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SENATE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON STRATEGIC FORCES  
UNITED STATES SENATE

DEPARTMENT OF THE AIR FORCE

PRESENTATION TO THE  
SENATE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON STRATEGIC FORCES  
U.S. SENATE

SUBJECT: Status of Air Force Nuclear and Strategic Systems

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## **Introduction**

Chairman Nelson, Ranking Member Sessions, distinguished Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to discuss your Air Force's strategic forces.

As Assistant Chief of Staff for Strategic Deterrence and Nuclear Integration, my team, on behalf of the Chief of Staff, leads planning, policy development, advocacy, integration, and assessment for the Airmen and the weapon systems performing Nuclear Deterrence Operations, a core function of our United States Air Force. *Continuing to Strengthen* our nuclear enterprise remains an Air Force priority, in fulfillment of the President's mandate that, as long as nuclear weapons exist, the United States will maintain a safe, secure, and effective arsenal.

The Strategic Guidance announced by the President and Secretary of Defense on the 5th of January states, "U.S. forces will be capable of deterring and defeating aggression by any potential adversary." It continues, "Credible deterrence results from both the capabilities to deny an aggressor the prospect of achieving his objectives and from the complementary capability to impose unacceptable costs on the aggressor."

Maintaining the credibility of our strategic deterrent requires a long-term commitment to our nuclear capabilities, through sustainment, investments in modernization, and eventual recapitalization. Most importantly, it requires deliberate development of the precious Human Capital required to maintain and operate our nuclear forces, and leading-edge Intellectual Capital to provide the innovative thinking that the 21st century security setting demands. The Air Force demonstrates such commitment every day.

In a constrained fiscal environment, the Air Force has made investments in the distinctive capabilities we provide to our joint and coalition partners. One of the distinct capabilities the Air Force provides the Nation is Global Strike, and the Air Force's ability to carry and deliver nuclear weapons to hold any target at risk is continually exercised under operational conditions. Results continue to confirm the readiness and accuracy of such capability. The Air Force helps ensure the Nation's worldwide power projection, even in the face of growing anti-access and area denial challenges, through funding of Air-Sea Battle priorities and through prudent investment in *Continuing to Strengthen* its Nuclear Enterprise.

## **Revitalizing Thinking**

Every day, about 36,000 Airmen in the United States Air Force are performing Nuclear Deterrence Operations, a mission that remains vital in the 21st century. In many respects, the Cold War was fairly simple and mutual deterrence with the Soviet Union seemed predictable. As the 2010 Nuclear Posture Review indicated, “Russia remains America’s only peer in the area of nuclear weapons capabilities. But the nature of the U.S. - Russia relationship has changed fundamentally since the days of the Cold War.” During the Cold War, we became experts at Sovietology. We understood them and they understood us. Today, we have hit fast-forward in our thinking, seeking that same level of understanding about a wide array of potential adversaries and potential proliferators.

The Chief of Staff of the Air Force has tasked us to, “Revitalize thinking within the Air Force about crisis stability and 21st century deterrence dynamics.” For 21st century deterrence, one size does not fit all, and deterrence of near-peers and other nuclear armed states requires new thinking and tailored application. Still, deterrence must ensure that potential adversaries, both peers and non-peers, lack incentive to use their nuclear capabilities. The non-peer case may be the most challenging, and our more likely threat. Our power projection capabilities must be credible in the eyes of potential adversaries, increasingly so in pre-crisis situations and especially in a regional context. The assurances and extended deterrence we provide allies strengthen our security relationships while supporting our nonproliferation goals. Such effects increase in importance in a complex, multi-polar environment. The Air Force is focused on these new dynamics.

## **Sustainment, Modernization, and Recapitalization**

America continues to be a leader in nuclear nonproliferation. In fact, since the end of the Cold War, we have retired or dismantled tens of thousands of nuclear weapons. The current stockpile has undergone a 75 percent reduction since the fall of the Berlin Wall. While our arsenal size declines, the commitment to sustainment and modernization grows. This is not a paradox. The importance of each individual weapon increases as overall numbers go down; every weapon system and every warhead must be reliable. The FY13 President’s Budget submission makes hard choices, appropriate to our constrained fiscal environment, but continues to invest in the enduring and compelling attributes the Nation needs from its Air Force deterrent forces.

We have a plan for two decades of sustainment and modernization to keep Minuteman III viable and credible until 2030. To prepare for beyond 2030, the Air Force has begun a Capability-Based Assessment and Initial Capabilities Document for a successor program, Ground Based Strategic Deterrence (GBSD). The DoD is preparing to begin a GBSD Analysis of Alternatives to study the full range of concepts to recapitalize the land-based leg of the Triad.

The recent Strategic Guidance also states, that "...while the U.S. military will continue to contribute to security globally, we will of necessity rebalance toward the Asia-Pacific region." Our ability to project power and hold targets at risk despite adversary employment of anti-access and area denial strategies is driving our choices in bomber force programs reflected in the President's budget submission.

The B-52 continues to provide critical stand-off capability and will be sustained until a replacement capability comes on line. We are accepting some risk in B-52 modernization in order to apply resources to ensure the B-2, our only long-range direct-strike asset, remains capable of penetrating in an anti-access and area denial environment. The combined capabilities of these bombers directly support our power projection requirements.

Over time, our ability to hold targets at risk with current technologies and systems will diminish. The nuclear-capable Long Range Strike Bomber (LRS-B) is a Department of Defense commitment to address that eventual shortfall. We remain committed to delivering a force of 80-100 new bombers starting in the mid 2020s.

We currently have service life extension programs in progress for the Air Launched Cruise Missile to ensure its viability beyond 2030; such programs include the propulsion system, guidance and flight control systems, and warhead arming components. In the FY13 President's Budget, the program for its replacement, the Long-Range Standoff (LRSO), was delayed until FY15 as part of the adjustments necessary in our constrained fiscal environment. However, the LRSO Analysis of Alternatives, which began in August 2011, continues apace and is scheduled to be completed in early FY13. Despite the LRSO delay, there will not be a gap between ALCM and LRSO.

The B61 is an aging weapon, originally designed and built in the 1960s. Though they remain ready and reliable, some warheads in our current stockpile date back to 1978. Without refurbishment of key components, it will continue to age and eventually will not meet the

requirements for a safe, secure and effective nuclear deterrent. The Department has fully funded the Air Force portion of the B61 Life Extension Program, which will deliver the first production unit at the end of FY19. The B61 is critical to bomber viability, deterrence of adversaries in a regional context, and support of our extended deterrence commitments.

To fund these high priority programs, the Air Force had to make the hard decision to restructure programs with unacceptable cost growth and technical challenges. Last year, we briefed you about initial steps we were taking to replace the UH-1N Huey helicopters, under a program called the Common Vertical Lift Support Program (CVLSP). Prioritization of available funding demands difficult choices, and as a result, the CVLSP program has been deferred. UH-1N Huey helicopters will continue to operate and support the nuclear security mission. We made other investments in missile security to reduce the risk of meeting requirements. In the United States, we installed Remote Visual Assessment (RVA) cameras at our Minuteman III Launch Facilities and started installing Remote Targeting Engagement Systems at our nuclear storage locations. We also recently began a \$14.4M MILCON project to build a new Security Forces training facility at Camp Guernsey, Wyoming. In addition, U.S. and NATO funds are producing security upgrades for weapon storage sites in Europe.

One critical capability that underpins our deterrent forces is nuclear command, control, and communications, otherwise known as NC3. NC3 underpins U.S. nuclear deterrence and provides our Nation's leaders with the means to manage and employ a wide range of strategic options for rapid power projection. It is especially important with lower force structure numbers. The Air Force is entrusted with a major portion of our Nation's NC3 systems, and many of these systems are nearing the end of their lifecycles. Constrained budgets and increasing system complexity require us to pay special attention and use innovative management and program oversight. Over the past two years, the Air Force has developed strong links with all the other key NC3 stakeholders throughout the government, codified Air Force NC3 roles and responsibilities, and prioritized near-term NC3 programs for investment.

### **NST Implementation**

A little over a year ago, the New START Treaty (NST) entered into force, giving us until 5 February 2018 to meet our obligations to reduce and limit our strategic forces to meet the NST's central limits. To ensure the activities needed to achieve an ICBM and heavy bomber force

compliant with NST's central limits, the Air Force has fully funded NST implementation with \$20.1M in FY13 and an additional \$50.6M through the FYDP. Implementation activities are underway including the reduction of systems no longer used to perform the nuclear mission. This includes the elimination of 39 heavy bombers in storage at Davis-Monthan Air Force Base and an environmental study to eliminate 103 empty ICBM silos. We are also looking at methods to convert some B-52Hs from dual-use mode to a conventional-only capability.

### **Human Capital**

A safe, secure, and effective nuclear deterrent for the 21st century requires top-notch people dedicated to uncompromising stewardship. We are institutionalizing fixes and developing an enduring culture of self-assessment to *Continue to Strengthen* the nuclear enterprise. Increasing pass rates and leveling of repeat deficiencies during Nuclear Surety Inspections indicate success in this endeavor. Root cause analysis is embedded into process improvements in our enhanced nuclear inspection program and in initiatives to improve unit performance. Over the past 3 years, root cause analysis led to several structural, procedural and process improvements.

As part of our culture of self-assessment, we continue to refine our organizational constructs, an example being the successful transfer of CONUS munitions squadrons from Air Force Materiel Command to Air Force Global Strike Command.

We are also committed to the professional development of our Airmen through new formal training programs and more deliberate developmental education, all designed not only to bring Airmen up to date quickly on the current issues within the nuclear enterprise, but also to foster the critical thinking necessary for the 21st century security setting.

### **Closing**

The Air Force provides two legs of our nuclear Triad and extended deterrence for Allies and partners for a relatively low cost. Nuclear Deterrence Operations amount to 4.6 percent of the total Air Force budget, about 1 percent of the total Department of Defense budget.

As events over the past year demonstrate, the United States does not get to choose the timing or location of a crisis. Having ready, diverse, and resilient capabilities to ensure stability during crises remains very important. The attributes of the Air Force's deterrent forces – the

responsiveness of the ICBM and the flexibility of the bomber – underwrite the Nation’s ability to achieve stability in the midst of the crises and challenges of the next few decades.

The President’s budget submission makes hard choices, but retains the commitment to strong deterrent capabilities through modernization and recapitalization programs. That commitment is made manifest every day by the 36,000 Airmen performing deterrence operations, demonstrating those capabilities, and doing it with precision and reliability. They are trustworthy stewards of our Nation’s most powerful weapons, still needed to project power, to deter and assure in the 21st century.