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DEPARTMENT OF THE AIR FORCE

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

SUBJECT: Air Force Nuclear Programs and Policies in the Fiscal Year 2016 Defense Authorization
Request and Implementation of Nuclear Enterprise Review Recommendations

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Introduction

Chairman Sessions, Ranking Member Donnelly, distinguished Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to discuss Air Force nuclear programs and policies.

As the Assistant Chief of Staff for Strategic Deterrence and Nuclear Integration, my team, on behalf of the Secretary and Chief of Staff of the Air Force, leads planning, policy development, advocacy, integration, and assessment for the Airmen and weapon systems performing Nuclear Deterrence Operations, a core function of the United States Air Force. In today's increasingly complex, multi-polar environment, the highly stabilizing deterrence and assurance effects provided by Air Force nuclear forces—intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs), nuclear-capable bombers, and dual capable aircraft (DCA)— will continue to play a critical role in ensuring the security of the United States and assuring our allies and partners.

Throughout the 1990s and early 2000s, a confluence of forces contributed to an erosion of the nuclear mission within the Air Force. This period of decline was characterized by a loss of senior leader focus, fragmentation of responsibility, and chronic underinvestment in our personnel, weapon systems, and supporting infrastructure. While in recent years we have reversed this downward trend and made substantial progress towards addressing these deficiencies and the problems that resulted from them, we recognize considerable work lies ahead. As Secretary James has emphasized, restoring the health of the nuclear enterprise is an undertaking that will require sustained, long-term focus and effort.

Despite challenges, the dedicated Airmen who accomplish the nuclear mission every day continue to do so with remarkable professionalism, pride, and determination. For these women and men and the nation they serve, the Air Force remains fully committed to identifying and confronting systemic issues in our nuclear forces, and making the investments necessary to ensure they remain credible and effective in the decades ahead.

Nuclear Enterprise Reviews

From the outset of the Internal and Independent Nuclear Enterprise Reviews (NERs) directed by former Secretary of Defense Hagel in February 2014, as well as the review led by the Commander, U.S. Strategic Command (USSTRATCOM), the Air Force partnered closely with the assessment teams to provide unfettered access to our operations, personnel, and processes.

Combined, these assessments examined an extensive range of personnel, management, oversight, mission performance, training, testing, and investment areas across the nuclear enterprise. To date, we have implemented a number of the Air Force-specific recommendations produced by the NERs, and our work towards completing the remaining ones continues at a steady pace.

Under the direction of our Secretary and Chief of Staff, and with oversight and guidance from the Nuclear Deterrent Enterprise Review Group (chaired by the Deputy Secretary of Defense) and the Senior Oversight Group (chaired by the Director of Cost Assessment and Program Evaluation), we are approaching the implementation and tracking of NER follow-on actions through a systematic and responsive process, one intended to yield tangible and lasting improvements.

Following completion of the NERs in the fall of 2014, the Air Force's immediate efforts were concentrated on addressing the most exigent gaps identified in the reviews. As we gradually transition our attention this year to implementing NER initiatives that require longer-term action, we are placing renewed emphasis on strengthening assessment processes and developing valid metrics to ensure that the changes we institute are measurable and enduring. While continuous improvement and rigorous self-assessment have been guiding precepts of our efforts to strengthen the enterprise since our broad reorganization of this mission area in 2008-2009, we recognize that the success of our NER follow-on actions is critically dependent on how well this effort is integrated into existing Air Force nuclear oversight structures and processes, where our senior leadership can apply sustained focus, provide accountability, and marshal necessary resources.

Consistent with that objective, NER findings have assumed a central place in the agendas of our Nuclear Oversight Board, chaired by the Secretary and Chief of Staff with participation from all ten of our major command commanders, and the three-star level Nuclear Issues Resolution and Integration board. Both of these bodies, which are organized and managed by AF/A10 and meet quarterly to focus exclusively on issues of importance to the nuclear mission, serve as vital cross-functional forums where senior leaders can decisively prioritize, resource, and direct the implementation of solutions across the Air Force. We have determined that the Flight Plan for the Air Force Nuclear Enterprise, a comprehensive roadmap that outlines a series of strategic vectors for improving and monitoring the health of the nuclear enterprise, is the best framework through which to orchestrate our long-term NER response. Aligned in four focus areas—human capital, governance, inspections and assessments, and resourcing, with an

understanding that culture and morale are impacted by all of them—these vectors each have a corresponding action plan with execution and follow-up responsibilities assigned to specific Air Force entities.

The NER process has fostered an unprecedented renewal of senior level focus and collaborative engagement on the nuclear mission from the highest levels of DOD, and is already leading to positive outcomes that are visible throughout the force. We are optimistic that the new mechanisms created by the NERs can serve as a benchmark for future interagency collaboration as the Air Force continues its efforts in the coming years to improve the nuclear mission.

Sustaining the Effectiveness and Credibility of Our Forces

As long as nuclear weapons exist, the consequences of their potential use against the U.S. remains an existential threat that demands our strategic forces be prepared to meet not only the most likely contingencies, but also the most unlikely. President Obama has established a clear mandate that the U.S. will maintain safe, secure, and effective nuclear forces, even as we seek the peace and security of a world without nuclear weapons and take concrete steps to reduce our total number of weapons and the role they serve in national security strategy.

Consistent with the President's imperative, the Fiscal Year (FY) 2016 budget request seeks key investments in the sustainment, modernization, and recapitalization of Air Force nuclear weapon systems, supporting infrastructure, and our nuclear command, control, and communications capabilities (NC3). In addition, the budget provides strong support for our most critical asset: the Airmen we entrust to perform nuclear deterrence operations every day. Closely aligned with the priorities established by the NERs, as well as in multiple internal Air Force reviews of the nuclear enterprise, these investments in our air and ground legs of the Triad make important headway towards ensuring these systems remain effective and credible now and in the years ahead.

Weapon System Investment

The FY16 budget supports an array of modernization initiatives for our B-2A and B-52H bombers that will enable these aircraft to remain capable of performing their assigned nuclear and conventional missions. Despite these upgrades, both the B-52H (delivered in 1961-1962) and the B-2A (delivered throughout the early/mid 1990s) are becoming increasingly vulnerable to modern

air defenses. Accordingly, the FY16 budget advances research and development efforts for the Long Range Strike-Bomber (LRS-B) in order to ensure the nation retains a credible global strike and power projection capability in the decades ahead. We are anticipating a contract award for LRS-B in late spring of this year, with initial operational capability (IOC) for the planned fleet of 80-100 aircraft in the mid-2020s.

The budget funds life extension to 2030 of the AGM-86B air launched cruise missile (ALCM)—the nation’s only air-delivered stand-off strategic weapon, fielded by the Air Force in 1982 with a designed service life of 10 years. When employed from B-52H bombers, ALCMs provide an extremely valuable signaling capability and a degree of versatility unmatched elsewhere in the Triad. For these and other reasons, the FY16 budget request restores funding to the critical Long Range Stand-Off (LRSO) effort, a follow-on ALCM program that will eventually replace the AGM-86B. The funding level requested enables the program to meet USSTRATCOM’s operationally required need date and realigns Air Force integration efforts with the Department of Energy (DOE)/National Nuclear Security Agency (NNSA) life extension program (LEP) to produce an LRSO warhead.

The life extension effort for the B61, the Air Force’s primary gravity nuclear weapon, is equally important to the continued effectiveness of our deterrence and assurance capabilities. Both the B61-12 LEP, which DOE/NNSA manages, and the associated Air Force Tailkit Assembly program are supported in the FY16 DOE/NNSA and Air Force budgets. These efforts are synchronized and on schedule to deliver the first production unit B61-12 in 2020. The FY16 future years defense program (FYDP) also supports risk reduction activities for dual capable aircraft (DCA) integration for the F-35 Joint Strike Fighter. Our goal of reaching IOC for F-35 DCA with the life-extended B61-12 by 2024 remains unchanged. This program remains an important and highly tangible signal of the U.S.’s continued commitment to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, which has repeatedly affirmed the role of nuclear deterrence in the collective security of the Alliance.

Several sustainment programs for the nation’s fleet of Minuteman III (MM III) ICBMs and supporting infrastructure are funded in the FY16 budget that will extend the effectiveness of this system through 2030, consistent with Congressional mandates. For more than 50 years, continuously on-alert ICBMs have been a foundational pillar of America’s strategic deterrent, providing a level of responsiveness and stability not replicated by other legs of the Triad. In order

to preserve this capability for the nation beyond the phase out of MM III, the FY16 budget supports continued development and risk reduction for the follow-on Ground-Based Strategic Deterrent (GBSD) program. Last summer, Air Force Global Strike Command (AFGSC) completed the GBSD analysis of alternatives, and the program is already leveraging synergies with MM III modernization efforts to meet a target IOC in 2027.

For our major weapon system modernization and recapitalization efforts, the Air Force's partnership with DOE/NNSA—responsible for life extension of the nuclear explosive packages at the heart of our gravity weapons, cruise missiles, and ICBM reentry vehicles—remains productive and strong. Our ongoing cooperation with the Department of the Navy on ballistic missile sustainment, intended to leverage commonalities between the Air Force's MM III ICBM and the Navy's Trident II (D5) submarine-launched ballistic missile, is helping both services reduce program risk and improve affordability. Through the joint DOD-DOE Nuclear Weapons Council and other interagency channels, we will continue to pursue new opportunities to strengthen integration with our mission partners to ensure the success of our programs.

Addressing Other Critical Mission Needs

The FY16 budget addresses a host of other important mission needs, particularly across the ICBM force. These investments include the establishment of a program office to manage recapitalization of the Vietnam-era fleet of UH-1N utility helicopters performing the ICBM security mission, as well as the replacement of aging ICBM payload transporters with updated models. Complementing the longer-term modernization and recapitalization programs underway for the missile force, this budget also advances multiple initiatives to address immediate, near-term ICBM operations and maintenance needs.

Prior to the formal initiation of the NERs, in January 2014 AFGSC acted decisively to uncover and address urgent shortfalls throughout the missile wings through its Force Improvement Program (FIP). Guided by actual feedback provided by Airmen in the field performing missile operations, FIP yielded a diverse set of actionable recommendations, many of which were implemented or initiated last year with FY14 and FY15 investments. Examples of improvements for the ICBM force supported by FIP to date include incentive pays, scholarships, fielding of important test and maintenance equipment, refurbishment and deep cleaning of launch control centers and alert facilities, new utility vehicles, and upgraded tactical equipment and uniforms for

our security forces. Most significantly, FIP is supporting the addition of approximately 1,100 billets across AFGSC to strengthen manning in key nuclear specialties, as well as 158 technical and engineering billets at Air Force Materiel Command that will help preserve specialized skillsets within the nuclear sustainment enterprise and advance the GBSD program.

The FY16 budget also makes important first steps towards reversing the trend of decline in our critical nuclear mission facilities, particularly our 1950s-1960s era Weapons Storage Areas (WSAs) that support nuclear munitions storage and maintenance. The FY16 FYDP includes military construction funding to initiate the first phases of a comprehensive plan—the Weapons Storage Facility (WSF) Investment Strategy—that will replace existing WSAs with modern WSFs at AFGSC installations in the coming years. Additionally, the budget supports robust facilities sustainment, restoration, and modernization levels that will allow AFGSC to begin addressing a number of previously deferred infrastructure repairs across its ICBM and bomber installations.

As the lead military service for approximately two-thirds of the nation’s NC3 systems, the Air Force continues to work to improve focus on and resourcing of this vital mission. Critical to the execution of the nuclear mission, as well as Presidential and senior leader communications, NC3 must be secure, redundant, and highly survivable to ensure continuous connectivity in all environments. In order to consolidate and strengthen the life cycle management process for NC3, we continue to collaborate with mission partners to define key NC3 system elements, interdependencies, and authorities. In February of this year, the Secretary and Chief of Staff designated AFGSC as the Air force lead for this mission area. In this capacity, AFGSC is presently leading an Air Force Task Force charged with assessing oversight and organizational relationships related to NC3 acquisition and sustainment, as well as participating in a comprehensive DOD led NC3 capabilities study.

Strengthening Policies to Support the Mission

We are effectively capitalizing on the NER process to address long-standing inefficiencies in many administrative and policy areas affecting the nuclear enterprise. In close partnership with AFGSC and other Air Force, Joint, and DOD stakeholders, over the past twelve months we have implemented a number of important revisions to key programs and policies that are yielding substantial efficiencies. For example, we have restructured our Personnel Reliability Program (PRP) to eliminate redundancy and vastly reduce the number of individuals required to be covered

by the program. We anticipate these changes will result in considerable reductions in the man-hours required to administer PRP, while at the same maintaining the integrity and intent of the program.

Through the NERs we have accelerated previously initiated efforts to refine the scope and methodology of our nuclear inspection process, with the goal of reducing duplicative structures, providing wings with critical “white space” to focus on successful performance of the mission in lieu of constant preparation for inspections, and empowering Airmen to innovate by removing unnecessary requirements that promote micro-management and perfectionism. We continue to strengthen the ICBM career field by creating new paths for professional development and education, providing additional opportunities for leadership experience, and offering incentives to our missileers who elect to pursue higher levels of responsibility.

Treaty Compliance Efforts

In accordance with the terms of the New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty, Air Force activities to align our ICBM and heavy bomber forces with the treaty-compliant force structure established by DOD last spring by the deadline of February 2018 remain on track. In support of this effort, modifications to treaty-accountable ICBM silos and bombers will continue in 2015. Consistent with statutory mandates and USSTRATCOM requirements, we continue to preserve the capability to reconfigure MM III ICBM with multiple warheads.

Conclusion

The realization of the benefits intended from these investments and the Air Force’s ability to continue supporting combatant command nuclear requirements is critically dependent on the funding levels requested in the President’s budget. As the Secretary and Chief of Staff have made clear, should the Air Force have to operate at sequestration-level funding in FY16, no mission area—including nuclear deterrence operations—would be impervious to its effects.

Thank you for the opportunity to update the Subcommittee on Air Force nuclear enterprise policies and programs and our actions to implement NER recommendations. Our near and long-term commitment to continuous improvement of the nuclear mission—particularly through the deliberate development of our Airmen—will remain one of the Air Force’s top priorities.