

Opening Statement, Rep. Seth Moulton

FY24 Strategic Posture Hearing Opening Statement

8 March 2023

Thank you, Chairman Lamborn, and congratulations on your appointment as chairman of this subcommittee. I know you believe, as I do, that the issues this committee tackles are at the very core of our security as a nation. Therefore, it is important that we work together in a bi-partisan fashion to address the critical issues before us. I already know there is much that we agree on, and I hope that through open and transparent dialogue and debate, we can expand that area of agreement as we both learn more about these important and fascinating issues.

I would also like to welcome General Cotton, as this is your first Strategic Forces hearing. I am encouraged by our discussion last week, and your leadership is critical given the growing global strategic threat to the United States. I appreciate your view that strategic deterrence is much broader than nuclear weapons, as the world and the threats we face as a nation have evolved significantly since our nuclear triad was first established. I look forward to learning more about how you understand and apply integrated deterrence across multiple domains as you take command of STRATCOM. And as we welcome you, I also want to acknowledge that this will be General VanHerck's last strategic forces posture hearing. Thank you, sir, for your 36 years of dedicated service to our nation, and the past three years at the head of Northern Command. During that time you have shown great leadership across a range of critical issues, from welcoming our Afghan refugees, responding to the COVID-19 pandemic, and highlighting the need for better situational awareness over the Continental United

States—which, as we saw very clearly last month, is not just a hypothetical or a future need.

Thank you to all of our witnesses for being here, and for helping us begin the important work of writing the Fiscal Year 2024 National Defense Authorization Act.

As we sit in this hearing, Russia continues to wage an unconscionable war against Ukraine, using veiled threats of nuclear weapons—not to keep the peace between superpowers, but offensively—to try to turn around its losing war. Meanwhile, China is launching satellites that have dual-use capability, putting U.S. systems at risk. North Korea has been consistently launching ballistic missiles that can reach the United States. And just last week, the U.N. International Atomic Energy Agency reported they had found Uranium particles enriched to near bomb-grade purity at an Iranian nuclear facility. The mission of this subcommittee is growing in scope, importance, and urgency.

Our witnesses do not oversee development of weapons systems, but they are responsible for current operations, and are given the challenging task of predicting what the Department of Defense will need in the future to maintain strategic deterrence across all domains: air, land, sea, space, and cyber. While we are clear-eyed about the advancements our competitors are making in various weapons systems, we must also reflect on how our decisions, actions, and statements are understood by those competitors, to avoid starting or escalating an arms race, or worse, a miscalculation that could have catastrophic effects. Ultimately we should have two shared goals: ensuring our strategic advantage and credible deterrence over our adversaries; and reducing the number of weapons and chances of warfare on all sides.

I am encouraged that the Biden Administration is taking a more balanced approach to strategic deterrence, while maintaining and modernizing the triad and focusing on the real strength of the United States, its partners and allies. Dr. Plumb, I am heartened to hear you say clearly that “the Department will protect and defend U.S. space capabilities, along with those of our allies, partners, and the commercial sector when directed to do so.” And I welcome this administration’s real investments in domain awareness for NORAD with the modernization of the over-the-horizon radars along the existing Northern Warning System architecture. But, there remains much work to be done in the jurisdiction of this subcommittee, and the strategic posture of the U.S. must remain a top priority across both the Administration and Congress. I look forward to conducting that work together over the next Congress.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.