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Senate Armed Services Committee

STATEMENT OF  
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ARMED SERVICES  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON STRATEGIC FORCES

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Chairman Sessions, Ranking Member Donnelly, 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 week 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. 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 Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty and remains unwilling to join us in discussing further reductions in strategic nuclear weapons below the limits of the New START Treaty.

China continues its rise in the Asia-Pacific, where we continue our rebalance to maintain regional stability. China continues to introduce qualitative advances into its nuclear capabilities. North Korea—a threat to both us and our allies—just conducted its fourth nuclear test and conducted a space launch . As we work to counter Iran's malign influence against our friends and allies in the Middle East, we must also prevent Iran from reversing course on its commitments under the nuclear deal. Finally, denying terrorists access to nuclear weapons and weapon-usable materials is an absolute imperative in the ongoing fight to defeat terrorism.

### **Effective deterrence**

While his 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. The Department of Defense and the National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA) work closely together to maintain the safety and security of our nuclear forces at the lowest levels possible while still retaining a full set of options to respond to and address the potential threats we face. I will focus today on the third of these elements – ensuring 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.

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 a full 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 21<sup>st</sup> century security environment, without the need to mirror every potential adversary, system-for-system and yield-for-yield. Further, we believe we can meet current military requirements without developing new nuclear warheads or new military capabilities and we continue to manage our nuclear modernization consistent with those policy directives.

### **Deterring nuclear use in regional conflicts**

Deterring nuclear use in regional conflicts will remain one of those challenges for the foreseeable future. We must be able to deter not only large-scale nuclear attack, but also limited nuclear attack and deliberate nuclear escalation arising out of conventional regional conflict. I would like to touch on four important elements of a regional deterrence strategy aimed at minimizing the likelihood that an adversary will choose nuclear escalation. Together, these elements help convey that we won't let an adversary escalate its way to victory, split our alliances, achieve a favorable military situation, or coerce us out of protecting our vital interests.

First, we extend nuclear deterrence to certain allies. These formal security arrangements are both a representation of our commitment and, by explicitly putting U.S. credibility on the line, they are a means of strengthening that commitment in the minds of allies and potential adversaries.

Second, we are working to ensure an appropriate level of integration between nuclear and conventional planning and operations. This type of integration does not mean lowering the threshold for U.S. nuclear use, turning to nuclear weapons to further a conventional campaign, or increasing our reliance on nuclear weapons. Rather, integration means conventional operations must be planned and executed with deliberate thought as to how they shape the risk that the adversary will choose nuclear escalation. Similarly, nuclear planning needs to account for the possibility of ongoing U.S. and allied conventional operations. Integration also means strengthening the resiliency of conventional operations to nuclear attack. Conventional resiliency preserves Presidential flexibility in the face of limited nuclear use by providing the option of continuing the conventional fight even after the adversary chooses to escalate. We should not be in the position of forcing the President to choose between a nuclear-only response and a conventional-only response, allowing the adversary, not us, to dictate the means of the conflict. Finally, integration means being prepared to restore deterrence following adversary nuclear use, so that failure to deter first use does not translate into failure to deter subsequent nuclear use.

Third, effective 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. Russia's purported doctrine of nuclear escalation to deescalate a conventional conflict amounts to 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 have to be prepared if Russia creates a conflict and drives it across the nuclear threshold; we do not want to simply assume that once the nuclear threshold has been crossed that escalation cannot be limited. We are tasked with providing the President with credible options for responding to nuclear threats and nuclear aggression, including responding to limited nuclear use as noted, with nuclear and/or conventional means. 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.

Fourth, sustaining a diverse set of U.S. nuclear capabilities is essential for the role they play in regional deterrence and assurance. 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 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.

### **Sustainment and modernization program**

The Administration's nuclear sustainment and modernization plan is necessary for sustaining effective deterrence, and it is affordable if prioritized appropriately by the Department, the Congress, and the Nation. It is essential that Congress support the President's FY 2017 budget request and Future Years Defense Program (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.

Our systems have already been in use decades past their intended service lives. Delaying modernization and warhead life-extension would diminish the size and degrade the capabilities of our nuclear forces until they age out of service entirely. National security decisions and arms control agreements, rather than a failure to sustain and modernize, should determine the size and shape of our deterrent capabilities.

The FY 2017 budget request funds warhead life extension and 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 bomb Life-Extension Program (LEP), and development of a Long-Range Standoff missile (LRSO) to replace the aging

Air-Launched Cruise Missile (ALCM). The B61-12 and LRSO are necessary to sustain existing military capabilities, not to provide new ones.

The President's approach to nuclear sustainment and modernization is consistent with his nonproliferation and disarmament objectives. The FY 2017 budget request and FYDP support a program that sustains a safe, secure, and effective nuclear deterrent; reduces the numbers and types of weapons; retains leverage for future arms control agreements; and assures allies they don't need their own nuclear arsenals. The current nuclear stockpile is a dramatic departure from the Cold War, in terms of both numbers and types of weapons. The B61-12 LEP will go further by consolidating four existing bomb variants and allowing eventual retirement of the B83 strategic bomb, the last megaton-class weapon in the stockpile. We are retaining only those capabilities we need to sustain stable and effective deterrence.

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, and those ahead. Thank you again for the opportunity to testify. I look forward to your questions.