

Air Force Global Strike Command Technology and Innovation Symposium

The Honorable Erin C. Conaton
Under Secretary of the Air Force
17 November 2010
2620 words / 22 minutes
As prepared for delivery

Greetings

Thank you, Mr. Rockett, for the kind introduction. I also want to thank you, General Klotz; not only for hosting this event, and your inspiring words, but for your 38 years of military service. You've made a tremendous difference in both standing up and leading Global Strike Command to full operational capability. I want to thank you and Nancy for an incredible career and for leadership in one of our Air Force's primary missions. I know you

are leaving this command in the very capable hands of General Jim Kowalski but you will be missed.

I also want to thank Mr. Craig Spohn from the Cyber Innovation Center, who is co-sponsoring this symposium; and all the leaders who are here from across the Air Force and the world, providing insight into the current and future nuclear enterprise. It's a pleasure to speak at the first Global Strike Technology and Innovation Symposium. I'm also looking forward to the score postings of the inaugural Global Strike Challenge competition. I'm sure you are all anxious to get to that part of the day but I do want to take a few minutes before we head to the base.

[Introduction](#)

My message to you today, on behalf of our Secretary and Chief, is this: What you do matters. It matters to our Air Force

and to our Nation's security. Each of you here plays a vital role in our nuclear mission – whether it's providing essential leadership, maintaining critical systems and equipment, or having the ability to put weapons on target – your contributions are why we have a safe and secure nuclear enterprise and an effective strategic deterrent. I also know you appreciate, that with the importance of your mission come the responsibility for constant vigilance. We're in a business with no room for error and we're regularly reminded of the stakes.

What you do matters

Let me take a moment to describe how what you all are doing everyday resonates in Washington. More than two years after the Secretary and the Chief came to office in the wake of troubles in our nuclear work, one of the Air Force's top priorities

remains the strength of our nuclear enterprise. As General Klotz has just emphasized, this topic remains of critical national importance and has the attention of Secretary Donley and General Schwartz daily. Your work is on the front pages of papers around the country, and on the table for discussions at the highest levels of our government.

Just a few short weeks ago, the President's attention was brought to missiles at F.E. Warren. In fact, within hours of this news, both General Schwartz and Secretary Donley were in Secretary Gates' office. Our Airmen at F.E. Warren did an incredible job to quickly restore communications with the affected missiles and are now working hard to understand what happened. And they've had to do this with the eyes of the Nation on them. It's a testament to their skill, their ingenuity, and their leadership.

In July of this year, the Secretary and the Chief delivered our 2-Year Nuclear Update to the Secretary of Defense, reporting the significant changes we've made to improve our nuclear enterprise since the incidents of 2007 and 2008. While it was the Secretary, the Chief, and General Klotz presenting, what they were presenting was your work – the combined progress of thousands of individual Airmen holding yourselves and your units to the highest standards.

In the report, we noted the establishment of a Nuclear Oversight Board, created to ensure institutional focus on the nuclear deterrence mission. The Board has met 9 times since its inception. We're using it to review enterprise metrics, set vectors and measure progress.

Through the Nuclear Oversight Board, we've made other significant changes which include: standing up Air Force Global Strike Command; creating a new Air Force Headquarters Directorate, Air Force/A10; consolidating the CONUS Weapons Storage Areas into the Air Force Nuclear Weapons Center; and restructuring out Nuclear Surety Inspections. These initiatives are helping to ensure effective leadership oversight across the spectrum of nuclear responsibility.

Global Strike Command was founded on the premise that no mission is more important than the operation, maintenance, security, and support of nuclear weapons. As you know, your Global Strike Command achieved full operational capability on September 30th, a considerable achievement. It's the first completely new command the Air Force has stood up in more

than 27 years, and it took only 14 months to go from activation to full operational capability. General Klotz – again, I applaud you and your talented team of professionals for the hard work that went into activation of Global Strike Command.

Establishing the new A10 office on the Air Staff was also an indication of the importance of our nuclear mission. A10 is responsible for the synchronization and integration of the Air Force nuclear enterprise and strategic deterrence issues across the Air Staff and the Major Commands. It will also implement initiatives from the Nuclear Oversight Board and integrate Nuclear Posture Review activities. A10 was blessed with an extraordinary first leader in Major General Don Alston – now back in a command position after escaping the Pentagon... Major General Bill Chambers has now taken the leadership reins and is already

playing a key role as we finalize our FY 12 budget. These major organizational changes have provided a new level of leadership, advocacy, and accountability, and have laid the foundation for continuous improvement in managing and carrying out the nuclear mission.

Additional oversight and accountability of the nuclear enterprise is being provided by the Air Force Nuclear Weapons Center as the consolidated focal point for nuclear weapons life cycle management, dedicated to providing war-winning nuclear capabilities on time and on cost. The Nuclear Weapons Center is headed up by Brigadier General Everett Thomas and we're grateful he's lending his extensive nuclear systems experience to lead the way in nuclear surety and sustainment.

The comprehensive overhaul of our inspection process has allowed us to better inform our MAJCOM commanders, General Schwartz, and Secretary Donley about our operational readiness and surety. Since the implementation of more rigorous measures in our inspection process, we've been able to better identify deficiencies, allowing us to focus on the appropriate remedies and improvement. We see every inspection's results at the Headquarters and senior DoD leaders ask us about the trend lines. We're cheering you on when the results are good, and we're supporting your efforts to improve when they're not so good. These inspections measure our mission readiness, and we must continue to hold ourselves to a very high standard.

Plainly, it's an exciting time to be in the nuclear business. As we continue to adapt to the post-Cold War security environment, it

is worth noting that there is a broad consensus throughout the government on the critical nature of nuclear weapons, perhaps for the first time since the end of the Cold War.

I came to the Air Force after a decade of working military issues in the U.S. Congress, during years where there were regularly contentious debates over nuclear issues. But after a decade or more of inattention to the nuclear enterprise, interspersed with arguments over “Robust Nuclear Earth Penetrators” and low-yield weapons, Congress established in the 2008 National Defense Authorization Act the widely-respected bipartisan U.S. Strategic Posture Review Commission. This Commission helped to develop and demonstrate that a bipartisan consensus had emerged in support of renewed focus on and investment in the nuclear enterprise. Their influential report and a

handful of additional contemporary reviews emphasized making the investments needed to maintain our strategic deterrent and served as a significant reference point in drafting the Nuclear Posture Review, or NPR.

The NPR built on this emerging consensus and reflects an important fact: our national leaders fully support the important work you do and are committed to keep investing in it.

The NPR released in April of this year, notes that while the “threat of global nuclear war has become remote...the risk of nuclear attack has increased.” We’re increasingly seeing the efforts of terrorists groups and countries that may be at odds with the United States or its allies attempting to gain access to nuclear technology and weapons. The threat of nuclear terrorism and proliferation highlight the imperative for us to maintain a safe,

secure, and effective nuclear enterprise while strengthening strategic stability with existing nuclear powers.

The NPR lays out five objectives as a result of the current security threat: 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.*

These goals reflect both the enduring significance of strategic deterrence and the evolution of our nuclear posture to reflect the emerging threat of nuclear proliferation and terrorism. In particular, these latter two priorities make plain that the NPR

should not be misinterpreted as undermining the significance of nuclear deterrence.

The national security objectives identified in the NPR will be reinforced by the New START Treaty, if ratified by the Senate. Because of crucial role the Air Force plays in providing the nation's strategic deterrent, the treaty will be incredibly important to our work. Our senior leadership – both uniformed and civilian – supports this Treaty and looks forward to the Senate's action on it in the coming weeks.

While the intention of the Treaty is to reduce the number of strategic delivery vehicles by 74 percent from START I levels and the number of strategic warheads by 30 percent from the Moscow Treaty levels, this reduction does not indicate a reduction in the

importance of the nuclear mission – on the contrary, a smaller arsenal gains even greater strategic significance.

The United States will still maintain a healthy complement of nuclear capabilities – 1,550 accountable strategic warheads, 700 deployed strategic delivery vehicles, and 800 deployed and non-deployed strategic launchers. Importantly, the treaty won't prevent the United States from pursuing our missile defense programs and long range strike capabilities as elements of a more conventional deterrence strategy. And critically, it will provide visibility into Russia's nuclear programs. Since the expiration of START I at the end of 2009, we haven't had an agreement in place to conduct on-site inspections of Russia's nuclear weapons or facilities. New START will again provide us the ability to verify Russia's nuclear weapon stockpile compliance.

Critically, the Treaty and the NPR reinforce the continued relevance of the Nuclear Triad. As Secretary of Defense Gates has stated, the Air Force will meet the Treaty's limits by retaining up to 420 deployed single-warhead Minuteman III ICBMs at our current three missile bases, and up to 60 deployed heavy bombers. How the Air Force will specifically achieve these force levels will depend on many factors. But we're working on implementation plans so that when the time comes, we'll be ready to quickly meet our treaty obligations.

Over the next decade, the United States also plans to invest over 100 billion dollars to sustain existing strategic delivery systems capabilities and modernize strategic systems. Almost half of that – 40.5 billion dollars – is going to AF programs; including Minuteman III modernization; B-52 upgrades; and the

sustainment of our B-2 fleet. In addition to the billions spent on these systems, one billion dollars will be invested into improved Command, Control, and Communications capabilities. This substantial investment into the infrastructure that sustains our nuclear weapons and the means to deliver them demonstrates the national commitment to modernizing our remaining nuclear force.

[You cannot take your eye off the ball](#)

The President, Secretary Gates and Secretary Donley have all reaffirmed that *as long as nuclear weapons exist, we will retain a safe, secure, and effective nuclear deterrent both to deter potential adversaries and to assure U.S. allies and other partners that they can rely on America's security commitments.* To do this, we'll continue to demand the highest standards of performance

and accountability from our force. We will keep the focus on organizing, training and equipping to flawlessly execute this mission. And we can be proud that we've taken some significant steps over the past few years to ensure we remain a credible strategic force both at home and abroad.

The Air Force is now – and will continue to be – an indispensable provider of two thirds of the Nation's nuclear deterrent. The President tasks the Airmen in this room and all those you represent with this enduring and evolving mission. What has not changed, nor will ever change, is this mission demands a level of attention to detail and constant vigilance beyond all others in the Department of Defense.

After being confirmed, my first visit to a Major Command was here to Global Strike Command. In my short 8 months with the

Air Force, I have also been in both bombers and out to a Launch Control Center. I have had the privilege of speaking with the operators of our nuclear weapons systems, the security forces that protect our nuclear weapons, the missile and aircraft maintainers who keep our nuclear forces “launch ready” and the many force support personnel vital to ensuring the safety, security, and reliability of our nuclear deterrence mission.

These Airmen, though not always deployed to overseas locations, spend large amounts of time away from their homes and families in order to keep us safe. I want to thank these Airmen – particularly as the holidays approach – and make sure you know that we appreciate your sacrifice.

This summer, I was telling a senior leader at Nellis Air Force Base – who just so happens to be a fighter pilot – that I was on

my way to talk to our Airmen at Malmstrom AFB. Unprompted, he told me how much he respected those who are part of our nuclear mission because, as he said, they have to be 100% perfect every single day. He's right, and I hope you appreciate the esteem in which you are held across our Air Force.

Conclusion

We're celebrating the first year of Global Strike Command, but our nuclear mission has a rich heritage. For more than sixty years in a variety of command structures, our Airmen have done an incredible job of remaining vigilant, and prepared to respond, in order to deter the threat of nuclear attack. It was brave Airmen like you – missileers and bomber crews – who helped to diffuse

the Cuban Missile Crisis, won the Cold War, and even now, stand watch to deter aggression from around the globe.

Because we live in a world where nuclear weapons exist and we face enemies that seek to do us grave harm, our missileers stand constant alert. Our bombers remain prepared to generate. Our nuclear security forces continually patrol. And our maintainers and force support personnel ensure our weapons systems and operators are always at the ready. They do all this while focusing on excellence, adhering to the highest standards, and executing the precise day-to-day operations required of those responsible for our nuclear weapons systems. It is an amazing thing you do, and you serve a grateful Nation.

Along with this first ever Global Strike Command Technology and Innovation Symposium is the inaugural Global Strike

Challenge. The competition is a continuation of the long history of vigorous competition between Air Force nuclear professionals that serves to improve our readiness and provides an avenue to learn valuable lessons relevant to real-world operations. I know that the fierce competition brought out the best in you. I am certainly looking forward to learning shortly who the victors are!

Thank you again for being here and for your sacrifice and service.