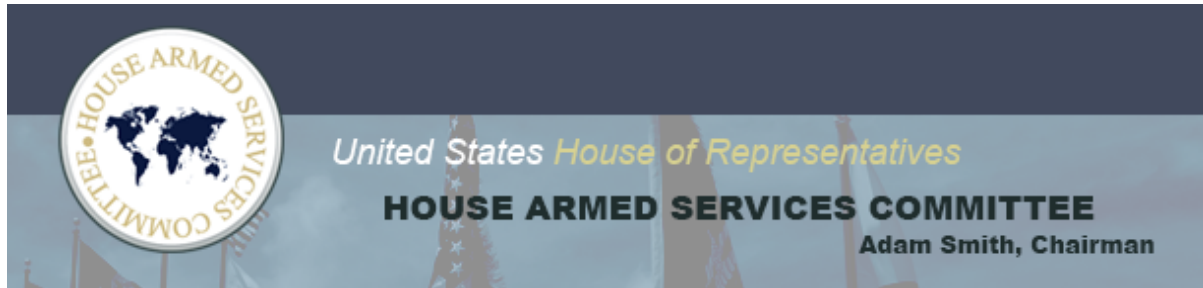


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Opening Statement (As Prepared)
Chairman Jim Cooper
Subcommittee on Strategic Forces Hearing:
"Fiscal Year 2023 Budget for Nuclear Forces and Atomic Energy Defense Activities"
May 17, 2022

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This hearing will come to order. I would like to begin by thanking our distinguished panel of witnesses for testifying today. We look forward to hearing from the Honorable Jill Hruby, Administrator of the National Nuclear Security Administration; the Honorable Deborah Rosenblum, Assistant Secretary of Defense for Nuclear, Chemical, and Biological Defense Programs; the Honorable John Plumb, Assistant Secretary of Defense for Space Policy; Vice Admiral Johnny Wolfe, Director of U.S. Navy Strategic System Programs; and Lieutenant General James Dawkins, U.S. Air Force Deputy Chief of Staff for Strategic Deterrence and Nuclear Integration.

Unfortunately, the world continues to become more dangerous with regards to nuclear weapons. Since this hearing last year, Russia has continued to develop, test, and field new nuclear capabilities. Vladimir Putin has openly threatened the use of nuclear weapons during his immoral and unlawful war in Ukraine. China is substantially expanding both its silo fields and its industrial capacity to produce nuclear weapons. North Korea has been testing short and long-range missiles capable of carrying nuclear weapons. And following the Trump administration's withdrawal from the JCPOA, Iran—as predicted—is now closer to having a nuclear weapon than ever in history.

In its National Defense Strategy and Nuclear Posture Review, the Biden administration has reaffirmed the critical importance of the nuclear triad, and that maintaining a safe, secure, and effective nuclear deterrent remains the top priority of the Department of Defense. This commitment is clear in the strong FY23 budget request for the Department of Defense, which fully funds the Sentinel ICBM, B-21 bomber, Long Range Standoff weapon, Columbia-class submarine, and Trident D5 missile to meet planned fielding dates. It is equally apparent in the strong request for the National Nuclear Security Administration—\$21.4 billion, an increase of more than \$750 million from the FY22 enacted level, including

\$16.5 billion for weapons activities.

In reading through the testimonies of our witnesses, we are reminded of the immense amount of work that both the Department of Defense and the Department of Energy have ahead of them in sustaining our legacy forces and infrastructure, while also recapitalizing the nuclear enterprise for the next seventy years. The fact that so many just-in-time transitions from legacy-to-modern are happening simultaneously with a small, specialized workforce, raise concern about the ability of the Department of Defense and National Nuclear Security Administration to deliver these programs on-time and on-budget. I look forward to hearing from our witnesses about what steps both departments have taken to improve risk management and prioritization across the nuclear portfolio.

As we look at the immense undertaking that is before both the Department of Defense and National Nuclear Security Administration to successfully deliver modernized capabilities for the ground-, air-, and sea-legs of the triad, we need to be focused and realistic. In that regard, I commend the Biden administration for its decision to retire the B-83 gravity bomb and forgo a new nuclear sea-launched cruise missile. Adding a life-extension to the B-83 and developing a new SLCM warhead would further strain a National Nuclear Security Administration complex that is already facing significant challenges. Tasking Virginia-class submarines to take on a nuclear mission would be extremely costly and burdensome—we need those platforms fully focused on their critical conventional missions.

Another area where we need to impart realism is plutonium pit production. There is broad agreement that we need to develop the ability to sustainably produce at least 80 new nuclear warheads per year to replace our current stockpile. But both the National Nuclear Security Administration and the Nuclear Weapons Council have acknowledged that the current statutory requirement to produce 80 plutonium pits per year by 2030 is unachievable—and throwing more money at Savannah River cannot change that outcome. Rather than harbor an illusion, it's time we rethink our plutonium plan, set achievable goals, and go execute.

As I have said countless times, this Subcommittee's work is arguably the most meaningful and consequential of any in Congress. Our nuclear deterrent has been the bedrock of our safety and security for the past seven decades, and we must remain steadfast in ensuring that is the case going well into the future.

I request the witnesses keep their opening remarks to no more than five minutes, and that members respect the same limit for their questioning.

I now turn to my Ranking Member, Mr. Lamborn, for any opening remarks he may have.

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