

**RECORD VERSION**

**STATEMENT BY**

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Chairman McConnell, Ranking Member Coons, and esteemed members of the Subcommittee—thank you for the opportunity to testify on behalf of the Soldiers, Airmen, Civilian teammates, and families of the National Guard.

The National Guard is a unique force in our Nation's military. We are the indispensable combat reserve of the Army and the Air Force, bringing both operational capacity and strategic depth to the fight. The National Guard's value proposition cannot be understated. At only four percent of the Department of Defense's (DoD) budget, we provide twenty percent of the Joint Force. Our 433,000 Soldiers and Airmen live and serve in nearly every community in the 50 States, three Territories (Puerto Rico, the Virgin Islands, and Guam), and the District of Columbia (DC). Our geographic dispersion and the dual nature of our service—providing global combat capabilities to the Joint Force, and homeland defense and response capabilities under the management of a state's governor—means we are postured and ready to respond to any mission, anywhere.

The National Guard's myriad of missions fall into three key categories: the warfight, the homeland, and partnerships. All missions are integral to implementing President Trump's vision of peace through strength and support the Secretary of Defense's priorities of restoring the warrior ethos, rebuilding our military, and reestablishing deterrence. Moreover, the National Guard mission triad seamlessly aligns with the 2025 Interim National Defense Strategic Guidance (INDSG). At a

strategic level, the INDSG directs the DoD to defend the homeland, deter China in the Indo-Pacific by prioritizing combat-credible military forces, and share the responsibility of countering threats with our allies and partners.

The INDSG is the Department of Defense's response to a dangerous, dynamic, and complex moment in history, with unprecedented challenges to our national security. We face vulnerabilities on our borders including illegal immigration, deadly narcotics trafficking, advanced air and missile threats, cyber intrusions, and critical infrastructure risks. China continues to build its military at an alarming rate, while Russia, Iran, North Korea, and terrorist organizations also contribute to the dangerous overall strategic environment.

Over the National Guard's 388-year history, we have continually adapted and evolved to meet the moment, protect our communities, deter our adversaries, and—when called upon—win our Nation's wars. Your continued support made this evolution possible, and we cannot overstate our appreciation to this Subcommittee and your Congressional colleagues' commitment to the National Guard. We continue to offer a remarkable value to our Nation, providing our Joint Force with combat forces, operational capabilities, and strategic depth. We also provide our Governors with crisis response forces to save lives and mitigate human suffering.

While we met and exceeded our goals with historic levels of recruiting this year, we cannot take our foot off the accelerator. We must continue recruiting the

next generation of elite warfighters while retaining our most skilled and talented Soldiers and Airmen. We must prioritize concurrent recapitalization, investing in equipment across air, land, space, and cyber domains to ensure future lethality, survivability, and interoperability with our active component counterparts. We need to accelerate the pace of innovation, drawing on the unrivaled civilian expertise of our dual-status warfighters. The National Guard is a vital component of the Joint Force and the INDSG, and now is the time to maximize our lethal, professional, cost-effective force.

### **Defending the Homeland: A National Guard Mission, an INDSG Priority**

The National Guard plays an integral role in homeland defense. The Secretary of Defense directed the DoD to defend the homeland, to include sealing our borders, protecting critical infrastructure, advancing the United States' interests in the Western Hemisphere, responding to natural and manmade disasters and cyberattacks, and defending the American people against the threat of attack by ballistic, hypersonic, and cruise missiles, and other advanced aerial attacks—the most catastrophic threat facing the United States, through a next-generation missile defense shield known as the Golden Dome. The National Guard plays an integral role in homeland defense, in addition to responding to natural and manmade disasters.

As part of the homeland defense mission, the National Guard operates fifteen of North American Aerospace Defense Command's sixteen Aerospace Control Alert

sites, defending America's airspace against air and missile threats for Operation NOBLE EAGLE. In 2024 alone, the Western and Eastern Air Defense Sectors, scrambled fighters to investigate 559 suspect aircraft and enforced 278 temporary flight restrictions across the East and West coasts of the United States. The National Guard is also poised to play a critical role in establishing a Golden Dome with our extensive expertise in air and missile defense. The National Guard holds the Nation's only Ground-Based Mid-Course Missile Defense Brigade and plays a critical role in integrating with space-based sensors and artificial intelligence-driven command systems, providing personnel for ground-based interceptors, and supporting interagency coordination.

We are also dedicated to securing and preserving the communities where we live and serve. The National Guard supports the defense of our borders, providing surveillance, logistics, and infrastructure support to the Department of Homeland Security's U.S. Customs and Border Protection, with roughly 6,000 Guardsmen supporting border operations. In addition, the National Guard's counterdrug program has disrupted the flow of deadly narcotics in every state, territory, and the District of Columbia for more than three decades. In 2024, more than 2,700 Guardsmen supported nearly 2,600 Law Enforcement Agencies in Counterdrug Operations that led to the seizure of more than \$13 billion in currency, property, and illegal narcotics. The program trained more than 67,000 law enforcement agents from more than

13,000 partner agencies We are expanding our footprint to assist law enforcement in combatting the opioid crisis and other illegal activities crossing our borders.

The National Guard is also the most capable and experienced disaster response force in the Nation. In 2024, the National Guard responded to 6 hurricanes, clearing more than 6,200 miles of roads, and 285,000 cubic yards of debris, as well as distributing nearly 2.7 million meals and 7.6 million bottles of water. In late 2024, when historic hurricanes and flooding devastated North Carolina, the National Guard mobilized more than 1,000 Guardsmen across 12 states to perform rescue missions and deliver food, water, and critical life sustaining supplies. Additionally, while the National Interagency Fire Center tracked nearly 62,000 wildfires impacting 8.8 million acres, t. The National Guard provided aerial firefighting support with 800 fixed- and rotary-wing sorties delivering 3.5 million gallons of water and fire retardant.

The National Guard provides critical cybersecurity and information technology support, including mission assurance, network assessment and protection and risk mitigation. The National Guard cyber force is principally organized, trained and equipped to support DoD cyber mission requirements, however, can be directed to provide threat mitigation support to critical infrastructure and other non-DoD entities. Many National Guard servicemembers hold cyber positions in their civilian jobs, allowing them to combine an intimate knowledge of leading-edge cyber technologies from the private sector with a deep appreciation of cyber tradecraft

that comes from high-level security clearances and years of military training. The Guard's cyber force is proud to fight on the frontlines of the cyber domain.

The National Guard also contributes to resilience in the homeland through Weapons of Mass Destruction prevention and response operations performed by specialized National Guard Chemical, Biological, Radiological, and Nuclear Response Enterprise forces. More than 10,000 National Guard Soldiers and Airmen are specially trained and equipped to prevent or respond to major or catastrophic domestic Weapons of Mass Destruction incidents.

The National Guard is a versatile and ready community-based force serving as force-multipliers in the defense and resilience of our homeland. We always rise to the occasion and meet our Nation's needs in both homeland defense and response. Our agility and responsiveness in the face of global and dynamic threats and hazards also serves as a deterrent to our adversaries, who see the strength of our national resolve.

### **Detering our Adversaries: The National Guard as a Ready and Lethal Warfighting Force**

The National Guard provides combat-capable Soldiers and Airmen to every Combatant Command, and maintains the depth and readiness needed to rapidly surge for large-scale combat operations ensuring the Department is the most elite

and lethal force. Our Soldiers and Airmen are formidable, experienced, and battle tested.

On April 13, 2024, during Operation TRUE PROMISE, the DC Air National Guard's 121st Fighter Squadron (FS) launched six F-16s to defend Israel, successfully neutralizing enemy drones and cruise missiles. Simultaneously, the Tennessee National Guard's 134th Air Refueling Wing provided critical in-flight fueling to U.S. and coalition fighters, ensuring extended patrols, successful intercepts, and deterrence of further aggression, saving countless lives. The operation was so successful that 11 Air Guardsmen were awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross and an additional 4 have nominations currently underway. This performance, made possible by Air National Guard-led modernization efforts like upgraded sensors, datalinks, and communications suites, underscores the 121st Fighter Squadron's pivotal role in integrated joint and allied operations across multiple theaters. The operation showcased not only the platform agility of the ANG's Block 30 F-16s, but also the strategic foresight behind efforts like Open Viper, ALR-69A, Angry Kitten Combat Pod, and Legion.

The National Guard's critical role as a combat-capable force is undeniable. We provide nearly 40 percent of total Army operational forces and 30 percent of total Air Force operational forces at merely four percent of the DoD budget. We continue to build our ranks through investment in recruiting and retention thanks in no small part



to the incredible support of this committee and your congressional colleagues. We realize that when it comes to recruiting, we must pursue every opportunity to seek out the very best our Nation has to offer. To meet this need we are expanding our outreach, capitalizing on recent recruiting successes, and leveraging our community-based connections to attract top talent. Our value as warfighters is not strictly a matter of strategic depth; we represent the best warriors in our profession of arms – tested and proven on the training ground, on the battlefield, and in elite combat arms competitions around the globe. The National Guard has garnered an impressive set of victories in cyber, language, F-35, sniper, tank crew, small arms, and counter unmanned aerial systems competitions against international, Joint Force, and interagency teams, and recently received the AAAA Air/Sea Rescue Award for Kosovo operations.

Our warrior ethos embodied by strength, readiness, and lethality makes us a formidable part of the Joint Force and enhances our Nation's ability to deter adversaries. The National Guard will continue to uphold the highest standards as we rebuild our military and deter our adversaries.

### **Sharing Responsibility for National Security: Allies and Partners, Local to Global**

The National Guard maintains partnerships at every level, from local to global, sharing collective responsibility for our national security. At the local and state levels, we maintain relationships with first responders and emergency managers to enhance

resilience and improve response and resilience in our communities. Our approximately 2,500 armories, bases, and readiness centers serve as hubs for community engagement and response and strategically posture our Service members to defend and serve our nation. Our Guardsmen live in nearly every ZIP code and serve in every state, territory, and the District Columbia—as well as in every Combatant Command. At the federal level, the National Guard collaborates with the Department of Homeland Security, the Department of Health and Human Services, Department of Justice, and other agencies to seamlessly respond to domestic crises, counter illicit trafficking organizations, and prevent cyber incursions. Our success at working across the air, land, sea, space and cyber domains coupled with our unique community based organizational structure makes our Nation stronger, which further reestablishes our deterrent posture.

Internationally, the National Guard executes the State Partnership Program (SPP), which pairs a state's National Guard with a partner nation. Today, the SPP has 115 partnerships in every Combatant Command, encompassing nearly 60 percent of global nation states. When we engage and train with our SPP partners, we make them more capable of their own security, and more lethal and interoperable with the United States. against shared adversaries. In addition, the SPP proves its value year after year. In 2024 alone, the program conducted more than 1,000 engagements at less than one percent of the security cooperation budget.

Furthermore, partnerships with key industry leaders, finance, technologists, engineers, and academics from across the United States and the technological breadth of this country. Currently, National Guard members with civilian careers have brought that expertise, industry best practices, and mindset to the Department to rebuild our military for potential future conflict. The National Guard also maintains a unique link to our defense industrial base. Specifically, many of our Guardsmen have civilian careers in the aerospace, cyber, and engineering sectors, bringing that civilian experience to military operations. Our citizen-Soldiers and Airmen develop corporate knowledge while working in the defense industrial base while these industry partners benefit from their years of military experience to develop the most lethal solutions of tomorrow. Sharing the burden of security across our partnerships at every level makes us Stronger Together, Stronger Tomorrow.

### **Looking into the Future**

As I look towards the future, I plan to focus on four areas – Warfighters, Readiness, Partnerships, and Modernization – to execute the DoD’s objectives.

Warfighters are the foundation of the National Guard and the bedrock of an effective force. Developing lethal and elite Soldiers, Airmen, and Civilians is vital to our success. Strategic competitors and the changing character of war demand a laser focus on readiness. Investments in our foundational readiness accounts such as flying hours, Weapon System Sustainment, Facilities Sustainment Restoration &

Modernization, Ground Operations Tempo and Base Operations Support—will play a pivotal role in the Nation’s ability to counter threats, deter adversaries and respond to domestic crises.

Partnerships advance the United States’ national security posture and interests both at home and abroad. Our partners provide asymmetric advantages locally and globally. We will continue to look for ways to expand our partnerships and leverage our relationships.

As we rebuild and modernize our military, in a challenging, fiscally constrained environment, the National Guard can serve as the ultimate force multiplier supplying combat-capable warriors at a fraction of the cost.

I look forward to working with the Service Secretaries, Service Chiefs, OSD and this body to modernize our aging weapon systems, air and ground platforms, and combat support infrastructure, recapitalizing them with systems such as the UH-60M, F-35, F-15EX, KC-46, AH-64E. Equipping our forces will remain a critical component of this strategy, bridging capability gaps and seams, and ensuring our warriors can operate effectively in contested environments by matching capabilities to evolving threats.

### **Conclusion**

The National Guard’s mission triad—the warfight, our homeland, and partnerships— combines to ensure a force that’s Always Ready, Always There. We are

fully aligned with the INDSG. We are focused on our vital role in the Joint Force and continue to provide remarkable value to the taxpayers in the communities we serve.

We must pour on the afterburners when modernizing our equipment and our approach to overcome tomorrow's challenges today. With your support, we will continue to transform, innovate, and adapt to meet the challenges of today's strategic environment, so we can achieve peace through strength and if deterrence fails, decisively win.

Your National Guard is Always Ready, Always There!