence both the Republic of Korea and U.S. actions in the region. The threat of the DPRK using such weapons during a conflict or in an unconventional or clandestine attack is not outside the realm of possibility. The DPRK also continues to enhance its ICBM capabilities, and its leadership recently declared that the country's status as a nuclear weapons state "has now become irreversible." Finally, while Iran does not currently possess nuclear weapons, it continues to enrich uranium and undertake other activities that shorten the timeline needed to acquire nuclear weapons if it chooses to do so.

In response to this evolved threat landscape, the Department continues to determine and implement necessary actions to address a nuclear modernization Program of Record that is necessary but may be insufficient for realities of the security environment we face. The Department is grappling with new deterrence challenges and the need to deter multiple nuclear-armed adversaries simultaneously. We recognize that we must be flexible, efficient, and adaptable to the evolving geopolitical landscape in order to defend the homeland and provide options to the Secretary and the President that bolster deterrence.

NUCLEAR MODERNIZATION

To that end, we continue to execute on the modernization effort of our entire nuclear deterrent, to include all three legs of the triad, the nuclear stockpile, production capabilities, and NC3. Modernization programs of this scale have not occurred for nearly 40 years. Equally as important, DoD is focused on mitigating potential risks and ensuring there are no gaps in capabilities during the transition from legacy to modern systems. With efforts of this scope and complexity, there are bound to be some challenges; however, the Department remains committed to delivering.

For the air leg, the conventional and nuclear-capable B-21 Raider rolled out late in 2022 and will eventually replace the B-2 and conventional-only B-1 bombers. The B-21 will be a visible deterrent capability and provide operational flexibility across a wide range of military objectives. The nuclear-armed AGM-86B Air Launched Cruise Missile will be replaced by the Long-Range Standoff (LRSO) weapon. LRSO is a joint effort involving DoD and DOE/NNSA, with the Air Force responsible for cruise missile development and integration and DOE/NNSA responsible for the W80-4 warhead. With the ability to penetrate and survive advanced integrated air defense systems, the LRSO will maintain the viability of the B-52H fleet for the

nuclear mission and ensure the United States continues to field a visible, flexible, tailorable, and credible nuclear deterrent through the airborne leg of the triad. The LRSO and W80-4 programs remain on schedule to deliver capability to the warfighter.

The COLUMBIA-class SSBN remains a critical component of our nuclear triad modernization efforts. However, the Navy has realized challenges to delivering the first COLUMBIA-class SSBN, and DoD will continue to drive improvement in schedule. Additionally, the Department continues to increase investment in the sea-leg and provide opportunities to utilize additional capacity in the most survivable and assured second strike leg of the nuclear triad. The COLUMBIA-class SSBN will be equipped with the modernized Trident II D5 Life-Extension 2 strategic weapon system, which will ensure the effectiveness of the sea-based leg of the triad through the 2080s. The Life-Extension 2 program is critical, and I implore your support for this program to ensure that it can deliver in the late 2030s.

The DoD, through the U.S. Navy, is executing the nuclear-armed sea-launched cruise missile (SLCM-N) program of record as established in the FY 2024 National Defense Authorization Act. The SLCM-N will provide an important regional deterrence capability in response to the aforementioned challenges we face in the future. Thanks to the flexibility granted to the DoD and our partners at the DOE/NNSA, the NWC has endorsed the W80 warhead family as the optimal choice to balance risk and schedule. The DoD and NNSA are in the process of adhering to the FY 2025 statutory requirements with the selection of a warhead not previously prescribed.

The modernization of the land-based leg of the triad through the Sentinel Program is the most complex program the Air Force has undertaken in decades. In January 2024, the Air Force formally notified Congress and DoD of a critical Nunn-McCurdy breach. DoD executed its statutory responsibilities by conducting a robust review of the program and detailed root cause analysis. This analysis revalidated the program requirements and deemed the Sentinel program as essential to national security. The program continues to be restructured, and the Air Force and DoD are actively mitigating Sentinel programs risks as well as identifying options to improve end-of-life margin needed to sustain the current Minuteman III missile system to ensure there are no capability gaps as we maintain our Nation’s nuclear deterrent.

Finally, our NC3 systems are being modernized and efforts are underway to move toward the next generation of systems. NC3 performs across all relevant Detect, Decide, and Direct mission threads. However, as with all our modernization programs, significant work remains to be done, and the program is not without risk.

On the DOE/NNSA side, several significant milestones have been reached including the first production unit for a war reserve plutonium pit, a pivotal first step in restoring DOE/NNSA's ability to produce plutonium pits at the quantities needed to support military requirements. Additionally, DOE/NNSA has completed the production of the B61-12 program, is nearing completion of the W88 ALT 370 program, and is on track to deliver the B61-13 first production unit this fiscal year—ahead of schedule. However, despite this progress, we know that significant risks remain. We appreciate DOE/NNSA's strong commitment to meeting DoD's objectives and our shared deterrence mission. As the evolving geopolitical environment challenges deterrence and assurance in new ways, DoD and DOE/NNSA will continue to closely collaborate, through the NWC, to identify ways to mitigate near-term risks and seize opportunities to urgently develop the capabilities and processes necessary to meet the long-term demands of the mission.

Risks today also reside within the defense industrial base, including the sustainment of aging systems in the field, our current and future workforce, supply chain security, and cybersecurity threats. Beyond the production base, we also lack the muscle memory necessary to execute modernization programs quickly. DoD and our interagency partners are making progress every day to mitigate risk and address these challenges, but we recognize that much remains to be done.

NUCLEAR WEAPONS COUNCIL

The NWC is acutely aware of the challenges facing the nuclear enterprise and has been working tirelessly to analyze and understand decision trade-space; capitalize on existing processes; institute process changes when and where necessary; and, ultimately, act on difficult decisions that will enable the United States to maintain a safe, secure, credible, and effective nuclear deterrent into the future. We are focused on understanding suites of decisions that reflect our priorities and enable the NWC to trade and balance risk across the entire nuclear enterprise. The ability to address the threat and mitigate transition risk are key principles for the NWC as we

look to understand where we need to be in the next decade and beyond in relation to the projected threat environment, the challenges associated with our modernization efforts, and what we can do today to increase options for decisionmakers in the future. We look at the nuclear enterprise as a holistic system—from fielded systems and modernization efforts to the workforce, supply chain, and NC3. We are focused on understanding our risks, how we can best buy them down, and how these risks fit with national-level decision-making.

DoD and DOE/NNSA have already taken steps to field capabilities to enhance deterrence and flexibility and reduce risk to the modernization program, such as the establishment of the B61-13 Program and the Navy's decision to investigate pre-inactivation restricted availabilities for OHIO-class submarines and procure additional Trident solid rocket motors. The B61-13 takes advantage of a current, established production line for the B61-12 and will strengthen deterrence by providing the President with additional options against certain harder and large-area military targets. The B61-13 is not, however, a substitute for a hard-and-deeply-buried target defeat weapon. The establishment of this program, support from Congress, and DOE/NNSA's ability to accelerate delivery have truly been a win for the deterrent and the Nation. Additionally, the NWC continues to investigate the option space for advanced capabilities and is identifying further Phase 1 Concept Assessments to ultimately inform potential acquisitions.

NORTH ATLANTIC TREATY ORGANIZATION / ALLIES

As Secretary Hegseth has directed, as the DoD acts urgently to strengthen homeland defenses and deter China in the Indo-Pacific, we must empower U.S. allies and partners to lead efforts against other threats with critical but more limited U.S. support. One aspect of this support that the United States must keep at the forefront is the close nuclear partnership we have maintained with the United Kingdom (UK) since 1958. Over the years, this partnership has evolved into a mutually beneficial and reciprocal partnership paramount to both our nation's security. We remain committed to supporting the UK's nuclear deterrent and nuclear modernization efforts, including further alignment of our W93/Mk7 warhead/reentry body with the UK's A21/Mk7 Warhead Program. The decisions we make in the United States for our nuclear enterprise continue to directly support the UK's Continuous-At-Sea-Deterrent. A credible, reliable, and survivable UK deterrent strengthens our collective security, and it

contributes significantly to European and Euro-Atlantic security as the UK declares its nuclear capability to the defense of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO).

As Secretary Hegseth has stated, the United States remains committed to the NATO alliance and to the defense partnership with Europe. As Vice Chair for Safety, Security, and Survivability of NATO's High-Level Group, I have worked to maintain senior Allied political focus on modernizing NATO's communication and consultation capabilities, and our Allies have responded. We are also working to enhance accountability to ensure Allies meet their previous commitments to modernize infrastructure that is critical to the security of NATO's nuclear mission, and we are institutionalizing the way Allies gain insight to nuclear-related projects "on the ground" to enable them to make informed policy decisions and recommendations. Our Allies understand the challenges the United States faces in the Indo-Pacific, and our commitment to providing extended deterrence to NATO is the necessary foundation for NATO Allies to take on more responsibility for the deterrence and defense of the Euro-Atlantic area with conventional forces.

CONCLUSION

Because nuclear weapons are at the center of our adversaries' strategies, we must adapt our mindset and processes to the demands of the future and reset the enterprise baseline accordingly. Building the enterprise that we need is only possible with a more integrated approach than the one we have had in the past. Our strategic choices are informed by the progress we make and challenges we encounter with our DoD platform and delivery systems programs; by our ongoing and planned warhead programs; by our projections of production capabilities and capacities that are struggling to advance; and, of course, by the threat.

This is where we find ourselves today: driven by new and advancing threats; facing an enterprise in the process of rebuilding; and, as a result, adapting our decision-making bodies to address these challenges. To accomplish all that we have planned and all that we must plan for, we need the talented people behind the enterprise to make it happen. We have made significant strides towards developing the necessary nuclear deterrent but remain humbled by the challenges we face and work that remains to be done. I would like to thank this Committee for its longstanding, bipartisan support for our nuclear deterrent mission and for the dedicated

professionals across the nuclear enterprise. Thank you for your time today. I look forward to your questions.