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U.S. House of Representatives

Washington, DC 20515-6035

ONE HUNDRED SEVENTEENTH CONGRESS

August 9, 2021

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President Joseph R. Biden, Jr.
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Mr. President,

As your Administration begins its nuclear posture review, rightfully in the context of the overall national defense and national security strategies, I urge you to consider a series of vital issues related to the modernization of our nuclear deterrent, the infrastructure of the National Nuclear Security Administration, and the nuclear command, control, and communications enterprise. This requires the close attention of you and your national security leadership to ensure the nuclear deterrent is safe, secure, reliable, *affordable*, and is balanced across the full spectrum of integrated deterrence. I urge you to ensure this review directly influences your next budget request, in line with your Interim National Security Strategy, which notes the importance of taking steps to reduce the role of nuclear weapons in our national security strategy.

While the cost of our nuclear modernization program has long concerned me, I have been equally concerned with the previous Administration's complete lack of serious engagement with potential nuclear armed adversaries to pursue arms control and reduce nuclear proliferation and the likelihood of nuclear war, whether it be intentional or through misunderstanding or miscalculation. I am grateful that you have resumed discussions with Russia, our only true nuclear peer, and begun to make progress by jointly declaring that "a nuclear war cannot be won and must never be fought." This lays a strong foundation for your Administration to seek further verifiable arms control agreements beyond the New START Treaty with Russia through a Strategic Stability Dialogue that aims to reduce nuclear threats to the United States and its allies. At the same time, your Administration should use this review process to seek a tangible path forward in opening a more robust dialogue with China on its nuclear forces, doctrine, and intentions.

With regard to our own nuclear enterprise, the affordability and executability of our modernization program is central to the viability of our nuclear deterrent. We currently possess, and must continue to have, a strong nuclear deterrent. However, I urge you to take a hard look at whether every ongoing and planned effort is necessary. This includes considering whether its requirement is being driven to dominate our adversaries, or if it is instead focused to provide a credible and reliable deterrent – those statements are not synonymous and often are confused as such. In particular, across the Navy and Air Force programs, we are advancing not only an unprecedented number of new weapons under development, but also maintaining costly systems, such as the B-83 gravity bomb, that have questionable operational relevance in today's

environment. When asked about the requirements for all of these systems, the Department of Defense quickly points to Russian and Chinese investment in nuclear weapons, which I fear leads us down the path to a newly invigorated and very dangerous arms race.

In addition to the Department of Defense modernization efforts, the National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA) has had an increasing number of requirements levied upon it, not only by DoD, but also Congress. In nearly every instance, NNSA programs have seen massive cost increases, schedule delays, and cancellations of billion-dollar programs. This must end. Your review should ensure both the Secretaries of Defense and Energy personally recommit to rigorous—and additional—oversight of the entire enterprise, and not just with that which they respectively are charged. As we near the budgetary heights of the “nuclear modernization mountain” we can ill afford further delays and cost overruns.

Additionally, your NPR should take a hard look at our nuclear command and control system and efforts to modernize it. Given the evolving cybersecurity and information warfare threats, we must ensure that our systems are secure and protected against accidental or inadvertent launch. Your Administration should consider conducting a “fail-safe and risk reduction review.” Such reviews have yielded important insights, recommendations, and changes for policymakers in the past.

The last decade has taught us, painfully, that we cannot afford to continue adding new requirements, capabilities, and platforms, and expect that they will be delivered on time and within budget while we also modernize the infrastructure necessary to produce and sustain such capabilities. It is simply acknowledging reality that we must make hard choices. In this vein, I urge you to consider the following actions as part of the review:

- Task the Secretary of Defense and the Commander of Strategic Command to provide you specific, credible, and realistic options to reduce the requirements that drive the size and diversity of the U.S. arsenal.
- Task the Secretary of Energy to provide specific, credible, and realistic options for reducing cost and ensuring success of the modernization program of the National Nuclear Security Administration.
- Conduct a bottom-up review of our nuclear employment strategy, to include weapon system and warhead configuration requirements, to deter increasingly capable adversaries without exacerbating existing arms race pressures.
- Review the plan for plutonium pit production and ensure it is both necessary and achievable within the announced cost and schedule.
- Consider reducing the circumstances under which you will use or threaten the use of nuclear weapons, including a “No-First-Use” policy.
- Review the size and/or necessity of the land-based leg of the triad and independently validate the Air Force’s cost estimates regarding the cost of the Ground Based Strategic Deterrent.
- Review the relationship of ongoing advanced, long-range conventional weapons systems to our strategic deterrent, including whether such capabilities might obviate the need for nuclear weapons in specific circumstances.

- In the context of a framework for dialogue with Russia and China, and through the Administration's concurrent Missile Defense Review, ensure that missile defense is considered as a component of that framework with respect to potential future arms control discussions and agreements.
- Consider including the State Department as an observer to the Nuclear Weapons Council, to ensure arms control policy is linked to posture planning.

Beginning in the early days of your Administration, with the extension of the New START Treaty, you have demonstrated a willingness to pursue smart policies that make the United States and its allies safer and more secure. I encourage continued dialogue with Congress as you complete the NPR and look forward to working with you and your Administration on this important issue.

Sincerely,



Adam Smith
Chairman

House Armed Services Committee

Cc;
Lloyd J. Austin III, Secretary of Defense
Jennifer M. Granholm, Secretary of Energy