

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

July 8, 2016

The Honorable Ashton B. Carter
Secretary of Defense
United States Department of Defense
1000 Defense Pentagon
Washington, DC 20301

Dear Secretary Carter:

You and several of your civilian and military colleagues at the Department of Defense have expressed to us your strong support for maintaining and modernizing our nation's nuclear triad. We appreciate this support during your time as Secretary of Defense and welcome the robust Fiscal Year 2017 budget request for nuclear modernization that DoD provided to Congress. We therefore are concerned about recent statements from staff members of the National Security Council that question the nuclear modernization agenda and threaten to undermine the Department's long-established position on this vital national security issue.

We strongly believe in the value of the interlocking capabilities of the three legs of the triad. The sea leg's unparalleled stealth introduces uncertainty into any adversary attempt to threaten the U.S. or its interests. The air leg provides us with the flexibility to redeploy deterrent assets, signaling intent and demonstrating resolve to both adversaries and allies alike. Finally, the land-based ballistic missiles provide persistent deterrence and a widely dispersed target set that complicates any adversary plan to threaten the United States and serves as an overwhelming barrier against any aspiring nuclear power mounting a nuclear challenge to our nation.

We must modernize these forces to preserve their deterrent capabilities. We must maintain the pace of replacing our Ohio-class submarines before the fleet's hulls and reactors reach the end of their service lives. Continuing development of the B-21 will provide us with a much needed new nuclear-capable bomber to defeat future advanced air defense systems. We also need a new air-launched standoff weapon to hold the broadest possible array of targets at risk. Finally, we must reconstitute our intercontinental ballistic missile force before the existing system degrades and becomes obsolete. In addition, the warheads carried on each of these delivery systems must be refurbished so that their deterrent capability remains unquestioned.

The Senate recently authorized the administration's FY17 nuclear modernization request in the FY17 National Defense Authorization Act. We are therefore particularly concerned that the Administration now may consider steps to slow down modernization programs or withdraw them from future year defense plans. We seek your assurance that the Department of Defense will: 1) advance existing modernization programs as expeditiously as possible, including approving critical milestones for the Ground Based Strategic Deterrent program and the Long Range Stand Off cruise missile program; 2) preserve a robust program of nuclear modernization across the next five year defense plan; and 3) continue to articulate the value of strategic deterrence and the need for nuclear modernization in light of a wide array of strategic challenges facing the United States.

We are grateful for your past support in the effort to modernize the triad, and we hope you can reassure us of the Department's support for the ongoing modernization agenda. We look forward to your response and to continuing to work with you to ensure the United States retains a safe, reliable and effective deterrent for the foreseeable future.

Sincerely,

John Hoover

Jon Testa

Joe Donnelly

Heidi Heitkamp

Steve Daines

Chris Hatch

Mark R. Warner

David Vitter

Wally

Mark

Frank

Rob Fischer

John Barrasso

Jack Reed