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THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON STRATEGIC
FORCES SENATE ARMED SERVICES
COMMITTEE
UNITED STATES SENATE

DEPARTMENT OF THE AIR FORCE
PRESENTATION TO THE SENATE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON STRATEGIC FORCES
UNITED STATES SENATE

SUBJECT: FY26 Posture for Department of Defense Nuclear Forces
STATEMENT OF: General Thomas A. Bussiere, Commander
Air Force Global Strike Command

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INTRODUCTION

Air Force Global Strike Command (AFGSC) provides strategic deterrence and long-range strike capabilities anytime, anywhere as directed by the President, and the Commander, United States Strategic Command (USSTRATCOM). As a cornerstone of our Interim National Defense Strategy, AFGSC sustains current forces while simultaneously integrating future long-range strike weapon systems. This past August marked the 15th anniversary of AFGSC's establishment, a testament to our vital role as the central force provider for the Air Force's strategic responsibilities, but our command is younger than our weapon systems. The B-2A and B-1B are over 30 years old, and the B-52H just had its 72nd birthday. The Minuteman III missile (MMIII) is 55 years old and the overall intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) weapon system is even older. The nuclear, command, control, and communications systems (NC3) is built on Cold War-era architecture. As AFGSC transitions legacy systems to new technologies, we must achieve balance between critical sustainment of aging systems and continued funding for essential replacements such as the B-21 bomber and the Sentinel ICBM.

AFGSC demonstrates dedication to the Nation's credible deterrent through continuous global engagement. Strengthening deterrence requires a force that is demonstrably lethal, always ready, and operates with shared national security objectives. In 2024, AFGSC planned and executed 33 Bomber Task Force (BTF) events, encompassing 267 days of deployed bomber operations across multiple geographic commands. AFGSC executed more bomber task missions in the last 12 months than the last 20 years combined. The demand signal for BTFs to showcase American airpower, empower allies and partners, and give adversaries pause is significant, and will likely only increase in the future. The 24/7 vigilance of our ICBM force marks 55 years of unyielding resolve afforded by the MMIII. The dedication to our operational tempo, coupled

with our focus on people, mission, modernization, and engagement, enables AFGSC to maintain its strategic advantage in both the nuclear and conventional realms.

However, AFGSC faces a watershed moment: there is no remaining margin in our legacy fielded forces but the demand for these capabilities has not waned. Arguably, AFGSC capabilities have never been more important for our overall defense due to the modernization, increasing capabilities, and diversification of the nuclear capabilities of our adversaries. We must never forget the weight of our responsibility in safeguarding national security. Sustaining our legacy systems cannot be overlooked as all hands focus on the daunting challenge of modernizing and recapitalizing all legs of the nuclear triad. AFGSC needs continued support and on-time, stable funding to equip our Airmen to compete effectively in this ever-changing and challenging strategic environment.

GLOBAL SECURITY ENVIRONMENT

The United States and Allies and partners face one of the most challenging threat environments since the Cold War, as highlighted by the need to simultaneously deter two major nuclear-armed adversaries and a nuclear-armed rogue nation, the DPRK). China and Russia possess advanced and diverse nuclear capabilities, demanding a complex and multifaceted strategic approach. The Kremlin's deployment of nuclear weapons to Belarus and its plans to aggressively expand its military present new challenges to European security. Additionally, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) has doubled down on expanding nuclear capabilities, and the potential for Iran to develop nuclear weapons remains a grave concern. In an unprecedented move, the DPRK has deployed approximately 10,000 troops to support Russia's efforts against Ukraine on the battlefield. Most alarming is the deepening alignment amongst these nuclear-armed actors and the need to be ready to defeat this new axis of aggressors.

As the Department's pacing threat, China continues to pursue an unprecedented military buildup, including the expansion, modernization, and diversification of its nuclear and conventional forces. China's growing stockpile of deliverable air-, ground-, and sea-launched weapon systems pose a challenge to current United States and allied missile defense systems beyond the Second Island Chain. China remains on an accelerated pace to possess 1,000 operational nuclear warheads by the end of the decade, complicating the requirements for United States deterrence globally. China's establishment of new silo fields and new ICBMs will only increase the threat posed by the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP). Consequently, China will possess new options for coercive purposes before and during a crisis or conflict. China is also rapidly modernizing air and sea conventional capabilities with next-generation aircraft such as their stealth H-20 bomber and enhanced naval strike weapons to keep United States and allied forces outside of optimum employment parameters in a regional conflict.

China's nuclear force expansion is complemented by an increasing industrial base capacity to create plutonium from fast- breeder reactors. Of additional concern is China's deepening economic, diplomatic, and military support to and alignment with Russia. China's economic and diplomatic support is helping Russia sustain its war in Ukraine. China and Russia are also expanding their defense cooperation beyond Ukraine; for the first time last year, Chinese and Russian bombers conducted a joint patrol in international airspace off the coast of Alaska.

China's nuclear and conventional expansion efforts, in conjunction with deepening growing ties to Russia, raise the risk to United States and allied forces in the Indo-Pacific region. Despite Russia’s heavy losses, it still maintains the world's largest nuclear stockpile with modernized systems and a growing arsenal of novel asymmetric nuclear weapons. Additionally, President Putin announced that Russia reserves the right to use nuclear weapons against any

country that poses a critical threat, including from conventional weapons, to Russian or Belarusian sovereignty and/or territorial integrity. Additionally, President Putin stated the participation of, or support from, a nuclear state conducting aggression against the Russian Federation and/or its Allies from any non-nuclear state would be considered a joint attack.

While the DPRK is not an adversary on the same scale as China or Russia, it still presents deterrence dilemmas for the United States and our allies and partners. The DPRK poses a persistent threat and growing danger to the United States homeland and the Indo-Pacific region. The DPRK continues to expand, diversify, and improve both conventional and nuclear strike capabilities. The development of liquid and solid-fueled missile systems will further complicate our ability to monitor and react to ballistic missile threats. The DPRK has expanded partnerships with both China and Russia, which provides political cover for Kim Jong Un regime's continued nuclear weapons expansion. The DPRK and Russia signed a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership Treaty in June 2024, which includes a mutual defense provision and highlights the deepening strategic alignment between the countries, particularly in their opposition to the United States and our allies. The agreement also codified cooperation in areas such as trade, investment, and nuclear energy. DPRK rhetoric also continues to become more confrontational as the United States and the Republic of Korea conduct strategic exercises and bring strategic assets into the theater. The situation remains tense and any conflict on the Peninsula could involve multiple nuclear-armed actors, thus raising the risk of escalation and nuclear employment.

As of today, Iran does not possess a nuclear weapon and it remains the policy of the United States that Iran be denied a nuclear weapon and ICBM capability; however, Iran is expanding its nuclear program in concerning ways, to include producing highly enriched

uranium. Iran continues to enhance military capabilities, holding the largest inventory of ballistic missiles in the region, and funds militia groups as well as terrorist organizations throughout the Middle East. Iran also continues to pursue destabilizing policies across the region, providing material and lethal support to a range of U.S.-designated terrorist organizations and militia groups. Iran's longstanding support to Hamas enabled the October 7th terrorist attack against Israel. Furthermore, Iran's continued support to the Houthis has enabled the ongoing attacks on commercial shipping in the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden and numerous attacks on U.S. forces across the region.

Most concerning are the increasing transactional relationships between nuclear-armed adversaries. This axis of aggressors continues to defy international law through technology exchanges, joint exercises, and mutual support. China and Russia's "strategic partnership" features extensive military cooperation, with China supplying crucial materials that bolsters Russia's defense industry. Iran provides Russia with drones and missiles, while the DPRK has sent vast quantities of arms, ammunition, and personnel. The continued cooperation raises the possibility of a multi-front war, which necessitates a reassessment of long-term defense strategies and escalation dynamics.

FACILITIES SUSTAINMENT, RESTORATION, AND MODERNIZATION (FSRM)

The current Air Force Installation Infrastructure Action Plan highlights a critical vulnerability for AFGSC, most notably aging facilities and infrastructure coupled with consistent underinvestment in power projection platforms. Installations are increasingly susceptible to both adversarial threats and extreme weather environments, posing an unacceptable risk to the Striker mission. All of these concerns undermine global strike options for our nation.

Weapons Generation Facilities and Weapon Storage Areas

In addition to modernization of weapon systems, the command continues our long-term plan to recapitalize aging Weapon Storage Areas (WSAs) with facilities known as Weapons Generation Facilities (WGFs). These facilities fulfill a major security initiative for the command and help ensure nuclear security by significantly reducing operational, logistical, and munitions risk. The sequencing and timing of the WGF recapitalization efforts are driven by operational requirements and outdated WSA conditions. Of the seven planned, five are currently in the FY25-29 Future-Years Defense Program and four are under construction. Of those under construction, two are bomber WGFs and two are ICBM WGFs. The WGF at Dyess Air Force Base (AFB) is planned for FY28, and the design is scheduled to complete this fiscal year. F.E. Warren AFB has seen the first completed WGF and is scheduled to reach full operational capability (FOC) in early 2026. The timing and sequencing of the modernization endeavor are critical to sustaining credible deterrence while ensuring integration of and support to new mission weapon systems.

Supply Chain and Flying Hour Program Challenges

Every weapon system that AFGSC provides must have a defense industrial base robust enough to support the sustainment of operational capabilities in order to maintain a credible deterrent against adversaries. Current and future weapon systems cannot withstand any further supply chain disruptions and must be funded to the maximum extent possible to restore supply chain resiliency. The Air Force must restore readiness and posture, so our platforms will be ready today and for the future.

A critical shortage of parts is severely limiting the bomber execution of the fleet flying hour program. The shortage, driven by diminishing manufacturing sources, materiel shortages,

long repair times, and a shrinking industrial base, is reflected in the rising Total Non-Mission Capable Supply rate, leading to increased downtime and cannibalization of parts from other aircraft. Current support and readiness spares packages are insufficient to meet operational demands. This parts crisis directly impacts essential maintenance, hindering both Programmed Depot Maintenance (PDM) and home-station work, reducing operational flexibility.

Diminishing Manufacturing Sources and Material Shortages issues, the lack of vendor bids, and long lead times have resulted in delayed delivery of required parts. These issues have negatively affected Aircraft Availability (AA). Continued support of the Full- Scale Fatigue Testing is imperative to keep the B-52H airframe in use since it has surpassed its scheduled lifespan. Similarly, the Forward Intermediate Fuselage replacement for any high hour airframes must be pursued to maintain the current and future fleet size. We must continue to modernize the B-52H avionics systems to ensure compatibility in joint operations and global airspace.

The E-4B National Airborne Operations Center (NAOC) provides a survivable command and control capability. The fleet is approaching end-of-service life and faces sustainment challenges. The low density/high demand dynamic of the platform prioritizes AA as the E-4B 's top concern. Along with aircraft age, other factors include lengthening PDM times, diminished manufacturing sources, and parts obsolescence. Initiatives such as PDM flow optimization, KC-10 engine long-core procurement and overhaul, and recovering unused 747- 200 parts from a NASA aircraft retirement action have shown some success towards mitigating known sustainment issues.

The E-4B Program Office will also sustain and modernize mission system capabilities until the replacement platform, the Survivable Airborne Operations Center (SAOC), is operational. Current examples of successful ongoing modernization programs include a Low

Frequency Transmit System, Family of Advanced Beyond Line-of-Sight Terminal and Survivable Super High Frequency systems. Additionally, as the E-4B gets closer to SAOC transition and subsequent end-of-life, AFGSC will balance modernization efforts and AA.

OPERATIONS

ICBM Operations

The modernization of the U.S. ICBM force is critical to maintaining a credible and effective nuclear deterrent. ICBMs are the most responsive leg of the U.S. nuclear triad providing rapid global strike capability. The Sentinel program is a massive undertaking that is pivotal to U.S. national security and represents the Air Force's most critical recapitalization effort to date. The sheer size, scale, and scope of this effort cannot be overstated as the entire system is being rebuilt from the ground up. Even with its inherent complexities, Sentinel remains essential to national security and there are no alternatives to the program that provide acceptable capability to meet joint requirements at less cost as certified by the Department of Defense (DoD) to Congress in 2024. By enhancing the accuracy, security, and reliability of the U.S. ICBM force, Sentinel will ensure the effectiveness of this critical leg of the U.S. nuclear triad.

ICBM Modernization Roadmap

In 2024, the Sentinel program underwent a Nunn-McCurdy review to address cost overruns exceeding 37 percent. The Department’s final Nunn-McCurdy estimate determined the cost increase to be 81 percent. In response, AFGSC immediately initiated a comprehensive review of both system requirements and Concept of Operations (CONOPS). The ongoing process focused on refining system requirements, operational concepts, and fostering collaboration between stakeholders to ensure a cost-effective and successful modernization of the ICBM force.

RV Modernization: The ICBM warhead stockpile continues to fulfill USSTRATCOM mission requirements beyond its planned lifespan. AFGSC engages in efforts with DoD partners to produce fuse replacements for the existing stockpile of Mk21s to support Sentinel initial operational capability (IOC). This effort not only strengthens the industrial base but also establishes a framework for future capabilities, ensuring the land-based leg of the nuclear triad remains a robust and adaptable strategic deterrent.

Collaborative Leadership for Sentinel Success

Unified Approach: AFGSC and the Air Force Nuclear Weapons Center (AFNWC) have formed a strong partnership to address Sentinel challenges and accelerate ICBM modernization efforts. Leadership from both organizations collaborate regularly through integrated partner teams, General Officer Steering Groups, and Executive Steering Boards to proactively resolve issues and ensure alignment.

Revalidated Requirements: Since July 2024, AFGSC has spearheaded an effort to revalidate and recertify all Sentinel requirements to maintain performance. The objective is to work towards a cost-effective strategy for the program, expected to be refined by the end of the year. All requirements were traced to source documentation for need and military utility. The collaborative effort between AFGSC and AFNWC assures the Sentinel program delivers a weapon system that meets all strategic requirements.

Evolving Concept of Operations: The Sentinel CONOPS serves as a critical communication tool, clearly articulating operational requirements to both the acquisition community and contractors during the design phase. The Weapon System Requirements and current CONOPS were reviewed and signed in March 2025.

Site Activation Task Force (SATAF) Achievements

In October 2024, the Sentinel program transitioned from Program Integration Offices to fully operational Task Force at F. E. Warren AFB, Malmstrom AFB, and Vandenberg Space Force Base (SFB). Minot AFB is progressing to establish its task force presence, marking a significant milestone in the program's execution. Simultaneously, Sentinel support facilities are undergoing preparations to accommodate Sentinel-assigned personnel and equipment at these bases, ensuring a smooth transition while safeguarding operational readiness of the MMIII weapon system.

Local engagements

The Director of ICBM Modernization continues to take a holistic approach to Sentinel education and socialization by visiting the three missile wings and engaging in dialogue with community members. These engagements offer an opportunity to address concerns from the local population and leaders within the areas impacted by the Sentinel weapon system. These conversations will continue with community town hall meetings through 2025.

While many aspects of the Sentinel program are going right, we must remain vigilant and fully committed to the unparalleled recapitalization of a critical component of our national security. Maintaining the MMIII weapon system while concurrently bringing Sentinel online demands careful and sustained attention. The Sentinel program is not just about modernization - it is about preserving peace through strength.

SECURITY RESPONSE FORCES

Our nuclear security teams, comprised of steadfast and highly trained professionals, stand ready to defend our nation's nuclear arsenal. However, they face a rapidly evolving threat landscape that requires constant adaptation and support. Our leaders are actively addressing the complex challenges of organizing, training, and equipping these defenders to meet current and

emerging threats, from countering unmanned aerial system (UAS) activity to operating in extreme weather conditions at our bomber and missile bases. Their crucial mission demands unwavering focus and investment as it remains central to USSTRATCOM operational plans and national security.

To enhance the safety and lethality of our Security Forces, AFGSC is modernizing its vehicle fleet. This modernization effort directly addresses serious safety concerns surrounding the aging Up-Armored High Mobility Multi-Purpose Wheeled Vehicles (UAHMMWV), a platform tragically linked to multiple fatal rollover accidents at AFGSC ICBM wings, resulting in the loss of two defenders in 2023 and 2024. The Joint Light Tactical Vehicle (JLTV) is a modern and improved tactical vehicle providing better field of view, suspension systems, and modern safety features compared to the currently employed UAHMMWV. I continue to request Congressional support to field AUVs to reduce the risk of mishaps and unnecessary loss of life.

As AFGSC navigates these modernization efforts, the arrival of the MH-139A Grey Wolf marks a positive step towards strengthening the security posture of the ground-based nuclear deterrent. The MH-139A provides greater speed, range, and carrying capacity above the current UH-IN fleet. Following successful testing, the MH-139A is on track for IOC in 2025, with full deployment across all ICBM bases by 2027.

As of February 2025, thirteen MH-139A helicopters have been delivered – seven to Malmstrom AFB, three to Maxwell AFB, and two are in retrofit status for the environmental control system and radio. The current buy profile procures nineteen aircraft, eleven of which will field at Malmstrom AFB and eight at Maxwell AFB by August 2025. The arrival of the MH-139 Grey Wolf marks a decisive upgrade for AFGSC, bringing a more lethal presence to the defense of the ground-based nuclear deterrent.

Counter-Unmanned Aerial Systems

Since 2016, AFGSC, with crucial backing from USSTRATCOM, has made strides in counter-unmanned aircraft technology to strengthen our national deterrence. During 2024, two U.S. military bases experienced security breaches involving UAS, raising concerns about this growing threat. In August, multiple UAS conducted a week-long surveillance operation over Plant 42 in California, potentially gathering intelligence on classified projects. In November, a Chinese citizen was apprehended for using a UAS to photograph Vandenberg SFB. These incidents underscore the vulnerability of military installations to UAS surveillance and the potential compromise of national security.

We must match our capabilities to the threats we face. The Joint Counter-small Unmanned Aircraft Systems C-sUAS Office and Office of the Secretary of Defense for Acquisition and Sustainment lead the overall DoD effort to combat current and future UAS threats, and United States Northern Command is the synchronizer for Counter-UAS (c-UAS) efforts in the homeland. In recognition of this growing challenge, the Department launched Replicator-2, a whole-of-department and interagency effort to improve c-sUAS protection for critical assets, largely centered on the homeland (CONUS). AFGSC is actively contributing to these efforts as well as leveraging internal innovation endeavors to seek solutions for the specific challenges our forces face from UAS, especially as they relate to operations in the ICBM missile fields and defense of our WSAs and WGFs. As we modernize our nuclear capabilities over the coming decade, we must also prioritize modernizing our defenses against UAS threats.

BOMBER OPERATIONS

The United States must maintain military superiority by integrating new technologies while sustaining existing capabilities. AFGSC will work with the Secretary of the Air Force's

staff to obtain waivers of the five- year "sunset" prohibition on modernizing aircraft scheduled to retire, (as codified in Section 2244a of Title 10) as doing so is clearly in the national security interest of the United States. Leveraging this statutory authority for the B-2A is essential to maintaining long-range global strike nuclear deterrent capabilities while completing modernization programs impacting all Air Force bombers.

Nuclear Requirements and Conventional Long-Range Strike Mission

Conventional long-range strike capabilities are equally important and must evolve to address emerging threats. AFGSC must maintain the ability to hold any target at risk, anywhere in the world, at any time. Our airmen routinely demonstrate this capability through CONUS-to-CONUS missions and BTF deployments, reinforcing allied confidence and deterring adversary aggression. The future of conventional long-range strike will be shaped by a two-tiered approach. The B-21 Raider and its family of systems will provide advanced stand-in capabilities by leveraging next-generation stealth, sensing, and precision-strike technology to penetrate contested environments. Simultaneously, the B-52H, armed with the Standoff Attack Weapon, will deliver massed fires from outside heavily defended areas. This integrated force will enable AFGSC to generate a persistent, scalable, and lethal global strike capability, ensuring dominance across the spectrum of conflict.

B-21 Raider

The B-21 is the most exquisite weapon system ever built. At its core, the B-21 enhances deterrence by ensuring the United States can hold any target worldwide at risk, even in contested regions protected by sophisticated air defense systems. We are building on lessons learned from the B-2A to give the B-21 a survivability edge in high-threat environments. The B-21's ability to penetrate and persist in hostile airspace makes it uniquely suited for both deterrence and, if

needed, decisive action.

Beyond its combat capability, the B-21's strategic value is amplified by its role in a broader network of systems. This makes it more than just a bomber - it is a force multiplier that enhances situational awareness and joint operations. Its design also emphasizes adaptability, with a modular structure and digital engineering that allow rapid upgrades to counter new threats, ensuring relevance for decades.

From the outset, the B-21 program has leaned forward and considered sustainment while the design was in development. As a result of those early considerations, the B-21 program is ahead of schedule on certain portions such as technological data, product support, and material readiness. Affordability, combined with easier maintenance due to advancements in stealth coatings and manufacturing, supports a larger, more sustainable fleet, which will be key for deterring adversaries who might otherwise exploit any gaps a smaller force could create. We must continue looking at how to right-size the bomber fleet to meet the demands the Nation is asking of it.

The B-21's dual nuclear and conventional capabilities are critical as competitors seek to challenge us by operating below nuclear thresholds. As a result, the United States must also deter using conventional weapons tailored to meet the needs and capabilities of the B-21; if we lose the ability to deter malicious regional actions via a combination of stand-in and standoff, nuclear, and conventional effects, we play into adversary anti-access/area denial aspirations. The B-21's fusion of stealth, versatility, scalability, and enduring design strengthens U.S. deterrence, ensures credible response capabilities, and offers cost-effective modernization for maintaining tactical and strategic advantage in the 21st century. The success of the B-21 Raider program is a testament to the unprecedented collaboration among our military and civilian experts. The

seamless integration of operational, acquisition, and industry professionals – specifically, the mighty Eighth Air Force, the Rapid Capabilities Office, and Northrop Grumman– is the driving force behind this program's remarkable progress. This synergistic partnership enables us to develop and field the world's most advanced platform unrivaled in its ability to project power globally at a time and place of our choosing.

B-2A

The B-2A is the USAF's sole penetrating bomber, providing unmatched stealth and strike capability, making it a cornerstone of both conventional and nuclear deterrence. Targeted modernization in low observable signature and supportability modifications, communications upgrades, and weapons delivery ensures the B-2A maintains its lethal edge through B-21 fielding. The Adaptable Communications Suite is entering test and evaluation with efforts to accelerate fielding in FY26. The B-2A Displays Modernization Program is currently in test and evaluation and is anticipated to enter the Production and Deployment Phase (Milestone-C) in 4QFY25, alleviating the second Mission Impaired Capability Awaiting Parts driver for the B-2A fleet. These modernization efforts are essential to bridge the capability gap until the B-21 reaches FOC.

B-1B

The B-1B platform remains a conventional force workhorse until the B-21s are fully fielded. Time and again, B-1Bs have taken the lead in combat, demonstrating their critical role in combat operations. This, in addition to their enduring participation in the DoD's BTFs, is designed to demonstrate that the United States can reach any target in the world with minimal risk to its forces. The B-1B is currently undergoing the most significant modernization program in its 30-year history. Through the B-1 Embracing Agile Scheduling Team program, the B-1B

received a suite of accelerated upgrades, including enhanced friend-or-foe identification, more secure communications, and improved defensive systems. The program also introduced valuable new tools like a modernized simulator and digital twin technology, enabling more effective training and proactive maintenance. As both a proven combat platform and a cornerstone of future deterrence strategies, the B-1B will remain a vital asset for projecting American airpower well into the 21st century.

B-52H

The B-52H Stratofortress remains the backbone of the USAF, providing unmatched long-range strike capability and heavy payload capacity for the past 70 years. Even today, the B-52H continues to demonstrate its relevance in operations around the world. To ensure the B-52H can continue to deliver this level of combat power for decades to come, AFGSC is undertaking major modernization efforts for its aging B-52H fleet, aiming to extend its service life beyond 2050. This includes re-engining the bomber with Rolls-Royce Fl30 turbofans, upgrading its radar to an Active Electronically Scanned Array system for improved reliability and mission effectiveness, and procuring a new Weapon System Trainer to simulate future B-52H configurations and capabilities. The B-52H's modernization into the B-52J platform is not just about upgrades - it is essential for viability of the bomber.

Even as we upgrade to the more lethal B-52J, global demand for BTFs is surging, not subsiding. B-52H deployments showcase the importance the United States places on assuring Allies and partners as the visible presence of our bombers, airmen, and integrated operations provides a critical deterrent against potential adversaries. This demand for a strong, responsive bomber presence will only intensify in the coming years, making our modernization efforts all the more urgent.

Air-Launched Cruise Missile (ALCM) to Long Range Standoff (LRSO)

The Air Force is replacing its aging ALCM with the LRSO weapon, which is being desig ned, developed, and deployed as a modern nuclear-capable cruise missile. The LRSO program is progressing well, having achieved a successful design review and currently undergoing flight testing.

AIRBORNE OPERATIONS CENTER

AFGSC's NC3 architecture connects our Commander-in-Chief and command authorities to forces around the globe, before and during conflict. One component in this NC3 network is the NAOC, which is always on alert to connect the President, Secretary of Defense, Chairman of Joint Chiefs of Staff, and senior leaders.

The E-4B Program Office will sustain and modernize mission system capabilities as necessary through the transition period until the replacement platform is operational. The Sierra Nevada Corporation - SAOC contract is progressing well. Three aircraft were received in April 2025, and we are on track to receive an additional two in September 2025. The Integrated Baseline Review was completed in October 2024 and the System Requirements Review and Digital Data Package process are both on track. The SAOC program stands to mitigate all issues within the current NAOC fleet as well as serve as a next-generation aircraft that will be postured to directly support the President, the Secretary of Defense, and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff well into the future.

This need for reliable command and control is met in part by the newly activated 95th Wing, which brings together specialized units to ensure seamless execution of strategic operations. The 95th Wing now provides combatant commanders with assured command and control (C2) over assigned forces through global command, control, and communication

capabilities. The wing organizes, trains, and equips the total force to execute strategic requirements as set forth by commanders.

Operating under 8th Air Force and AFGSC, the 95th Wing incorporates existing units from across different components of the Air Force. These include the 595th Command and Control Group, the 253rd Command and Control Group; and the 610th Command and Control Squadron. This integration forms a cohesive and powerful unit.

NUCLEAR COMMAND, CONTROL, AND COMMUNICATIONS (NC3)

AFGSC plays a critical role in ensuring robust NC3 capabilities. We are responsible for the Strategic Readiness and effectiveness of our Air Force's nuclear deterrent forces, which hinges on reliable NC3. These efforts ensure vital NC3 systems are integrated into my portion of our nation's strategic nuclear enterprises.

Furthermore, AFGSC and the United States Space Force (USSF) have critical interdependency when it comes to NC3. Space-based assets are integral to NC3 by providing early warning of missile launches and enabling swift decision-making and response options. Satellites provide secure communication channels between national leaders and nuclear forces, ensuring reliable transmission of orders and information. Through coordinated efforts, AFGSC and USSF unlock amplified capabilities that exponentially enhance the effectiveness and resilience of the nation's strategic deterrence. For example, AFGSC is integrating the Advanced Extremely High Frequency system into our ICBMs, bomber forces, and command posts. AFGSC is also advancing efforts to enhance survivable beyond-line-of sight communications for the bomber force, including the development of High-Speed Terminals.

Additionally, we continue reexamining legacy technologies through a modern lens. Long

established high-frequency waveforms are now benefiting from digital software-defined radios, which enhance performance and provide critical redundancy in the event of space-based system failures. In the Very Low Frequency domain, we continue to modernize our receivers with smaller, plug-and-play replacement solutions that enable seamless upgrades while maintaining compliance with cryptographic standards. Additionally, our Senior Leader Network remains a vital asset, ensuring strategic decision makers in Washington have reliable world-wide communications and services in times of crises.

NC3 is the cornerstone of America's deterrence posture. AFGSC continues to leverage industry and academia to pursue next-generation technologies including protected satellite communications for secure connectivity, artificial intelligence (AI) powered cyber defense for real-time threat detection and mitigation, and integrated multi-domain command and control for faster, more adaptable agile decision-making. Every day, AFGSC hones this strategic capability, ensuring that if called upon, we will be ready.

AIRMEN AND FAMILIES

The unwavering dedication of our Striker Airmen, who work tirelessly 24/7, truly enables AFGSC to stand ready to face any challenge or threat, even as our advanced weapons systems and modernization efforts capture global attention.

Innovation

Maintaining our competitive edge demands a steadfast commitment to innovation, a commitment embodied by our resourceful and dedicated Airmen. STRIKEWERX, the Global Strike innovation hub, stands as a testament to this commitment. Recognizing that our airmen are our greatest asset, we have fostered an environment where ingenuity can flourish. We connect Airmen with industry experts and academia, sparking partnerships that drive rapid and impactful

technological improvements.

We continue to adapt and adopt inexpensive commercial sector technologies, including improving bomber pilot training, modernizing bomber crew alert communications, training for emergency situations more realistically, and providing our security forces with more effective technology as they secure our nuclear capability. Airman ideas have produced tangible results, including operationally fielded B-52H engine pod covers and deployable maintenance structures to facilitate operations in frigid conditions at our northern bases. This ability to rapidly translate innovative ideas into executable solutions underscores AFGSC's dedication to equipping warfighters with leading-edge technologies.

To combat recurring engine failures in B-52Hs at Minot AFB caused by extreme cold, engineers developed a new engine inlet cover design incorporating a heating duct. This initiative, culminating in the "Strike Tank 2023" project approved in October 2023, saw delivery of testable prototypes by June 2024. These covers, offering full engine encapsulation and a heating mechanism, proved so effective that 12 were immediately procured for operational testing. By August 2024, the success of the covers led to equipping the entire Minot B-52H fleet. This proactive solution saves an estimated 7,500 maintenance hours per year and prevents costly engine damage, showcasing a remarkable return on investment in operational readiness.

In addition, we are empowering Airmen to harness the power of data analytics and AI. The Command uses AI to project trends in operational status and quickly address and identify problem areas. Our use of centrally funded Air Force cloud platforms brings together enterprise and Command data to inform the Commander's risk assessment. The Command uses commercial AI/machine learning offerings within the USAF data fabric to accelerate business processes. AFGSC is also one of the most prolific users of robotic process automation tools in the USAF.

By providing access to cutting-edge tools and training, we enable Global Strike Airmen to develop and leverage secure cloud-based applications that streamline processes and maximize the efficiency and effectiveness of our personnel.

Missile Community Cancer Study

The health and well-being of our Airmen and their families is a top priority. This is why AFGSC teamed up with the USAF School of Aerospace Medicine (USAFSAM) in 2023 to conduct a thorough investigation to address concerns about a possible link between working on missile fields and cancer. The Missile Cancer Community Study includes a comprehensive environmental analysis. Over 2,400 samples are being collected and analyzed in three phases across three Missile Wings and Vandenberg SFB. With two rounds of sampling already completed, the investigation revealed trace amounts of polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) exceeding the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) recommended threshold on 4 out of 1205 total surface swipe samples. To ensure the safety and well-being of our Airmen, Missile Alert Facilities with PCBs above the EPA threshold were promptly and thoroughly cleaned. They have since passed rigorous safety inspections and are now back in full operation. Initial findings from phases IA and 1B of the epidemiologic study have shown no increase in cancer rates among our Missile Community compared to the non-Missile Community or the general U.S. population. This includes data on 14 common cancers.

Additionally, Phase 1C did not identify a statistically significant elevated mortality of these cancers in the Missile Community when compared to the general U.S. population. While the initial phases of our study have been reassuring, we are committed to gathering the most comprehensive data possible. To that end, we are incorporating state cancer registries into the second phase of our study to gain a complete understanding of potential health risks within the

Missile Community. Phase 2, scheduled for completion by the end of 2025, will offer a more complete and detailed analysis of cancer incidence within the Missile Community. AFGSC is actively engaging with leading health organizations such as the USAFSAM, the Defense Centers for Public Health, and Veterans Affairs throughout this process. To ensure full transparency, we hold quarterly town hall meetings, provide updates on a dedicated webpage, and share findings with stakeholders to ensure our Airmen and families are informed. We understand this is about more than just data - it is about the health and peace of mind of our Airmen, their families, and our veterans. We are unwavering in our commitment to providing them with clear, accurate information and ensure complete transparency throughout this process. They deserve nothing less.

Professional Military Education and Development

Building a culture of excellence and pride within AFGSC is key to maintaining the warrior ethos and achieving mission success. My AFGSC Force Development Division is committed to providing our personnel with the knowledge, skills, and experiences necessary to excel and lead our command with distinction.

AFGSC partners with Air University to modernize Professional Military Education (PME), particularly Intermediate Developmental Education (IDE). Our flagship effort is the School of Advanced Nuclear Deterrence Studies at Air Command and Staff College, which develops deterrence and assurance experts equipped to advise senior leaders across the DoD. AFGSC also participated in the successful Agile Learning pilot program, an IDE modernization initiative focused on flexible, mission-relevant learning experiences. Building on this success, AFGSC is committed to exploring the full potential of innovative programs like Agile Learning. Beyond officer PME, AFGSC provides high-quality professional development opportunities for

enlisted Airmen, including unique, mission-focused content incorporated into Enlisted Airmanship Continuum courses.

Robust pre-command education is also critical. The Nuclear Stewardship Executive Course provides Group and Wing Commanders and their Senior Enlisted Leaders with a deep understanding of their nuclear mission responsibilities. Our AFGSC Command Team Course unites Squadron Commanders and their Senior Enlisted Leaders, forging a shared understanding and purpose. Through this course, they gain the knowledge and skills to lead their squadrons as one cohesive force, effectively executing this critical mission. We continuously assess and refine our pre-command education to ensure relevance and efficacy in preparing commanders for the complexities of the nuclear enterprise.

In addition to education and training, AFGSC offers coveted internships-including AFGSC Intern, Striker Trident, Striker Titan, and Striker Trailblazer-providing exceptional officers, enlisted personnel, and civilian Airmen with invaluable hands-on experience in the nuclear enterprise. The Academic Partnerships in Nuclear Education program collaborates with academic institutions to provide Airmen access to advanced education in fields like defense and strategic studies, nuclear deterrence, and engineering management.

These initiatives, alongside our Air Force Reserve Officer Training Corps Summer Internship Program, are key to attracting and developing top talent for AFGSC. By cultivating an environment where individuals are recognized and rewarded based on their abilities, performance, and contributions, we aim to attract the best and brightest. Upholding rigorous standards for our Airmen is non-negotiable, as it directly contributes to mission accomplishment and the long-term health of our command.

To encourage individual drive, recognize excellence, and cultivate a strong sense of pride

within its ranks, AFGSC is exploring various strategic initiatives focused on enhancing both talent management and retention rates. The Personnel Division has launched a series of "sprints" to rapidly analyze data and assess recommendations that will enhance transparency in the assignment process, as well as incentivize AFGSC bases.

AFGSC is working on restoring recurring Career Field Health Briefings and expanding the Commander's Nuclear Focus list to include additional Air Force Specialty Codes (AFSCs). In line with improving retention, AFGSC reevaluated Selective Reenlistment Bonus (SRB) multipliers based on recommendations from the RAND study and updating related policies. The input from key AFSCs regarding SRB adjustments is under review.

AFGSC addressed quality of life by introducing a one-time cold weather pay incentive for Airmen stationed at northern tier locations such as Malmstrom and Minot AFB, effective from 1 April 2024. In addition, AFGSC with assistance from the Assistant Secretary of the Air Force for Manpower and Reserve Affairs, instituted a civilian retention incentive in order to retain top civilian talent. The 10 percent monetary incentive is calculated as a percentage of the employee's rate of basic pay.

These initiatives prioritize transparency, flexibility, and competitive compensation to effectively align talent management with the demanding requirements of the Strategic Nuclear Deterrence mission. By investing in its Airmen, AFGSC reaffirms its commitment to its workforce and strengthens America's fighting force.

Defense Health Agency

The current state of healthcare within AFGSC needs attention. The Defense Health Agency (DHA) recently reorganized and established a Personnel Reliability Program Tiger Team to address gaps that could jeopardize the readiness of our Airmen and their families,

particularly with the impending B-21 bed-down at Ellsworth AFB. While the Tiger Team addressed some concerns, the lack of a Surety Support Coordination Cell highlights a lack of uniformity. Chronic underfunding and staffing shortages across the Military Health System worsen our DHA's ability to provide timely and quality care. This chronic instability, resulting in hundreds vacant positions at MTFs on Air Force Bases, directly impacts mission readiness and reduces access to care for military families.

CONCLUSION

AFGSC stands at a watershed moment. The world is watching as we simultaneously sustain aging Cold War systems and usher in a new era of strategic deterrence. We are modernizing at a significant pace while ensuring legacy systems remain ready to answer the nation's call. We are tackling challenges head-on, including aging infrastructure, supply chain disruptions, or the need to counter evolving threats like UAS. Through it all, our greatest strength remains our Striker Airmen - the heart and soul of AFGSC. Their dedication, innovation, and resilience are the driving force behind our success. However, we cannot afford to be complacent and must remain vigilant in the face of growing threats. We must continue to invest in our people, ensuring they have the resources, training, and support they need to carry out their critical mission. With unwavering commitment to our mission and steadfast Congressional support, AFGSC will continue to deter aggression, assure Allies, and safeguard our nation's security, now and into the future.