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Senate Armed Services Committee

STATEMENT OF
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ARMED SERVICES
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Chairman Rogers, Ranking Member Cooper, and distinguished Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to testify on U.S. nuclear policy and strategy, and to frame the President's Fiscal Year (FY) 2017 budget request within the context of today's dynamic security environment. Your support for the nuclear sustainment and modernization plan it funds is essential to ensuring the effectiveness of our nuclear deterrent forces.

Security environment

Last month, Secretary Carter identified five evolving security challenges that have driven the focus of the Defense Department's planning and budgeting this year. Each has a nuclear dimension that our policy and strategy must address.

Two of these challenges reflect a return to great power competition, in regions where we face nuclear-armed potential adversaries that can pose an existential threat to the United States and our allies and partners. Russia has undertaken aggressive actions in Crimea and elsewhere in Ukraine, and adopted a pattern of reckless nuclear posturing and coercive threats. Russia remains in violation of the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty and remains unreceptive to the President's offer to negotiate further reductions in strategic nuclear weapons below the limits of the New START Treaty.

Russia's violation of the INF Treaty is serious in its own right, but should not be viewed in isolation from its overall aggressive behavior. Therefore, the Administration has determined that our responses should focus on responding to that full range of aggressive behavior. We must take a comprehensive approach to Russia's actions, integrating responses across all instruments of national power. As Secretary Carter testified last week, "the United States is taking a strong and balanced strategic approach in response to Russia's aggression: strengthening both our allies and ourselves, including through investments in this budget, while also giving Russia the opportunity, if it chooses, to rejoin the international community and work with us where our interests align. On the military side, we are developing and implementing a strategy to address Russian military actions that includes modifying and expanding air defense systems to deny Russia offensive capabilities; placing an increased emphasis on working with allies and partners to improve our collective capability to counter complex cruise missile threats; working with

other departments and agencies to encourage and facilitate allied acquisition of advanced capabilities by those most concerned with Russian behavior; and investing in the technologies that are most relevant to Russia's provocations. We are enhancing our posture in Europe by increasing the amount of prepositioned equipment sets in Europe as well as the number of rotational U.S. forces, including Reserve forces, through increased funding for our European Reassurance Initiative.

China is introducing qualitative advances into its nuclear and conventional military capabilities as it continues its rise, while we continue to implement our Rebalance to the Asia-Pacific with the goal of maintaining regional stability. Earlier this year North Korea conducted its fourth nuclear test, followed by a ballistic missile launch that placed a satellite into orbit. In response to the evolving North Korean threat, the United States and the Republic of Korea have made an alliance decision to begin formal consultations regarding improvements to the alliance missile defense posture, specifically the viability of a Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) system in the Republic of Korea.

As we work to counter Iran's malign influence against our allies and partners in the Middle East, we will remain vigilant for any reversal of course by Iran on its commitments under the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). Finally, denying terrorists access to nuclear weapons and weapon-usable materials is an absolute imperative in the ongoing fight to defeat terrorist organizations.

Effective deterrence

While the Administration's ultimate goal is a world without nuclear weapons, the President has been consistent and clear in his commitment to maintain a safe, secure, and effective nuclear arsenal for as long as nuclear weapons exist. DoD and the National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA) work closely together to maintain the safety and security of our nuclear forces at the lowest possible number of nuclear weapons consistent with retaining a full set of options to address current and potential threats. I will focus today on what we in the DoD are doing to ensure the effectiveness of our nuclear deterrent.

Effective deterrence means convincing any potential adversary that attacking the United States or its allies would bring risk that far outweighs any expected benefits of aggression. This requires

that our nuclear capabilities and posture provide the ability to implement U.S. deterrence strategy, preserve the strategy's credibility, and reinforce strategic stability. Maintaining the ability to achieve the President's objectives if deterrence fails strengthens the credibility of our strategy.

Regional deterrence requires a balanced approach to escalation risk that deters escalation, but also prepares for the possibility that deterrence might fail. We accept and convey the reality that no one can count on controlling escalation in a crisis or conflict. Russia's purported doctrine of nuclear escalation to deescalate a conventional conflict amounts to a reckless gamble for which the odds are incalculable and the outcome could prove catastrophic. Any resort to nuclear weapons would be the ultimate form of escalation. However, we must be prepared if Russia creates a conflict and drives it across the nuclear threshold; we do not simply assume that escalation cannot be limited once the nuclear threshold has been crossed. We are tasked with providing the President credible options for responding to nuclear threats and nuclear aggression, including responding to limited nuclear use. Both aspects of this balanced approach are mutually reinforcing. Possessing a range of options for responding to limited use makes credible our message that escalating to deescalate is dangerous and will ultimately be unsuccessful.

Sustainment and modernization program

Our approach to meeting the range of challenges we now face or might face in the future is to maintain a deterrent that is robust and stable, rather than one that is necessarily reactive to every action of potential adversaries. This remains best served by sustaining the nuclear Triad and Dual-Capable Aircraft (DCA) with a diverse range of nuclear explosive yields and delivery modes. The Triad and DCA provide the credibility, flexibility, and survivability to meet and adapt to the challenges of a dynamic 21st century security environment, without the need to mirror every potential adversary, system-for-system and yield-for-yield. Thus, the Administration's plan focuses on sustaining and modernizing current platforms, delivery systems, and warheads to preserve existing military capabilities in the face of evolving threats, rather than developing new nuclear warheads with new military capabilities. In addition to positioning us to address threats as they emerge, this approach bolsters strategic stability by decreasing incentives for, and the likelihood of, a future arms race.

This approach to nuclear sustainment and modernization is consistent with the Administration's nonproliferation and disarmament objectives. The FY 2017 budget request and Future Years Defense Program (FYDP) support a program that sustains a safe, secure, and effective nuclear deterrent without nuclear explosive testing; assures allies they don't need their own nuclear arsenals; retains leverage for future arms control agreements; and reduces the numbers and types of weapons in the arsenal.

The current nuclear stockpile is a dramatic departure from the Cold War, and we are retaining only those capabilities we need to sustain stable and effective deterrence. The United States and Russia are both decreasing their deployed strategic nuclear weapons stockpiles under the New START Treaty. We have reduced from 23 nuclear warhead types in 1990 to 12 warhead types today, and the B61-12 Life-Extension Program (LEP) is on track to allow us to reduce further to 6 warhead types by the mid-2020s. The B61-12 will replace multiple variants of the B61 that have different explosive yields, and will have lower yield than some of these variants, but it will not expand the range of yield options available in the current stockpile. It will also replace the B83 strategic bomb, the last megaton-class weapon in the stockpile. The Air Force Tail Kit will provide the B61-12 a measure of improved accuracy to give it the same military capability as the higher-yield bombs it replaces.

The Administration's nuclear sustainment and modernization plan is necessary for sustaining effective deterrence. It is essential that Congress support the President's FY 2017 budget request and FYDP for nuclear weapon-related activities. Further delays to the program would put the safety, security, and effectiveness of our nuclear forces at significant and unacceptable risk.

To be clear, our choice is not between keeping or modernizing the current forces. Rather, the choice is between modernizing those forces or watching a slow and unacceptable degradation in our ability to deter.

Many of our systems are already well past their intended service lives. Delaying modernization and warhead life extension programs would diminish the size and degrade the capabilities of our nuclear forces until they age out of service entirely. Neglect and inaction should not determine the size and shape of our deterrent capabilities. These decisions should be based on national security considerations and arms control agreements.

The FY 2017 budget request funds sustainment and recapitalization within the strategic submarine (SSBN) force, the intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) force, the strategic bomber force, and our DCA. This includes the B61-12 LEP, and development of a Long-Range Standoff missile (LRSO) to replace the aging Air-Launched Cruise Missile (ALCM).

Credible air leg strengthens effective deterrence

I was asked to focus in particular on the need for the LRSO, and I would like to do so in the context of our overall air-carried nuclear forces. Effective nuclear deterrence requires that the adversary believe that the United States has the capability and the resolve to defend itself and its allies and respond to a nuclear attack. The B61 bomb and the ALCM provide important contributions to the range of credible options available to the President for responding to nuclear attack, especially an attack involving limited nuclear use by an adversary. And because aircraft can be visibly deployed and flown during a crisis, they provide a forceful reminder to an adversary contemplating aggression that the risk it faces is real.

The ability to respond proportionately to a limited nuclear attack strengthens our ability to deter such attacks from ever taking place. This is critical in a world where we must not only avoid unintended escalation, but also deter deliberate nuclear escalation like that envisioned in Russia's current strategy. Deterrence might fail if an adversary believes limited nuclear weapon use against a U.S. ally or partner might coerce the United States to grant concessions or abandon its friends due to a lack of credible, proportionate response options. If allies and partners conclude that they cannot rely on the United States to respond effectively to restore deterrence, they might opt to pursue their own nuclear arsenals, thus undermining our nonproliferation goals. These are conditions that would be truly dangerous and destabilizing.

A strategy of relying on large-scale nuclear response is credible and effective for deterring large-scale nuclear attack, particularly against one's homeland, but it is far less credible in the context of limited adversary use, particularly against an ally or U.S. forces operating abroad. Retaining more diverse nuclear options gives us the ability to minimize collateral damage in the event the President determines that a nuclear response is required. This, however, does not mean that there will be a lower nuclear threshold or higher likelihood of U.S. nuclear use. Indeed, the United States has long maintained a high threshold for nuclear use together with a diverse range of

nuclear forces and response options. The LRSO and B61-12 will sustain that range of existing military capabilities in the face of evolving threats.

B61-12 LEP

The B61-12 LEP will sustain our ability to forward-deploy nuclear weapons with fighter aircraft as well as strategic bombers. It will provide the sole gravity bomb to sustain our strategic and non-strategic air-delivered nuclear deterrent capability and the sole nuclear capability for NATO DCA. It is a critical component to sustaining our extended deterrent commitments in Europe. In its strategic role, the B61-12 is essential for sustaining the B-2 bomber's contribution to our nuclear forces until the LRSO is deployed. It will also retain for the President the unique flexibility that gravity bombs provide through the option of recalling up to the moment of weapon release above a target.

LRSO

The Administration's decision to field a modern ALCM replacement is essential to maintain the ALCM's unique contribution to stable and effective deterrence. The ALCM can be launched by a bomber from outside enemy territory, evade air defenses, and reach targets inaccessible to even a stealth bomber. The current system, initially fielded in 1982, is already decades beyond its planned 10-year service life, and its viability will be challenged over the next decade by advanced air and missile defenses.

Cruise missiles provide capabilities that complement rather than duplicate that of a stealth bomber. Standoff capability improves the survivability of our bomber fleet, extends its effective range, and multiplies the type and number of penetrating targets each bomber presents to the adversary. This complicates the air defense problem facing any country seeking to negate the air component of our deterrent. As air defense capabilities continue to improve and proliferate, we cannot assume our technological lead will forever ensure unchallenged U.S. bomber operations over any target in any theater.

The LRSO is an important element of a modernization program designed to support the policy objective of maintaining strategic stability with Russia and China. The LRSO will utilize a refurbished version of the current W80-1 ALCM warhead. The number of refurbished nuclear warheads will not exceed the current inventory of W80-1 warheads in the active stockpile and

inactive hedge, and is far lower than the approximately 1,000 missile bodies needed to support both the deployed force and testing requirements over the projected lifetime of the system. The LRSO will further contribute to strategic stability by retaining a response option that does not pose the threat of a disarming surprise attack to Russia or China. The process of alerting strategic bombers is observable, and the aircraft and the missile must spend hours flying towards their targets. Thus, ALCMs provide more potential for warning than do either ballistic missiles or ground- and sea-launched cruise missiles forward-deployed in theater or aboard ships on station.

Looking forward

Though we have the right mix of nuclear forces today and, we believe, for the foreseeable future, we need to continually assess our strategy, posture, and capabilities. As the security environment evolves, we must ensure we have the forces and posture required to fulfill the roles of nuclear weapons in U.S. national security strategy – in particular the fundamental role of deterring nuclear attack on the United States and our allies.

Similarly, at Wales, NATO Heads of State and Government recognized the changed security environment in Europe and took a first step towards strengthening the Alliance's deterrence and defense posture by approving the Readiness Action Plan (RAP). The RAP was a direct response to the challenges posed by Russia, but it is not enough. The Alliance continues to renew its emphasis on deterrence and collective defense, and among many other efforts is considering adjustments to ensure NATO's nuclear deterrence capabilities remain credible, flexible, and tailored to the specific threats that it faces – an approach that NATO has followed for decades.

We look forward to your continuing support in our collective efforts to ensure the United States is able to meet the security challenges we face today, as well as those ahead. Thank you again for the opportunity to testify. I look forward to your questions.