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SUBCOMMITTEE ON STRATEGIC FORCES
SENATE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE
UNITED STATES SENATE

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

SUBJECT: FY25 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, anytime, anywhere, as mandated by the President and the Commander of United States Strategic Command (USSTRATCOM). Not only is the command leading the charge in sustaining current forces and deploying future long-range strike weapon systems, the command also remains the cornerstone of our National Defense Strategy. However, our command is at a critical juncture. Our operational margin is razor-thin, our resources are stretched to their utmost limits, and the demand for our capabilities remains relentless while our adversaries are increasing and diversifying their nuclear capabilities at an alarming rate. Today, I urgently appeal for your immediate support as we confront these pressing challenges while safeguarding our nation's security.

AFGSC forces are continuously deployed worldwide, supporting all Combatant Commands (CCMDs). Our missile and bomber forces are deterring every day, ready to execute nuclear taskings and conduct long-range strikes anywhere on the globe at any given moment as part of the Department's integrated deterrence approach. Simultaneously, AFGSC embarked on an historical, crucial nuclear modernization and recapitalization effort, replacing and refurbishing aging bombers, intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs), helicopters, command and control aircraft, and standoff weapons. This strategic imperative to modernize is not just important; it is long overdue. The nation cannot afford a lapse or decline in our force posture as we introduce new capabilities, as part of the Department's broader integrated deterrence approach. We must maintain an unbroken nuclear backstop to underpin all other elements of national power.

As the Commander of AFGSC, my priority is ensuring mission readiness, excellence, and pride in our service to the nation; service with an amazing history and a boundless future among our "Strikers." These priorities are not just words but the pillars of integrated deterrence, providing crucial long-range conventional and nuclear strike capabilities for our Allies and partners. Despite a shifting and challenging geopolitical landscape, we maintain our ability to execute nuclear options, when directed by the President of the United States, safely and reliably while ensuring conventional strike. Our daily efforts are the bedrock of national defense, a privilege we execute with unwavering dedication. However, dedication is not enough. We need

your continued support and stable funding to equip our Airmen to compete effectively in this ever-changing and challenging strategic environment.

GLOBAL SECURITY ENVIRONMENT

Currently, the United States, along with Allies and partners, faces the challenge of deterring two major nuclear-armed competitors possessing modern and diverse nuclear capabilities: the People's Republic of China (PRC) and the Russian Federation—who openly stated it is moving nuclear weapons to neighboring Belarus. Additionally, we confront the escalating nuclear threat presented by the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) and the possibility of nuclear armament by the Islamic Republic of Iran if it decides to pursue a nuclear weapon.

The PRC continues to be the pacing challenge for the United States as Beijing continues to expand, modernize, and diversify its nuclear and conventional forces. The PRC'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. Beijing remains on an accelerated pace to possess at least 1,000 operational nuclear warheads by the end of the decade, complicating the requirements for United States deterrence globally. The PRC's establishment of new silo fields and new ICBMs will only enhance the degree of survivability, reliability, and effectiveness of PRC nuclear forces. Consequently, Beijing will possess new options for coercive purposes before and during a crisis or conflict. The PRC is also rapidly modernizing air and sea conventional capabilities with next-generation aircraft and enhanced naval strike weapons to keep United States and Allied forces outside of optimum employment parameters in a regional conflict. Thus, the PRC raises the risk to United States and allied forces in the region.

Russia continues to emphasize nuclear weapons in its overall security strategy, even more so as Moscow faces significant conventional losses during its on-going war against Ukraine. It is estimated that as of the end of 2023, Russian forces had suffered 315,000 casualties since the beginning of its full-scale and illegal invasion of Ukraine. By the end of 2024, if the current casualty rate continues, Russian forces will have lost over half a million personnel in Ukraine. While the conventional threat to NATO appears to have waned, Russia maintains a robust nuclear force with modernized systems and a growing arsenal of novel asymmetric weapons. The

end of this conflict remains unclear. However, it is evident that President Putin has no intention of halting the fight and losing face. Russia's nuclear rhetoric and signaling continue and remain unresponsive to international messaging and pressure.

While the DPRK is not a rival on the same scale as the PRC and Russia, it 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 the PRC and Russia which provides political cover for the Kim regime's nuclear weapons expansion. The 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 on the Peninsula. A conflict on the Peninsula could involve multiple nuclear-armed actors, raising the risk of escalation and nuclear employment.

Iran does not today possess a nuclear weapon. However, Iran does continue to expand its nuclear program in concerning ways, including by producing highly enriched uranium. Tehran continues to enhance military capabilities, holding the largest inventory of ballistic missiles in the region and funds militia groups and 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 United States designated terrorist organizations and militia groups. Indeed, Iran's longstanding support to Hamas enabled the October 7th terrorist attack against Israel and its 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 United States forces across the region. Should Iran decide to pursue a nuclear weapon, Iran would further challenge United States deterrence and assurance, which is why United States policy is to ensure Iran cannot acquire a nuclear weapon.

OPERATIONS

ICBM Operations

As the nuclear triad's land-based component, the Minuteman III (MMIII) ICBM system is our most responsive strategic deterrent option and maintains the highest degree of nuclear command and control among the triad. Geographically dispersed, reliable, and highly responsive, the MMIII force denies adversaries a perceived first-strike benefit. The MMIII was introduced 50 years ago with a planned 10-year service life. The robust design of MMIII, along with the dedication of our Airmen who support ICBM operations and Air Force investments, ensure a high availability rate even as end-of-life margins collapse.

The MMIII weapon system evaluation program evaluates CCMD reliability models and strategic planning factors. There are, however, limitations in test architecture that will impact testing capability as the MMIII moves closer to end of life:

1. Operational Test Launch (OTL) requirements will encounter test assembly scarcity and challenges with fielded missile components.
2. Starting in Fiscal Year 2030 (FY30), the United States Space Force (USSF) Autonomous Flight Safety System Implementation requirement will inhibit MMIII from being launched outside the Western Range. Without a waiver, MMIII testing cannot continue beyond 2030.
3. AFGSC anticipates a rise in range requirements due to MMIII OTL and other Department of Defense (DoD) weapons systems.

Sentinel, the LGM-35A Ground-Based Strategic Deterrent, is intended to replace the MMIII weapons system. The Sentinel program requires the replacement of every facet of the MMIII weapon system, including flight systems, command and control, launch systems, missile silos, control centers, and other ground infrastructure. It's important to stress much of the infrastructure has been in place for over 50 years requiring a substantial replacement effort. In January 2024, the Sentinel program triggered a Nunn-McCurdy breach. AFGSC has partnered with Assistant Secretary of the Air Force (Acquisition, Technology, and Logistics) leadership to support the DoD review of the Sentinel program, as required by the Nunn-McCurdy statute.

As we continue to modernize the land-based leg of the nuclear triad, balancing current operations with modernization will present many challenges—none insurmountable with coordinated, disciplined execution and teamwork. To prioritize these challenges, with the assistance of Congress, I have established the AFGSC ICBM Modernization Directorate. The directorate comprises current and new personnel to ensure a graceful retirement of MMIII. The new directorate is currently operational and anticipates Full Operational Capability (FOC) in FY25.

Security Response Forces

Steadfast and highly trained, our nuclear security teams stand ready to defend our nation's nuclear deterrent. However, leaders face a multitude of new challenges associated with organizing, training, and equipping a substantial force of dedicated professionals in the context of today's threats. Across AFGSC bomber and missile bases, our Airmen continue to defend critical assets in extreme environments and traverse vast expanses of the northern-tier missile fields. AFGSC Security Forces manning requirements will continue to increase due to nuclear modernization and transition.

In 2015, the Up Armored High Mobility Multipurpose Wheeled Vehicle (UAHMMWV) was flagged as a safety concern in the USAF Hazard Report submitted to Congress. AFGSC responded to these safety issues by implementing a strategy involving the procurement and deployment of a diversified fleet comprised of Joint Light Tactical Vehicles (JLTVs). The Security Forces enterprise embarked on a modernization initiative for its armored vehicle fleet by introducing the JLTV. The first nuclear security mission with JLTVs was completed in 2023. Headquarters Air Force opted to centralize procurement of the JLTVs, with funding allocated through Air Force Material Command (AFMC). Each JLTV, priced at approximately $1.2 million, includes essential mission support equipment crucial for Security Forces Airmen engaged in nuclear security. AFGSC anticipates the incremental delivery of 208 JLTVs through FY30, enhancing operational safety and effectiveness.

In 2021, AFGSC conducted a Limited User Evaluation of the JLTV which identified the necessity for a mixed fleet of armored vehicles to sufficiently support the unique operating environments and diverse capabilities required for varying AFGSC mission sets. In collaboration

with the Pentagon, AFGSC pursued the Armored Utility Vehicle (AUV) as a Level-1 armored vehicle, weighing 12,000 pounds, as opposed to the 22,500-pound JLTV. Following rigorous source selection procedures, the AUV has now entered an open Indefinite Delivery, Indefinite Quantity contract for 303 units, contingent upon funding availability.

To mitigate safety concerns, AFGSC enacted a tactical pause for UAHMMWV use while seeking to rapidly replace the vehicles with the more capable JLTVs and AUVs. The commander-directed UAHMMWV pause enabled a deliberate training and certification relook. Additionally, the pause enabled the restructuring of the vehicle's use in the demanding missile field environments. Today, UAHMMWVs remain available for limited use in the missile fields to ensure operational warfighter readiness.

To complement JLTVs and provide a more effective and safer patrol vehicle, AFGSC seeks to urgently procure AUVs. Any delay in purchasing the AUVs poses a significant risk to our Security Forces Airmen who travel 3.5 million miles a year across ICBM fields. It is imperative that adequate funding and accelerated fielding be utilized to mitigate risk to our Defenders. We need your support for an $84M reprogramming action. The reprogramming action will allow AFGSC to secure 301 modified Ford F-350s for the safe movement of security forces Airmen conducting nuclear security missions throughout our Global Strike missile field complexes, and ultimately reducing the risk of future mishaps and unnecessary loss of life. I request Congressional support to field the AUV.

The fielding of the MH-139 "Grey Wolf" represents a generational leap forward in nuclear security capability for AFGSC, as the replacement for the Vietnam era UH-1N. The capability of the Grey Wolf advances tactical ICBM operations and is essential to securing the ground-based leg of the nuclear triad. In March 2024, the MH-139 program transitioned from the Developmental Testing phase to the Initial Operational Testing and Evaluation (IOT&E) phase. IOT&E is scheduled to conclude in early 2025. The provisional 550th Helicopter Squadron (550 HS) will conduct IOT&E under AFOTEC supervision at Malmstrom AFB, MT. Once IOT&E is complete, the 550 HS will focus on training UH-1N aircrew on the MH-139 platform. The MH-139 program is scheduled to reach Initial Operational Capability (IOC) in late Spring of 2025. Following Malmstrom AFB's UH-1N transition to the MH-139, F.E. Warren AFB will begin

transitioning to the MH-139 in 2026. Minot AFB is scheduled to begin transitioning in 2027. Simultaneous to Malmstrom AFB's IOT&E, Air Force Reserve Command's 703 Helicopter Squadron (703rd HS) will prepare to take over Flying Training Unit (FTU) duties at Maxwell AFB. The 703 HS expects FTU execution in late 2026.

Bomber Operations

Like the ICBM force, the bomber force is engaged daily. AFGSC bomber forces stand ready to execute nuclear taskings and are poised to conduct long-range strike anywhere in the world. A clear example occurred in February 2024 when two B-1B bombers flew non-stop from the United States, struck Iran-aligned militia group supported targets in Syria, and returned to land at home station, in the United States. AFGSC provides direct support to each CCMD via Bomber Task Force and CONUS to CONUS missions. Our forces consistently operate at maximum capacity, leaving minimal room for operational flexibility or additional surge capacity.

As AFGSC continues to modernize the B-52H and develop the B-21, we must also sustain B-1B and B-2A aircraft until the B-21 is operational at each main operating base. A fully funded and sustained bomber force ensures we have a credible conventional and nuclear deterrent and also the immediate capability to meet Combatant Commanders' operational requirements. 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, which is codified at 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-1B and B-2A is essential to maintaining AFGSC's nuclear deterrent capabilities while completing modernization programs impacting all Air Force bombers.

Until the B-21 Raider fleet is fully fielded, the B-1B will continue to play a prominent role in USAF global power projection. To prepare for emerging threats from peer competitors, modernization and sustainment must continue. Today, the B-1B backstops global operations through Bomber Task Forces missions that display the aircraft's ability to operate from decentralized locations like Luleå-Kallax Air Base, Sweden and Bengaluru, India.

The B-2A Spirit is the only penetrating bomber in the USAF. The platform and crews remain the cornerstone of the bomber force and our nuclear deterrent. However, sustainment

challenges have limited the ability of B-2A crews to conduct in-aircraft training. The B-2A is the only penetrating bomber and must remain fully operational, until replaced by the B-21 Raider.

Since the B-21's inception, top-level key system attributes and performance parameters have remained unchanged. Similarly, since the Engineering and Manufacturing Development contract was awarded in 2016, the B-21 program has remained within its Acquisition Program Baseline for both cost and schedule targets. The FY25 President's Budget includes funding to continue development and procurement of the program's planned Low-Rate Initial Production. Significant remaining milestones for the program include executing the flight test campaign and the start of low-rate initial production. The FY25 President's Budget also encompasses modernization activities continuing across the Future Years Defense Plan (FYDP). These activities include conventional weapon integration, air vehicle provisioning, sensors, and continued nuclear certification activities, as well as Long Range Standoff (LRSO) mission integration.

The B-52H Stratofortress continues to be the enduring backbone of United States strategic deterrence. However, the B-52 faces sustainment challenges. Parts obsolescence also increases aircraft down time and leads to higher cannibalization rates of parts from other aircraft. Upcoming engine, radar, and crew interface modifications will present training and simulation challenges for the next generation of aviators and maintainers. To meet mission requirements, available training sorties will continue to decrease. A lack of training sorties leads to a lack of current aircrew to fly mission lines and an inability to absorb the number of crews required. AFGSC continues to pursue a medium fidelity weapon system trainer to maintain aircrew readiness and increase training quality.

The B-52H Commercial Engine Replacement Program (CERP) and Radar Modernization Program (RMP) are vital upgrades addressing critical sustainment issues, ensuring combat readiness through 2050. The Air Force Life Cycle Management Center's Propulsion Directorate flagged the current B-52H TF-33 engines as unsustainable beyond 2030. Rolls Royce's F130 turbofan was chosen as a replacement for the TF-33. Simultaneously, the B-52H radar faces sustainability challenges due to parts obsolescence. The RMP proposes installing a modified off-the-shelf radar to enhance reliability, reduce operational costs, and allow for future expansion. With RMP planned for IOC at the start of FY28 and CERP projected for IOC in FY33, any

delays or cuts directly impact the B-52H force size. Until engine replacement begins in FY31, AFGSC may face periods without enough engines for all B-52Hs. Funding delays or shortages will immediately and severely affect aircraft availability. Prioritizing funding, ensuring parts availability, and optimizing industry partner efficiency are critical measures to maintain program momentum.

Our Air Launched Cruise Missile (ALCM) is also in need of replacement. LRSO is a Major Defense Acquisition Program (MDAP) to design, develop, produce, and deploy a weapon system replacement for the current ALCM. LRSO will replace ALCM on a sortie-by-sortie basis. In March 2023, a successful Critical Design Review (CDR) was accomplished. The LRSO total life-cycle cost is $29B with an Average Procurement Unit Cost set at $7.85M base year FY21. The planned purchase of the 1,020 missiles includes post-Milestone C production to support fielding with associated weapon system life cycle sustainment and surveillance requirements. Margin and timing with Department of Energy is assessed as a moderate risk to meet the warhead first production unit timeline. The LRSO program remains on track for IOC in 2030.

AFGSC also continues to make progress replacing aging Weapon Storage Areas (WSAs) with single facilities known as Weapons Generation Facilities (WGFs). Nuclear security is a key function of our mission, and these facilities are a major security initiative for the command. The facilities significantly reduce operational, logistical, and aircraft and vulnerability. AFGSC cannot overemphasize enough the appreciation and continued need for Congressional support to stay the course in this critical effort. The timing and need for the WGFs are driven by operational requirements and outdated WSA conditions. Currently, five WGFs are in the FYDP. Three are bomber WGFs with one in design planning and two in construction while two are ICBM WGFs with both in construction. Two remaining WGFs are outside the FYDP. The methodical and deliberate process to build these facilities is paying off. F.E. Warren AFB will see the first complete WGF construction this year and is scheduled to reach FOC in FY25. The timing and sequencing of the modernization endeavor are critical to sustaining credible deterrence while ensuring deconfliction and support to new mission weapon systems.

Cyber and Unmanned Aircraft Systems

AFGSC faces many challenges due to the changing cybersecurity environment. These challenges have driven new information protection and security standards for all systems,

including the Nuclear Command, Control, and Communications (NC3) enterprise. NC3 programs often fail to gain the notoriety of larger acquisition programs. However, the Air Force NC3 weapon system is a vitally important weapons system for AFGSC, the Air Force, and the DoD. NC3 consists of thousands of items spread across multiple platforms and mission areas to include our Airborne, ICBM, Command Posts, and Primary Command Centers collectively.

Built during the Cold War, many of our NC3 systems require modernization now to meet the demands of modern cybersecurity. AFGSC continues to work with the Air Force Deputy Chief of Staff for Strategic Deterrence and Nuclear Integration to map out the NC3 cyber terrain and partner with 16th Air Force and AFMC to increase NC3 system security and monitoring. These efforts require dedicated funding to be successful. With sustainment support and funding spread across multiple Program Executive Officers, Program Elements, and Program Offices, the ability for AFGSC to effectively drive consensus and prioritize funding is extremely difficult. We need better alignment, accountability, and transparency of the management of these programs and a clearer answer to who oversees each system and the associated funding streams. NC3 is a no-fail mission. We must elevate the importance of NC3. AFGSC will continue working closely with USSTRATCOM, Headquarters Air Force, Space Force, OSD, and industry partners to generate the NC3 Next modernization plan.

AFGSC long-range strike forces, both nuclear and conventional, provide the foundation for the security of our nation. AFGSC continues to incrementally modernize systems for the fight of tomorrow while balancing sustainment efforts for today's force. Soon we will field an Advanced Extremely High Frequency compatible system to support ICBMs and nuclear command posts. We will also field a Senior Leader Network providing critical line of sight communication capabilities supporting senior leaders in times of crisis. Simultaneously, we are developing a modernized very low frequency receiver that will support future waveform and cryptographic modernization upgrades, along with advanced aircrew alert systems and non-satellite based beyond line-of-sight communications systems. We must ensure modernization executes with speed and agility to guarantee seamless fielding all in a cyber contested environment.

Cyber is not the only threat facing our command. The conflict in Ukraine along with the recent increase in unmanned aircraft attacks on shipping in the Red Sea highlight the ever-

increasing threat posed by unmanned aircraft, both in number and complexity. AFGSC, with the direct support of USSTRATCOM, has been at the forefront of the Air Force's counter-unmanned aircraft efforts since 2016. Our team of trained Defenders employ equipment that was developed five years ago, while the adversary continues to evolve and adapt at the speed of technology. Additionally, our teams operate within the United States and therefore must act in accordance with domestic law and published Rules for Use of Force. While the DoD's Joint Counter-small Unmanned Aircraft Systems Office is leading the overall DoD effort, our AFGSC team is leveraging internal innovation efforts to seek solutions for the specific challenges our forces face from unmanned aircraft, especially as they relate to operations in the ICBM missile fields and defense of our WSAs and WGFs.

Airborne Operations Center

The Survivable Airborne Operations Center (SAOC) weapon system is the replacement for the legacy E-4B National Airborne Operations Center system. The SAOC will provide an advanced command and control capability that is survivable and enduring. Replacement of the E-4B fleet is necessary due to the aircraft approaching end of service life and Air Force sustainment challenges. Diminished manufacturing sources and obsolescence have led to aircraft availability concerns. As the E-4B gets closer to SAOC transition and subsequent end-of-life, AFGSC will need to balance modernization efforts and aircraft availability. To satisfy operational requirements, SAOC will be comprised of a Commercial Derivative Aircraft (CDA), mission system, and ground support systems. The CDA will be hardened to protect against nuclear and electromagnetic effects and modified with an aerial refueling capability, to enable sustained airborne operations. The mission system will integrate secure communications and planning capabilities on modern information technology infrastructure.

AIRMEN AND FAMILIES

While our weapons systems and modernization efforts garner the attention of Allies and adversaries across the world, our Striker Airmen are the reason AFGSC stands ready to face any challenge or threat, 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

Across various units within AFGSC, our Airmen have demonstrated exceptional performance and dedication. Airman-driven innovation is key to advancing mission

effectiveness. Our STRIKEWERX innovation team has worked to develop cost-effective solutions to mission obstacles with excellent results in multiple areas, to include platform operations, maintenance, and aircrew training. STRIKEWERX Design Sprints have paired Airmen with industry and academia to produce prototypes including B-52 engine pod covers and rapidly deployable shelters. Additionally, our STRIKE Tank Airman innovation competition led to initiating a mobile shielded enclosure prototype for nuclear mission support and an artificial intelligence solution to consolidate disaggregated B-52 aircrew training material into a single accessible mobile application.

Deterrence is grounded in safe, secure, credible, and reliable weapons, operated by reliable Strikers, every day. The maintenance of our legacy weapon systems, while simultaneously modernizing the nuclear force, requires consistent funding, and a supported and sustainable force. To that end, the command is actively reviewing the personnel reliability program to ensure policy guidance, processes, and resourcing aid in the delivery of a credible defense. Part of an Airmen's reliability is the knowledge that they and their families are supported medically. AFGSC has partnered with the Defense Health Agency to improve the electronic health record to meet reliability program requirements and improve access to care in our rural communities. However, we can and must do more.

In 2023, concerns were raised about a potential correlation between missile field service and cancer. AFGSC partnered with the USAF School of Aerospace Medicine (USAFSAM) to lead a comprehensive two-pronged study to examine risks to the safety of our Airmen. One arm is evaluating the environment through three rounds of over 2,400 samples, at each of the three Missile Wings and Vandenberg Space Force Base. We have successfully completed two rounds of sampling. In the first round, out of 900 total surface swipes, polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) over the EPA threshold were detected on four low-touch surfaces at three Missile Alert facilities (MAFs). The three MAFs were immediately shut down until mitigation was complete. All three MAFs are now operational. All air, drinking water, and soil samples have returned below regulatory levels for chemicals or hazards in both rounds of testing. Radon levels at all three missile wings were below the intervention threshold. To account for seasonal variation, the third round of sampling will occur this spring.

The epidemiology arm of the study is comparing the rates of 14 common cancers in the general population to missile-related career fields using large Government databases. AFGSC and USAFSAM released the initial set of results from the epidemiology review in February 2024. From the very limited data set of electronic military medical records, the researchers found no increased incidence of non-Hodgkin Lymphoma, and cancer rates within the missile community were consistent with national military rates at the time of the study. The clinical review is now moving to the next phase, which includes the DoD Cancer Registry and Department of Veterans Affairs data. These additional data sets could provide additional insights on potential risks.

Getting results for our Airmen, families, and veterans coupled with transparency remains our priority throughout this effort. For our veterans we are communicating and sharing our progress with the Department of Veterans Affairs Military Environmental Exposure Sub-Council. This council reviews potential cases of toxic exposure. We are also conducting a complete review and validation of the hazard assessments and occupational health surveillance for the missile community. The safety and care of our Airmen is paramount. AFGSC has hosted five Town Halls with Airmen and Guardians to keep the missile community updated on results as they come in, followed by immediate notifications to senior leaders and Congress. The safety and care of our Airmen is paramount.

Ensuring the retention of our Strikers is critical to maintaining a proficient and ready nuclear force. With specialized training and experience, retaining talent is essential. Recognizing the potential transition of many Strikers to the private sector, AFGSC is conducting a comprehensive analysis focusing on nuclear maintenance, command and control, and security forces Air Force Specialty Codes (AFSCs). These frontline AFSCs are vital for the security and operation of the nation's nuclear triad. We are evaluating human resource strategies geared towards crafting a distinct and customized plan tailored specifically for the Nuclear Enterprise. Furthermore, we have collaborated with RAND-Project Air Force to undertake an impartial study of our mission, leaving no aspect unexamined in our pursuit of enhancing command excellence.

AFGSC’s Force Development Division is the command lead for the deliberate development of AFGSC leaders and nuclear mission professionals. The team plans, develops,

organizes, and executes the Command's deliberate nuclear deterrence and assurance education efforts. Our team specializes in integration of Air Force and command-level programs to address issues related to deterrence education and development to ensure applicability and relevance for specific mission area needs. We leverage the best available commercial technologies to field education programs that develop nuclear mission focused leaders while building an enduring leadership culture across the AFGSC staff, Numbered Air Forces (NAF), and Wings.

As part of its steadfast commitment to Airmen development, AFGSC has forged a partnership with Air University to pilot a base-level Professional Military Education (PME) initiative, targeting Intermediate Developmental Education for Majors, Major selects, and their civilian counterparts. The groundbreaking program enables officers and civilians to blend the flexible distance learning elements of Air Command and Staff College with the interactive in-person seminar format provided by in-residence PME. Concurrently, AFGSC has revamped its course curriculum for command teams' pre-command education, which involved a comprehensive redesign of the Squadron Leadership Course and the introduction of a first-ever Nuclear Stewardship Executive Course. The initiative aims to furnish Squadron, Group, and Wing Commanders, as well as their Senior Enlisted Leaders, with a profound understanding of their roles, responsibilities, and authorities in relation to the nuclear mission of the DoD, USSTRATCOM, and the United States Air Force. Moreover, AFGSC offers highly coveted internships tailored for exceptional officers, enlisted personnel, and civilian Strikers. These year-long programs immerse participants in a diverse array of educational and developmental experiences, including exposure to strategic and national level leadership, academic forums, and international partnerships, all aimed at cultivating future "Strategic Thought Leaders" for the Nuclear Enterprise. Upon successful completion, graduates are selectively placed in assignments designed to maximize their unique skill sets. Furthermore, AFGSC spearheads Aviation Inspiration Mentor outreach efforts through Project Tuskegee, a community engagement initiative aimed at informing, influencing, inspiring, and attracting the next generation of rated and non-rated operators. Since inception in 2022, Project Tuskegee has reached hundreds of thousands across various communities, showcasing opportunities within AFGSC. Through strategic partnerships and engagements at national-level events, Project Tuskegee aims to recruit talented individuals from diverse backgrounds to contribute to key modernization efforts such as the MH-139A, B-21 Raider, and B-52J, thus shaping the future landscape of AFGSC operations.

Caring for Airmen and families remains a sacred duty. We are falling short at our Child Development Centers (CDCs). Hiring challenges are the primary driver of shortfalls at installation CDCs. The Department of the Air Force (DAF) implemented various hiring and retention incentives which has increased the CDC staffing levels from 72.6% in February 2023 to 82.4% in February of 2024, reducing the unmet childcare need by 222 children. There are limited options within the local community at some locations. DAF works to support those families through subsidized childcare programs. Wings are also implementing initiatives to combat these gaps. The Malmstrom AFB school liaison officer championed a pilot "Transitional-K" program for military children. This on-base CDC early childhood development program intends to address childcare issues and enhance academic performance. The pilot program includes 18 military families with support from local high schools and the local university to help children transition between pre-K and a kindergarten educational environment. The program helps offset childcare needs and allows military families access to early childhood development resources.

Minot AFB has received top priority from Air Force Installation and Mission Support Center to plan, design, and construct two additional classrooms and renovate an existing classroom into two separate rooms. This initiative will enable the care of 30 more children. Furthermore, Minot AFB has implemented a $5,000 hiring incentive for an 18-month commitment as part of recruiting and retention initiatives. A healthy CDC is critical to the readiness of an individual and should be looked at as a no-fail mission. Support from Congress that improves hiring, facility upgrades, and other efforts will not only help AFGSC but will benefit the entire Air Force. Simply put, our command needs congressional support to fund initiatives geared towards bettering the lives of our Airmen and families.

Despite efforts by many, military spouses continue to face employment challenges; in fact, military spouses experience an unemployment rate among the highest in the country at approximately 21% - around seven times the national average. Montana took the challenge head-on and Malmstrom Air Force Base spouses have been positively impacted by the Montana Board of Public Education voting to adopt Montana Superintendent Arntzen’s recommended changes to teacher licensing. These revisions allow for flexible approaches to help address the retention and recruitment of teachers. Additionally, the changes specifically allow for licensure reciprocity for

military spouses and dependents. We expect other state legislatures will follow to support the remainder of our installations.

AFGSC actively addresses violence prevention and response across its installations, focusing on filling Integrated Primary Prevention Workforce and True North provider positions. However, the nationwide shortage of mental health providers presents challenges in attracting and retaining qualified candidates, particularly in rural areas. Efforts to incentivize service in difficult-to-fill locations aim to position AFGSC as a premier command. AFGSC anticipates participating in pilot programs to enhance Airmen and their families' resilience and response capabilities. Recently, a Resiliency Response Concept of Operations was developed to augment Disaster Mental Health guidance, ensuring coordinated support at installation, NAF, and Major Command levels. While the primary goal is prevention, the workforce remains prepared to respond swiftly and effectively, providing necessary support as situations demand.

AFGSC Strikers undertake the daunting task of executing two-thirds of the nation's nuclear triad mission, a responsibility demanding unparalleled complexity and resilience in the face of rigorous conditions. The mission unfolds against the backdrop of a monumental 40-year, $290B recapitalization effort, comparable in scale to the Eisenhower Interstate System. Recognizing the distinct challenges posed by the command's diverse locations, extreme climates, and mission demands, my team is diligently exploring various retention tools and strategies. These initiatives are aimed at aligning the priority of our talent management programs with the paramount importance of the Strategic Nuclear Deterrence mission. By advocating for transparency, flexibility in assignment selection, and financial incentives to retain seasoned talent through enhanced quality-of-life measures, we strive to foster a supportive environment conducive to mission success. However, the realization of these enhancements hinges on crucial congressional support, necessitating continued funding to address outdated facilities and sustain our vital mission capabilities.

CONCLUSION

AFGSC is acutely aware of the need to sustain our current force and modernize rapidly. We are prepared, yet we are close to being outpaced to meet the demands we find in today’s world. Despite having a robust plan that paves the way for our future force, we have no

operational margin. The preservation of our legacy force remains a vital national security objective.

Unparalleled operational parameters and an uncertain world confront the command daily. Our imperative is to uphold FOC to fulfill national security mandates, even as we integrate cutting-edge weapon systems. The presence of legacy systems mandates ongoing funding until full divestment can be achieved. Ensuring the execution of modernization efforts is imperative to maintaining credible deterrence.

We cannot slow down. AFGSC is building the force to face an uncertain future. Every portfolio is being modernized, from new sixth-generation aircraft to more capable Grey Wolf helicopters. However, the military-industrial complex is not keeping pace. Already, delays, inflation, and expanding overhead are chipping away at time margins and resources. Simply put, we need continued advocacy and bipartisan effort to field new capabilities and divest the old.

Our Airmen and their families are the bedrock of AFGSC, enabling sustainment, modernization, and deterrence. AFGSC and the nation have a duty to address the challenges our Airmen and families face. We are obligated to provide our Airmen with solutions to health concerns, access to necessary medical care, adequate childcare, and opportunities for education and personal growth. By taking care of them, they will take care of the mission.

AFGSC thanks Congress for its commitment to our command's national defense mission through strategic deterrence and long-range strike. The success of our efforts to develop and maintain these vital capabilities for our nation relies on coordination with Congress and the support you provide.