

Statement by

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Introduction

Chairman King, Ranking Member Fischer, and distinguished Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify on the Department's nuclear weapons policy, strategy, and capabilities in support of the Defense Authorization Request for Fiscal Year 2022.

As Secretary Austin has stated, nuclear deterrence is the Department's highest priority mission. Our nuclear forces provide the bedrock of our national defense, and remain essential to ensure no adversary believes it can ever employ nuclear weapons for any reason, under any circumstances against the United States or our allies and partners without risking devastating consequences. The Department will continue to maintain and field safe, secure, survivable, and effective nuclear forces to deter adversaries and to respond if deterrence fails. As Deputy Secretary of Defense Hicks has stated, "Maintaining a credible nuclear deterrent is critical to our nation's defense."

Today, the United States faces a complex global security environment, in which the critical challenges to our prosperity and security include strategic competition with an increasingly militarily capable China and Russia, increasingly dangerous regional powers, and accelerating technological changes with potentially strategic effects. In this competitive global environment, the risk of interstate conflict may rise because of advances in technology and new frontiers for conflict with a variety of actors—all making deterrence more challenging.

China, Russia, Iran, and North Korea have all demonstrated the capability and intent to advance their interests at the expense of the United States, its allies, and their regional neighbors. China has rapidly become more capable and assertive, and its military modernization, including of nuclear forces, is increasingly concerning. Russia's comprehensive conventional and nuclear modernization programs are adding new systems that threaten the United States and its allies and partners.

We are confronted with multi-faceted deterrence challenges including cyber, space and nuclear domains, and increased escalation risks. In a security environment where assertive strategic competitors are expanding and modernizing their nuclear capabilities to achieve strategic and potentially escalatory effects, we must maintain credible strategic deterrence against adversaries and protect the American people and our allies and partners.

The Nuclear Threat

China

China is continuing its rapid expansion and platform diversification of its nuclear arsenal. In this decade, China intends to at least double the size of its nuclear stockpile and will soon field a nuclear triad. The 2021 Threat Assessment Report from the U.S. Intelligence Community notes that "China is building a larger and increasingly capable nuclear missile force that is more survivable, more diverse, and on higher alert than in the past, including nuclear missile systems designed to manage regional escalation and ensure an intercontinental second-strike capability."

China is examining how lower-yield nuclear weapons and air-launched ballistic missiles fit into its expanding nuclear arsenal—an arsenal that includes a mix of strategic-range systems capable of striking the United States as well as theater-range forces capable of threatening U.S. allies and

partners as well as U.S. bases, and forces in the region. China is fielding a new generation of mobile missiles, with multiple independently targetable reentry vehicles (MIRVs) and penetration aids to overcome perceived missile defense capabilities. China has also developed a new road-mobile strategic intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) and is planning to arm its ballistic missile submarine with new submarine-launched ballistic missiles (SLBMs). Like Russia, China is also committed to the development of hypersonic strike systems, including nuclear-armed missiles.

In addition to its land- and sea-based components, China has announced development of a new nuclear-capable strategic bomber designed for stealth. China has also deployed a nuclear-capable precision-guided DF-26 intermediate-range ballistic missile capable of attacking land and naval targets. Although China maintains its “No First Use” policy publicly there is some doubt as to whether it intends on abiding by it, and China’s new nuclear weapons provide it with coercive options in a crisis or conflict.

Russia

According to the 2021 Annual Threat Assessment, Russia will remain the largest and most capable nuclear rival to the United States for the foreseeable future as it expands and modernizes its nuclear weapons capabilities and increases capabilities of its strategic and non-strategic weapons.

Russia’s comprehensive nuclear modernization program not only includes replacement of legacy systems, but includes fielding new, so-called “novel” nuclear systems. To date, Russia has recapitalized more than 80 percent of its strategic nuclear forces, including an array of modernization efforts and novel weapons programs. Some of Russia’s stated drivers of its modernization for its newer systems include perceptions of U.S. missile defense and Western conventional superiority.

Russia has also modernized and improved the capabilities of its theater and tactical nuclear forces. It has 1,000-2,000 non-strategic nuclear weapons of more than a dozen types. Moreover, according to the Defense Intelligence Agency, the number of Russia’s non-strategic nuclear weapons is expected to grow significantly over the next decade and the number of which are not limited by any arms control agreement.

According to the 2021 Annual Threat Assessment, Russia “believes such systems offer options to deter adversaries, control the escalation of potential hostilities, and counter U.S. and allied force near its border.” Although Russia may claim these weapons are defensive in nature to address conventional imbalances with the United States and its allies, this nuclear arsenal provides Russia with a multitude of options to coerce or threaten the NATO alliance and our Asian allies and partners. These options include the employment of limited nuclear first use in a regional context where Russia maintains the right to use such weapons in response to an existential threat.

North Korea

North Korea continues its unlawful production of nuclear weapons and ballistic missile capabilities in direct violation of United Nations Security Council resolutions. North Korea’s

nuclear capabilities constitute a significant and evolving threat to our allies and its tested ICBMs are designed to strike anywhere within the continental United States.

Between 2006 and 2017, North Korea conducted six progressively sophisticated nuclear explosive tests and three ICBM flight tests that demonstrate its ability to reach the U.S. homeland. It continues to produce fissile material for nuclear weapons. Most recently, in January 2021, North Korea unveiled a new type of submarine-launched ballistic missile, which it declared to be “the world’s most powerful weapon.”

North Korea’s continued development and deployment of nuclear weapons threatens its neighbors and the United States.

Iran

Iran continues to destabilize regional stability, pursue advanced military capabilities and technologies, and threaten U.S. allies and partners. Iran has developed and fielded a substantial arsenal of ballistic and cruise missiles that can strike targets throughout the region up to 2,000 kilometers. According to the Defense Intelligence Agency, Iran continues to deploy an increasing number of more accurate and lethal theater ballistic missiles, as well as pursue technical capabilities that could enable it to produce an ICBM if it chooses to do so.

The Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) effectively blocked Iran’s potential pathways to a nuclear weapon and enabled robust international monitoring of all aspects of Iran’s nuclear fuel cycle. Under the arrangement, Iran committed to dismantle much of its nuclear program, including significantly curtailing uranium enrichment activities and cutting its stockpile of low-enriched uranium by 98 percent, and opened its nuclear program to the most comprehensive and intrusive verification regime ever negotiated.

Iran is not currently undertaking the key nuclear weapons-development activities needed to produce a nuclear device, according to the Intelligence Community. However, since the United States exited the JCPOA in May 2018, Iran has taken steps to expand its nuclear activities in excess of the JCPOA’s limits and now is much closer to the fissile material required for a nuclear weapon than it was prior to taking these steps. Iran is also advancing its research and development on other capabilities of concern, such as the production of uranium metal, and is now doing so without the full benefit of the intrusive verification and monitoring measures that were in place when Iran was complying with its commitments under the deal. The Department supports the Administration’s strategy of pursuing principled diplomacy to again constrain Iran’s nuclear capabilities. The President has been clear about returning to compliance with the JCPOA if Iran resumes full and strict compliance with its commitments under the deal.

In addition, Iran’s development of more capable ballistic missiles makes it critical that the United States closely monitor developments in Iran to ensure our ability to deter its destabilizing and aggressive behavior.

Deterrence Policy

As the 2021 Interim National Security Strategic Guidance states, “we will address the existential threat posed by nuclear weapons” and the United States “will take steps to reduce the role of nuclear weapons in our national security strategy, while ensuring our strategic deterrent remains

safe, secure, and effective and that our extended deterrence commitments to our allies remain strong and credible.”

In keeping with past practice for incoming administrations, the Department is beginning a set of strategic reviews that will include U.S. nuclear posture and policy. This process will be informed by the 21st century security and fiscal environment. The reviews will align with the U.S. national defense strategy and will include an integrated approach to deterrence, across several domains—conventional, cyber, space, and nuclear—to strengthen U.S. national security and our extended deterrence commitments. They will consider and assess U.S. strategy, posture, and policy adjustments, and consider program execution risk—all with a goal of maintaining a safe, secure, and effective strategic deterrent, ensuring strategic stability, and reducing risks of mistake and miscalculation in crisis and conflict.

Reducing the Role of Nuclear Weapons

As the Interim National Security Strategic Guidance notes, the proliferation of nuclear weapons poses profound and existential dangers which cannot be effectively addressed with the United States on the sidelines. In the coming months, we will begin to explore those steps that can be taken to reduce the role of nuclear weapons in our national security strategy, while continuing to ensure our strategic deterrent remains safe, secure and effective and our extended deterrence commitments to our allies remain strong. Our upcoming strategic reviews will play a critical role in laying the groundwork for this effort by allowing us to examine areas where we can make progress toward this goal.

Ensuring a Safe, Secure, and Effective Strategic Deterrent through Nuclear Modernization

As Secretary Austin testified, we must sustain and modernize the nuclear triad to maintain credible deterrence in the face of 21st century threats. This committee is well aware of the age of our nuclear systems and DoD’s challenge in sustaining them as we simultaneously proceed with modernizing U.S. nuclear forces after decades of deferred recapitalization. As Secretary Austin has stated, “U.S. nuclear weapons have been extended far beyond their original service lives, and the tipping point, where we must simultaneously overhaul these forces, is now here.” Although the Administration is reviewing the U.S. nuclear posture, the President’s FY 2022 discretionary request supports ongoing nuclear modernization programs while ensuring that these efforts are sustainable. Secretary Austin has further noted that the Department will ensure that “our modernization program is being executed in the most cost effective and judicious manner.”

Effective deterrence requires a robust and credible nuclear command, control and communication (NC3) system that ensures the President has the ability to direct U.S. nuclear forces at all times, even under the most challenging circumstances. As the Department replaces an aging NC3 and considers future architectures, NC3 will continue to be a top priority.

The United States is making significant investments in modernization of nuclear delivery platforms. The Department has embarked on several on-going concurrent programs, many of which plan to deliver by 2030, to replace aging systems including: the Columbia-class ballistic missile nuclear submarines (SSBNs); modernization of the associated D5 missile and new reentry vehicles; the replacement and modernization of land-based ICBMs (Ground Based

Strategic Deterrent; GBSD); a nuclear long-range stand-off (LRSO) cruise missile; a modern bomber (B-21); and nuclear capable fighters (F-35).

The U.S. stockpile strategy must continue to evolve to enable the United States to field a modern deterrent fit for 21st century challenges. The Department of Energy’s National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA) life-extension, modifications, and nuclear weapons programs are designed to address DoD military requirements. Today’s dynamic security environment requires a mix of weapon attributes, and weapons modernization and sustainment programs—all of which must be backed up by world-class personnel and a resilient infrastructure. The United States has adopted a stockpile strategy that will ensure our nuclear weapons remain safe, secure, and effective against current and future threats. The imperative behind this strategy is to meet current and future military requirements with higher confidence and without explosive nuclear testing.

Our review of U.S. nuclear strategy and posture will assess the U.S. nuclear modernization programs to ensure that they deliver on time and are aligned with policy and requirements.

Renewed Focus on Strategic Stability, Risk Reduction, and Arms Control

The 2021 Interim Strategic National Security Guidance stated that “we will endeavor to head off costly arms races and re-establish our credibility as a leader in arms control.” President Biden has already demonstrated his commitment to re-establishing U.S. credibility and leadership on arms control by extending the New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (New START) for five years. The New START Treaty extension provides stability and predictability in addition to retaining limits on Russian systems that pose an existential military threat to the United States.

It ensures legally binding constraints on a substantial portion of Russia’s nuclear warheads, with an upper limit of 1,550 nuclear warheads on deployed ICBMs, on deployed SLBMs, and counted for deployed heavy bombers equipped for nuclear armaments (each such heavy bomber is counted as one warhead toward this limit). The Treaty also limits both deployed and non-deployed heavy bombers and launchers of ICBMs and SLBMs. And it keeps in place an important verification system, to ensure that Russia remains in compliance with its treaty obligations.

As we pass the 11th anniversary of the signing of the New START Treaty in April 2010, we must look to build on its foundation. The scope of Chinese and Russian nuclear modernization and expansion makes the task of seeking progress on further arms control, nuclear security, and risk reduction measures all the more necessary. In addition, the increasing potential for conduct in the cyber, space, and information domains to have strategic effects (with consequent escalatory risk) underscores the importance of meaningful dialogue with Russia and China on the range of emerging military technological developments that could threaten strategic and regional stability. Presidents Biden and Putin have already agreed to hold strategic stability discussions. Similarly, we will work to engage China with the goal of having it accept its responsibility as a nuclear-armed, technologically advanced power, which includes increased transparency and progress on nuclear risk reduction. The Department will support efforts to negotiate agreements and arrangements that make the United States and its allies and partners more safe and secure.

Commitment to Allies and Partners

As strategic competitors continue to invest in efforts to challenge the United States, we are harnessing our greatest strategic advantage—our network of allies and partners—both globally and regionally to deter aggression from China and Russia, and to contend with persistent threats from North Korea and Iran.

The extended deterrence assurances we provide to our allies and partners are a critical element of regional and strategic stability. No country should doubt the strength of our extended deterrence commitments or the strength of the U.S. and allied and partner capabilities to deter, and, if necessary, respond should deterrence fail.

NATO

In his January 26, 2021 call with NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg, President Biden emphasized the importance of shared values, consultation, and capabilities to strengthen deterrence. With regard to nuclear deterrence specifically, NATO Allies reiterated in the London Declaration in December 2019, that “as long as nuclear weapons exist, NATO will remain a nuclear Alliance” and that “we are fully committed to the preservation and strengthening of effective arms control, disarmament, and non-proliferation, taking into account the prevailing security environment.” The fundamental purpose of NATO’s nuclear capabilities is to preserve peace, prevent coercion, and deter aggression. The United States continues to make available its strategic nuclear forces for the defense of NATO, and they remain the supreme guarantee of the security of NATO Allies. The independent strategic nuclear forces of the UK and France have a deterrent role of their own and contribute significantly to the overall security of the Alliance. The forward deployment of U.S. nuclear weapons in NATO countries and the capabilities and infrastructure provided by Allies concerned also support NATO’s nuclear deterrence and defense posture, and provide a political and military link between Europe and North America.

United Kingdom

Our support to the UK and its Continuous-At-Sea-Deterrent contributes to NATO’s defense and has underwritten our collective peace and security from nuclear threats since the signing of the bilateral Mutual Defense Agreement in 1958. We maintain regular dialogue through Biannual Staff Talks and other technical engagements. The UK uses U.S. Trident missiles, equipped with UK warheads, onboard its VANGUARD-class SSBNs; and the new U.S. COLUMBIA-class and UK DREADNOUGHT-class SSBNs will share a common ballistic missile compartment. The UK will also utilize U.S. technology through the W93 program to support its parallel replacement warhead program. The UK’s nuclear forces are a key contribution to NATO’s nuclear deterrent posture.

France

The independent strategic nuclear forces of France also contribute significantly to the overall security of the NATO Alliance. The United States maintains a formal dialogue with France through Annual Staff Talks to facilitate understanding of each other’s threat perceptions and on other issues related to nuclear security.

The Republic of Korea, Japan, and Australia

And in Asia, our formal relationships with important allies such as the Republic of Korea and Japan are critical to regional security and stability and provide a critical deterrent to North Korean and Chinese threats. We have long-standing extended deterrence dialogues with the Republic of Korea (ROK) through the Deterrence Strategy Committee (DSC) of the Korea-U.S. Integrated Defense Dialogue and with Japan through the Extended Deterrence Dialogue (EDD). Through regular bilateral meetings, site-visits, and table-top exercises, both the EDD and DSC have helped us to develop a common Alliance understanding of deterrence principles, and to test application of those principles to scenarios we may face in the Indo-Pacific region. We also have meaningful consultation with Australia through the Strategic Policy Dialogue (SPD). The evolving nature of the SPD continues to be a venue that deepens our understanding of allied concerns on strategic and nuclear threats in the region. Moreover, we continue to use all of these venues to regularly assure our allies of the continued importance of U.S. extended deterrence commitments as a crucial part of our collective national security.

Conclusion

Mr. Chairman, let me conclude by stating that as the Department plans to begin its strategic reviews, enhancing deterrence and addressing strategic threats remain the highest priority. As long as nuclear threats exist and in an increasingly complex and threatening security environment, the United States must have a modern nuclear deterrent that is safe, secure, and credible to keep America and its allies and partners safe. We will continue to address the existential threat posed by nuclear weapons, strengthen strategic stability, pursue efforts to reduce nuclear risks and engage with our allies.

Thank you and I look forward to your questions.