Opening Statement, Rep. Seth Moulton

FY24 Request for Nuclear Forces and Atomic Energy Defense Activities

28 March 2023

Thank you, Chairman Lamborn. And welcome to our panel of distinguished witnesses.

As we sit in this hearing room, Putin continues to threaten the use of nuclear weapons in Ukraine and is talking about moving nuclear weapons into Belarus. North Korea is likely readying for their next ballistic missile launch. IAEA inspectors are raising flags regarding Iran's ability to enrich uranium to the point of producing a nuclear weapon, and the Chinese Communist Party is conducting a nuclear expansion at a rate that aims to reach parity with the United States within a decade. The jurisdiction of this subcommittee remains one of the most consequential of any in Congress, and our nuclear forces are at the core of our national security, the bedrock, the foundation.

I believe humanity would be safer if we eliminated nuclear weapons. The sheer number of close calls with accidental launches we have had in the past seven decades should concern anyone who understands nuclear holocaust and a few shreds of statistical theory. I hope we never lose sight of what should be a shared goal of all nations, but until we get there, we know only two fundamental ways to prevent nuclear weapons from ever being used: The first is reducing the number we all have through arms control, and the second is instilling confidence in our adversaries that the weapons we have are safe, secure, reliable, and can be employed to devastating effect.

There is broad bipartisan support for the nuclear triad, and ensuring that our systems remain safe, secure, and reliable. In fact, it was Secretary Mattis who—

after publicly expressing concern regarding the land-leg—ordered a review of whether all three legs of the triad are still necessary, and the conclusion was yes. Our systems must check those three boxes—safe, secure, and reliable—to provide a credible deterrent as we face a dynamic this country has never previously confronted – two nuclear peer adversaries. This is an area in which the Chairman and I very much see eye to eye. This means making the significant investments across the Department of Defense and National Nuclear Security Administration, the NNSA, to produce new platforms, such as the B-21 and Columbia-class SSBNs; modernized delivery systems, such as the Sentinel ICBM, Long-Range Stand-off weapon and the next Trident D5 life extension variant; and updating aging NNSA infrastructure across the National Labs and production facilities so that they can deliver nuclear warheads on-time and on-schedule to the Services.

The Chairman and I also firmly agree that a strong U.S. nuclear deterrent is at the core of strategic stability in today's world. This is true not just with our adversaries, but because of the umbrella it provides to our allies and partners as well. Amidst Putin's nuclear saber-rattling over Ukraine, U.S. contributions to the NATO alliance have proven to be a stabilizing force. With regards to the INDOPACOM region, President Biden has been crystal clear – the U.S. has an "ironclad and unwavering commitment to draw on the full range of its military capabilities, including nuclear…to provide extended deterrence for the Republic of Korea" in the face of an increasingly antagonistic Pyongyang. Without a reliable U.S. nuclear deterrent to counterbalance our adversaries, the potential of proliferation to our allies is a real concern that we should take just as seriously as what Russia and the CCP are doing.

While our adversaries are making significant qualitative and quantitative improvements to their nuclear forces, U.S. programs—whether at NNSA or across

the DoD—continue to face schedule delays and cost overruns. Just last week, I read that Sentinel, which is planned to deliver "just in time" to replace the aging Minuteman III ICBMs, could be up to two years delayed. I am certain any schedule shift will also be met with a corresponding price tag to the already staggering $96B program. Meanwhile, at NNSA, the Uranium Processing Facility (UPF) is $2B over cost and is similarly delayed up to 2 years. And NNSA's plans to produce plutonium pits at the rate DoD requires have been delayed again, by years, until the mid-to-late 2030s—and we won't know how much it will realistically cost until 2025.

We also made public a few weeks ago that the CCP has surpassed the U.S in their quantity of ICBM launchers and is exceeding its own nuclear modernization plans with a path to get to 1,500 warheads by 2035. In the 2018 Chinese Military Power Report, DIA assessed that the purpose of their nuclear forces was to maintain a limited, but survivable, second-strike capability, consistent with their purported "no first use" policy. There was no mention by the intelligence community just 5 years ago about the potential expansion of their nuclear arsenal, yet in 2021 they released that they would more than double their stockpile by 2027. In other words, while U.S. programs are several years behind, the Chinese are now several years ahead.

This is unacceptable. And we don't know yet what a Moscow-Beijing alliance might portend for all of this. While Russia is sabotaging the last real example of verifiable arms control, we have yet to see a clear strategy for engaging the CCP in arms control discussions.

I hope today's witnesses can help this subcommittee better understand what is being done on both policy and acquisition to ensure that U.S. nuclear forces continue to keep us safe.