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STATEMENT OF
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BEFORE THE
HOUSE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE
ON
NUCLEAR FORCES
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Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Smith, and distinguished members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today on the undersea leg of the strategic deterrent triad.

The nation's nuclear triad of intercontinental ballistic missiles, strategic bombers, and submarine launched ballistic missiles is essential to our nation's well-being and will remain a necessary deterrent as long as nuclear weapons exist. Sea-based strategic deterrence is the Navy's #1 investment priority. It is the bedrock of our ability to deter aggression by major adversaries and to assure our friends and allies. In order to execute this mission, particularly as military competition continues to increase worldwide, we view maintaining and modernizing the undersea leg of the triad – our submarines, our missiles, and the command and control network that supports them as a national priority. This capability remains foundational to our survival as a nation.

Always Ready and On-call

The OHIO Class ballistic missile submarine (SSBN) and the Trident II (D5) strategic weapon system are the centerpiece of today's sea based strategic deterrence mission. We currently have 14 OHIO Class submarines executing this mission. Our oldest SSBN, USS HENRY M. JACKSON, was commissioned on October 6, 1984, completed her first patrol in 1985 and has executed over 90 patrols. She still has 10 more years of service until her mission is complete. As the OHIO Class ages, we remain vigilant in maintaining the same continuous coverage our nation has relied upon for over 5 decades.

All SSBNs are equipped with an accurate and reliable Trident II (D5) Strategic Weapons System. First deployed in the early 1990s, this system achieved its 165th successful test launch earlier this year. We are modernizing and extending the life of the D5 missile from 25 years to 50 years through sound engineering analysis and investment, and also modernizing the strategic weapons system that will be carried on the next generation SSBN, the COLUMBIA class. Just last month, Navy reached a significant milestone in this life extension program—the first two life-extended D5 missiles were loaded on an OHIO Class SSBN. It is critical that this program remains on track and aligned with the COLUMBIA Class acquisition program.

Building an Efficient Future Force

Our current platforms and life extension efforts will sustain a credible strategic weapon system until the 2040s. The COLUMBIA Class will be in service an additional 40 years, until well into the 2080s. With OHIO Class SSBNs starting to reach their end of life in the late 2020s, the COLUMBIA Class must be ready to start patrols early in fiscal year 2031. The Navy has already extended the OHIO Class service life from 30 years to 42 years. There is no engineering margin remaining for further extensions. Recapitalizing our ballistic missile submarines is a significant investment and something that happens only every other generation, making it critically important that we do it correctly. To meet COLUMBIA's first patrol in 2031, construction must begin in fiscal year 2021 – any further delay in the program will mean that for the first time in over 50 years, the U.S. would not have adequate ballistic missile submarines ready to meet Presidential requirements.

The COLUMBIA Class program will sustain the same level of at-sea presence we have today with the OHIO Class. To meet strategic requirements, the Navy must maintain a force of at least 10 ready-to-deploy SSBNs. Today we meet this requirement with 14 OHIO Class SSBNs. With the COLUMBIA Class SSBN's life-of-ship reactor core (which precludes a lengthy mid-life refueling overhaul) the Navy will be able to meet all at-sea requirements with only 12 submarines. This force of 12 submarines, each with 16 missile tubes, will provide sufficient flexibility and capacity to satisfy national strategic deterrent requirements in a cost efficient manner.

The Navy is taking aggressive steps to reduce procurement and life-cycle costs, while not compromising our investment in capabilities to stay ahead of the threat. Stealth is key among them. Stealth, largely built into the SSBN during construction and inherent in modern submarine design, ensures the submarine nuclear force is not detectable by our adversaries, and thus survivable. We are staying at the cutting edge of capabilities by leveraging technology from previous submarine classes, and by investing in new technologies specifically for the COLUMBIA Class.

In addition to reducing cost, we remain focused on the industrial base to ensure our partners are ready to support the delivery of COLUMBIA on time. As the program

matures, we continue to evaluate opportunities to stabilize the work force at private shipyards as well as the vendor base. The COLUMBIA Class is our #1 acquisition priority and we know our shipbuilding team and its infrastructure need to be prepared and stable in order to ensure success.

Finally, in addition to the submarine and missile aspects of the Navy's nuclear deterrent, the Nuclear Command Control and Communications (NC3) architecture provides the critical connection between the President and our nuclear forces. NC3 is a large and complex system comprised of numerous land-, air-, and space-based components. It provides survivable, secure, and enduring communications to our nuclear and conventional operations in all threat environments. Maintaining a credible nuclear deterrent for the long term requires recapitalization of key systems and capabilities throughout the NC3 architecture.

We've outlined some of the incredible technology we need to meet our strategic deterrent mission, but it is important to emphasize that all of this is at risk without an exceptional military and civilian workforce. From our industry partners and civil servants who design, build, and test our ships, to our shipyard workers who maintain them, to our Sailors who operate these ships day in and day out; our people – from all corners of the country – are what makes us the finest Navy in the world. They count on us to provide the tools, training, and resources to succeed.

Summary

Modernization of our triad and nuclear infrastructure are important to deter potential adversaries and to reassure allies of our continuing commitment to our extended deterrence. The Navy's top investment priority is to maintain and modernize the undersea leg of the triad. Our ballistic missile submarines and the weapon system they carry ensure no adversary can threaten the United States with nuclear attack without certain retaliation. A survivable, competent and professional deterrent underpins all other U.S. military operations around the globe and provides unique, invaluable assurance to our allies and partners.

The COLUMBIA Class acquisition program and the weapon system life extension efforts must remain on schedule to ensure an uninterrupted at-sea presence. We will

continue to work with industry and Congress to drive down costs while maintaining a credible, survivable nuclear deterrent capability. I cannot emphasize enough how these programs are fundamental to our survival as a nation. On behalf of our Sailors and civilians, thank you for your commitment and continued support, and I look forward to your questions.