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THE HOUSE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE SUBCOMMITTEE ON STRATEGIC FORCES

STATEMENT OF

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BEFORE THE

HOUSE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE SUBCOMMITTEE ON STRATEGIC FORCES

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Chairman Rogers, Ranking Member Cooper, and distinguished members of the subcommittee, I am honored to join you today. This is the first time I have appeared before a Congressional committee since retiring from active service in December of 2013 and I am pleased to be here to offer my personal perspective on the topic of conventional prompt global strike (CPGS). I thank the members of this subcommittee for the support you provided to me while I served as Commander, Air Force Space Command and as Commander, United States Strategic Command, and for your continued focus on important strategic issues. We live in challenging times and I continue to believe that a strong strategic deterrent composed of effective defenses, modern conventional and non-kinetic capabilities, an updated nuclear triad, and highly trained and well-led people will be needed to underwrite our national security and assure the security of our allies and partners well into the future.

As I testified while in uniform, the national security landscape is highly complex and uncertain. Yesterday's regional battlefield is becoming today's global battle-space as adversaries acquire technologies and exploit the interconnected nature of our world to quickly transit political, geographic, and physical domain boundaries. The potential threats to our security and the security of our allies are diverse, can arrive at our doorsteps rapidly, and can range from small arms in the hands of terrorists to nuclear weapons in the hands of hostile state leaders. The possible intersection of violent extremism and weapons of mass destruction remains a significant concern that requires constant vigilance. State and non-state actors alike can stress our intelligence capabilities and contingency plans by employing highly adaptive, hybrid combinations of strategies, tactics, and capabilities and by using the speed of information to mask their activities behind a veil of deception and ambiguity. New capabilities

like cyber weapons and unmanned vehicles are emerging and familiar weapons like ballistic missiles and advanced conventional capabilities are more available, affordable, and lethal.

I can't recall a time during my professional career when potential threats to our homeland were more varied or pronounced than they are today. The tragic events in New York on 9/11 and, more recently in Paris and elsewhere remind us that we must continue to pursue and destroy violent extremists and their networks while remaining constantly on guard to prevent and respond to attacks from them. Beyond violent extremists, state adversaries are seeking to change the strategic situation in their favor by improving their ability to threaten the US and allied homelands with attack by long-range conventional, cyber and, in some cases, nuclear weapons. When used in concert with capabilities designed to degrade our key operational advantages (e.g., space-based ISR and communications) and negate our conventional superiority, they believe a credible threat to escalate a conflict to the strategic level against the homeland will raise the risks and costs of US intervention to unacceptable levels and thereby enable more assertive foreign policies and aggressive actions.

Even discounting for hyperbole, news reports since my retirement have continued to validate what I saw while on active duty. Violent extremists continue to evolve and present an active threat. Russia and China are both upgrading their significant long-range conventional strike capabilities and exercise them routinely; both are active in cyberspace; both are deploying the means to threaten our national security space assets; both are improving their defensive and anti-access capabilities; and both can quickly inflict enormous casualties and damage on the US and our allies with nuclear forces that they are modernizing. Beyond Russia and China, North Korea routinely threatens its regional neighbors, US territory, and US forward

forces with conventional and nuclear attack and is working to deploy its weapons on intercontinental-class missiles in order to threaten the US directly. Active conflict and unrest continue elsewhere.

In my view, dealing with today's varied threats from actors with widely different capabilities and motivations requires the flexible application of a range of capabilities within strategies and plans that are tailored to specific adversaries and scenarios. Violent extremists and nation-states are not the same and we cannot deal with any of them in a "one size fits all" manner. Deterrence strategies that are the preferred approaches to counter nation-states will likely not be effective against violent extremists where direct action is often the only recourse. Nuclear weapons may not be the most credible deterrence tool against some targets and in some scenarios where they were once the preferred option. Therefore, it is increasingly clear that we must carefully match our strategies and plans to individual actors and deploy a range of conventional and nuclear capabilities that can either deter (if possible) or defeat them in multiple scenarios.

The capability to hold at risk and promptly attack a subset of high value targets with a long-range conventional weapon is one such capability. What I said when I advocated for this capability while still on active duty in 2013 remains true now: "Today, the only prompt global strike capability to engage potentially time-sensitive, fleeting targets continues to be ballistic missile systems armed with nuclear weapons. We continue to require a deployed conventional prompt strike capability to provide the President a range of flexible military options to address a small number of highest value targets, including in an anti-access and area denial environment."ⁱ

In my view, such a capability would both enhance strategic deterrence and improve our ability to react quickly in a time-critical scenario by providing the President with an option to promptly deliver a non-nuclear weapon against a limited but vitally important target or subset of highest-value targets at long ranges. Such targets might be presented either by violent extremists or nation-states, could emerge in day-to-day or conflict scenarios, and would most likely be highly defended, be found in the most challenging geographic locations, or be mobile (perhaps all three). While it is impossible to predict with 100% certainty what these targets might be, it is likely that they would fall into several general categories: those that pose an immediate threat to the US or allied homelands; those that involve the imminent use or movement of weapons of mass destruction; those associated with key extremist leaders; or those that represent a critical node in an important system that must be eliminated early in a campaign.

A CPGS capability would complement, not replace, other strike capabilities by filling a gap in the capabilities of both existing and planned systems. Today, the US has fielded forward-based and long-range conventional weapon systems (e.g., aircraft, tactical missiles; cruise missiles) with various range, speed, penetration, and munitions effectiveness characteristics. A number of studies and reports have concluded that traditional conventional systems can achieve the desired effects in many scenarios involving critical high-value time sensitive targets of the type mentioned above.ⁱⁱ In general terms, these traditional conventional strike systems can achieve satisfactory results when they are already in place or operating near enough to the target areas that they can bring weapons to bear in operationally relevant timeframes.

However, those same studies also show that existing and planned conventional systems cannot always meet the promptness (i.e., “within one hour”) or range (i.e., “global”) criteria that have been established as benchmarks for striking targets that are highly important both in value and time. It’s a simple analysis—traditional systems are insufficient if they cannot deliver weapons in an operationally relevant time frame; and in many plausible scenarios traditional conventional forces may not be close enough or in a position to do just that. The sophistication of today’s threats makes it highly likely that the type of targets and scenarios of interest to CPGS may be intentionally located beyond the timely reach of standard conventional forces. Again, in my view, while one hour and global range do not have to be absolute criteria for CPGS, the need remains to provide the President with the means to strike certain targets quickly with a conventional weapon, and in the face of the most challenging time and distance circumstances. Conventional prompt global strike is intended to prevent an adversary from using time and distance as a sanctuary.

Over the last several years, research and development efforts on CPGS have highlighted both the promise and challenges of fielding such a capability. As many have pointed out, beyond the technical challenges, CPGS systems also raise policy, doctrine, and operational concerns that would have to be resolved prior to deployment. For example, I fully agree that ambiguity and stability issues are important considerations that must (and probably can) be addressed. Additionally, important enabling capabilities such as ISR and battle management/command and control must also be addressed in order to field a viable operational system. The US would also need to carefully assess the role of CPGS in strategic deterrence. While it is US policy to reduce our reliance on nuclear weapons, I do not believe

conventional weapons generally and CPGS specifically can serve as a large-scale replacement for nuclear weapons.

Finally, I remain concerned about investment priorities. I am mindful of the difficult budget environment you are facing and worry that a robust CPGS effort could delay or eliminate other necessary modernization efforts. In my view, CPGS cannot and should not take the place of the vitally important nuclear or other strategic modernization efforts this subcommittee has worked hard to help craft and support. While I believe there is a real gap in our ability to strike promptly at long range with conventional weapons, and that CPGS could definitely help close that gap, I would recommend caution as you consider elevating this need against others. Conventional capabilities that help narrow the gap while also addressing broader needs are in the budget. CPGS is a necessary but niche capability and it seems to me that a prudent research and development effort to pursue new approaches and resolve technical and other associated issues is an appropriate way to get on a deliberate pathway to the future.

Mr. Chairman I remain an advocate for CPGS as a complementary capability to enhance deterrence and contingency response in the 21st Century. But in this budget environment I personally do so with a caveat. There are many important investment priorities that contribute to sustaining and enhancing our deterrence posture and ensuring our people remain the envy of the world. A prudent CPGS investment profile seems to me to be a sensible way to preserve future decision space while respecting budget realities.

Thank you again for inviting me to appear and I look forward to working with you in the future.

ⁱ Statement of General C. R. Kehler, Commander United States Strategic Command Before the Senate Committee on Armed Services, 12 March 2013.

ⁱⁱ See for example: National Research Council Committee on CPGS, “U. S. CPGS: Issues for 2008 and Beyond (2008)”; Defense Science Board, “Report of the Defense Science Board Task Force on Time Critical Conventional Strike from Strategic Standoff”, March 2009.