

Joint Statement of

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and

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Before the
Senate Armed Services Committee
United States Senate

Hearing to Receive Testimony on Matters Relating to the Budget of the
National Nuclear Security Administration

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Chairman Inhofe, Ranking Member Reed, distinguished members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to submit this statement as part of your hearing on matters relating to the budget of the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE)/National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA). We are pleased to join our NNSA colleague to discuss what four successive Secretaries of Defense have called the Department of Defense's (DoD) highest priority mission: ensuring that the United States has a safe, secure, reliable, and effective nuclear deterrent—now and in the future. As we continue to persevere through the COVID-19 pandemic, we want to assure you that U.S. nuclear forces are fully manned and fully ready today—in large part because they are backed by the world's best scientists and engineers at DOE/NNSA.

As the Under Secretary of Defense for Acquisition and Sustainment (USD(A&S)) and the Commander of U.S. Strategic Command (USSTRATCOM), we both play key roles in the nuclear deterrent mission. In the interest of brevity, we would like to frame our joint statement around three key points:

1. Despite actions by the United States to lead the world in reducing reliance on nuclear weapons, potential U.S. adversaries have gone in the other direction and placed greater emphasis on modernizing and expanding their nuclear weapons, delivery platforms, infrastructure, and command and control.
2. Although effective today, the U.S. nuclear deterrent remains dependent on aging weapons; delivery systems; infrastructure; and nuclear command, control, and communications (NC3) systems built during the Cold War.
3. DoD has embarked upon the first recapitalization of our triad since the end of the Cold War, and we cannot do it alone. The partnership between DoD and DOE/NNSA continues to thrive through the interagency Nuclear Weapons Council (NWC), and the NWC has made tremendous progress to align priorities, schedules, and investments between the Departments to ensure the future viability of our Nation's nuclear deterrent.

Today, we find ourselves fielding a smaller Cold War-era nuclear arsenal to deter a more diverse set of nuclear-armed potential adversaries. These potential adversaries are collectively fielding more modern, technologically sophisticated, and varied nuclear forces, and doing so at

an alarming rate. Strategic competition among existing nuclear powers has intensified, while challenges from newly established or aspiring nuclear weapons States continue to grow.

Our nuclear deterrent underwrites every U.S. military operation across the globe; it is the foundation and backstop of our national defense. It has kept the peace among the Great Powers of the world for over 70 years and has been strongly supported by each Administration and Congress regardless of political party. Furthermore, assuring allies and partners depends on their confidence in the credibility of our extended nuclear deterrence. We cannot overemphasize the immediate need to modernize our nuclear delivery systems and stockpile. To ensure the deterrent is credible in the face of future threats, we must also recapitalize NNSA's supporting infrastructure. Without consistent, methodical, and immediate investment in NNSA's nuclear enterprise, we will increase operational risk and degrade the Triad's flexibility to address future strategic uncertainty—thereby endangering our ability to meet the enduring national security objectives, shared by current and previous Administrations, which have underwritten the safety of our Nation for many decades.

The longstanding and repeated warnings about the need to modernize and recapitalize the U.S. nuclear deterrent are no longer warnings about the future. The tipping point in recapitalization, that we have long tried to avoid, is here. Previous and well-intentioned directive policy changes and de-emphasis of our nuclear deterrent resulted in decades of deferred investments in nuclear warheads, delivery systems, platforms, NC3, and supporting infrastructure. Although sustainment efforts have allowed us to maintain a viable nuclear Triad and to defer modernization investments for many years, continued delays are no longer an option. The mounting programmatic risks are now being realized and transferred to DoD as operational risk impacting strategic deterrence, and we believe the condition of the nuclear enterprise now poses possibly the greatest risk to deterrence.

Nearly all of the systems that compose the current nuclear deterrent are well beyond their original service lives and can no longer be cost-effectively life-extended to meet future requirements. DoD is addressing challenges with our aging NC3, delivery systems, and platforms. DOE/NNSA is facing similar challenges as the nuclear warheads in the stockpile continue to age and are being sustained well beyond their original service lives. Additionally, much of the DOE/NNSA nuclear weapons production infrastructure dates to the 1950s or earlier

and requires investment to provide a safe, secure working environment with the required capabilities and capacities; the majority of this infrastructure is rated as being in no better than fair condition. As a result, the community faces a situation where we must execute concurrent acquisition and fielding of modern replacement systems in each leg of the Triad while also investing in an updated nuclear weapons stockpile and supporting infrastructure.

As USD(A&S) and Commander, USSTRATCOM, we both serve on the NWC. The NWC is a joint DoD and DOE/NNSA coordinating body established by Congress to facilitate the alignment of requirements and to establish priorities as the two Departments fulfill their shared responsibility for providing the Nation's nuclear deterrent. The NWC's current structure and business processes are working well and enable senior-level attention and decisions on capabilities and capacities needed to maintain and modernize an effective nuclear weapons stockpile that meets the requirements of an increasingly challenging international security environment. The NWC regularly convenes to synchronize efforts between DoD and DOE/NNSA on the vision, strategy, and execution of the nuclear program aligned with the National Defense Strategy. The NWC also reviews costs and schedules for options related to the nuclear stockpile, driving DOE/NNSA and the Military Departments and Services to meet requirements in ways that are both cost-effective and timely. The NWC fully supports DOE/NNSA's efforts to establish a responsive and resilient nuclear security enterprise to meet U.S. deterrence and assurance needs. A responsive enterprise ensures DOE/NNSA can attract and retain a world-class workforce capable of responding to the dynamic and uncertain future we face.

Across both DoD and DOE/NNSA, the Administration is taking strong action to modernize our nuclear deterrent. The President's Fiscal Year (FY) 2021 Budget Request for DOE/NNSA fully supports the funding levels necessary to continue the critical modernization efforts needed to preserve our Nation's capability for deterring nuclear and non-nuclear attacks; assuring allies and partners; achieving U.S. objectives if deterrence fails; and hedging against an uncertain future. It also supports critical programs to ensure they remain synchronized across both Departments, and it puts us closer to ensuring the long-term flexibility and credibility of the U.S. nuclear deterrent. We recognize this is a 20-year nuclear modernization journey that we should have started 15 years ago.

The recent FY 2021 budget marks and policy language proposed by the House of Representatives Committee on Appropriations, should they be enacted in the final bills, would significantly jeopardize DOE/NNSA’s ability to meet DoD requirements, threaten the critical infrastructure and technical skills required to provide an effective and credible nuclear deterrent, and prevent the NWC from carrying out its statutory role to coordinate nuclear weapons activities between the two Departments. The NWC recently convened to review the appropriations marks that would affect the NWC’s entire Program of Record, including the ongoing B61-12 bomb, W88 warhead, and W80-4 warhead refurbishment efforts as well as the longer-term modernization programs. We strongly encourage Congress to authorize and appropriate the full budget request for DOE/NNSA and urge resolution of the policy language in a manner that enables the NWC to continue as an effective coordinating body for the Nation’s highest priority defense mission.

In closing, we thank this Committee for its longstanding, bipartisan support for our nuclear deterrent mission and for the men and women—both in and out of uniform—who are its backbone. We look forward to responding to your questions.