

**Reinvigorating the Air Force Nuclear Enterprise
Center for Strategic and International Studies**

**The Honorable Michael B. Donley
Secretary of the Air Force**

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As prepared for delivery

Thanks, Ray, for your introduction and for the invitation to be here today.

CSIS has long played a leading and bipartisan role in facilitating communication and debate within our national security community, and between the U.S. and other countries on a wide range of international security and global economic issues.

Over the past 30 years, I've spent many hours in this building on various committees and panels, and in this room listening to U.S. and foreign leaders discuss the defense and international issues of the day. It's truly an honor to be with you.

Five months

A lot has changed since I served as the Air Force Assistant Secretary for Financial Management in the late 80s and early 90s, and as acting Air Force secretary for several months in 1993. So the learning curve has been steep.

When I returned to the Air Force this past June, it was under unprecedented circumstances -- where both the Service Secretary and Chief of Staff were simultaneously replaced. As you recall this was due to concerns with the management of the nuclear enterprise -- and particularly two significant events: the accidental movement of weapons from Minot to Barksdale, and the shipment of a nuclear-related fuse to Taiwan.

I'd like to spend most of our time addressing efforts by the Air Force leadership to reinvigorate our nuclear enterprise, and then briefly touch on other work underway to support the smooth transition to a new Administration and prepare for the next Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR).

Nuclear

Since its inception in 1947, the Air Force has had a long and proud history of contributing to America's strategic deterrence posture. For over sixty years, stewardship of the Air Force nuclear enterprise has been our solemn obligation. Certainly, nuclear weapon systems, delivery platforms, and organizational structures have changed over the past decades -- reflecting changing presidential guidance, advancing technology, international geopolitics, and America's commitment to its treaty obligations.

During past decades, the nuclear arsenal entrusted to our care has increased ... and then decreased ... in size, and its composition has changed several times.

But regardless of size or composition, there is one fundamental precept that must undergird this critical enterprise. In the nuclear business, precision and reliability must underscore every action, by every Airman, at all times -- perfection must be our standard.

As one commander noted, sometimes in the defense department we focus on *managing risk*. But in the nuclear business, we must focus on *eliminating risk*.

This is an important philosophical distinction. Whether one is *managing* or *eliminating risk* can lead to very different views on how to organize, train and equip. It can also lead to very different views about how you manage the enterprise and what we need out of our inspections.

So it makes sense that how we organize, train and equip for nuclear operations and sustainment may differ from how we organize, train and equip for conventional operations and sustainment.

Recent work

When I arrived in June, multiple corrective actions related to nuclear matters were underway. However, it was clear that the Air Force needed to consider the nuclear enterprise from a more comprehensive and institutional perspective.

We needed to find and confront the root causes. What we were experiencing was not just a series of minor mishaps. These signal events were symptomatic of a deeper problem.

As the Schlesinger Report and similar investigations revealed, however, there has been a serious systemic erosion of focus, expertise, mission readiness and discipline across the Air Force nuclear weapons enterprise following the end of the Cold War.

We had lost our nuclear focus as other priorities emerged.

At the same time, nuclear advocacy and our culture of accountability and rigid adherence to standards had eroded. We had weaknesses in our nuclear inspections, staff assistance visits and unit quality assurance programs; and our nuclear policies and guidance were inadequate and conflicting.

Additionally, there had been a reduced priority for the development and management of nuclear subject matter experts, and our nuclear training programs were also inadequate. And underlying all of these was a lack of critical assessment of our state of affairs.

In response, we needed a comprehensive approach to problem solving with broad institutional support.

All the studies and reports indicate that we need to: rebuild our culture of accountability and rigorous self-assessment; rebuild nuclear expertise training and career paths for personnel; ensure we have solid end-to-end, sustainment systems; develop comprehensive investment plans for nuclear mission requirements; sustain nuclear deterrent mission advocacy and align authorities and responsibilities to meet nuclear deterrent mission requirements.

Greater introspection was warranted and we needed to recognize this as a unique opportunity for change. And we needed to collaborate with other partners in the nuclear arena as we discussed the way forward.

To start these deliberations, we established an Air Force Nuclear Task Force in late June with the overarching goal of developing a strategic roadmap to rebuild and restore capabilities and confidence in our stewardship of the Air Force nuclear enterprise. Additionally, General Schwartz and I held a series of meetings with the Air Force's most senior civilian and military leaders, and with our DoD and interagency partners to gain a shared view of problems and potential solutions.

The results of these efforts are reflected in the Air Force's nuclear roadmap which we published in late October. It is a comprehensive -- and I believe objective -- assessment of both root causes and required actions. And I would like to share with you the major actions we are taking as a result.

Establishment of the A10 Directorate

First, we have established a new "A10" directorate within the Headquarters. This new Air Staff Directorate reports directly to the Air Force Chief of Staff, and is responsible for policy oversight and integration of all our nuclear enterprise activity and issues. By elevating nuclear matters as a direct report to the Chief and centralizing all nuclear policy responsibilities into one organization, the A10 directorate will increase institutional focus and provide a single point of contact at the Headquarters for the management and integration for nuclear issues.

Nuclear Weapons Center

We are also using a phased approach to consolidate all nuclear sustainment matters under an expanded Nuclear Weapons Center at Kirtland Air Force Base, New Mexico. This action will clear up previously ambiguous chains of command by transferring nuclear-related program management responsibilities from the Space and Missile Systems Center to the Nuclear Weapons Center. In addition, we are extending positive inventory control over all nuclear-related materials entrusted to Air Force custody.

Global Strike Command

Additionally, we have proposed the establishment a new major command, responsible for all Air Force nuclear operations. This new "Global Strike Command" would streamline the Air Force's organize, train and equip functions for our nuclear-capable bombers – essentially B-52s and B-2s – and ICBMs under a single commander. This means that the nuclear-capable bombers of what is now 8th Air Force, and all of what is now in 20th Air Force, will report to this single new command.

The B-1Bs will remain subordinate to Air Combat Command, as will the intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (ISR) and command and control (C2) aircraft. Splitting the bomber force was a significant decision. This arrangement preserves the tremendous gains over the past 18 years in improving bomber support to theater operations. It is also consistent with the B-1's role as a strictly conventional bomber. It is important to add that the B-52s and B-2s will continue to support conventional operations, as they do today, when necessary.

This approach restores the necessary focus on the nuclear mission; provides a clear chain of command for all Air Force nuclear forces; and allows for one-to-one alignment between operations in Global Strike Command and sustainment with the Nuclear Weapons Center. In essence, the new command has one source for nuclear sustainment, and the Nuclear Weapons Center has one operational customer.

The combination also serves U.S. Strategic Command's nuclear deterrence and its global strike missions with dual-capable bombers and an ICBM force that could support STRATCOM's interest in prompt global conventional strike.

Global Strike Command (Provisional)

We plan to stand up Global Strike Command by next September, and will announce interim leadership and a provisional location by the end of this calendar year.

This stand up is significant not only because it restores our focus on the nuclear mission and culture, but because it demonstrates the Air Force's clear commitment to restoring excellence in nuclear matters. Proposing to stand up a new MAJCOM was not a decision that we took lightly, and the entire Air Force leadership team is committed to its success.

Process and procedural changes

To improve our processes and procedures for nuclear matters, we are also paying careful attention to the nuclear inspection process.

Specifically, the Inspector General has the task of centralizing standards and developing more consistent policies and interpretations of policy across the major commands. This includes development of inspector training and certification programs, and creating a core team of Nuclear Surety Inspection (NSI) inspectors that have the skills, experience, and expertise to carry out these important duties.

Our intent is to create a cadre of personnel with in-depth knowledge and expertise. This will ensure that our inspection process can deliver the results we need from it; not only upholding consistent standards, but also benchmarking and tracking performance, and sharing best practices across the nuclear enterprise.

Corporate Stewardship

We are also enhancing how we integrate nuclear stewardship across the corporate Air Force. In the headquarters, for example, we are consolidating all our nuclear-related program elements into one management portfolio. Our corporate panel process – which handles resourcing matters – is being revamped to include a panel dedicated to the nuclear mission. These changes will significantly improve corporate Air Force and senior leader visibility into how we are resourcing the nuclear mission area.

We will also establish a new senior civilian position within the office of the Under Secretary of the Air Force, who will have broad responsibility for policy oversight of nuclear matters. This focused civilian oversight in the Secretariat will ensure strong partnership with the uniformed A10 function, enabling comprehensive focus on nuclear enterprise management.

We're also establishing a Nuclear Oversight Board, chaired by the Chief of Staff of the Air Force and the Air Force secretary. It will establish nuclear-related policies and standards as well as develop and oversee enterprise-level performance metrics. The Board will also review inspection and audit reports pertaining to nuclear matters. Our initial focus will be implementation of the nuclear roadmap.

Cultural Changes

In addition to organizational re-alignments, we are taking steps to reorient many of our organizations toward a compliance-based culture. These changes will ensure that the Air Force returns to the standards of excellence in nuclear matters for which it was so well known during

the Cold War. In general, our emphasis across the Air Force reflects a back to basics approach in accountability, compliance, precision and reliability. With respect to nuclear matters, we are currently reassessing and rebuilding the requirements for education, training, career development and force development at all levels.

Clearly, steady leadership is crucial to reversing the systemic and cultural decline that devalued this all-important mission area since the end of the Cold War. And although important changes and fixes are underway, we find ourselves at the beginning of what will be a long road of rebuilding excellence in Air Force nuclear matters. Here, establishing a culture that appreciates how the nuclear mission requires clear focus, and providing a steady hand to this work, is key.

This is long term work, where success will be measured in years, not weeks.

[Nuclear Deterrence](#)

As we implement these organizational, structural and cultural changes, we must also consider the emerging challenges recently noted by Secretary Gates. More countries in the world have nuclear weapons than at the height of the Cold War – and we must have a credible deterrent force to meet these challenges.

Secretary Gates observed that, “As long as other states have or seek nuclear weapons – and potentially can threaten us, our allies, and friends – then we must have a deterrent capacity that makes it clear that challenging the United States in the nuclear arena – or with other weapons of mass destruction – could result in an overwhelming, catastrophic response.”

As he also noted, the nation’s nuclear weapons complex is aging and expensive. Transformation to a smaller, less costly, and more modern enterprise is necessary.

While the Air Force is adding resources to its budget to implement the initiatives in our roadmap, I should emphasize that our efforts to strengthen and recommit to this mission are not focused on increasing the size of our nuclear arsenal. Indeed, I would argue that our commitment to this mission needs to be independent of size. The Air Force needs to focus on being a good steward of the nuclear forces entrusted to us, regardless of their size, and regardless of changing emphasis in other DoD mission areas.

As we look forward, the nation will face critical decisions on the type and level of investment required to keep the current forces safe and reliable even as they potentially grow smaller.

And the Air Force is not alone in this work. The nuclear enterprise includes the Navy, DoE and other important policy partners in the Executive Branch and Congress. As operators of nuclear forces, the Air Force and our nuclear partners in the Navy will need strong policy and programming guidance from our DoD and national leadership to sustain focus on this critical national capability.

Even as our national leaders move forward to consider how nuclear arsenals might be further reduced, we as operators need their attention and support to ensure America’s nuclear deterrent remains credible. To be credible it must be operationally effective and flexible; safe, secure and reliable; and not be allowed to atrophy or decay through lack of attention or neglect.

[Coming months](#)

Of course, attending to the nuclear enterprise has not been our only task.

First, we are keeping up with the day-to-day business of the Air Force.

The Total Force of Active, Reserve, Guard and Civilian totals nearly 700,000 personnel. So as you can imagine, the work of organizing, training and equipping the Air Force keeps the headquarters pretty busy.

We have a special responsibility to ensure that the over 37,000 Airmen who are deployed and the hundreds of thousands who are supporting the joint team from home station are provided with the policy, guidance and resources necessary to provide well-organized, well-equipped, and well-trained forces to joint commanders. Increasing ISR assets in the CENTCOM AOR continues to be a priority.

We are also preparing for the **transition**--a hectic and exciting time in our democracy. 2008 marks the first time since 1952 that neither the incumbent president nor vice president was on the ballot. The certainty of this major change allowed the Executive Departments and Agencies to begin planning early.

2008 also marks the Nation's first wartime transition in 40 years – the last being during the Vietnam War. Today, we are involved in two shooting wars, as well as international efforts to track down terrorists. So it is tremendously important that we make this transition as smooth as possible.

To that end, Secretary Gates -- a long time veteran of administration transitions -- started DoD's transition planning several months ago and began efforts that:

- Established a transition management framework,
- Prepared transition materials for each of the political appointee and critical Non-Career-SES positions,
- Prepared facilities to receive the transition team,
- Bolstered logistics and personnel capacity to efficiently on-board new personnel, and
- Attempted to anticipate the needs and focus on the incoming team based on past transitions, and discussions with those who have been part of the previous processes.

Additionally, Secretary Gates has asked for the department's political appointees to consider staying as long as possible to assist the transition teams. His hope is to avoid the bathtub in leadership that typically accompanies changes in administrations -- especially as we remain a nation at war.

Within the Air Force, we are working to identify key decisions – on a range of issues – that will need to be made over the coming months. Decisions on F-22 and C-17 procurement, as well as an acquisition strategy to support the air refueling mission, top the list of acquisition issues requiring senior leader attention.

It is becoming increasingly clear that space and cyberspace are interagency domains, and that our work in these areas requires careful coordination with several DoD and interagency partners.

And we are investing time and manpower in several mid-term studies where we need to be prepared to engage and contribute in the next QDR, such as institutionalizing Air Force

contributions to our Nation's Irregular Warfare and Counterinsurgency operations capabilities, strengthening interagency discussion and decision structures for national security space, incorporating Unmanned Aerial Systems capabilities for the long term, and migrating the supplemental budgets to the baseline budget.

Conclusion

Today's Air Force faces many challenges, and through circumstances largely of our own making, finds itself at a critical milestone in our nuclear mission. We have started the hard work of recommitting to excellence across the nuclear enterprise, making adjustments in our processes, organizations and culture; and ensuring that leadership remains focused and attentive to the nuclear enterprise. However, much work remains.

A credible and reliable nuclear deterrent is essential to our national security and instills confidence in our allies and friends, and the Air Force has an essential role in this mission.

Today, thousands of America's Airmen ensure the readiness of the nation's nuclear arsenal.

They operate America's missile fields and train to deliver weapons from nuclear-capable aircraft. They sustain current nuclear weapon and delivery systems, ensuring the engineering integrity of Air Force nuclear systems.

At the senior reaches of the Air Force, our responsibility is to provide these Airmen and their civilian counterparts with the appropriate guidance and resources. That way, they can execute their responsibilities in accordance with the standard of perfection demanded by the nuclear mission.

We are fully committed to this task, and appreciate the expertise and knowledge that you offer in this domain. Thank you for allowing me to join you this morning, and thank you for all you do to support America's Airmen and their joint partners.