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United States Senate

September 24, 2021

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The Honorable Joseph R. Biden, Jr.
President of the United States
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington D.C. 20500

Dear Mr. President,

I write to express my concerns about organizational changes at the Department of Defense that could conflict with your 2021 Interim National Security Guidance to “take steps to reduce the role of nuclear weapons in (U.S.) national security strategy.”¹

On September 21, 2021, the Department of Defense announced that it removed the lead civilian official within the Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD) responsible for drafting the Nuclear Posture Review, part of your Administration’s Integrated National Defense Strategy. The Department of Defense stated that it eliminated the position of the Deputy Assistant Secretary for Nuclear and Missile Defense Policy, held by Leonor Tomero, as part of a reorganization within the Department.² But according to press reports, Department officials may have driven Ms. Tomero from her position for challenging traditional views on the role of U.S. nuclear weapons.³

Congress needs to understand whether ideology played any role in Ms. Tomero’s dismissal. I am also concerned that the sudden departure of a top appointee, charged with presenting you options on the future of the U.S. nuclear weapons enterprise, will result in a draft Nuclear Posture Review that reflects the Cold War era’s overreliance on nuclear weapons, rather than your lifetime of work championing policies that reduce nuclear weapons risks.

According to the Department of Defense, it will complete the Nuclear Posture Review by “early next year,”⁴ which coincides with the release of your Fiscal Year 2023 budget request. Given this

¹ C. Todd Lopez, *Nuclear Posture Review, National Defense Strategy Will Be Thoroughly Integrated*, DOD News, United States Department of Defense (June 25, 2021), <https://www.defense.gov/News/News-Stories/Article/Article/2671471/nuclear-posture-review-national-defense-strategy-will-be-thoroughly-integrated/> (hereinafter “Lopez, *Nuclear Posture Review, National Defense Strategy Will Be Thoroughly Integrated*”).

² Lara Seligman, Alexander Ward, Paul McLeary, *Pentagon’s top nuclear policy official ousted in reorganization*, Politico (Sept. 21, 2021), <https://www.politico.com/news/2021/09/21/pentagon-top-nuclear-official-ousted-reorganization-513502>.

³ Bryan Bender and Lara Seligman, *Biden’s nuclear agenda in trouble as Pentagon hawks attack*, Politico (Sept. 23, 2021), <https://www.politico.com/news/2021/09/23/leonor-tomero-pentagon-nuclear-hawks-513974>.

⁴ Lopez, *Nuclear Posture Review, National Defense Strategy Will Be Thoroughly Integrated*.

tight timeline, I respectfully request answers by October 15, 2021 to the following questions on the process and personnel that will shape your highly consequential Nuclear Posture Review.

1. Why did the Defense Department eliminate the top civilian position in OSD responsible for the Nuclear Posture Review? Why was the position eliminated in the midst of that Review, as opposed to before it began or when it is completed?
2. Ms. Tomero's demonstrated expertise in nuclear deterrence policy, arms control, and missile defense made her well-suited to lead and contribute substantively to the Nuclear Posture Review process. Why, given Ms. Tomero's specific expertise on nuclear policy, was she removed from the Nuclear Posture Review process or why was she not reassigned to a position under the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Space Policy, who will be taking over responsibility for nuclear policy?
3. When did the Department of Defense inform Ms. Tomero that it had eliminated her position as a result of a reorganization? Which Department officials communicated with Ms. Tomero about her dismissal and when? I am particularly interested in any communications that occurred between or among Ms. Tomero, her then-boss Acting Assistant Secretary of Defense for Strategy, Plans, and Capabilities, Melissa Dalton, and Undersecretary of Defense for Policy Colin Kahl. After Ms. Tomero's dismissal, did any senior Department leader communicate with her about the reason(s) for her dismissal?
4. The Defense Department stated that the decision to eliminate the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Nuclear and Missile Defense Policy was part of a reorganization within OSD Policy.⁵ How will the reorganization change the current OSD Policy office structure? Which officials will take over the duties previously performed by the former Deputy Assistant Secretary position?
5. On September 22, 2021, Defense Department Spokesperson John Kirby said that "we have a wide-ranging team of experts working" on the Nuclear Posture Review.⁶ Please identify the individuals and organizations consulting on the Nuclear Posture Review, including paid contractors.
6. Mr. Kirby also said: "We're going to continue to consider and include a wide range of viewpoints in the Nuclear Posture Review, including those from Administration Officials, of military leaders, academics and all others."⁷ How will the Department ensure that the advice of individuals who do not support the default military reliance on nuclear weapons

⁵ Lara Seligman, Alexander Ward, Paul McLeary, *Pentagon's top nuclear policy official ousted in reorganization*, Politico (Sept. 21, 2021), <https://www.politico.com/news/2021/09/21/pentagon-top-nuclear-official-ousted-reorganization-513502>.

⁶ John F. Kirby and Dr. Kathleen Hicks, Transcript of Press Briefing, United States Department of Defense, (Sept. 22, 2021), <https://www.defense.gov/News/Transcripts/Transcript/Article/2785615/deputy-secretary-of-defense-dr-kathleen-hicks-and-pentagon-press-secretary-john/>.

⁷ *Id.*

is included in this process?

7. The President's 2021 Interim National Security Guidance stated that the Administration will "re-establish [its] credibility as a leader in arms control" and "take steps to reduce the role of nuclear weapons in [U.S.] national security strategy."⁸ How will you ensure that your guidance is reflected in the options the Department of Defense puts forth?
8. I understand that the Department of Defense expects that by 2022 an independent review will be completed to evaluate the technical feasibility of extending the life of the Minuteman III intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM). To what extent will that independent review impact the options presented to you in connection with the Nuclear Posture Review and you Fiscal Year 2023 budget request?

According to the Congressional Budget Office, the United States plans to spend \$634 billion over the next decade on nuclear weapons.⁹ Your Nuclear Posture Review must balance concerns about the international threat environment, affordability, and the historic U.S. leadership role in reducing the role of these deadliest of weapons. As I wrote to you in July, "your Administration's NPR is a watershed moment where you can reject a 21st century arms race and make bold decisions to lead us towards a future where nuclear weapons no longer threaten all humanity."¹⁰ Sound personnel decisions and the protection of diverse viewpoints are essential for a sound policy outcome. I urge you to weigh-in directly on the process to ensure that your views are fully represented.

Sincerely,



Edward J. Markey
United States Senator

cc: The Honorable Lloyd J. Austin III
Secretary of Defense
U.S. Department of Defense
1000 Defense Pentagon Washington, D.C. 20301

cc: The Honorable Jake Sullivan
National Security Advisor
The White House
Washington D.C. 20500

⁸ [Lopez](#), *Nuclear Posture Review, National Defense Strategy Will Be Thoroughly Integrated*.

⁹ Rebecca Kheel, *CBO: US nuclear arsenal to cost \$634B over 10 years*, The Hill, (May 24, 2021), <https://thehill.com/policy/defense/555142-cbo-us-nuclear-arsenal-to-cost-634b-over-10-years>

¹⁰ <https://www.markey.senate.gov/news/press-releases/senators-markey-merkley-and-reps-beyer-garamendi-lead-colleagues-in-urging-president-biden-to-reduce-military-role-of-us-nuclear-weapons-in-upcoming-nuclear-posture-review>.