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THE SENATE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE SUBCOMMITTEE ON STRATEGIC FORCES

STATEMENT OF

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BEFORE THE

SENATE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE SUBCOMMITTEE ON STRATEGIC FORCES

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Chairman Fischer, Ranking Member Donnelly, and distinguished members of the subcommittee, I am honored to join you today to offer my personal perspective on the global nuclear weapons environment. The views I express today are mine and do not represent the Department of Defense, United States Strategic Command, or the United States Air Force.

As I begin I want to thank you for the support you provided to me and the people I was privileged to command while I served at Air Force Space Command and United States Strategic Command, and for your continued focus on these important matters.

21st Century Security Environment

We live in highly uncertain and complex times and I continue to believe that a robust strategic deterrent composed of missile defenses, leading-edge conventional and non-kinetic capabilities, modern nuclear forces, assured command and control, effective intelligence collection and support, and highly trained and well-led people will be needed to underwrite US national security and to assure the security of our allies and partners for as far into the future as I can see.

Threats to our security and the security of our allies are diverse, can arrive at our doorsteps quickly, and can range from small arms in the hands of terrorists to nuclear weapons in the hands of hostile state leaders. Yesterday's regional battlefield is becoming tomorrow's global battle-space where conflicts may begin in cyberspace and quickly extend to space...most likely before traditional air, land, and sea forces are engaged. Adversaries are acquiring technologies and exploiting the interconnected nature of our world to quickly transit political,

geographic, and physical boundaries. The possible intersection of violent extremism and weapons of mass destruction remains a significant concern that requires constant vigilance.

State and non-state actors alike stress our intelligence capabilities and contingency plans by employing highly adaptive, hybrid combinations of strategies, tactics, and capabilities and by using the speed of information to further their cause and mask their activities behind a veil of deception and ambiguity. New capabilities like cyber weapons and unmanned vehicles are emerging and familiar weapons like ballistic missiles and advanced conventional capabilities are more available, affordable, and lethal.

Current events remind us that we must continue to pursue and destroy violent extremists and their networks while remaining constantly on guard to prevent and respond to attacks from them. Beyond violent extremists, state adversaries are seeking to change the strategic situation in their favor by threatening the US and allied homelands below the nuclear threshold with attack by long-range conventional and cyber weapons, while preserving the capability to escalate to nuclear weapons with a variety of options from limited to major attacks.

This type of “integrated” strategic threat is completely different from the Cold War when strategic attack was synonymous with nuclear attack. When used in concert with capabilities designed to degrade our key operational enablers (e.g., space-based ISR and communications) and negate our conventional power projection capabilities, state adversaries believe a credible threat to escalate a conflict to the strategic level against the US homeland and the homelands of our allies will raise the risks and costs of US intervention to unacceptable

levels, force the US to the sidelines, fracture our alliances, and thereby enable more assertive foreign policies and aggressive actions. Nuclear weapons underwrite their approach.

Even discounting for hyperbole, recent public reports validate what I saw while on active duty. Violent extremists continue to evolve and present an active threat. Russia and China are both upgrading their significant long-range conventional strike capabilities and exercise them routinely; both are active in cyberspace; both are deploying the means to threaten our national security space assets; both are improving their anti-access/area denial capabilities to challenge our forward-deployed and power projection forces; and both can quickly inflict enormous casualties and damage on the US and our allies with nuclear forces that they are modernizing. Although I believe the likelihood of a massive surprise nuclear attack is low today (and still must be deterred), I am troubled by statements from Russia and elsewhere that describe the possible limited use of nuclear weapons in regional conflicts.

Beyond Russia and China, North Korea routinely threatens its regional neighbors, US territory, and US forward forces with conventional and nuclear attack and is aggressively working to deploy its weapons on intercontinental-class missiles to threaten the US directly. India and Pakistan raise the potential of nuclear use in their disputes. Active conflict and unrest continue elsewhere.

In my view, we cannot deal with any of today's adversaries in a "one size fits all" manner. Deterring dangerous actors with widely different motivations, objectives, and capabilities requires us to carefully tailor our strategies, plans and capabilities. Deterrence strategies that are the preferred ways to counter a nation-state will likely not be effective

against violent extremists where direct action is often the only recourse. Nuclear weapons may not be the most credible deterrence tool in some scenarios where they were once the preferred (sometimes the only) option. Therefore, we must match our strategies, plans, and capabilities to individual actors and deploy a range of conventional, non-kinetic, and nuclear capabilities that can either deter (always the preferred outcome) or, if necessary, defeat them in multiple scenarios. Similarly, we must also synchronize our extended deterrence strategies and plans with the unique needs of our allies and partners.

The Enduring Role of US Nuclear Weapons

A long-held view of deterrence theory suggests that deterrence exists when an adversary believes they cannot achieve their objectives, will suffer unacceptable consequences if they try, or both. It is based on an adversary's understanding of the capability and resolve of their potential enemy. Ultimately, deterrence is about human beings, what they value, and what they believe.

The end of the Cold War allowed the US to reduce the role and prominence of nuclear weapons in our defense planning and to dramatically reduce both the number of deployed weapons and the overall size of our stockpile. As several of my predecessors at United States Strategic Command and I recently stated: "Today's nuclear triad is far smaller and postured much less aggressively than its Cold War ancestor. Shaped by presidential initiatives and arms reduction agreements, by 2018 the number of weapons deployed on triad systems will be barely one-tenth of Cold War highs. Heavy bombers and supporting tankers are no longer loaded and poised to take off with nuclear weapons, and ballistic missiles are aimed at open

areas of the ocean. Theater nuclear forces have been reduced to a small number of dual-capable aircraft supporting the NATO alliance.”ⁱ In addition, policymakers have refined the US position on the potential use of nuclear weapons (extreme circumstances where vital national interests are at stake) and have restated the US commitment to the negative security guarantee contained in the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.

Nevertheless, nuclear weapons continue to play a critical role in our security strategy and the strategies of our key allies and partners as the ultimate guarantor of national survival. While no longer needed to deter a conventional attack from the massed armored formations of the now extinct Warsaw Pact, nuclear weapons continue to prevent both the coercive and actual use of these weapons against us (their primary objective), constrain the scope and scale of conflict, obviate the need for additional allies and partners to acquire their own, and compel potential adversary leaders to consider the implications of their actions before they act. Highly precise conventional weapons, non-kinetic capabilities, and defenses all play an increased deterrent role today; but I believe history shows that conventional weapons have never had the same overall deterrent effect as nuclear weapons and, therefore, cannot serve as a large-scale replacement. The ultimate paradox of the nuclear age is still with us—to prevent their use, we must remain credibly prepared to use them.

Going Forward

The Cold War has been over for more than 25 years and as tempting as it is to look backward to that time as the basis for today’s solutions (especially those involving nuclear weapons), we must recognize that little in today’s world is the same. I am concerned when I

hear the words *new cold war* used to describe either the current situation or a suggestion of our response to it. While many of the concepts sound the same, how we understand our adversaries and develop approaches to deter them must be based on a clear-eyed assessment of them and the realities of the 21st Century; not the mid-point of the 20th Century. Nuclear weapons remain foundational to our security, but nuclear weapons are only one of many important instruments that must be carefully orchestrated for maximum deterrent credibility and effect today.

US nuclear strategy and policy have been remarkably consistent over the decades. Changes have been evolutionary and not revolutionary and, thus, I believe the US and Russia have been able to establish a pathway that has dramatically reduced the nuclear threat while maintaining stability and deterrence credibility. Arms reduction and other efforts have verifiably reduced the stockpiles while promoting mutual visibility and understanding. Nuclear policy and employment strategy have been revised to meet today's deterrence needs, including the full consideration of conventional and non-kinetic strike capabilities in plans and options. But nuclear weapons are not gone from world affairs and are not likely to be gone anytime soon. The US is at a critical juncture regarding the future of our nuclear deterrent and, as numerous studies and reports have shown, we are out of margin.

The time to act has arrived. Again, as my colleagues and I recently said: "The last concentrated investment to modernize the triad came during the Reagan administration. We continue to rely on that era's Ohio-class ballistic missile submarines (SSBNs), missiles, and B-2 bombers today as well as B-52s, Minuteman ICBMs, Air Launched Cruise Missiles (ALCMs), and command and control systems that were designed and fielded far earlier. Even with periodic

upgrades and life extensions, legacy systems that were conceived and deployed over three decades ago are reaching the inevitable end of their service lives.”ⁱⁱ

A bipartisan consensus to modernize the triad, dual-capable aircraft, the nuclear weapons industrial complex, and the nuclear command/control/communications system has been carefully built between the Department of Defense and Congress. I fully support the triad and the nuclear modernization proposals that have been described in recent budgets, and hope the upcoming Nuclear Posture Review validates these plans and restates the sense of urgency needed to carry them out.

The modernization plans that are before you address the significant issues that exist in the nuclear enterprise. Weapon life extension programs will ensure the deployed force remains safe, secure, and effective. Modernizing the unique and highly specialized nuclear weapon industrial complex will sustain the deployed force and, with adoption of the 3+2 strategy, will allow us to further reduce the stockpile while retaining the critical capabilities and skills needed to respond to an uncertain future. Revitalizing the triad and dual-capable aircraft will continue to present an attacker with insurmountable attack and defensive problems along with the certainty of an effective response, provide the president with a range of options to deal with a crisis or conflict, and provide an effective hedge against technical failures or geopolitical uncertainty. Upgrading the nuclear command, control, and communications system will ensure the president remains linked to the forces for positive control.

In addition to the modernization plans already proposed, I would also highlight several other important needs for your consideration.

- Better adaptive planning capabilities to meet emerging (and possibly unforeseen) scenarios in a crisis or conflict.
- Increased attention to new threats like cyber weapons, inside actors, and drones.
- More emphasis on enhancing the resilience of critical space and network infrastructures.
- More effective integration of cross-domain capabilities.
- Prototyping and other steps to retain critical skills in nuclear weapon design and manufacture.

While I think the renewed discussion about strategic deterrence and nuclear weapons is long overdue, such discussion can become harmful if the result is confusion or paralysis. In my estimation, policy makers across several administrations have sent conflicting signals regarding the continued value of the US nuclear deterrent and the necessity and cost of its modernization. Clarity and commitment regarding nuclear weapons, their continued foundational role in US and allied defense strategy, and the investment needed to sustain them are as important now as they ever were during the Cold War. Deterrence credibility and national security demand it.

ⁱ Gen. C. Robert Kehler, Gen. Larry D. Welch, Adm. James O. Ellis, Gen. Kevin P. Chilton, Adm. Cecil D. Haney, Adm. Henry G. Chiles, Gen. Eugene E. Habiger, Adm. Richard W. Mies, Open Letter, "The U. S. Nuclear Triad Needs an Upgrade," The Wall Street Journal, 12 January 2017, p. A17.

ⁱⁱ Ibid.