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HOUSE COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES

SUBCOMMITTEE ON STRATEGIC FORCES

STATEMENT OF
GENERAL C. R. KEHLER
COMMANDER
UNITED STATES STRATEGIC COMMAND
BEFORE THE
HOUSE COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES
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Good afternoon. Chairman Rogers, Ranking Member Cooper, and distinguished members of the subcommittee. I am pleased to be here today with my esteemed colleagues to discuss the B61 Life Extension Program (LEP) and how it fits within our broader stockpile strategy.

Mr. Chairman, our nation's nuclear forces perform three key functions: deterring potential adversaries via credible nuclear capabilities and effective plans; assuring allies and partners of our extended deterrence commitments to them; and, in the unlikely event deterrence fails, employing nuclear weapons when directed by the President to achieve U.S. and Allied objectives. To accomplish these functions the nation requires a sound strategy, flexible guidance, effective plans, well-trained people, modernized nuclear delivery systems and associated life extension programs for the warheads, assured command and control, and the highly specialized infrastructure necessary to sustain them.

Today we are at the front end of a multi-decade effort to recapitalize our nuclear deterrent force and its supporting infrastructure. Planned investments will allow us to sustain the nuclear Triad of delivery vehicles, enable critical improvements to our national command and control systems, and systematically extend the life of essential weapons in the stockpile. We are studying options to recapitalize the responsive land-based ballistic missile capability while sustaining our current Minuteman III force through 2030. We are developing a modern long-range penetrating bomber and replacement cruise missile while upgrading our B-52H and B-2A bomber force to maintain today's visible and flexible air capability. We are proceeding with the Ohio-class Replacement Program to maintain an assured and survivable at-sea capability. We are selectively modernizing the nuclear command, control and communication (NC3) architecture to ensure secure, survivable, and enduring communications between the President

and the nuclear forces. In the meantime, investment in our space-based assured communications and strategic warning systems will address existing capability gaps as we sustain the current NC3 systems in the near-term.

In the context of this larger investment picture, I'd like to focus this afternoon on the nuclear weapon stockpile and in particular the B61 gravity bomb.

The Nuclear Weapons Council recently approved a policy-based, long-term strategy and initial implementation plan to sustain the stockpile and modernize our nuclear complex. This 3+2 strategy—so named because it will ultimately result in three ballistic missile warheads and two air-delivered warheads—allows us to build a modern stockpile to address 21st century threats and uncertainty. Through a series of synchronized life extension programs like the B61-12, we plan to improve confidence in the reliability, safety and intrinsic security of our nuclear weapons. Along the way, these programs will keep meaningful work in the nuclear complex and provide the impetus to develop and retain the critical workforce skills the United States needs to sustain the deterrent force.

Today's B61 inventory consists of five distinct variants all requiring unique and complex logistical support. The average B61 is over 25 years old, contains antiquated technology, and requires frequent handling for maintenance. Only through extraordinary measures has this aging family of weapons remained safe, secure and effective far beyond its originally planned operational life. As envisioned, the B61-12 LEP will extend that safety, security and effectiveness for decades. Specifically, the program addresses known aging issues, updates technology to meet 21st century operational and security standards, reduces maintenance intervals, and consolidates multiple variants into a single design. This consolidation offers opportunities for cost savings and significant stockpile reductions while maintaining U.S.

national security objectives and extended deterrence commitments. Finally, the B61 LEP has been optimized in both scope and timing to match the limited throughput of the nuclear industrial complex.

From my military perspective, the B61 is a key component of the 3+2 strategy and represents a necessary capability to meet national guidance. First, our recently updated nuclear employment guidance directs us to retain a Triad of nuclear delivery vehicles—a construct that gives our deterrent force strength, resilience and flexibility. The current and future nuclear bomber force is a necessary and crucial component of the Triad and arming that force is a top priority. Second, the life-extended B61-12 is envisioned to be the only nuclear gravity weapon in the future arsenal, enabling significant reductions in the overall stockpile and avoiding the enormous costs of successive, sequential life extensions to multiple families of systems. Third, the work being done on the B61 can be leveraged for future life extension programs. Failure to conduct this life extension now will discard that leverage and increase costs of future life extension programs. Finally, the B61 is the only weapon in the stockpile that fulfills both tactical and strategic missions.

While the current force is safe, secure and effective, I remain concerned that the substantial modernization efforts I've described come in the midst of a difficult financial period. In my view, the need for wise and sustained investments increases as we decrease the number of deployed weapons to New START levels. As we face budgetary constraints, we should not abandon the tenets of our strategy. Instead, we must continually assess options to re-phase programs while meeting our security objectives and strategic mission requirements, and preserve program flexibility in case a planned course of action proves infeasible.

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I give my strongest endorsement to the 3+2 strategy and to the B61-12 LEP. Over the long term, it is the right course of action to cost-effectively extend the life of our weapons, modernize our infrastructure and preserve our deterrent capability. I look forward to working with this subcommittee to ensure that the critically important modernization and sustainment programs for the platforms, weapons, command and control, and infrastructure proceeds as needed; and I look forward to your questions.