

NDU Congressional Breakfast: Nuclear Enterprise

The Honorable Michael B. Donley

Secretary of the Air Force

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Much has changed since the fall of the Berlin wall marked the end of the Cold War, and the beginning of a less-certain security era. Although the threat of global nuclear war has become more remote, the risk of nuclear attack has increased. Today, as described in the recently released Nuclear Posture Review, with the changed and changing international security environment comes the most immediate and extreme danger—nuclear terrorism. Another pressing issue is nuclear proliferation. Finally, we must address these two, while ensuring strategic stability with existing nuclear powers, particularly Russia and China. To this end, the NPR describes out five key objectives as a result:

- Preventing nuclear terrorism and proliferation
- Reducing the role of US nuclear weapons in our National Security Strategy
- Strengthening regional deterrence and reassuring US allies and partners

- Maintaining strategic deterrence and stability at reduced nuclear force levels, and
- Sustaining a safe, secure, and effective nuclear arsenal

The Air Force has a significant role to play for our Nation to meet all of these objectives, but the last two are of particular interest to me. I am now two days into my third year, and the nuclear mission has been our number one priority from day one.

Although we have been successful in deterring nuclear conflict over the years, events in 2007 and 2008 revealed a need to reinvigorate the nuclear enterprise—and that we have done. The Chief of Staff and I are now very focused on institutionalizing improvements and capitalizing on our gains. This is simply not a business in which we should ever be satisfied with the degree of excellence, and our marching orders are clear. The President and Secretary Gates have both stated that *as long as nuclear weapons exist, we will retain a strong, safe, secure, and reliable nuclear deterrent to protect us and our allies*. We understand this mission and what it means to the Nation, and will not—cannot—accept anything less than the highest standards of performance and accountability. We must be adequately organized, trained and equipped to execute this mission, and

we've taken some significant steps to ensure we remain a credible strategic force.

First, organization. We have clarified lines of authority, increased capacity, and increased oversight through organizational changes. Standing up of the Air Force Global Strike Command, the Air Force Nuclear Weapons Center, a fourth B-52 squadron, and a new Air Force Headquarters Directorate is complete and having significant impact.

The Global Strike Command will be fully operational by the end of September this year as the last of the manpower billets are filled. This organization established clear lines of authority and enables a dedicated focus on the nuclear mission, gaining operations of ICBMs in December, 2009, and bombers in February this year.

The Air Force Nuclear Weapons Center is the consolidated focal point for nuclear weapons life cycle management with the Air Force Materiel Command. The addition of a fourth B-52 squadron increased our capability to meet both nuclear and conventional training requirements. The new Air Force Headquarters Directorate, A-10, is responsible for the synchronization and integration of the US Air Force nuclear enterprise and strategic deterrence issues on the Air Staff. Finally, General Schwartz and

I now chair a Nuclear Oversight Board composed of senior uniformed and civilian leaders to provide oversight, advocacy, and focus on this mission.

As for training, having the right number of Airmen, with the right skills, and in the right seats has meant relooking at our manpower and professional development. First, we have grown the enterprise by over 2,500 Airmen. The Air Staff in our DC Headquarters has worked diligently with our Air Force Personnel Center in San Antonio to get the right person into the right job by identifying key nuclear billets in the Air Force, currently totaling 1,216. Now that we've identified the spaces...we need to find the right faces. We still face significant shortages in manning of our bomber maintenance units in the field, and shortages in pilots and navigators on the Major Command and Air Staffs.

Two Nuclear Enterprise Advisory Panels have been convened to develop and grow a professional development plan that offers a clear path. Like other professional development plans within the Air Force, the nuclear professional development plans include education, training, and experiences to shape Airmen for a career in the nuclear enterprise, and a system to manage the force.

In equipping the nuclear enterprise, the NPR reconfirmed the value of our nuclear triad in which each leg compliments the others. The unique attributes of our Intercontinental Ballistic Missiles spread across northern tier Air Force Bases provide the Nation a highly responsive and stabilizing force, providing 24/7 deterrence. Significant numbers of ICBMs deny adversaries the benefit of a limited attack that can leave our nation without a response force, fundamentally deterring a nuclear attack and stabilizing the international environment. Land-based ICBMs compel a potential opponent to consider and weigh the costs potential attack on US soil. Postured 24/7, ICBMs represent a high-readiness capability, at low operating costs.

Perhaps, the most flexible leg of our nuclear deterrent, however, includes air-delivered weapons, loaded on a long-range bomber, affording the President the option to increase or decrease force posture and thereby adjust the message to our allies and opponents. Simply generating our strategic nuclear bombers on alert allows the nation to make a strong statement; and the ability to reposition, launch, and recall bombers adds significant flexibility and scalability to our military tool box.

It also remains critical that this force be properly equipped to perform this mission not just for today, but in a fashion that considers sustainment

in the out-years. We've reprogrammed approximately \$500M to the nuclear enterprise in FY08 and FY09, and \$610M in FY10. We are creating strategic modernization plans and a detailed roadmap to sustain Minuteman III to 2030, while initiating a study of Minuteman III follow-on attributes. Additionally, we are beginning an analysis of alternatives for a follow-on cruise missile to the Air Launched Cruise Missile. And, we are replacing our Vietnam-era helicopters used at the ICBM bases.

Beyond these recapitalization efforts, we are also modernizing in other areas of enormous importance: intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance which supports missile warning; missile defenses that are being configured for regional threats; and integrated air and missile defense to support effective command and control.

We will modernize weapon fuzes in a joint modernization program with our US Navy counterparts. Also, we will invest in a life extension program for the B61 gravity bomb that is carried by our air-delivery weapons systems. Despite the current economic reality that is driving competition for dollars within the Air Force budget, we cannot afford to neglect the nuclear enterprise.

Ultimately, although significant improvement can be attributed to better organization, training, and equipment—all would be in vain if not for the ongoing efforts to uncover, analyze, address and review systemic weaknesses throughout the enterprise. We've significantly enhanced our Nuclear Surety Inspection process.

Our inspections are more rigorous and thorough than in the past. We hold our units to the highest possible standards; standards that in other industries or operational areas would be unheard of. We've also increased the frequency of inspections, and implemented a limited- and no-notice inspection regime. The inspection process has been a crucial catalyst for transformation.

Unparalleled standards, more frequent inspections, and now short- and no-notice inspections have, at times, meant admitting shortfalls, however minor. But importantly, we have, in a transparent manner, taken on the task in a positive, self-critical fashion that reflects and reinforces a culture that constantly strives for perfection. Deep cultural change—pride that accompanies a unit, a mission that upholds the highest standards—is perhaps the most important outcome we can achieve.

The world continues to look to America as a super power...and it remains an imperative for us to maintain a safe, secure, and reliable nuclear enterprise in a dynamic environment –as we negotiate reductions in forces with Russia, and other nations build their capability or enter the circle of nuclear-armed powers. Your Air Force takes this responsibility seriously, and will continue to take whatever steps are necessary to ensure we remain the world’s premier nuclear deterrence force.