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before the
House Armed Services Committee Strategic Forces Subcommittee (HASC-SF)
on Fiscal Year 2024 Nuclear Forces and Atomic Energy Defense Activities
March 28, 2023

Introduction

Chairman Lamborn, Ranking Member Moulton, and distinguished members of the Committee: Thank you for inviting me to testify before you on the President’s Fiscal Year 2024 (FY2024) Budget Request for U.S. nuclear weapon and warhead modernization and sustainment plans. I am honored to appear alongside Under Secretary Hruby, Assistant Secretary Rosenblum, General Bussiere, and Vice Admiral Wolfe.

Today’s security environment is characterized by intensifying strategic competition, aggressive behavior by strategic and regional competitors, rapidly evolving domains of conflict, shifting geopolitical alignments, and a growing risk of military confrontation. Our competitors are investing heavily in nuclear weapons that can threaten U.S. forces and territory and our Allies and partners while eroding long-standing norms of responsible behavior for nuclear-armed states. Russia’s recent purported suspension of its participation in the New START Treaty is the latest example of a pattern of irresponsible behavior that began even prior to its ongoing, brutal aggression against Ukraine. Beijing, meanwhile, is reducing transparency in its nuclear program at the same time as the PRC is developing new facilities that can produce fuel for weapons to support their rapid nuclear expansion.

Earlier this month, President Biden released his FY2024 Budget Request. As noted by Deputy Secretary of Defense Hicks, this is “the most strategy-aligned budget in history.” The President’s Budget request fully funds implementation of the 2022 Nuclear Posture Review, requesting \$37.7 billion to recapitalize, sustain, and operate the Department of Defense nuclear enterprise. This includes full funding for modernization of the nuclear triad, including the Sentinel intercontinental ballistic missile system, the Columbia-class nuclear-powered ballistic missile submarine (SSBN), the B-21 bomber, modernization of the aging B-52 bomber, the Long-Range Standoff (LRSO) cruise missile, and life extension programs for the Trident II (D5)

submarine-launched ballistic missile. The President's Budget request also fully funds our nuclear security infrastructure and nuclear command, control, and communications (NC3) architecture. The President's FY24 request of \$37.7 billion is \$3 billion more than the FY 2023 request. Sustained Congressional support for this monumental, generational effort is critical to ensuring that the United States will maintain a safe, secure, and effective nuclear deterrent and strong and credible extended deterrence.

Security Environment

The risk of confrontation with or among nuclear powers is a defining fixture of the challenging security environment in which we operate today. The PRC is engaged in a significant and fast-paced expansion, modernization, and diversification of its nuclear forces, which has resulted in the establishment of a nascent nuclear triad. If the PRC continues the current pace of its nuclear force expansion, it could field an arsenal of about 1,500 nuclear warheads by 2035. The PRC's intercontinental-range forces are complemented by several theater-range road-mobile ballistic missile systems, and it is developing advanced delivery systems, such as a strategic hypersonic glide vehicle and a fractional orbital bombardment system (FOBS) that are capable of delivering nuclear payloads. The PRC is also taking steps that suggest it intends to increase the peacetime readiness of its forces by moving to a launch-on-warning posture. While the end state of the PRC's nuclear force expansion remains uncertain, the trajectory of these efforts points to a large, diverse nuclear arsenal with a high degree of survivability, reliability, and effectiveness, encased in an opaque posture. This could provide the PRC with new options before and during a crisis or conflict to leverage nuclear weapons for coercive purposes, including military provocations against U.S. Allies and partners in the region.

The scope and pace of the PRC's nuclear expansion, as well as its lack of transparency and growing military assertiveness, raise questions regarding its intentions, nuclear strategy and doctrine, and perceptions of strategic stability. This underscores the need for discussions on practical steps to reduce nuclear risks, including steps that could lay the groundwork for additional discussion of mutual restraints in capabilities and behavior. Despite this need, the PRC has steadily reduced transparency in its nuclear program over time and rejected bilateral engagement with the United States to include arms control. The PRC's development of new

nuclear material production and reprocessing facilities—including with Russian assistance in supplying nuclear fuel for a plutonium-generating breeder reactor—is particularly troubling because these facilities could support nuclear warhead production. The United States is already entering a security environment in which it faces, for the first time, two major nuclear powers as strategic competitors and potential adversaries. As China continues to expand and diversify its nuclear arsenal, this will create new stresses on stability and new challenges for deterrence, assurance, arms control, and risk reduction.

Russia, meanwhile, continues to emphasize nuclear weapons in its strategy while modernizing and expanding its nuclear forces. Russia has engaged in irresponsible and troubling nuclear saber-rattling throughout its unprovoked and indefensible invasion of Ukraine. Russia is steadily expanding and diversifying nuclear systems that pose a direct threat to NATO and neighboring countries. In addition to New START Treaty-accountable systems, Russia maintains a large stockpile of warheads that are not treaty-limited. It continues to pursue several novel nuclear-capable systems designed to hold the U.S. homeland or Allies and partners at risk. Some of these systems are also not accountable under the New START Treaty.

Russia's recent claimed "suspension" of the New START Treaty is legally invalid and the latest example of its irresponsible nuclear behavior. Mutual compliance with the New START Treaty strengthens the security of the United States, our Allies and partners, Russia, and the world. Russia's claimed "suspension" of the New START Treaty will not stop the United States from continuing to fully support Ukraine, and it will not dissuade the United States from continuing to uphold its commitments to its Allies and partners. At present, the United States continues to fully implement the treaty, including the New START Treaty's numerical limits. We will continue to monitor and examine what impact Russia's purported suspension and any other Russian actions will have on U.S. national security.

North Korea, also known as the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK), presents significant and growing deterrence dilemmas for the United States and its allies and partners. The ongoing expansion, diversification, and improvement of the DPRK's nuclear and ballistic missile capabilities presents a growing danger to the U.S. homeland and the Indo-Pacific. A crisis or conflict on the Korean Peninsula could involve multiple nuclear powers, raising the risk of a broader conflict. The DPRK continues to improve, expand, and diversify its

conventional and nuclear missile capabilities, posing an increasing risk to the U.S. homeland and to U.S. forces, allies, and partners in theater. The DPRK recently displayed new, larger intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs) during a military parade, conducted ICBM tests in February and March of this year, and conducted a variety of missile tests over the last year, including what it claims are hypersonic missiles.

U.S. Nuclear Strategy and Posture

The President's FY2024 Budget fully implements the 2022 Nuclear Posture Review (NPR), which was nested within the National Defense Strategy (NDS). The NPR reaffirmed the need to maintain a safe, secure, and effective nuclear deterrent, as well as a strong and credible extended deterrent, while also recognizing our continued obligation to identify practical steps to reduce the role of nuclear weapons in our strategy and, by extension, the risk of nuclear war globally.

The Department is acting along several lines of effort consistent with key findings of the NPR, which are reflected in the President's Budget request. In addition to the full-scope modernization of the nuclear triad, the Department is refining its approach to the challenge of facing two major nuclear powers; examining ways across all domains to address hard and deeply buried targets; strengthening extended deterrence; and exploring arms control and risk reduction initiatives where possible.

Recapitalization of U.S. nuclear forces, the U.S. nuclear security enterprise, and U.S. nuclear command, control, and communications (NC3) supports the objectives of U.S. nuclear strategy and policy as outlined in the NPR. These include ensuring that U.S. nuclear weapons can fulfill their fundamental role, which is to deter nuclear attack on the United States, our Allies, and partners. The United States would only consider the use of nuclear weapons in extreme circumstances to defend the vital interests of the United States or its Allies and partners. The modernization of U.S. nuclear forces is critical to ensuring that they are able to deter nuclear employment of any scale directed against the U.S. homeland or the territory of Allies and partners, whether on the ground, in the air, at sea, or in space.

The NPR also recognized that the United States must retain the capability to deter both large-scale and limited nuclear attacks. The capability to deter limited nuclear attacks is critical given that some competitors have developed strategies for warfare that may rely on the threat or actual employment of nuclear weapons to terminate a conflict on advantageous terms. Some allies and partners are also particularly vulnerable to attacks with non-nuclear means that could produce devastating effects. Although the fundamental role of U.S. nuclear weapons is to deter nuclear attack, the NPR recognized that nuclear weapons also contribute to deterrence of all forms of strategic attack; assurance of Allies and partners; and the ability to achieve Presidential objectives if deterrence fails. Meeting these objectives requires that we invest in a safe, secure, and effective arsenal through continued support for the nuclear modernization program of record.

In the course of implementing the NPR, the Department is refining its approach to the challenge posed by the PRC's nuclear weapons modernization and expansion, which presents the United States with the unprecedented challenge of having to deter two major nuclear powers simultaneously. We are confident that currently deployed U.S. nuclear forces are sufficient to deter and, if necessary, respond to any threats we face today and in the coming years. The United States does not need to maintain numerical parity with both nuclear powers combined to achieve its deterrence and other objectives. Nevertheless, we continuously evaluate the security environment and recognize that it may become necessary to consider strategy and force adjustments in the future.

The NDS anchors our integrated deterrence strategy in our Allies and partners, recognizing that close collaboration with Allies and partners is foundational to U.S. national security interests and for our ability to address challenges from the PRC and Russia. Extended deterrence is key to this approach. Allies and partners can be confident that the United States is willing and able to deter the range of strategic threats they face whether in crisis or conflict. The Department is pursuing new ways to enhance our extended deterrence commitments, including by fielding flexible nuclear and non-nuclear forces suited to deterring regional nuclear conflict, identifying pragmatic steps to strengthen deterrence consultations, and exploring opportunities for multilateral dialogue, exercises, and other activities. In turn, modernizing the U.S. nuclear triad is a fundamental element of U.S. extended deterrence commitments. Only if the United States can deter strategic attack against the Homeland can Allies and partners be confident that U.S. regional extended deterrence commitments are credible.

But deterrence alone will not reduce nuclear dangers. The United States supports a comprehensive and balanced approach that places a renewed emphasis on arms control, nonproliferation and risk reduction to strengthen stability, heads off costly arms races, and signals our desire to reduce the salience of nuclear weapons globally. We pursue these goals with a full understanding that progress requires willing partners prepared to engage responsibly and on the basis of reciprocity. The Department is committed to seeking mutual and verifiable nuclear arms control and non-proliferation measures when they can increase our national security interests.

Nuclear Force Posture and the President's Budget

As Secretary Austin recently observed, the United States is on the verge of a new phase—one in which we face two major nuclear powers as strategic competitors for the first time. This is, in Secretary Austin's words, "a challenging and dangerous moment." Nuclear forces are critical to meeting all four of the Department's defense priorities outlined in the NDS: defending the homeland; deterring strategic attack; deterring aggression, while being prepared to prevail in conflict when necessary; and building a resilient Joint Force. We are moving with a sense of urgency to modernize our capabilities to ensure a safe, secure, and effective nuclear deterrent and strong and credible extended deterrence. At the same time, risks to our deterrent from programmatic, geopolitical, technological, and operational challenges are increasing every day, especially with regard to the near-simultaneous modernization of our ground-, sea-, and air-legs of the triad. Sustained and consistent congressional support is essential to continue the modernization of the ground-, sea-, and air-based legs of the nuclear triad on schedule.

The President's FY24 Budget Request invests \$37.7 billion in the Nuclear Enterprise recapitalization as well as sustainment and operations. This request reflects full funding for recapitalization of all three legs of the nuclear triad and includes in excess of \$5.6 billion for the modernization of NC3 systems.

Ground Leg

The FY24 budget request includes \$4.3 billion for the LGM-35A Sentinel ICBM weapons system, formerly known as the Ground-based Strategic Deterrent. The Sentinel

weapons system will replace the entire force of Minuteman III missiles, which is aging out and has been life-extended multiple times since its initial deployment in 1970—well past its original 10-year design life. Sentinel features increased capability, enhanced security, improved reliability, and lower lifecycle sustainment costs compared to the Minuteman III. This will ensure Sentinel has the adaptability and flexibility to address a changing threat environment, contribute to the credibility of the overall nuclear triad, and ensure the safety, security, and effectiveness of the U.S. deterrent through the 2070s. Sentinel is currently in the Engineering and Manufacturing Development phase. The FY2024 request of \$4.3 billion supports ongoing developmental activities as well as long-lead procurement for key components. The President’s Budget also requests funds for the National Nuclear Security Administration’s (NNSA) development of the W87-1 warhead, which will eventually deploy on Sentinel.

Sea Leg

The FY2024 budget requests \$6.2 billion for the *Columbia*-class nuclear-powered ballistic missile submarine (SSBN), which will replace the current fleet of *Ohio*-class SSBNs as the most survivable leg of the nuclear triad. *Columbia* is a top acquisition priority for the Department and will ensure the effectiveness and availability of the sea-leg of the triad through the 2080s. The FY24 request includes roughly \$5.8 billion for procurement of the second *Columbia*-class boat (SSBN 827) and advance procurement for future boats. In addition, the FY24 budget requests \$456.6 million for Trident II (D5) submarine-launched ballistic missile (SLBM) life extension. Funding for the D5 Life Extension 2 (D5LE2) is necessary now to extend the life of the Trident II through the 2080s. D5 Life Extension 2 also supports the Department’s priorities with respect to supporting our United Kingdom allies because life-extended Trident II missiles will initially equip the UK’s next SSBN under the auspices of the Polaris Sales Agreement. The President’s Budget request also includes \$516 million in Defense Department and Energy Department funding to support the Navy’s development of the W93/Mk7 reentry system and the NNSA’s development of the W93 warhead and re-entry body. Together the W93/Mk7 will support the UK’s separate but parallel warhead modernization efforts.

Air Leg

The President’s Budget request includes \$5.3 billion for the B-21 RAIDER bomber and \$978.2 million for the Long-Range Standoff cruise missile (LRSO), which will be equipped with

NNSA's W80-4 warhead. The President's Budget also supports modernization of the B-52 bomber. All three programs will ensure the continued credibility of the air-leg of the triad and provide the President with flexible options to deter and respond to strategic attacks. The B-21 will be a key component of the United States' conventional and nuclear capable deep-strike capabilities, providing a visible and flexible deterrent capability that can also penetrate and survive highly contested threat environments around the world. The FY24 Budget Request for the B-21 includes \$2.3 billion for procurement, allowing the program to transition to low-rate initial production. The LRSO is needed to replace the Air Launched Cruise Missile (ALCM), which entered service in 1982 and is well past its original 10-year service life. The LRSO is necessary to maintain the viability of the B-52H fleet, providing the President with visible, flexible, and credible airborne deterrent options. The LRSO will also eventually be deliverable by the B-21. These investments in the modernization of dual-capable F-35 aircraft and B61 gravity bombs are critical to ensuring that the United States can contribute to the security of its NATO allies with modernized nuclear deterrent capabilities.

Nuclear Security Enterprise

As part of its commitment to a safe, secure, and effective nuclear deterrent and strong and credible extended deterrence, the Department recognizes the importance of a resilient and adaptive nuclear security enterprise, one equipped with modern infrastructure enabled by a world-class workforce equipped with modern tools. The Department strongly supports NNSA's development of a balanced, flexible stockpile capable of pacing threats, responding to uncertainty, and maintaining effectiveness. We must re-establish, repair, and modernize our production infrastructure, and ensure it has the appropriate capabilities and sufficient capacity to build and maintain modern nuclear weapons in a timely manner. The nuclear security enterprise must be able to respond in a timely way to threat developments and technology opportunities, maintain effectiveness over time, and at all times ensure that the enterprise can achieve Presidential guidance. Congressional support to the NNSA and its complex of labs, plants, and sites is essential to meeting these objectives. The Department will continue to advocate for investments in DOE/NNSA that will sustain a safe, secure, reliable, and effective nuclear

stockpile that can be certified without nuclear explosive testing and will be responsive to a changing threat environment.

Conclusion

The National Defense Strategy and the Nuclear Posture Review articulated a clear need to sustain robust deterrence across domains. Our nuclear forces, NC3, and production infrastructure are essential to meeting this objective. While there should be no doubt that the current nuclear triad provides a safe, secure, effective, and credible deterrent even amid the stresses of today's security environment, it remains essential that we maintain focus on sustaining and modernizing our deterrent capabilities. It is my honor to partner with the members on this panel to rise to the challenges we face. Thank you for your support to the Department and the President's FY24 Budget Request.