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House Armed Services Subcommittee on Strategic Forces

STATEMENT OF
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Chairman Rogers, Ranking Member Cooper, and distinguished Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to testify on the Administration's plan for modernizing U.S. nuclear deterrent forces.

President Obama's approach to reducing nuclear dangers has consistently included two key pillars: working toward a world without nuclear weapons, and maintaining effective deterrence along the way. Because we cannot responsibly count on achieving global disarmament before the U.S. arsenal ages into obsolescence, we must proceed with modernized replacements to maintain our nuclear deterrent for us and our allies. Nuclear recapitalization is not only necessary; it is also affordable if prioritized appropriately, and is consistent with the President's vision of ultimately reaching a world without nuclear weapons.

Nuclear dangers persist in the world. China and Russia are improving their arsenals and, through development programs already well underway, ensuring their ability to maintain them for decades to come. Russia increasingly employs nuclear threats as tools of intimidation. And North Korea not only continues to pursue nuclear weapons capable of striking our allies and homeland, but has repeatedly and directly threatened such attacks.

We have reduced the prominence of nuclear weapons in our strategy, but we recognize the foundational role nuclear deterrence continues to play. Nuclear forces provide our most potent means of convincing potential aggressors that striking the United States or its allies with nuclear weapons would bring risks that far outweigh any benefits they could hope to achieve.

In his 2009 Prague speech, President Obama committed the United States to work toward global disarmament while at the same time maintaining a safe, secure, and effective nuclear arsenal for as long as nuclear weapons exist. In subsequent reviews, in 2010 and 2013, the Administration concluded that stable deterrence is best provided by sustaining our nuclear triad of strategic bombers, submarines, and intercontinental ballistic missiles, or ICBMs, together with our Dual-Capable Aircraft, or DCA. 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 requiring us to mirror every nuclear weapon system others might deploy. Our nuclear forces are structured and postured to bolster strategic stability by decreasing incentives for, and the likelihood of, a future arms race. In addition to providing unique and complementary

capabilities, each leg of the triad provides a hedge against changes in the security environment or technical problems in either of the other legs.

The need to sustain effective deterrence and strategic stability drives the requirement to modernize U.S. nuclear forces, and we must make investments now to have replacements ready when needed. At nearly thirty years old, the B-2 bomber is the newest system in the U.S. triad. In the coming decades, our bombers and 1970's-era ICBMs will reach the point where they can no longer be extended without extensive work and investment that in some cases would likely exceed the cost of modern replacements. The air-launched cruise missile is decades beyond its planned service life—its reliability degrading and its viability increasingly challenged by advanced air defenses. And our nuclear-armed submarines will irreversibly age out of service beginning in 2027.

Consequently, the OHIO Replacement Program is essential to sustaining the most survivable leg of the triad. The Ground-Based Strategic Deterrent will maintain the responsiveness and extremely secure command and control of our current ICBM force, and will preserve its role in severely complicating the necessary scale of any adversary attempt to disarm the United States. The B-21 strategic bomber, the B61-12 gravity bomb life extension, the Long-Range Standoff cruise missile, and F-35 nuclear capability will sustain deterrence-signaling ability and the range of options currently available to the President for effectively deterring and credibly responding to limited as well as large-scale nuclear attack against the United States or its allies.

Contrary to frequent mischaracterizations, we are not spending a trillion dollars on nuclear modernization. The modernization costs, spread over twenty years, will be an estimated \$350B-\$450B. To put this in context, the total defense budget in Fiscal Year 2016 alone is \$580B. The cost for nuclear modernization is substantial, but is not unreasonable for what Secretary Carter called the “bedrock of our security.” Sustaining consensus among the executive and legislative branches, and clearly explaining the associated rationale to the public, is essential to pursue a sustainable modernization program.

Our modernization plan is consistent with the President's Prague Agenda. It directly supports U.S. nonproliferation and disarmament objectives by enabling reductions in our arsenal while continuing to assure allies that they do not need their own nuclear capabilities. Claims that U.S.

modernization signals a nuclear arms buildup or renewed arms race fail to fairly characterize the activities of other countries, and do not account for the fact that our modernization is not a response to Russia or China, but merely the sustainment of our current deterrent capabilities – capabilities that have served us well – into the future. For example, replacing legacy warheads will allow further reductions in a stockpile that is already 85 percent smaller than at its Cold-War peak, and we are reducing warhead types in addition to total numbers. We are not developing new nuclear weapons, and warhead life extension programs will not support new military missions or provide for new military capabilities.

Recapitalizing the triad will preserve existing military capabilities for preventing both large-scale and limited nuclear attacks, even as threats evolve.

To deter massive nuclear attack, the United States must maintain a force that is invulnerable to a disarming strike. Survivable forces encourage nuclear restraint on the part of potential adversaries because they ensure that such an attack cannot possibly succeed. Strategic stability requires a solid foundation that is not susceptible to any single point of failure, and each leg of the triad makes its own unique and critical contribution: strategic submarines designed for survivability, a highly responsive ICBM force, and a bomber force that is both survivable once alerted and recallable during its relatively slow approach to designated targets. Preserving this stability provides insurance against the fear and confusion that would accompany any serious military crisis under the nuclear shadow.

While a massive nuclear strike would bring the greatest devastation imaginable, the more acute threat might be a limited attack aimed at coercing rather than destroying the United States or its allies. An adversary faced with losing a war of aggression might use a small number of nuclear weapons, perhaps even one or two, against U.S. forces or allies in an attempt to force capitulation. Our unwavering commitment to the security of our allies should make clear that this would be a grave miscalculation, destined to fail. A flexible nuclear force helps demonstrate this commitment. Retaining a range of capabilities—in explosive power and methods of delivery—strengthens deterrence by showing the United States is prepared to respond in a wide range of scenarios, including an adversary’s calibrated nuclear escalation.

Nuclear deterrence and disarmament share the same ultimate goal of reducing the risk of nuclear war. Forgoing or delaying modernization would increase that risk and impair our ability to protect U.S. and allied vital security interests. As we continue to work toward a world without nuclear weapons, effective nuclear deterrence is an imperative we must not ignore. President Obama has repeatedly noted the consequent need to ensure a safe, secure, and effective nuclear force, and I would like to thank this committee especially for your support in that effort.