



U.S. Department of Defense
Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense (Public Affairs)

News Transcript

On the Web:

<http://www.defenselink.mil/transcripts/transcript.aspx?transcriptid=4284>

Media contact: +1 (703) 697-5131/697-5132

Public contact:

<http://www.defenselink.mil/faq/comment.html>

or +1 (703) 428-0711 +1

Presenter: Secretary of Defense Robert M. Gates

September 12, 2008

DoD Special Briefing With Secretary Gates; James Schlesinger, Chairman, Task Force for Nuclear Weapons Management on The Task for Nuclear Weapons Management Report from the Pentagon Briefing Room, Arlington, VA

SEC. GATES: The order of march this morning, I'll make a brief statement and then take just four or five questions and then turn the briefing over to Secretary Schlesinger.

Today the department is releasing a report by the Task Force on Nuclear Weapons Management. Last June, I asked former Secretary of Defense Schlesinger to head a task force to assess the Air Force's handling of nuclear weapons and nuclear weapons-related material in light of the misshipment to Taiwan in 2006 and the unauthorized weapons transfer from Minot Air Force Base to Barksdale Air Force Base in 2007. I asked the task force to report back to me in 60 days on matters involving the Air Force and in 120 days on department-wide measures. Today we release the first of these two reports, and copies will be made available to you.

The report -- as I've said before, protection and safety of our nuclear arsenal is perhaps the most sensitive mission of the armed forces. That arsenal was vital to winning the Cold War and remains a vital deterrent. Furthermore, ensuring complete physical control and proper handling of nuclear weapons at all times is critical to maintain the confidence of our friends and allies around the world who rely on U.S. nuclear deterrents as well.

The Air Force has begun to restore its nuclear mission and is already tracking more than 180 corrective actions, as noted in the Schlesinger report. The Air Force will take additional measures as required.

The Schlesinger report considered the findings of previous studies by the secretary of the Navy, the secretary of the Air Force, director of the Defense Logistics Agency and Admiral Kirkland Donald.

I appreciate the long hours that went into this effort and I would like to thank Secretary Schlesinger, the chairman, and his team for their hard work. I've read their report. It is comprehensive and the actions it recommends, I believe, will help ensure the excellence of Air Force stewardship of our most important mission.

Lita?

Q Mr. Secretary, can you talk about whether the -- it's a good idea to combine the nuclear-related activities under one command? Does that solidify and coordinate better, this command?

And secondly, can you talk a little bit about whether or not any other either reprimands may be coming?

SEC. GATES: Take the second part of your question first.

The acting secretary of the Air Force and -- and the chief of staff are reviewing the recommendations that had been made with respect to disciplinary matters, and that process is under way.

One of the concerns that -- that I had as a result of reading Admiral Donald's report, reinforced by reading the report of the task force, is the lack of unity of command, and not having one person or organization accountable for -- for the overall mission.

Now, I'm not sure what the right answer is, but -- but I think that some -- that one of the principal actions that needs to be taken is to address this question of unity of command. And whether that ends up being a new kind of command I think is something that -- or a new command -- is something that -- that Secretary Donley and General Schwartz will have to address.

I think -- I think that the task force, as you'll see, makes -- makes a strong case in this respect for a new command. But the Air Force will be taking a look at that.

Q Did the report come up with any new examples of mismanagement that either shocked, dismayed or disappointed you? Or is the public -- is the record pretty much complete now in terms of the really bad examples of mismanagement?

SEC. GATES: Well, I think that it -- I think that -- I don't think that it identified any new or consequential examples of mismanagement. I think that it does go in -- in some respects, a little deeper into issues of culture, of resourcing, of human capital and problems in that area than Admiral Donald's report did.

Q Mr. Secretary, before these -- the incidents occurred, we were assured all the time that the security around nuclear weapons was the highest possible, essentially that these kinds of things couldn't happen. How confident are you now, given where you are right now, that there won't be a repeat of these kind of embarrassing lapses in the near future?

SEC. GATES: Well, I think that there -- clearly I think we have the attention of the Air Force. And this is -- dealing with this is a very high priority, not just for the secretary and the chief of staff but for all senior Air Force officers. And in fact they're bringing in a large group of people from all around the Air Force to address these issues in the near future.

So I think it's a very high priority for the Air Force. A number -- as I indicated, a number of corrective actions are already under way. So I think that there already has been -- have been steps taken to provide the kind of confidence that we expect in terms of the handling of nuclear weapons and nuclear-related materials.

I think -- I won't be completely assured until all of the corrective measures have been taken. I would say this, I think that -- I have confidence that the short-term problems that led to the kinds of problems that led to what happened with respect to the shipment to Taiwan and what happened at Minot have been addressed, and I'm confident that those won't be repeated.

Where I need greater assurance is that some of the longer-term issues that have been identified both by the Donald report and by the Schlesinger task force have been addressed, and that we are on the way to resolving those problems in terms of resourcing the mission, both human and financially. And -- and I would feel better if we could get approval on the Hill of the reliable warhead replacement program.

But I have -- I have high confidence that the kinds of things that happened won't happen again. We are still on the path to remediation when it comes to the other, longer-term issues.

Q Mr. Secretary?

SEC. GATES: Yeah.

Q If I could ask a question about Pakistan, could you clarify for us what authorities our commanders in Afghanistan have to conduct raids inside Pakistan, including our Special Operations commanders?

SEC. GATES: Well, I would just say that our commanders, I think, have the authorities that they need to protect our troops in Afghanistan and just leave it at that.

Q Mr. Secretary, in answering Leda's (ph) question, you said that Acting Secretary Donley and General Schwartz would make determinations on disciplinary abuse. Can I ask, have you accepted any resignations stemming from this report?

SEC. GATES: No.

Q I ask because you're standing, so just to make sure. (Laughter.)

Q Oh dear! (Laughter.)

Q Getting to the issue of --

SEC. GATES: Fair enough.

Q I've lost my train of thought now. (Laughter.)

SEC. GATES: Standing and alone. (Laughter.)

Q That's right. (Laughter.)

To the issue of the long-term -- you discussed that you were -- you're still not confident that the long-term solutions have been done yet within the Air Force. And one of the things the Donald report pointed out, and you I think mentioned when you asked for the resignation of General Moseley and Secretary Wynne, was this issue of there wasn't this sense of urgency within the Air Force that they needed to do this stuff, and frankly, it had become sort of a second or third task -- "oh yeah, the nuclear things, we'll worry about that later."

Can you address that issue, the cultural issue? Have you seen since the departure of Moseley and Wynne any change there? Is that what you talked about in terms of things you have yet to see and you would like to see more movement on in terms of the long term?

SEC. GATES: I -- what I would say is, I have seen amply demonstrated that fixing these problems and doing this mission and the stewardship of the nuclear mission is a very high priority for the Air Force at this point. And I would say that the leadership of the Air Force has made clear that proper stewardship of this mission is the Air Force's highest responsibility -- the nuclear mission.

Q Sir, what did you learn from this report that you didn't learn from the Donald report or any previous report? What's new in it?

SEC. GATES: Well, I think that -- as I indicated in an earlier answer, I think that it goes into deeper -- goes into more detail in terms of some of the longer-range problems and deficiencies that have existed and how they evolved from the early '90s and what has happened along the way. So I think there's more historical texture in terms of how this happened, and then I think that there is a more robust set of recommendations on the remedies for some of these problems, both the short term and the long term.

Last -- (inaudible).

Q What are some of the corrective actions that the Air Force is taking? I know there's a long list, but can you highlight some of the ones that they're working on right now?

SEC. GATES: Well, I think trying to, you know, centralize management of the nuclear weapons material and related materials is one of the major steps that they've already taken. That's the major one that I would think of.

Last question. Yeah?

Q Secretary Gates, back in February the Defense Science Board Task Force on Nuclear Weapons Surety, chaired by retired General Welch, had many recommendations for the Air Force, as you know. But they also had one specific recommendation for your office.

They recommended that you create an Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for the Nuclear Enterprise that would report directly to you. I'm wondering if you have already reviewed that recommendation and you had decided not to do that or if you are waiting until you receive part two of the Schlesinger task force recommendations that deal with the whole nuclear enterprise before you consider something like that.

SEC. GATES: I'm going to wait for the second part, which looks at the Defense nuclear enterprise as a whole.

Q Sir, are you open to something like that?

SEC. GATES: I'm open to it, but I'm running out of time, though -- (laughter) -- both today and more long-term.

Secretary Schlesinger?

Thank you.

MR. SCHLESINGER: Thanks, Mr. Secretary.

As Secretary Gates has indicated, we got started in late June. This is the first phase of the report. It deals with the Air Force's nuclear mission.

The next phase, which will probably be published in December, will deal with the Department of Defense as a whole. It will incorporate the Navy's part of the nuclear mission. It will deal with the structure within the Department of Defense. It will deal with what I'll call the leadership question at the national level, which is, of course, essential for dealing with the troops in the field so that they feel that they have an important mission.

Let me deal with several topics.

First, the nuclear mission itself and the nuclear deterrent. As I think all of you will recognize, the nuclear mission has altered substantially since the days of the Cold War. At the time of the Cold War, we were fearful that the Warsaw Pact had a conventional force advantage and that the nuclear mission in part was to deter a Warsaw Pact attack on Western Europe, which was seen to be vulnerable for a variety of reasons that we need not review.

That mission has gone by the boards. The nuclear deterrent role today is quite different, and it is much more circumscribed than it was in the days of the Cold War. However, it is no less important, despite the fact that the domain of the nuclear mission has shrunk.

One needs to be aware that the United States holds a nuclear umbrella over the other NATO nations, over our allies in the Western Pacific, as well as Australia and New Zealand, some 30-odd nations which depend upon the U.S. nuclear umbrella.

And the confidence that they have in that umbrella will determine whether or not they themselves may seek to acquire nuclear weapons. Some have expressed increasing misgivings about whether or not they feel comfortable under the umbrella. And part of the task of the Air Force and of the Department of Defense will be to resuscitate their confidence in the credibility of the nuclear umbrella.

Second point. Over the years, there has been an atrophy of the Air Force interest in the nuclear mission. This goes back to the disestablishment of the Strategic Air Command in 1991. As you may recall, the Strategic Air Command was broken up: the bombers went off to the Mobility Command, the missiles originally going to the Air Combat Command and then subsequently to Space Command, and finally the missiles themselves -- the bombers themselves stayed with the Air Combat Command.

Each of these commands -- each of these commands had other priorities and, over the years, those other priorities were demonstrated in the overall Air Force budget.

As a result, the nuclear mission has been underfunded and this has resulted in a shrinkage of billets for units and even those shrunken billets remain unfilled in many cases.

There is a shortage of security personnel. There is a shortage of maintenance people. There is a shortage of those who supervise the nuclear establishment and there is -- has been a very noticeable lack of nuclear expertise.

Over the years, the -- what has been the long-time practice during the Cold War and subsequent years of developing the theory and doctrine of deterrence has more or less disappeared not only from the Air Force schools, more generally from military schools, if -- the doctrine of deterrence has, to a large extent, been forgotten.

And we are dealing with a political condition -- as most of you know, the efficacy of the nuclear deterrent lies in the eyes of the beholder, and that influences both the -- those who are -- we are seeking to deter and more importantly, in a way, those whom we seek to protect.

Finally, with regard to our recommendations, we have a fair number of substantial recommendations for change in the Air Force. In particular, we have -- we recommend that the elements of the nuclear mission be brought together under a major command and that as a consequence that command will be able to interface with U.S. STRATCOM. We suggest that the Air Force Space Command be re-designated as Air Force STRAT and that it be held accountable for the efficacy of the nuclear mission.

The sustainment mission has been handed off to the Air Force Materiel Command, and it has acted promptly to create a nuclear weapons center in Albuquerque.

To this point, as you will recall from the discussion earlier by the secretary, there has been a failure to deal effectively with the sustainment mission, perhaps most notably exemplified by the Taiwan question.

There are major organizational changes. As the secretary mentioned, the Air Force has already started work on them. They have 180 corrective actions. It is a highly commendable response on the part of the Air Force. It has established a solid basis for change, and all of the Air Force leaders are saying the right things. The real question is whether there will be follow through on what is now being said.

As the secretary indicated, there will be a meeting in the near future here in the Washington area, in which the Air Force will address these questions.

Let me pause there and introduce to you some of our colleagues: General Carns at the far end; Chris Williams next to him; J.D. Crouch, third chair; Jacques Gansler sitting in this fourth chair. You may address your questions to me or to any one of them. I should mention that the other three members of the task force, who are not here, include Admiral Giambastiani; Dr. John Hamre, the head of CSIS; and Frank Miller. We intend to work Admiral G very hard in the next phase, when we deal with the DOD overall.

Ma'am.

Q Mr. Secretary, can you talk a little bit about how you think a new central -- more centralized command would differ from the previous version several decades ago, and whether or not you got a lot of either pushback or reluctance from the Air Force to move in that direction again, sort of what the dialogue was?

MR. SCHLESINGER: We have not seen that much pushback from the Air Force. Generally, the Air Force has been receptive to these recommendations. Once again, the real question is whether there will ultimately be the kind of follow through, but to this point the Air Force has been quite receptive.

We have made a recommendation that all the bombers be put into a -- into a numbered Air Force. We have recommended that that -- that the bombers be responsive to the new Air Force STRAT, which will be interfacing with US-STRATCOM.

There is, in the view of most people, no perfect solution. I think that there will possibly be some concern on the part of Air Force officers with regard to the movement of all the bombers into Air Force STRAT.

But as far as I know, that is the principal question on which reservations have been expressed, to this point. And that will be up to General Schwartz and to the acting secretary to deal with.

Sir.

Q Mr. Secretary, when you said the task force recommended that one major command be in charge of the nuclear enterprise, are you saying that that should be Space Command?

MR. SCHLESINGER: We redesignate Space Command as Air Force STRAT. And that would interact with the combat command, namely USSTRATCOM.

Q Just an obvious question: What does Air Force STRAT stand for?

MR. SCHLESINGER: Well, it's Air Force STRATCOM.

MR.

: Air Force Strategic Command.

Q Air Force Strategic Command.

Q Sir, I wanted to ask you essentially the same question I asked Secretary Gates, which is, given that these corrective actions are under way, and you said that it's a commendable response, how confident are you? How confident should the American people be or the world, for that matter, that U.S. nuclear weapons are safe and secure, while these corrective actions are taken on?

Are you confident today that these kind of lapses that happened, in the past, couldn't happen again tomorrow?

MR. SCHLESINGER: Yes.

We have gotten the attention of everybody, down to the lowest level. And once one has the attention of wing commanders who are being held responsible today, for what goes on in the wing, we are going to see that the existing requirements are carried out.

As Secretary Gates indicated, we are more concerned about longer-term issues, in particular, rebuilding international confidence, in the credibility of our nuclear deterrent.

That is a major barrier to proliferation. And that is not significantly going to be affected by the improvements that we see at the -- have already seen at the lowest level.

General Carns, you want to comment?

GEN. MICHAEL CARNS (U.S. Air Force, retired, and former vice chief of staff and director of Joint Staff, Joint Chiefs of Staff): It is amply clear that the steps by the secretary of Defense have clearly gotten the attention of the Air Force through the major leadership changes.

Secondly, this chief and this secretary have also made it amply clear that number one on their priority list is not only remedying the deficiencies in the nuclear area, but also infusing a strong sense of accountability at command levels for all activities, nuclear and otherwise.

I think that I would be more than willing to say that there is bordering on no chance that there's going to be a problem, because the attention of command and the accountability of command has been made amply clear. And there will be a meeting next week, next Thursday, here in Washington, on the 18th, where senior leadership will be brought together to address the nuclear summit.

STAFF: Thank you, sir.

MR. SCHLESINGER: Do you want to comment, J.D.? (No audible reply.)

STAFF: Sir?

Q Mr. Secretary, do you have an estimate on how much it will cost to correct all of these deficiencies? And do you have an estimate on how many more airmen, officers it will take to fill up these ranks?

MR. SCHLESINGER: (Inaudible) -- back again, I think we are talking about 1,500 or 2,000 people that would have to be moved.

The -- with regard to the budget, the Air Force has designated it -- what -- is a billion and half dollars, or thereabouts, to be inserted in the FY '10 budget. That, of course, deals only with the short-term -- relatively short-term problems. It does not deal with the long-term problem of any modernization of the nuclear deterrent.

GEN. CARNS (Ret): The only thing I would add is that the recommendations in here, for the most part, address leadership, culture and organizational issues, which in the main do not cost money. They require realignments, new policies, new procedures, new practices to be put in place.

And so the short-term costs are relatively modest. But as the secretary has indicated, we have to address -- we have to address the long-term issues of viability over the long term.

STAFF: Sir?

Q Yes. I had a question of why you decided to choose Space Command to re-designate, instead of Air Combat Command, which had the bomber mission.

MR. SCHLESINGER: Of course Space Command already had the missiles in it. Air Combat Command has been focused primarily on conventional activities. That has been part of the problem, and it will be up to the Air Force, if the Air Force chooses not to move the bombers, to Air Force STRAT, to see to it that the bombers pay attention to the nuclear mission, which has not been the case over the course of most of the last decade.

Q Quick follow-up to that.

The nuclear weapons stationed at airbases in Europe -- would this also -- would these weapons also fall under Air Force Strategic Command?

MR. SCHLESINGER: No.

As I mentioned earlier, the sustainment mission would be part of the --

MR.

: Air Force Materiel Command.

MR. SCHLESINGER: -- Air Force Materiel Command. And the issue, of weapons in Europe, is part of the larger DOD issue that we will be addressing over the months ahead.

Q I wonder if you could expand on the erosion of confidence in the nuclear deterrent. What is, in your view, the cause of that, apart from these incidents? And what has to be done to change that?

MR. SCHLESINGER: The other countries have taken note of the incidents that have led the secretary to embark on various investigations, including our own task force. They are keenly aware of the Minot-Barksdale incident. They lose confidence in at least the Air Force's problems.

Now, they know that there is a Navy mission out there that, given the additional capabilities of the Air Force, combined with the Navy, that we still have a very powerful nuclear force. But they have been worried about the implications of these incidents, with regard to the efficacy of the force and with regard to the safety and surety of weapons.

That is part of it.

In addition, we have had discussion of zero nuclear weapons, which in this country and, indeed, in the United Kingdom -- and this has gotten the attention of some other participants in the protection by the American nuclear umbrella. They have been concerned about whether or not that becomes American policy. I should point out that under this administration, at least, that is firmly rejected. I can provide you with the -- you will find in here the statement of the administration with regard to nuclear deterrence.

STAFF: Sir?

Q Sir, if one looks at the publicly released timeline that the DOD provided when the news came out of this errant Taiwan shipment, at the top, initially there was some Air Force culpability, but beyond that point, it seems to me that DLA was -- (inaudible) -- involved in those missteps. So my question is, what needs to happen between the Air Force's relation with DLA to prevent something from the -- like the Taiwan incident from happening again? Should I read from what you're saying that if the Air Force makes its changes, that that will greatly reduce the chances of something similar happening again, or --

MR. SCHLESINGER: We have attended to the supply chain. The DLA will be part of our future investigation with regard to the overall Department of Defense. There have been adjustments made. Who's on top of that -- Jacques?

JACQUES GANSLER (former undersecretary of Defense for Acquisition, Technology and Logistics): When we complete all the recommended actions -- and were they to be implemented, the United States Air Force would be -- would be responsible for the item management and positive control of all nuclear-related material. We would remove it from DLA and move it over to the Air Force.

Q Would you make a similar recommendation to the Navy as well?

We would remove it from DLA and move it over to the Air Force.

Q Would that -- would you make a similar recommendation for the Navy as well?

MR. GANSLER: The Navy does it that way.

Q They -- okay.

MR. GANSLER: This is the FSP model, which the Navy uses.

Q Okay. Thank you.

MR. SCHLESINGER: Sir.

Q Sir, if I can just follow up on Jim's question about international reaction to this, you talked quite a bit about people who rely on the U.S. nuclear umbrella, but obviously there are countries that actually rely on the U.S. nuclear enterprise for their own independent nuclear. And I'm thinking about the British in particular, who are heavily reliant on the U.S. for maintaining.

I wonder if you can talk with any specificity about conversations you or the board had with the British about this, and whether they had any concerns since they are so heavily reliant on their own Trident -- on the U.S. for their own independent nuclear deterrent.

MR. SCHLESINGER: All indications are that the British have no concerns, and they have been reassured that there will be availability for the modernization of their nuclear submarines.

Sir -- ma'am.

Q When you talk about the concerns that you heard from the international community, are you talking -- (inaudible) -- about European concerns or about Middle Eastern concerns, particularly Israel, were the Israelis concerned that this nuclear umbrella doesn't help them? And are you concerned that they may take actions as a result of that nervousness, if you will?

MR. SCHLESINGER: The formal obligations of the United States are to the countries that I've mentioned: NATO, Western Pacific and the Antipides. And Israel, which has concerns of its own, are not formally protected.

However I think that it probably would be ill advised for any nation to act on that lack of formality. There are, probably are informal arrangements.

Sir.

Q How long might it take to address fully this problem with confidence?

MR. SCHLESINGER: I think that once others see that we are well on the road, to restoring the Air Force nuclear mission, and that the leadership of the Air Force is engaged with that problem, and they begin to see the results with regard to shifting of personnel, into the nuclear mission, the expansion of training of people, in the nuclear mission, that whatever doubts they may have had, in the past, will be resolved.

Q So if everything goes well, how much time might that take?

MR. SCHLESINGER: I think that we are dealing with relatively short periods, to restore confidence, probably six months to a year.

Q Does your report recommend any further disciplinary action against Air Force officers?

MR. SCHLESINGER: That is not in the report. That is not our task. I believe that disciplinary actions are under way in the Air Force.

Sir.

Q A recent inspection at the 5th Bomb Wing failed, the 5th Bomb Wing, for nuclear security concerns and major failures with their nuclear security. I was wondering how your task force has addressed this and what kind of recommendations you might have made, for nuclear security and the protection of the nuclear warheads.

MR. SCHLESINGER: We make strong recommendations with regard to nuclear inspection. There has been -- I'd put this carefully -- an uneven performance in the past, in that, as you will see in the report, various inspections have in the past resulted in pass grades in 2006 and 2007, and in 2008 there's the failure, which -- and there's been great variance in the performance of the -- of those being inspected, in the eyes of the inspector, which is a worrisome element which we hope will be cured.

Q Quick follow-up to that. What do you think about the Air Force's corrective action within Space Command to institute no-notice inspections to their nuclear bases? What kind of effect do you think that might have?

MR. SCHLESINGER: Well, I think that that is enormously important. It is the equivalent of no-notice inspections on the international scene of nuclear facilities. It gets the attention, as opposed to -- when notice is given, the consequence is that whoever's being inspected will be well-prepared for the inspection.

Q Sir, as you know, the Air Force has also been considering the establishment of a major command for cyberspace.

And in the last couple of weeks in the blogosphere there's been rumors that there may be some combined nuclear and cyberspace command. I'm wondering if you feel it would be a good idea to include, you know, offensive cyberspace or cyberspace in general under the Air Force Strategic Command that you envision, or if that would be too much under the umbrella of one command.

MR. SCHLESINGER: We did not address the question of cyberwarfare. As you have indicated, that has been under careful consideration both by the Air Force and the Department of Defense and, if I might add, the director of National Intelligence.

That is a problem that will have to be sorted out. It is, I think, apparent that cyberwarfare is one of our serious problems and that it is -- leads to the same kinds of considerations that one has with regard to nuclear deterrence -- in this case, deterrence of cyberattacks.

I should point out, of course, that there are low-level cyberattacks which we encounter every day. Our concern, of course, is of a major cyberattack by a major power.

Q But in general, sir, would you favor or be more inclined not to favor inclusion of another major mission under the AF STRAT that you are recommending should --

MR. SCHLESINGER: I think that that will have to be sorted out in the -- in our next report.

Sir.

Q Sir, were you surprised at the level of erosion in the standards or in the measure with the deterrence doctrine, given your previous experience?

MR. SCHLESINGER: We were surprised, as a matter of reality. We -- the erosion had gone much further than we anticipated. The two incidents were a reflection, were a reflection and symptomatic of considerable discontent. And the discontent rose up to the colonel level.

There has not been much Air Force attention to the nuclear problem at any higher levels, to this point. I think that, as you see, there is considerable adjustment going on and much higher attention.

Sir.

Q Mr. Secretary, you alluded to the unannounced inspections, as a way to get the commanders' attention. Are there any other things you could be more specific about, of how you're getting the attention of commanders to go and improve these -- the deterioration?

MR. SCHLESINGER: The simple answer is that if they're not out on the tarmac, as nuclear weapons are moved, and they do not see that the procedures are followed, they're likely to be disciplined, or their careers may end. That tends to get their attention. That has been brought home to them as a major responsibility.

Sir.

Q You were mentioning the priorities of the Air Force leading to the current state of affairs of the nuclear mission. And I was wondering, with Space Command being redesignated --

(Cross talk.)

With Space Command being redesignated as AFSTRAT, would there have to be any shift in their priorities, as current to the new redesignation?

MR. SCHLESINGER: We would hope so. We would hope that the appropriate levels of reinforcement, as it were, in terms of personnel would take place, making the new Air Force STRAT not only accountable, but they are given the resources to be accountable.

Sir.

Q Mr. Secretary, you said the Air Force has come up with 180 corrective actions. I was just wondering what -- did they start developing these corrective actions when you and your team started investigating, or have they been developing these for the past -- you know, since February?

MR. SCHLESINGER: I think that Secretary Gates indicated that the actions that he took earlier had gotten the attention of the senior officials in the Air Force and that they started worrying immediately. All of the Air Force commands have issued letters indicating that those in the commands had a responsibility for dealing with the nuclear mission. Are those letters publicly available, I believe? Michael?

GEN. CARNES (Ret): I don't know, but I --

MR. SCHLESINGER: We don't know. But in any event, they all --

GEN. CARNES (Ret): (Off mike) -- several announcements in the material available. We can --

MR. SCHLESINGER: Sir.

Q Mr. Secretary, you had said earlier there was a shortfall in airmen trained in the nuclear enterprise. Also you said you recommended between 1,500 and 2,000 airmen be shifted into that mission. Would that alleviate the entire shortfall or just part of it?

MR. SCHLESINGER: That was a -- that was my guess based upon our discussions. I will buck that question to General Carnes.

GEN. CARNES (Ret): As you will see in the body of the report, as well as in some of the annexes, our onsite visits to two-thirds of the bomb wings and two-thirds of the missile wings pointed out a number of areas where there were significant shortages created both because of the need to support the war, and also the 40,000 reduction, which the previous leadership had tried to use to fund new programs. Those deficiencies go to the heart of being able to support that mission in a robust way.

And so the restoration of a number of those positions in functions like security and maintenance and even on the staffs on the inspection side and others is relatively modest when you consider that we need to bring back up to right-sizing the three bomb wings and the three missile wings. So the estimate is it's less than 2,000. And with Secretary Gates' directive to turn the Air Force's reduction around, from around 313 and take it back to 330, there should be sufficient manpower spaces to meet all these needs and ensure that the commander has not only accountability for the wing and its mission, but also the resources to stand behind it.

Q So how many airmen is the nuclear enterprise short as of right now?

GEN. CARNES (Ret): I cannot give you that number, and the reason I would not even want to guess is because over the time these manning documents have been reduced, and we therefore need to go back and remaster these documents to make sure the number is right.

I'll give you an example. In the case of the missile wings, reductions have resulted in the removal of all intelligence officers from missile wings. So it isn't a matter of sending an intelligence officer back; it's a matter of reestablishing that position and manning it.

MR.

: Perhaps one or two more, and then we'll get the report out to you.

Q I'm wondering what your impression of the Air Force's Blue Ribbon Review report was? That was the first task force that I know of that was put together on that.

I was just wondering what your impressions and if that report went far enough, in your opinion.

MR. SCHLESINGER: We recommend going further.

Sir.

Q Sir, how would you recommend that the Air Force foster a new cadre of nuclear enlisted personnel and officers given that, as you said in your opening comments, we're living in a world where the bomber mission and the ICBM mission has gone from being two-thirds of the triad to today being, I think, two-thirds of one-third of one-third of the new triad.

So how do you -- how would you go about doing that, fostering that cadre?

MR. SCHLESINGER: The strategic mission under the new triad is separable from the other elements, as far as capability is concerned. And the -- this is a question of leadership, in large degree. Those who work in the nuclear area must feel that they are on an important mission.

They have heard too frequently that the nuclear mission is number one. And they see an erosion of resources, a lack of attention from above, both at the wing level and elsewhere, at higher levels. And as a consequence, they doubt all of the rhetoric in Washington about the nuclear mission being important.

It is a job of leadership to restore the confidence the people serving in that mission have, that indeed it is important, and that they are serving the nation's interests. That is part of it.

The latter part of it is that they must be given incentives, career incentives, which have to a considerable extent disappeared. The -- if you look at the missile force, which has just been renamed as a missile wing, as opposed to a space wing, the tendency has been for officers to be shifted out of missiles, into space, so that they believe that the career incentives point in the direction of staying away from the nuclear mission.

That is going to be changed, I believe, and that incentives will be recreated.

At the present time -- or until recently, the -- if you were, let's say, in a missile wing and you volunteered for Iraq or Afghanistan, you were immediately dispatched and your position remained unfilled. Your commander could make no effective protest about the departure of trained personnel on the one hand or the lack of fulfilling that space. We believe that that is under repair at this time.

STAFF: I see one last one. Let's take -- this is the last one.

MR. SCHLESINGER: Way back there.

Q Sir, there's been a lot of discussion within the space community over the last five years --

MR. SCHLESINGER: Within the space community?

Q Yes -- that they are subservient to the missileers and that they would like to see their command separate from theirs for operational reasons, for promotional reasons. Is this an issue that would fall within your purview, given this change that you're suggesting, or is that something the Air Force is just going to have to figure out on its own?

MR. SCHLESINGER: We will have to look at that again later on. To this point, we take note of the fact that General -- (name inaudible) -- has redesignated missile wings, that he is engaged -- and other commanders have

been -- in strengthening the moral and the capabilities of the missile wings. I think that space has gotten some of the glamour and that that has led to a desire on the part of some to separate themselves. I think that some of the glamour will now move back to the nuclear mission and that the desire to separate will be diminished.

STAFF: Thank you all for attending today and for your interest.

(C) COPYRIGHT 2008, FEDERAL NEWS SERVICE, INC., 1000 VERMONT AVE. NW; 5TH FLOOR; WASHINGTON, DC - 20005, USA. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED. ANY REPRODUCTION, REDISTRIBUTION OR RETRANSMISSION IS EXPRESSLY PROHIBITED.

UNAUTHORIZED REPRODUCTION, REDISTRIBUTION OR RETRANSMISSION CONSTITUTES A MISAPPROPRIATION UNDER APPLICABLE UNFAIR COMPETITION LAW, AND FEDERAL NEWS SERVICE, INC. RESERVES THE RIGHT TO PURSUE ALL REMEDIES AVAILABLE TO IT IN RESPECT TO SUCH MISAPPROPRIATION.

FEDERAL NEWS SERVICE, INC. IS A PRIVATE FIRM AND IS NOT AFFILIATED WITH THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT. NO COPYRIGHT IS CLAIMED AS TO ANY PART OF THE ORIGINAL WORK PREPARED BY A UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT OFFICER OR EMPLOYEE AS PART OF THAT PERSON'S OFFICIAL DUTIES.

FOR INFORMATION ON SUBSCRIBING TO FNS, PLEASE CALL CARINA NYBERG AT 202-347-1400.