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On Fiscal Year 2025 Nuclear Forces and Atomic Energy Defense Activities
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Introduction

Chairman Lamborn, Ranking Member Moulton, and distinguished members of the Committee: Thank you for inviting me to testify before you on the President’s Fiscal Year 2025 (FY2025) Budget Request for U.S. nuclear weapon and warhead modernization and sustainment plans. I am honored to appear alongside Under Secretary LaPlante, Under Secretary Hruby, Lieutenant General Gebara, and Vice Admiral Wolfe.

Today’s international security environment is highly dynamic and challenging. It is characterized by growing strategic competition, increasingly antagonistic behavior by multiple state adversaries, and rapidly developing domains of conflict. For the first time, the United States now faces two major nuclear powers as strategic competitors. The People’s Republic of China and the Russian Federation continue to rapidly evolve their military capabilities—including their nuclear forces—to hold the Joint Force and U.S. homeland at risk and increasingly threaten U.S. allies and partners globally. In addition to enhancing their nuclear and other strategic capabilities, our competitors are challenging long-standing expectations of responsible conduct in the international system.

To meet these challenges, the President’s budget request for FY 25 calls for critical investments in our nuclear enterprise. This includes \$49.2 billion for the modernization, sustainment, and operations of all three legs of the nuclear triad and \$11 billion for the Nuclear Command, Control, and Communications (NC3) systems.

Security Environment

People's Republic of China (PRC)

The PRC has developed a nuclear triad of land- and sea-based missiles and a nuclear capable strategic bomber. The PRC will likely have more than 1000 operational nuclear warheads by 2030, as assessed by the U.S. intelligence community. Most of these warheads will be fielded on platforms capable of ranging the territory of the United States. The PRC's diverse arsenal now maintains intercontinental-range forces, theater-range road-mobile ballistic missile systems, strategic hypersonic glide missiles that can carry nuclear warheads, and sea-launched ballistic missile submarines to hold the United States at risk.

While the endpoint of the PRC's fast-paced and significant expansion and diversification of its arsenal remains uncertain, the PRC remains reluctant to engage meaningfully on risk reduction or be transparent about its nuclear weapons development, even after the United States participated in several bilateral meetings with senior PRC diplomatic and military officials on this topic. The PRC's trajectory nevertheless points to a large, diverse nuclear arsenal that is increasingly effective, reliable, and survivable. Such an arsenal could yield new coercive options for the PRC in the run up to or during a conflict or crisis with the United States or its allies and partners. These developments call into question the force posture and state of readiness that the PRC will maintain into the future, including the credibility of their purported No First Use declaration.

Russia

Russia is also modernizing and diversifying its large nuclear arsenal of strategic and theater-range weapons—an arsenal that features centrally in Russia's overall security strategy.

These forces pose an acute threat to the United States and a direct threat to Russia's neighbors and the NATO alliance. Russia's illegal, full-scale invasion of Ukraine and its dangerous nuclear saber-rattling highlight Russia's irresponsible behavior in the international community. Further, though Russia has not formally withdrawn from the New START Treaty, it has eroded the Treaty's effectiveness and reduced much-needed transparency with its legally invalid purported suspension. Outside of any treaty confines, Russia possesses a sizeable warhead stockpile and is pursuing multiple novel nuclear systems, including advanced hypersonic systems that it has used against Ukraine. These systems are additive to existing capabilities and are designed to hold the U.S. homeland, allies, and partners at risk. Russia's actions are also destabilizing the global environment and Russia has given no indication that it seeks stable relations.

Russia is also developing a concerning anti-satellite capability—it is related to a new satellite carrying a nuclear device that Russia is developing. This capability could pose a threat to all satellites operated by countries and companies around the globe, as well as to the vital communications, scientific, meteorological, agricultural, commercial, and national security services we all depend upon.

Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK)

The DPRK continues to improve and diversify its nuclear and ballistic missile capabilities. Though not a competitor on the same scale as Russia or the PRC, the DPRK presents deterrence dilemmas for the United States and regional allies. Conflict on the Korean Peninsula risks escalation and the involvement of multiple regional nuclear-armed actors.

Iran

Iran today does not possess a nuclear weapon. However, Iran's pursuit of nuclear activities continues to be of deep concern. Additionally, the recent attack on Israel highlights Iran's destabilizing and reckless behavior.

U.S. Nuclear Strategy

The 2022 Nuclear Posture Review (NPR) recognized that as the security environment evolved, it may be necessary to consider nuclear strategy and force adjustments to assure our ability to achieve deterrence and other objectives. Should we find ourselves in a large-scale military confrontation with a major power or regional adversary, the Joint Force must be postured with military capabilities—including nuclear weapons—that can deter and defeat other actors who may seek to take advantage of this scenario to engage in opportunistic aggression. In such circumstances, we must also be prepared to fully leverage other instruments of national power and the capabilities our allies and partners can bring to bear.

The Department remains prepared to engage in discussions with other nuclear-armed states where possible to reduce nuclear risks, despite the challenges that have emerged in the security environment. We do so, however, with realistic expectations, understanding that progress requires reliable partners prepared to engage responsibly and on the basis of reciprocity. The further deterioration of the security environment and the actions of our competitors, including their demonstrated unwillingness to engage us, has made risk reduction efforts both more necessary and more challenging.

The President's budget request meets this moment. While the fiscal commitment to modernizing the nuclear triad will be a multi-decade endeavor, the President's FY 25 budget

request continues the Administration's investment in our nuclear enterprise. This request for the Department of Defense includes \$49.2 billion in nuclear enterprise modernization as well as sustainment and operations. This represents more than five percent of the total DoD budget request, underscoring the commitment of the Administration to the nuclear deterrent in today's international environment.

U.S. Nuclear Posture

The NPR noted that “we face uncertainties with respect to the direction, velocity, and endpoint of Russian and PRC force development,” and “the choices [potential adversaries] make could compel us to consider the need for nuclear posture adjustments.” The administration has had an ongoing process to assess the implications of the changes in the security environment and take steps to account for these developments regarding deterrence, assurance, and our ability to provide senior decision-makers with tailored and flexible options when circumstances require.

Part of this assessment includes taking a fresh look at nuclear modernization, including by examining the program of record (POR) that was initially conceived in a very different environment. We are evaluating its suitability based on current and projected changes in the international arena, and in some cases making modest adjustments.

The administration has closely followed the work of the bipartisan Congressional Strategic Posture Commission (SPC), and other experts on the PRC's emergence as a major nuclear power and the dilemmas this presents for deterrence, assurance, and overall defense strategy. The SPC's findings align with the Department's assessment that nuclear deterrence strategy as captured in the National Defense Strategy (NDS) and the NPR remain sound. Their

findings also align with our assessment that the POR is necessary but may not be sufficient going forward given the changing security environment and the likely challenges associated with executing the transition from legacy to modern systems across the triad. While the triad is safe, secure, and reliable today, we cannot retreat from our modernization efforts as our adversaries modernize and emphasize nuclear weapons in their national strategies.

The administration is prepared to further adjust the modernization program of record and the posture, readiness, and composition of nuclear forces if needed to sustain deterrence, assure allies, and achieve U.S. objectives if deterrence fails. We remain confident in our current forces and posture today, but if nuclear force adjustments are required to maintain deterrence and assurance, we must be ready to execute them in sufficient time to avoid a deterrence or assurance shortfall.

DoD and the National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA) have already taken steps to field capabilities to enhance deterrence and flexibility and reduce risk to the modernization program, such as the development of the B61-13 gravity bomb and the Navy's pursuit of pre-inactivation restricted availability (PIRA) for OHIO-class submarines. The B61-13 takes advantage of an open, established production line for the B61-12 and will strengthen deterrence and assurance by providing the President with additional options against certain harder and large-area military targets. However, the -13 is not a solution for the Hard and Deeply Buried Target problem and the Department continues work on a comprehensive strategy for defeating such targets. PIRA activities will extend the life of certain OHIO-class submarines and support the effectiveness of the sea-leg portion of the nuclear triad.

Following preparations for the retirement of the B83-1 gravity bomb, and pursuant to both NPR implementation and section 1674 of the FY24 National Defense Authorization Act

(NDAA), the Department conducted a study of weapons programs to address hard and deeply buried targets (HDBTs). The interagency study provides analysis of current and emerging HDBT mission sets and associated military requirements; an evaluation of weapons programs that would allow the United States to effectively hold HDBTs at risk; and a strategy for fielding capabilities in sufficient quantities that would account for future developments in the growing HDBT set.

The FY24 NDAA also directs the Department and the NNSA to establish and commence implementation of a SLCM-N program. We will comply with the NDAA requirement and will look to execute in a manner that provides the most deterrence value for the least risk to the modernization program, the production, enterprise, and the Joint Force. In March, the Department established a Major Defense Acquisition program, directing the Navy to initiate a program office and begin the analysis phase. We look forward to working with Congress to find the most beneficial and effective approach to implementing SLCM-N legislation and are moving out with speed.

As the Department continues to invest in our strategic deterrent, we remain prepared to engage in arms control and risk reduction measures with our nuclear-armed competitors, should circumstances permit. With Russia, we have conveyed our willingness to adhere to the New START Treaty's central limits while it remains in force, so long as Russia does so as well. Unfortunately, as you have seen in public statements, Russia is to date unwilling to engage on nuclear risk-reduction and a post-2026 arms control framework. China has also rejected efforts to engage substantively on issues related to risk reduction and strategic stability. For this reason, we must consider a future in which Russia continues to possess large numbers of warheads on

strategic, non-strategic, and novel systems, while the PRC continues to rapidly expand and modernize its arsenal.

The Department will continue to assess the changing security landscape and remain agile in making potential adjustments to our posture while carefully considering the impact on strategic stability; the capacity of the defense industrial base and the nuclear weapons production enterprise; cost; competing priorities; the need to deliver modernized forces; and potential countervailing adversary responses.

Allies and Partners

The United States does not face these challenges alone. Rather, security architectures in the Euro-Atlantic and Indo-Pacific regions are a critical U.S. strategic asset over those governments that challenge the rules-based international order. Indeed, the U.S. network of allies and partners provides asymmetric advantage that our competitors can never hope to match. The NDS anchors our integrated deterrence strategy in our allies and partners, recognizing that close collaboration with them is foundational to U.S. national security interests and to our ability to address challenges from the PRC and Russia.

Extended nuclear deterrence is key to this approach. Allies and partners can be confident that the United States is willing and able to deter the range of strategic threats they face whether in crisis or conflict. The Department is pursuing new ways to enhance our extended deterrence commitments, including by fielding flexible nuclear and non-nuclear forces suited to deterring regional nuclear conflict, identifying pragmatic steps to strengthen deterrence consultations, and exploring opportunities for multilateral dialogue, exercises, and other activities. In turn, modernizing the U.S. nuclear triad is a fundamental element of U.S. extended deterrence

commitments. Only if the United States can deter strategic attack against the Homeland can allies and partners be confident that U.S. regional extended deterrence commitments are credible.

In my role as Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense, I have been privileged to lead U.S. extended deterrence efforts with key allies in both bi- and multilateral fora. In two years, we have convened dozens of meetings on four continents to advance and augment our extended deterrence commitments. These efforts enhance deterrence by presenting our adversaries with a unified front, and they enhance assurance by demonstrating our resolve to defend our treaty allies with the full range of U.S. capabilities, including nuclear.

In the Indo-Pacific region, we continue to deepen nuclear consultations and coordination as part of our alliance commitments. We recently convened the second meeting of the U.S.-Republic of Korea (ROK) Nuclear Consultative Group (NCG), an outgrowth of the Washington Declaration between President Biden and President Yoon at the White House in 2023. The defined workstreams of the NCG—including information sharing, consultation, coordination, strategic communications, integration of ROK and U.S. forces, nuclear and strategic planning, and leadership decision-making—will strengthen extended deterrence and manage the threat posed by the DPRK. A third NCG meeting will convene this June in Seoul.

In December 2023, our Japanese Ministries of Defense and Foreign Affairs counterparts hosted us in Tokyo for the U.S.-Japan Extended Deterrence Dialogue that convenes biannually. We will host the first meeting of 2024 this June and will continue to enhance bilateral cooperation, improve coordination, and strengthen the Alliance's capabilities. In February 2024, we hosted our Australian colleagues in Hawaii for the annual U.S.-Australia Strategic Policy Dialogue. Collectively and across the regional partnerships, these discussions allow us to

coordinate our deterrence policies, strategic messaging, and activities that reinforce regional security, including promoting better synchronization and interoperability.

In Europe, the United States and our NATO allies have stood united against Russia's brutal war of aggression in Ukraine and reckless and coercive nuclear rhetoric. The United States is implementing its commitments under NATO's 2022 Strategic Concept to take all necessary steps to "ensure NATO's nuclear mission remains credible, effective, safe, and secure." Following the Vilnius Summit in 2023, the United States is working through the NATO High Level Group (HLG) to augment our planning to increase the flexibility and adaptability of NATO nuclear forces and achieve the broadest possible participation in NATO's nuclear burden-sharing in the Alliance's nuclear mission. We are working closely with allies to modernize NATO's dual-capable aircraft mission and continue to review NATO's nuclear posture so that our deterrent remains credible and effective. We will continue to adapt as necessary. Most recently, we welcomed new members Finland and Sweden to the HLG, and we are working closely to integrate our new allies into ongoing efforts.

Individually and collectively, U.S. allies have expressed appreciation for our deepening partnerships. As long as allies and partners face nuclear threats, extended nuclear deterrence will remain a pillar of regional security architectures. Together, we will continue to collaborate with allies and partners to tailor extended deterrence and assurance policies that are responsive to the security environment and that integrate our collective capabilities across all tools of national power.

FY 25 Investments

Delivering modernized nuclear forces is essential to sustaining and strengthening deterrence. To support the deterrence mission, the President's FY 25 budget request fully funds recapitalization of all three legs of the triad – sea, air, and land. It also supports the sustainment and modernization of the Nuclear Command, Control, and Communications (NC3) systems, which supports providing senior decision-makers with flexible response options in a conflict should a situation require.

For the sea leg, SSBNs are critical, stabilizing, and efficient elements of U.S. nuclear deterrence and assurance and are the most survivable leg of the nuclear triad. The FY 25 budget requests \$9.9 billion for the modern COLUMBIA-class SSBN system, \$287.1 million for the W93/Mk7 warhead and \$919.1 million for Trident II (D5) Life Extension 2, which will take the Trident system into service through the 2080s. Additionally, it requests \$995 million for OHIO-class ballistic missile submarine (SSBN) ship operations and depot maintenance. The President's budget also requests \$3.1 billion to enhance flexibility in the options that could be provided to decision-makers and reduce risks to the sea-leg of the triad during the transition from legacy to modern systems.

For the air leg, the President's budget requests \$5.3 billion for the B-21 RAIDER bomber and \$833.8 million for the long-range standoff (LRSO) cruise missile. These programs will contribute to the continued credibility of the air-leg of the triad and provide the President with flexible options to deter and respond to strategic attacks. The B-21 is capable of penetrating modern air defenses and will replace the B-1 and B-2 systems, while complementing the modernized B-52s. The President's Budget also supports modernization of the B-52 bomber's radars and engines to support its continued viability through the 2050s. Collectively, these systems will help support the long-term effectiveness of the air leg. Collectively these systems

will help support the long-term effectiveness of the bomber leg. An additional \$21.6 million is requested for F-35 Dual-Capable Aircraft, rounding out the air leg of our nuclear deterrent.

For the ground leg, the President's budget requests \$194 million for Minuteman III sustainment, with \$565 million slated for development of the Mk21A reentry vehicle. The ground leg is the most responsive element of the nuclear triad, as it is in a high state of readiness and communication can be achieved promptly. ICBMs deter aggression by signaling to any adversary that they can never be confident in disarming such a dispersed, reliable, and responsive capability. Following the statutory requirements of the Nunn-McCurdy Act, the Department is conducting a comprehensive review of the Sentinel program. While the review progresses, we will continue working to guarantee that Minuteman III remains viable and reliable.

Finally, the FY 25 request also contains \$11.4 billion for recapitalization efforts to modernize, develop, and procure new equipment and capabilities for improved system survivability and mission performance. These funds continue development and production activities for multiple programs to enable assured connectivity to disseminate National Command Authority direction to fielded nuclear forces. This investment in the NC3 portfolio includes \$1.6 billion for the Air Force's Survivable Airborne Operations Center (SAOC) and \$775 million for the Navy's Take Charge And Move Out (TACAMO).

These investments will build on the accomplishments of the past year, including the first flight of the B-21 RAIDER; preparations for a modern variation of the B61 nuclear gravity bomb, the B61-12 and development of the -13; the completion of nuclear certification of U.S. dual-capable aircraft and personnel deployed to Europe in support of NATO; and the completion and delivery of a DoD strategy to defeat HDBTs, which has enabled the Department to take steps to retire the B83 gravity bomb.

The Department is committed to fielding flexible nuclear forces suited to deterring regional nuclear conflict, including weapons deliverable by strategic bombers and dual-capable fighter aircraft as well as the ability to forward deploy nuclear weapons. In addition to complying with statutory requirements for SLCM-N, we have retained the W76-2 low-yield submarine launched ballistic missile warhead and continue our fielding of the F-35A dual-capable fighter aircraft equipped with the B61-12 bomb.

Continued, consistent, and on time funding for the nuclear enterprise is imperative as legacy systems are used well beyond their planned service life and operational risks increase. Sustained congressional support for this effort is paramount.

Conclusion

As we continue to contend with the deteriorating international environment, the Department remains focused on maintaining a safe, secure, and effective nuclear deterrent and is committed to making the critical investments needed to strengthen the U.S.'s strategic force posture. Thank you to the committee for its resolute support for the Department and our servicemembers. I look forward to answering your questions.