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COMMITTEE

STATEMENT OF

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INTRODUCTION

Chairman Lamborn, Ranking Member Moulton, and distinguished Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today regarding the Fiscal Year (FY) 2025 request for nuclear forces. It is a pleasure to join my colleagues to discuss matters relating to the U.S. nuclear deterrent, which underpins all of our national defense priorities. As the 2022 National Defense Strategy (NDS) and 2022 Nuclear Posture Review (NPR) direct, the Department of Defense (DoD) will advance our priorities through integrated deterrence—backstopped by a safe, secure, and effective nuclear deterrent and a strong and credible extended deterrence. 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 President’s FY 2025 budget request reinforces the prioritization of our nuclear modernization and sustainment efforts by including \$49.2 billion to recapitalize, sustain, and operate the nuclear enterprise. The budget request includes full funding for the modernization of the three legs of the triad—submarines, intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBM), and bombers—and for the sustainment and modernization of our nuclear command, control, and communications (NC3) systems.

While the budget reflects our serious commitment to the viability of the U.S. nuclear deterrent, it is no secret that the geopolitical environment has continued to change—and not for the better. Our Nation is encountering a fundamentally different global security landscape than the previous decades with two nuclear-armed strategic competitors in Russia and China. DoD is intimately 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.

As Under Secretary of Defense for Acquisition and Sustainment (USD(A&S)), my office is at the forefront of DoD’s efforts to sustain and modernize the U.S. nuclear deterrent. I serve as senior advisor and technical expert to the Secretary and Deputy Secretary of Defense for a broad range of issues associated with the nuclear deterrent and chemical and biological defense; additionally, I serve as the Chair of the Nuclear Weapons Council (NWC). I am proud of the work that the NWC has executed over the past several years to adopt a strategy to address the various challenges facing our nuclear enterprise.

SECURITY ENVIRONMENT

Today, we now face two major nuclear powers, the People's Republic of China (PRC) and the Russian Federation, as strategic competitors for the first time. We are also faced with the growing nuclear threat posed by the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) and the Islamic Republic of Iran's continued expansion of its nuclear program. Additionally, our potential adversaries are increasing their level of coordination and cooperation with one another and eroding the foundation we have built through arms control. This threat environment raises the possibility of simultaneous conflicts with multiple nuclear-armed adversaries.

The PRC's nuclear modernization and expansion presents new complications in an already-challenging region. DoD's recently unclassified assessment paints an increasingly stark picture of Beijing's intentions. The PRC is engaging in broad military modernization that tests the United States and our Allies in new ways. As part of that military modernization, the PRC is significantly expanding its nuclear forces. DoD now assesses that, if the PRC continues its current trajectory, it will reach more than 1,000 operational nuclear warheads by 2030, supported by an increasingly capable and diverse nuclear triad that will include a range of advanced capabilities. Those weapons will enable the PRC to take an increasingly aggressive regional posture that, understandably, alarms our Allies across Asia and the Pacific and threatens our national security interests.

Simultaneously, Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine and its ongoing reckless actions serve as stark reminders of nuclear risk in a contemporary conflict. Russia has been modernizing its arsenal 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. As we have learned over the past two years, those weapons underwrite a clear willingness in Moscow to use threats of nuclear escalation for coercive benefit and revisionist ends. This past year alone, Russia continued its threatening behavior by rejecting efforts for arms control and risk reduction dialogue with the United States, announcing an intended placement of tactical nuclear weapons in Belarus, and increasing its partnerships with the DPRK and Iran.

The DPRK also possesses the ability to attack both our regional Allies and the United States with nuclear weapons. The DPRK views its nuclear arsenal as a means to ensure regime

survival and influence both the Republic of Korea and U.S. forces in the region. The threat of the DPRK using of such weapons during a conflict or in an unconventional or clandestine attack is not outside of the realm of possibility. The DPRK also continues to advance its ICBM capability 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 increase its stockpile of highly enriched uranium, shortening the timeline it would need to acquire enough fissile material for a nuclear weapon.

My office supports the Administration’s two-pronged approach to strategic stability that includes investing in our deterrence capabilities and plans while pursuing arms control and risk reduction measures where possible. It is critical that we ensure that extended deterrence and assurance remain credible in the face of growing adversary threats. We must be prepared for a future with few, if any, constraints on nuclear arsenals where Russia continues to possess large numbers of warheads on strategic, non-strategic, and novel systems while, simultaneously, the PRC continues to expand and modernize its arsenal.

In 2022, Congress directed an independent, bipartisan assessment—known as the Strategic Posture Commission (SPC)—to analyze the threat landscape and address the validity of the strategic posture of the United States. The SPC’s conclusions recognize a fundamentally different global setting than the United States has experienced or expected. DoD acknowledges the important work of the SPC, the seriousness of its findings, and is actively discussing its recommendations. Simultaneously, as stated in the 2022 NPR, DoD continually assesses whether the evolving security environment requires adjustments to our U.S. nuclear strategy or posture to sustain deterrence, assurance, and our ability to achieve employment objectives. The SPC’s findings concur with our own, that the fundamentals of U.S. deterrence strategy, as captured in the 2022 NDS and NPR, remain sound; however, our modernization plans cannot ignore the PRC’s nuclear build-up, Russia’s continued threat to regional and global security, the persistent threat posed by North Korea, and the rising threat posed by Iran. Given the challenges of the emerging security environment, there are several areas in which we may need to take action to ensure our continued ability to deter adversaries, assure Allies, and provide the President options if deterrence fails. This may include adjustments to our nuclear modernization programs and, potentially, our nuclear force posture, readiness, and composition.

While DoD is not yet in a position to make concrete proposals, we recognize that any decision to adjust our force posture, readiness, or composition would not be taken lightly and will require careful consideration of a range of factors, including the implications for strategic stability, our existing capabilities, the capacity of the Department of Energy's National Nuclear Security Administration (DOE/NNSA) complex, cost, competing priorities, and the need to deliver on planned modernization programs. We are focused on the near-term challenges we face, as well as those we will face 10-plus years from now. We cannot wait for our adversaries to dictate the future global security environment. We must calibrate our future nuclear capabilities to deter adversary advances which are already ongoing and prioritize these efforts to assure security for the United States and our Allies now and in the future.

NUCLEAR MODERNIZATION

The 2022 NPR reaffirmed a continuing commitment to a safe, secure, reliable, and effective nuclear deterrent and reiterated that the combination of all three legs of the U.S. nuclear triad is the best approach to maintaining strategic stability. To that end, we have made progress undertaking a decades-long modernization effort of our entire nuclear triad simultaneously, to include all three legs of the triad and NC3. Given modernization programs of this scale have not occurred since the Cold War era, the 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, I am cautiously optimistic about the progress that we are making across the enterprise.

For the air leg, the conventional and nuclear-capable B-21 Raider rolled out in 2022 and will eventually replace the B-2 and conventional-only B-1 bombers. The B-21 will be a visible and flexible 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 Program will maintain the viability of the B-52H fleet for the nuclear mission and ensure the United States continues to field a visible, flexible, and

credible nuclear deterrent through the airborne leg of the triad. The LRSO Program is on schedule. The B-52H will also undergo substantial modernization to include new engines, radars, and communications equipment, resulting in the new designation as the B-52J model.

As recently announced, the Navy is projecting to deliver the first COLUMBIA-class Ballistic Missile Submarine (SSBN) Program 12-to-16 months late based on current performance. The COLUMBIA-class SSBN remains a critical component of our triad modernization efforts, and DoD will continue to drive improvement in schedule and prepare mitigations. The COLUMBIA class will eventually 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 Congress, in Section 1640 of the FY24 NDAA (Public Law 118-31), directed establishment of a Major Defense Acquisition Program for a sea-launched cruise missile nuclear (SLCM-N). The weapon will contribute a supplemental capability to reinforce theater regional deterrence, a key objective of the 2022 NPR. In March 2024, I signed an Acquisition Decision Memorandum directing the Navy to establish a program office and to begin the analysis phase. Additionally, the NWC is leading a review of options to execute the SLCM-N program in a manner that balances cost, deterrence value, and risk to the program of record and the Joint Force. Executing this program successfully will require careful balancing of SLCM-N programmatic manning with on-going Navy and NNSA programs, which draw from a limited pool of experienced government personnel and the same nuclear weapons industrial base and production enterprise.

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. On January 18, 2024, the Air Force formally notified Congress and DoD of a critical Nunn-McCurdy breach. DoD is executing its statutory responsibilities by conducting a robust review of the program and detailed root cause analysis. DoD will assess the program's schedule and cost growth to ensure the review is comprehensive and accounts for all potential sources of change. Every day, the Air Force and DoD are actively mitigating program risks 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 five crucial functions: detection, warning, and attack characterization; adaptive nuclear planning; decision-making conferencing; receiving Presidential orders; and enabling the management and direction of forces. The President's FY 2025 budget request reinforces the prioritization of these critical capabilities, and DoD is making significant progress with attention at the most senior levels. 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, progress has been made toward the current program of record of maintaining a safe, secure, effective, and reliable nuclear weapons stockpile. This past year alone, DOE/NNSA has delivered more than 200 modernized weapons to DoD. We also commend DOE/NNSA's commitment to producing a minimum of 80 pits per year as close to 2030 as possible and for the progress they have made on various infrastructure and capabilities recapitalization efforts. 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 reflected in the FY 2025 budget request. 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 develop the capabilities and processes necessary to meet the long-term demands of the mission.

Risks today also reside within the defense industrial base, 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 and process 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 serves as the focal point for interagency activities to sustain and modernize the U.S. nuclear deterrent. The NWC is acutely aware of the challenges facing the nuclear enterprise and has been working tirelessly to analyze and understand decision and tradespace; 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. While the NWC’s statute is largely focused on the nuclear stockpile, Congress and recent DoD leadership have entrusted this body with additional responsibilities to engage issues across the deterrent more broadly. To address this, the NWC has developed and exercised a strategic framework founded on an identification and ranking of its priorities to understand and make strategic and risk-informed choices, with the understanding that not everything can be accomplished simultaneously.

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 phrases “pacing the threat” and “mitigating transition risk” have become 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 create greater options for decisionmakers in the future. We look at the nuclear enterprise as a holistic system—from fielded systems 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.

Another important nuclear deterrent management and oversight mechanism is Nuclear Deputy’s Management Action Group (N-DMAG). Established in 2022 and occurring on a twice-yearly basis, the N-DMAG is already driving critical DoD decisions. The N-DMAG provides interagency senior leadership with options for mitigating specific risks arising from the tight transition between existing and modernized nuclear forces and opportunities to pace the growing nuclear threats facing the Nation.

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 Navy’s decision to investigate pre-inactivation availability for OHIO-class submarines and DoD and NNSA’s establishment of the B61-13 Program. The B61-13 will take advantage of a current, established production line for the B61-12 and strengthen deterrence by providing the President with additional options against certain harder and large-area military target sets. The B61-13 is not, however, a substitute for a hard-and-deeply-buried target defeat weapon. The establishment of

this program and the support from Congress has truly been a win for the deterrent and the Nation. The NWC and N-DMAG are actively examining and acting on risks and opportunities and will continue to make decisions to preserve options for DoD and DOE/NNSA leadership now and in the future.

CYBER / SURETY

In accordance with Section 1644 of the National Defense Authorization Act for FY 2022 and on behalf of the Secretary of Defense, my office has commissioned an independent review of the safety, security, and reliability of nuclear weapons and related systems, to include nuclear weapon systems, the NC3 system, and the integrated tactical warning and attack assessment system. As the first review of its kind since the 1990 Federal Advisory Committee on Nuclear Failsafe and Risk Reduction, this comprehensive review will assess nuclear surety against a full spectrum of threats including cyber, supply chain, and emerging and disruptive technologies; provide options and recommendations to strengthen safeguards against unauthorized or inadvertent use; and ensure the authorized use of nuclear weapons. We look forward to discussing the results and implementation of this review with Congress once it is completed this summer.

NORTH ATLANTIC TREATY ORGANIZATION / ALLIES

Given the ever-changing international security environment, it has never been more important for the United States to reaffirm its commitments to its Allies and partners. One aspect that the United States must keep at the forefront is our partnership with the United Kingdom (UK). As described in the NPR, 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 United States and UK have shared a nuclear partnership since 1958 and, over the years, this partnership has blossomed into a mutually beneficial and reciprocal partnership paramount to both our nation's security. The decisions we make in the United States for our nuclear enterprise continue to directly support the UK's Continuous-At-Sea-Deterrent. DoD stands committed to this partnership and looks forward to the renewal of our U.S./UK Mutual Defense Agreement this calendar year.

Lastly, DoD's support to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) remains resolute and enduring. While the world is facing more unprecedented events and global

tragedies than ever, our NATO Allies trust the United States to stand firm on its commitments. Our Assistant Secretary of Defense for Nuclear, Chemical, and Biological Defense Programs serves as Vice Chair of the High Level Group and remains focused on continuing to modernize our communication capabilities and institutionalize the way Allies raise concerns and exchange technical data and program information related to NATO's nuclear deterrent mission. As NATO territory defensive line grows larger, with the addition of Allies in the past year, DoD understands that the expectations on the United States will only continue to grow. We must approach this most-critical alliance with consideration for how our decisions for national security truly impact the whole of the global security environment.

CONCLUSION

As long as our adversaries continue to make nuclear weapons a centerpiece of their strategy, we will need to adapt our mindset and processes to the needs 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; by our obligations to our Allies; 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, evolving the decision-making bodies that we use 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.