

073113 Air Force Association, National Defense Industrial Association and Reserve Officers Association Capitol Hill Breakfast Forum with Lieutenant General James Kowalski, Commander, United States Air Force Global Strike Command, on “Nuclear Deterrent, Prompt Strike, and Triad Perspectives.” (For additional information on NDIA/AFA/ROA seminars contact Peter Huessy at phuessy@afa.org).

[This is a rush, unofficial transcript provided by National Security Reports.]

MR. PETER HUESSY: I would like to welcome you all here to this, our last seminar before September. My name is Peter Huessy, and on behalf of the Reserve Officers Association, the Air Force Association and the National Defense Industrial Association, I would like very much to welcome you to hear the next in our series of seminars on nuclear deterrence, missile defense, arms control, proliferation and defense policy.

I also would like to welcome our friends from the embassies of France, the Czech Republic, Britain, Russia and Germany, who are here today. I also would like to acknowledge our friends, General Fay and General Dawkins who are here today as well. Thank you. Also, my friend, Will Curtis, the professor from Annapolis. I always like to say that because I get to teach in his course. And there's nothing against the Air Force Academy, but it's a beautiful campus to walk into and teach over there in the morning.

I also would like, since this is the last event for the summer until we have two more in September – on September 18th Keith Payne will talk about his new publication on minimal deterrence. And on the 19th we have a colleague of mine who's going to talk about China and China cyber warfare against the United States, before we break for the year.

We have two conferences. We have scheduled one in Kings Bay in Georgia, which we hope to do in November. And we do have now confirmation of a conference we're going to do in Bloomington, Indiana with the sponsorship of Crane and NavSeaAir. We're going to do a seminar on the joint work between ICBM and SLBM communities, as well, and that will be the week of October 14th.

I also want to give a special thank you to my sponsors for this year who have over the last 32 years, many of them have continued to support us from Raytheon, from Merck (ph), from TASC, from Northrop Grumman, Bechtel, the Nuclear Exchange Monitor, Boeing, Systems Planning and Analysis, ATK, General Dynamics, Fluor, SAIC, Lockheed Martin and Aerojet. I want to thank you all for your support for all these years, and particularly for this year as well.

We are honored today to have Lieutenant General James Kowalski, who as you know in January 2011 was appointed as the Commander of the Air Force Global Strike Command in Barstow Air Force Base in Louisiana. He also has now been nominated to be the Vice Commander at StratCom in Omaha, Nebraska. And General, I want to congratulate you on that and look forward to seeing you next year here in that role.

As you know, the General is responsible for organizing, training, equipping and maintaining all U.S. intercontinental ballistic missiles and nuclear capable bomber forces. The mission is to develop and provide combat ready forces for nuclear deterrence and global strike operations to support the president of the United States and combat commanders. The command comprises more than 23,000 professionals operating at various locations around the globe. And the command currently has six wings and controls the nation's entire inventory of Minuteman III intercontinental ballistic missiles, the B-2 and B-52 bomber aircraft.

General Kowalski, again, on behalf of our sponsors of ROA, NDIA and AFA, I want to thank you for coming all the way from Barksdale to join us this morning to share with us your thoughts on the nuclear deterrent of the United States of America. Would you all give a very warm welcome to Lieutenant General James Kowalski?

(Applause).

GEN. JAMES KOWALSKI: Well, Peter, thank you for inviting me to come out, and thanks to the sponsors. It truly is a privilege to be able to come to Washington, D.C. and represent the almost 25,000 airmen of Air Force Global Strike Command. Air Force Global Strike Command's heritage goes back to Strategic Air Command, General Curtis LeMay, second commander of Strategic Air Command.

Lieutenant General James Kowalski, the second commander of Air Force Global Strike Command. General LeMay commanded for nine years. I'm not going to beat his record.

(Laughter).

As much as I might want to, the Air Force is going to let me have this job for about four years. So this will be my last opportunity in this position, probably, to come to one of these breakfasts and have a conversation with a wide ranging group of folks. And some of you are very familiar with Global Strike Command, have followed it for a while. Others are not. So what I'd like to do is just give a little context first, and then rather than give you the Rotary Club speech before going to the questions, I'll hit on some of the hot issues, some of the core issues to me, and then we'll open it up.

The command was stood up to bring together the nuclear ICBMs and the nuclear capable bombers. So the ICBMs came out of Air Force Space Command. The nuclear capable bombers came out of Air Combat Command.

And in August of 2009 a new Air Force major command, the first new Air Force major command in 27 years, was stood up, to bring these together to put focus back on the nuclear area, to have a commander accountable and responsible to the chief, and to present those forces to U.S. Strategic Command, and also to primarily, in my view, to restore the culture.

I talked about LeMay being the commander for nine years. If you are the commander for nine years and your deputy, General Power goes on to command for seven years, it's pretty easy to establish a culture. You can just do that by force of personality. But it was important for us to focus in on the cultural things, and I'll get to that here a little bit more in a second.

So as we brought together the bombers, we brought together the air ops, and we brought together the ICBMs and we re-established this idea of, okay, what is that culture, what is it that we need to bring to these airmen, how do we regain the trust of the American people after the incidents of 2006 and 2007? And it came down to really one thing, and that was ensuring that every airman understood and embraced the special trust and responsibility of nuclear weapons.

Now, the mission of the command was relatively straightforward. That mission was to develop and provide combat ready forces for nuclear deterrence and global strike operations: safe, secure and effective, to support the president of the United States and the combatant commanders. And that sounds a lot like every other major command's mission statement: develop and provide, that's the organize, train and equip mission; the ready forces, and to give them to the combatant commander.

Now because these are nuclear forces, we put the president in there because we're the only Air Force major command that provides forces directly to the president. Those forces are on alert. The only person that can execute them is the president of the United States. There's something different about the nuclear mission.

So on the one hand, when I say a culture of special trust and responsibility, my airmen rightly ought to be told, why is it special? It's special, one, because when you go on alert you're working for the president of the United States. It's also special because when we go out to any Air Force base and we look at anything on that base: a vehicle, a computer, an airplane, a desk; all of those things belong to United States' citizens.

There is not a single nuclear weapon that belongs to the United States Air Force. Every nuclear weapon belongs to the Department of Energy. The Air Force has operational control, but that's it. We're stewards of those weapons.

So this idea of the two man, the two person policy, of split controls of nuclear weapons all the way up the chain to the president of the United States, even includes the Department of Defense which has the weapons systems and delivery platforms, and the Department of Energy which has the weapons. Nobody has all control of everything, except for the president. And that's how the system was designed.

And then the third reason that it's a special trust and responsibility – and some of you are familiar with the chairman's White Paper he put out on mission orders and commander intent. Most of the things that we do in the military, we can tell a smart NCO or a good lieutenant, I need you to take that hill. And that NCO, that lieutenant is going to figure out a way to take that hill. He'll get that job done.

But in the nuclear business what we do and how we do it are equally important. So we're not going to tell some lieutenant I need you to go out to that ICBM silo and bring that weapon back, and I don't really care how you do it. I care intensely how you do it.

You're going to do it exactly with this many people in the convoy. You're going to do it exactly under these weather conditions. You're going to do it with the approval of the wing commander. You're going to do it with the approval of the commander of the major command notified that you're doing that today.

And you're going to have two helicopters. And everybody is going to be certified in the task and they're going to be on the personnel reliability program. The entire bureaucracy of nuclear surety will be applied and the checklist will be run precisely in the exact order that you were told to do them, the exact order we trained you to do them. And you will have connectivity throughout this event.

We don't take risks. And it was interesting, we have a regular exchange with the French air force, the two democracies that still have a nuclear air force. And as we do this regular exchange with the French, I sat through one of their briefings with General Chirac (ph). And he talked about zero operational risk – zero operational risk.

And you've heard the secretary of the Air Force, the past secretary of the Air Force, the previous chief and the current chief, the previous secretaries of Defense talk about the need for perfection in this mission area. So this area is different. This is a special trust and responsibility.

And the first time I've heard this phrase I was surprised. And that phrase is, "these weapons aren't for warfighting." Nuclear weapons are not for warfighting. The first time I heard that, and it was only five or six years ago, I went, that doesn't sound right to me, because I spent my career in this.

But the more I thought about it, the more I realized that that was an accurate statement. These are weapons of national policy. These are weapons for the president. These are weapons to influence, to create uncertainty and fear in the minds of potential adversaries.

So when we think about dealing with an Iran or we think about dealing with a North Korea, we don't really have nuclear weapons in those plans (at ?) the regional combatant commanders, because that's not how we use these weapons. So it's a very different concept, but it's restoring that sense among those 25,000 airmen that are doing this mission day-in and day-out, that when the president says this will be safe, secure and effective, that means something. That's part of our mission statement. That's part of the culture of the special trust and responsibility.

So as we go forward and when we think about nuclear deterrence operations, there's really – you know, I'm a big supporter of the triad, so it makes it easier for me to think things through. And when you parse through the Nuclear Posture Review, when you parse through actually most of the things that we've written about our nuclear policies for the past 10 or 15 years, there's only three effects that we look for.

The first is, we look for that strategic stability, and that's with those higher end adversaries: Russia and China. Strategic stability with the Russians right now means for us a regular relationship: all the mil-to-mil contacts, diplomatic contacts, contacts we have, transparency on both sides. We understand the inventories of each nation when it comes to strategic weapons. And we're able to do things like the president just announced in Berlin, which is maybe it's time for the next step. Let's start the negotiations to bring these inventories, which are pretty high, 1,500 plus for each of our nations, down to the next level.

In 2011 the Russians came to the U.S. and participated in a security exercise, as we demonstrated to them how we ensure security of a nuclear convoy. And just within the last two weeks, our equivalent of their long-range rocket force commander, and that's General Mike Carey, the 20th Air Force Commander, went to Russia and did the reciprocal visit and watched the Russians go through different procedures on how they provide security for their convoys. And those are the kinds of relationships and the kinds of strategic stability that's built when you have a triad and when you have the relationships that negotiated agreements like the New START Treaty give us.

The second effect is nuclear weapons as part of a regional architecture. There's an interesting book out. I just started it. It's by Paul Bracken, "The Second Nuclear Age."

Some of you have probably already read it. For all I know, he's in the audience. But I apologize for not having finished it before I came here to speak.

But it's consistent with some of the other things that have been written out there for a while, by Keith Payne and others, about how we've doubled the number of nuclear power states since the Non-Proliferation Treaty of 1968 – almost doubled. What does that mean? And a lot of times we have a very narrow focus and we think, it's not a problem now. It's not a problem next year. But maybe it is a problem in 10 year.

Because these states that are acquiring nuclear weapons, and those that may be thinking about acquiring nuclear weapons, are doing it for reasons very different than the reasons that we acquired them post-Cold War, and the reasons that we retain them, and the reasons the Russians had them and the reasons the Chinese have them. So the construct that the Non-Proliferation Treaty was originally written in, is different today. And we have to understand what that means as we continue to pursue our nonproliferation goals.

And the third effect is that of assurance. How do we assure our allies? How do we provide that nuclear umbrella so that our allies and our friends do not feel compelled to either get their own nuclear weapons or feel compelled to have to accommodate a potential adversary?

And I think that's an important part of what we do that's often forgotten. And when you live inside the beltway and work inside the beltway, there's a tendency not only to mirror image adversaries, sometimes there's a tendency to mirror image our allies. There's a tendency to make blanket statements about the need for the B-61 or the need for NATO to have nuclear weapons. But if you are not there, if you don't live in their capitol, if you don't have their history, I think it's worth pausing a little bit to look at a map and see who's on their borders and think about the concerns that they might have.

Last year we had the chief of defense of Norway come visit the United States on an exchange visit. Now this is an army four-star general, chief of defense of Norway. Norway is in NATO. Norway is a participant in Afghanistan. The last place you would have thought he would have visited was Strategic Command and an Air Force Global Strike Command wing.

But in fact, when he was given the choice of where to visit, he chose to visit Strategic Command and an Air Force Global Strike Command wing. And the reason he did that is to say, thanks, to thank the U.S. strategic forces for providing his nation that nuclear umbrella so that

they could then pursue their national security objectives, be full participants in NATO, without having to worry about that high-end threat on their own border.

I was talking about how the triad had three effects, three attributes, three risks. The three attributes, of course, are safe, secure and effective. And over the years those of you in the audience that have been doing this mission for a long time have heard it as safe, secure and reliable. We've heard it as safe, secure and effective. We've heard it safe, secure and credible; safe secure, credible and reliable.

So basically we got it. It's safe and secure; it's reliable and credible. If you don't have all of those, you're certainly not going to be effective.

So that was part of the president's speech in Prague back in 2009 when he said make no mistake, as long as these weapons exist the U.S. will have a safe, secure and effective arsenal to deter adversaries and assure allies. Well, that's pretty clear to me. There are a lot of other things in the statement that are consistent with our national policy since 1968. This administration has chosen to be more active in that, and I think that's good. I think this is good timing.

But what we can't forget is this is a two-track challenge. Because at the same time we want to pursue these additional reductions, at the same time we worry about the threats of nuclear weapons proliferation, nuclear weapons in the hands of terrorists, we also have to ensure that we keep that force safe, secure and effective.

And then the three risks. The three risks – and this is, I think, where the triad is of the greatest benefit to us, in mitigating these risks. The first risk is one of geopolitical surprise. The second risk is some kind of technological disruption. And then that third risk of a technical failure of one element or one leg of the triad.

Now I've talked about safe, secure and effective, and I've talked about the culture, and I talked about how every airman has to embrace this special trust and responsibility. What we can't do, what I can't do, is demand perfection from my airmen and at the same time not give them the tools, the training, the facilities and the weapons systems that are up t those standards.

And I think it is too easy for us to dismiss the responsibility of ensuring that we have a safe, secure and effective arsenal. That is not just Global Strike Command. It's not just the United States Navy and SSP. It's our laboratories. It's the intellectual infrastructure.

We have to continue to make those investments. It's the B-61 life extension program. It's all the pieces and parts that come together to make sure that this capability, the ultimate guarantee of national sovereignty, that we continue to invest in it.

We've taken about a 20 year procurement holiday since the Soviet Union dissolved. And we have to be careful about extending that tool and breaking faith with our own airmen.

Okay, let me just touch on a couple of issues that might spur some questions later, or defer some questions later. I don't know which one it would be. Some of the issues that have come up over the last six to nine months.

One is the Minot crew force. You know, one of the things we talked about was holding our airmen to higher standards. In the reports that were done on the Air Force nuclear enterprise after the 2007 unauthorized transfer, one thing that was one of the recurring themes was the Air Force's lack of critical self-assessment.

In fact, if you looked at the inspections prior to the 2007 incident, everybody seemed to always do okay. So there's a problem there. There was a problem in the inspection program. There was a problem in the standards. There were problems in training.

And part of what we did as we tried to fix all the different pieces of this, was to implement a more rigorous inspection program. And for the first couple of years it was, I think, as much punishment as it was rigor. And I came across that way, and that was done for a reason. It was done to just sort of shake up, down to the smallest unit level, and to re-invigorate them and re-energize them on things as simple as self-inspection checklists, to remind them that not only are we telling you we think that what you do is important, but we're going to send a team of colonels and chief master sergeants to get into your kitback (ph) and to find every little thing out there that's wrong and to share it with the other wings so that we can bring the standards up across the command.

And what we found – and then as we throttled back around 2010, 2011 and then we did some restructuring of our inspections to try to give the wing and the squadron commanders more time to do training – we actually found that the number of significant discrepancies out there in the wings, and the numbers of critical discrepancies, continued to decline. The number of minor discrepancies continued to climb, which in our view, was a good metric. I'm less interested in who passes and who fails, than I am in this larger, long-term picture of: are my inspectors finding big problems that they then spend their time writing reports about; or, do they not find any big problems and have to keep looking for little ones? I'd rather have them looking for little ones because that means we've got the big stuff and the commanders and the chiefs, have got that big stuff taken care of. And that's what we've seen.

And this consolidated unit inspection that took place at Minot Air Force Base created 22 areas in the 91st Missile Wing. And one of those areas was the ICBM pre-force operations. That, in the past, had been an area inspected by what we would normally call standardization and evaluation. In the missile community it's the combat capability eval. It has a slightly different name.

And it was a surprise that that wing got a mark. They had gotten all (sats ?) in the past. And we had some conversations after the inspection.

General Carey was going to be all over it. The wing commander was all over it. And I said, okay, you guys got it, but you're going to see the team come out. And it will probably be out in about nine months to a year.

And then we had the email come out. And I'd be more than happy to chat individually with people about that email. The lieutenant colonel who had written the email had sort of brought together a number of different issues into an email that was a recurring email format that he used to communicate to the crew force. He was the deputy operations group commander.

And rightly so, once that email was made public, some of those terms, the words that he used, when linked with an inspection, are startling. So, you know, we sort of got a little wire brushed over it, and that's fine. You know, I think transparency is a good thing.

General Kehler asked for a root cause analysis on this. So we went back and we said okay, whatever you're doing to the missile wing commander and the 20th Air Force commander, continue to do that. But we're going to pull together this separate team to take a look at it and help you get to what are the root causes.

So some of you are familiar with this (five whys ?) idea. So you ask, why did this happen? Well, the idea of a root cause analysis is to continue into that (five whys ?), to keep drilling back until you find the thing within the process that you can fix that ensures it doesn't happen again. So it ends up being about an 18 month solution to ensure that the changes you've made have really taken effect.

The bottom line, the wing leadership acted aggressively. They did not act outside the bounds that we would expect them to act. Seventeen of the 19 crewmembers that were decertified have been recertified. One of those went as PCS and moved to another position that doesn't require recert. And one of them is still undergoing disciplinary actions, so he will probably not be recertified anytime soon.

Let me talk about reinvesting and sequestration. We've made a lot of strides since we stood up the command in investing in our airmen, investing in our weapons systems. But sequestration gives us a little bit different problem.

And I think you've heard enough about sequestration inside the beltway. I'm not going to spend a whole lot of time talking about it. If somebody is interested in specifics for Global Strike Command, I will say a couple of things.

One is, we can get to lower funding levels, but the mechanism of sequestration gives us some significant problems early on. And what I liken it to is we basically as an air force are having to take out a payday loan. The cuts have been so dramatic that we're taking out a payday loan on readiness.

We're taking a payday loan out on our facilities. We're taking a payday loan out on the morale of our airmen and the morale of our civilians. And as some of you I know have never ever taken out a payday loan, but you probably know that the interest rates on those are pretty exorbitant. And the interest rates on these loans that we're having to take out to get these budget periods met are going to be pretty high. Now, we don't know how high they are yet.

Sequestration is really three sequential phases. One is get through this year. And I think we can do that, frankly, with leadership. You know, we can tell our airmen all you've got to do is get through the end of September.

We can tell our civilians, I know this hurts. I know this is unfair. But all we've got to do is get through the end of September.

The challenge then in this sequence – the next challenge is next year. And as you heard the Secretary of Defense say, he can't make any guarantees about next year. Well now that's a problem. That's a problem with that civilian and that's a problem with that airman. What do you mean you can't tell me about next year?

We can't tell you about next year because we don't know. We don't know how much money we're going to have next year. I don't know how many flying hours I'm going to have next year. Flying hours is the core part of this engine that drives everything and how we fund money over a year. And if I don't know how many of those I've got, it makes it hard to do a lot of other things.

So it's at a level of uncertainty, is an additional challenge that we have. And folks want to know exactly, what's the impact of sequestration? Show me the number.

I'll tell you – some of you have heard this phrase, not everything that you can count matters. And not everything that matters can be counted. And a lot of what really matters

here: the morale of our airmen, the morale of our civilians, the combat readiness of the force, can't be measured as easily as we would like it to be able to be measured.

Nuclear force structure, to touch on that real quickly. New START limits, we will get to those by February of '18. The administration wants some decision space, so the decision on the force structure won't be made probably until next summer.

But we're proceeding with the de-MIRVing of our ICBMs to get them to single warheads. And we're proceeding with the elimination of the so-called phantoms, which are the empty silos that would count under the treaty. So we have to destroy them to clear them off the books along with some of the bombers that are based down at Davis-Monthan in the boneyard. And then the president, as I already mentioned, has proposed further negotiations with the Russians for reductions of up to one-third.

Okay, I touched on a lot of things. I've burned up about a half-hour at this, so now I'd like to open it up to any questions.

(Applause).

MR. PAT HOST (ph): Thanks, General, Pat Host with Defense Daily. I would like to ask first, could you expound please on the payday loan remark? You know, sequestration is across the board budget cuts. I'm just wondering how that's also kind of like borrowing at high interest rates? And secondly, I remember last February you said that Global Strike Command was reducing B-52 flying hours by 10 percent to prepare for sequestration. We have another round of sequestration coming up. Is there anything else you're doing for Global Strike Command to help prepare for further budget cuts?

GEN. KOWALSKI: Yeah, the first part of your question, probably the easiest way to explain that is, you know, this idea of a payday loan is what we were able to do – and frankly it was guidance from the Department early on – that we were not going to take readiness reductions in our nuclear deterrence operations. But when I told you what our mission statement was, I said it's nuclear deterrence and it's global strike operations. So the conventional part of our mission set was at risk to the O&M cuts of sequestration, specifically the flying hour cuts.

So while we fenced what we needed to ensure the readiness of our nuclear force, that came at the expense of our conventional forces. For the missile fields, no difference. I mean, we continue to fly our helicopters. We continue to do everything we need to do in direct support of U.S. Strategic Command.

On our B-2s, our B-2s are manned at such a rate and they fit into the Strategic Command plans in such a manner that there was no reduction in B-2 flying hours. In our B-52s, which are significantly heavily committed to conventional plans, we basically had the equivalent of half of our squadrons – we didn't sit down half of our squadrons – but about half of our crewmembers were on a path to be not mission ready, which is basically we didn't have the flying hours to fly them and keep the other crews ready for nuclear deterrence operations. So at the squadron, at the wing levels, they made those decisions on who was going to fly and who was not going to fly.

If the decisions that we have made a month ago, two months ago now, had stayed in effect, we would have been at 1 October with about half of our B-52 crew force completely non-mission ready. And they would have been non-mission ready for such a period of time that we would have had to get them recurrent in a number of activities. So we start getting into the specifics of how long can you not do a particular event: a takeoff, a landing, an air refueling, before you require extensive training and be ready again?

So when I talk about that interest rate, that interest rate is, you know, next year's flying hours are going to be at a reduced level. We don't know what the level is yet, but it will be reduced. But they are based on a program that sustains readiness. They're not based on a program that takes about half your crew force and gets them ready again.

So do you see the challenge there? Basically instead of being able to take all of next year's flying hours and just use them to maintain the force, I've got to spend some of those flying hours to get half of the crew – half of the crew force ready again. Now we've gotten some relief with the release of the OCO money. I think it was – don't quote me on this please, but it was like \$1.5 billion.

And our part of that going into flying hours actually instead of this steep decline and then this huge climb up, it's sort of levels that out. So we have maybe about one-quarter of the crews right now are non-mission ready in one category or another. But because we have an influx now of flying hours, we're starting to resume that flying and we'll be able to level off into that. So the actual impacts won't be as bad as they could have been.

But what about the facilities? What about the maintenance? I mean, if you let your roof go long enough, it's going to be more expensive to fix it in the future. And those are the kinds of things we're at when we talk about the facilities on our installations. And if we're only going to do safety and health kind of repairs to them, what things are we not doing that are normal maintenance that you would do?

You know, are we in the position basically not changing the oil in our car because we can't afford an oil change? What kind of bill does that drive in the future.

So that's sort of where we're at. And those are things that are a little bit easier to measure. The things that I can't measure are those civilians who've had a 20 percent pay cut for this last part of the year. And then I stand up in front of them and tell them I think you're okay next year but I don't know.

I think that we have enough insight into next year's budget that we can plan around this. It's certainly better insight than we had last year. But I can't make any guarantees. So, you know, now I'm relying on them. I'm relying on this social contract we have. I'm relying on their sense of service and commitment to say okay, I'll continue to serve.

Some of them have other demands. Some of them have family demands. And some of them are not going to be able to continue to serve. And I worry about losing some of the best ones.

So anyway that was what I – I probably went too long with that, but that's sort of what I meant by that payday loan concept. It's the idea of it's going to cost you a lot more later. And I think some of the folks that are smarter at acquisition than I am could probably talk about that similar impact in acquisition and procurement programs.

In the budget cuts on the flying hours, before we got to sequestration I said it looked to me like this was going to happen, so I already started tailoring down some of my flying hours with the intent to preserve them. That was well meaning but pointless on my part because once sequestration hit all the flying hours got reshuffled across the Air Force. Fortunately, like I said, nuclear deterrence operations got fenced. So for the most part, my command stayed pretty healthy and I had about half my crew force there to worry about.

But if you go back to the year 2000 and if you look at 2010, prior to sequestration, in the B-52s they've already taken about a 20 percent cut in flying hours over that decade. And now we're looking at about another 20 percent cut in flying hours. That is really driving us to figure out, how do we mitigate this? How do we figure out what things are truly critical out there?

And it has a longer term impact, too. The military is this constant flow of people coming in, becoming experienced, upgrading to other positions and moving on. And in the aviation community, one of the markers that you use to do that is how many flying hours an officer has.

Well, if I have a 10 percent cut between 2000 and 2010, and now I'm going to give them another 10 or 20 percent cut going into the future, how do I get that right number of flying hours to give them the right level of experience where I can upgrade them to be an aircraft commander or put them in charge of an airplane. It's not just a problem I've got, it's a problem across the Air Force. So now we have to go back and say, what's the right metric to determine

whether a co-pilot is ready to upgrade to aircraft commander, or an aircraft commander is ready to upgrade to instructor pilot?

I mean, am I counting individual events? Am I trying to figure out how many trips to the simulator I have to make? If you signed up eight years ago, seven years ago to join the Air Force in the middle of a war, and now you spend most of your flying hours in a simulator, and airlines start hiring again, am I going to get myself some other kind of (retention ?)?

So there's a lot of things here that we don't understand and there's going to be a lot of secondary and tertiary effects of this that are going to be difficult for us to measure. And I wish I had some very clear answers, but all I can see is some problems – some opportunities – I mean, I think we've got an opportunity here to make an investment in our simulators. If our simulators were better, maybe there's more thing that we can do in the simulators. But I do know that in the B-52 I've got to be able to fly that airplane to a range. And I don't have ranges close to my bases. So at some point I can reduce flying hours, but only down to a certain point, and then I can't get any lower because I can't reach the range.

MS. : (Off mic) – last year in the Air Force fiscal year '13 budget funding was taken out from the next upgrade for the B-52 fleet. And you had said at that time that you hoped to bring it back in fiscal '14. However, because of the continuing austere environment, what is the status of funding for the next upgrade?

GEN. KOWALSKI: We were able to get the first group of 30 aircraft funded. And in fact, the first operational aircraft has gone off to get that upgrade. And I think that's going to be done as part of the depot maintenance at Tinker.

So the contract has been let. It's in place and the upgrade is going on for that first 30. And then in fiscal year '15 we expect to have the funding for the next tranche of airplanes – the rest of the aircraft.

MR. : A question about North Korea. Earlier this year North Korea ratcheted up tension on the Korean Peninsula. (I think at some point we went to DF-3 ?). And I think one of the turning points was the time when the U.S. sent B-52 and B-2s to the Korean Peninsula during their joint military exercises.

But in Korea, there are politicians -- (off mic) – they said that's not enough. This is the time we need tactical nuclear weapons in Korea. How would you assure people – those people that the U.S. still has a nuclear umbrella for South Korea in spite of this budget cut situation?

And correct me if I'm wrong, but wouldn't it be a better idea for the U.S. to forward deploy the B-52, for example, to Guam instead of withholding them in the U.S.? It would send a strong message to North Korea.

GEN. KOWALSKI: We actually do have aircraft rotated, stationed in Guam. We always – I can say we always have six deployed because we actually call the program “Continuous Bomber Presence.” So ever six months we rotate out a new squadron and we keep a minimum of six airframes, sometimes more, out there on Guam, to provide exactly that presence.

I think what was demonstrated there as part of those – in response to those tensions – was the ability to do those operations from the U.S., so the ability to fly a B-2 from the U.S. to the Korean Peninsula. Certainly it is – I think it sometimes looks like it's a relatively simple thing to do. It takes a lot of pieces and parts to make that happen. I wouldn't say that it's hard, but it is complicated.

It certainly requires tankers and our Air Mobility Command. It requires some command and control. But it's something we practice and it's something, frankly, we're good at. And, you know, I would hope that the part of the message is to assure the Korean people and all of our friends and allies in the region that when the United States chooses to we can reach out.

And we can reach out with a helping hand or, if we have to, we can reach out with something like a B-2. So I don't know what to say beyond that. You know, policies on placement of nuclear weapons is a little bit above me. Like I said, these are national and political weapons, so that would be a decision for somebody else to make. I'm comfortable in our ability to provide extended deterrence with bombers.

DR. WILL CURTIS: I'm Dr. Will Curtis from the Naval Academy. About two years ago I had an opportunity to visit Maxwell Air Force Base and – (inaudible) – Air Force Base. I was looking at the program on nuclear strategy, and so forth in Colorado at the Air War College. As you know, that was a part of the recommendation of the Schlesinger Commission. How would you assess that program now, the progress that has been made since the commission report – (off mic) – Air Force to put in motion that change that was recommended?

And also, I'm a little concerned what sequestration is going to do to those programs, because – (off mic) – had to cancel its programs and workshops they have every year that was supposed to be in Washington, D.C., because of funding. And I get some negative feedback from people – (off mic) – negative impact of sequestration – (off mic).

GEN. KOWALSKI: I think we're doing, like I said, we're doing what we have to do to get through this year. And I'm not sure what cuts Air University had to make. I do know that about 18 months ago I had that very same question, and so did my vice commander, about how do

we go back in and reassess the War College, that PME, professional military education, piece of the reinvigoration of the nuclear enterprise?

And we went out to ATC's headquarters staff, and they went out and they did an assessment, and we had our folks as part of that. And the general assessment was it's a pretty good course. It's been able to stay up.

And it's not just that one course or the one course in Air Command and Staff College. It really has been – it's part of a broader effort. You know, we stood up a series of courses, most of them given out by the Nuclear Weapons Center out at Kirtland, to rotate people through. We've paid more attention to nuclear fellowships as part of intermediate developmental education and senior developmental education, where we send people out to the laboratories or we send people out to some of the universities with a specific focus on nuclear. And then we put in the personnel processes to track them so that we know where they go next. So I think we're putting the right tools into place, but like a lot of things it's just going to require us to constantly watch it until it becomes imbedded in the culture and it becomes part of the habit patterns in how people behave.

MS. ELAINE GROSSMAN: Thank you, Elaine Grossman from National Journal. General – (off mic) – conventional prompt global strike, both short- and medium-range weapons – (off mic).

GEN. KOWALSKI: Yeah, I really can't. I'm not in a position to answer that question because it's not a formal program. And I'm not part of that other than in sort of an advisory role where the OSD team that is working and has my phone number. And they do call us occasionally and we have been brought in, particularly on the ConOps pieces early on. But if there is engagement with my command with them, it's happening at a lower staff level because I've not been informed on anything in several months now.

MS. GROSSMAN: (Off mic).

GEN. KOWALSKI: No, not really. I mean, shorter can be prompter. It takes a long time to go a long ways. But other than that, I'm sorry, I'm just outside my length.

MR. : (Off mic) – you talked about not having risk in the management of nuclear weapons, in Cold War days keeping ICBMs online was very important. And I've heard stories about – (off mic).

GEN. KOWALSKI: Well actually, I'm glad you asked that question because it brings up a pretty good point. And that is, we're often accused of being a Cold War force. Now first of all,

having been a Cold War warrior, I don't know why that term is pejorative, because I thought the Cold War was relatively successful.

But let me step away from that for a second and say, I don't think we're any more a Cold War force than an aircraft carrier or a special ops or the UH-1 helicopter. Just because you had these systems during the Cold War, and now we adapt them, we change our doctrines, we change our organizations, we change their training, we change their operational plans. We have adapted for this second nuclear age, where we continue to deter at the high-end.

But at the same time we have emerging threats that are reasonable, but we don't know where they're going to be in 10 years. So let me lead back into your question, though. Because during the Cold War – you know I talked about the culture of Strategic Air Command. A lot of people can talk – say a lot of different things about what that culture was. But at the end of the day that culture was, we're ready to go to war tonight. That was the culture of Strategic Air Command.

You know, safe, secure, credible, that operational credibility is fundamental to nuclear deterrence. And during the Cold War, that's what it was all about. It was demonstrating that operational credibility.

I remember being a young aircraft commander and this is at Marks Air Force Base and we had D-model B-52s on that installation that had come back from Vietnam and they were broken. They were physically never going to fly again. And what we would do is we would taxi them around when the Soviet satellites were overhead. And we'd taxi them around, the Soviet satellite would come over and go ah, because we're trying to demonstrate that operational credibility.

When we would do the elephant walks – how many people here know what an elephant walk is? I don't see too many young people raising their hands. An elephant walk is where you would take five B-52s on alert – this is about a 500,000 pound airplane that at the time used JP-4, a relatively flammable fuel, and they were loaded with 20 nuclear weapons.

And we would have a claxon and everybody would run out. You didn't know. You weren't pre-staged.

And you'd go speeding out there in your 1972 Dodge pickup truck with people in the back, and come screeching to a halt and jump out, open that hatch, get in there, hit the starter cartridges, which are huge canisters of gunpowder in these eight engines – did I mention there were nuclear weapons there – in these eight engines with fire to get those engines up and spinning as quickly as possible. And then the taxi order was determined by who was ready first. So you'd have multiple people pulling out. I wouldn't say they were playing chicken.

(Laughter)

But the first person in was the first person back for lunch. Plus, you knew the wing commander was out there watching. So you wanted your crew to be the best.

So you've got these five B-52s, 100 nuclear weapons, taxing down the runway, being followed by KC-135s. And they go down the runway and they'd come back in and then they'd pull into parking. And you would do this huge movement with all of these engines running, with all of this, hot brakes, just everything.

And we did that timed with the overflight of Soviet satellites, so they could see that every single one of those bombers worked. And that was about operational credibility. That was about showing an adversary you were ready today to go to war.

We're not in that position. I mean, you know, for the past 15 years it's been pretty clear. It's talked about in the Nuclear Posture Review.

We're really not worried. It's a remote possibility, you know, to the point of not hardly worth discussing, that idea of some kind of first strike, because we've established a relationship with the Russians. We don't have the ideological tension that we had during the Cold War, which is not to say there aren't points of tension, but they're certainly not on the scale it's been in the past. So as a result, when we think about our nuclear forces, I don't need to demonstrate that kind of operational credibility. I don't need to take those kinds of risk.

In fact, I would tell you that the greatest risk to my forces is an accident. The greatest risk to my forces is doing something stupid. That puts my force at risk more-so than almost anything else out there I can think of. So when I talk about it's different today, it's not a Cold War force and we don't apply Cold War mentality and we don't take those risks.

So, you know, this is something that is part of that cultural change we've had to put out there with our airmen. I've got a lot of nuclear weapons on alert. The nation has a lot of nuclear weapons on alert, when you add in the submarines.

I think we're pretty – we are very secure in our nuclear force. And I think the ICBM force, 450 hardened, dispersed launch facilities, make us invulnerable to any potential nuclear adversary, with the exception of the Russians. And it would require the Russians to exhaust their inventory.

So as a result, what's your definition of strategic stability? Mine is that neither side has either an incentive or fear of a first-strike. And I don't think our nation has any fear today of a first-strike. And to a large reason, because we have 450 hardened and dispersed launch facilities in the heartland of this nation.

That's sort of a long answer, again.

MR. KEITH TORONTO (ph): Hi, General, Keith Toronto with Inside Defense. Sir, I wanted to ask about Global Strike Command. As you get ready to move on, what are the things that you think the command needs to do to continue to grow and be more efficient and more effective in its mission?

GEN. KOWALSKI: Well, I think one, it's something that the whole Air Force needs to do, and that is we have to somehow make the changes in our culture related to becoming efficient. You know, I grew up in a military where you were less worried about efficiency than you were effectiveness, because that's what we did. You know, you didn't want to take risks with your airmen's lives. You wanted to make sure that you had whatever capacity you needed to defeat an adversary, plus some more.

But now we really have to be more thoughtful about efficiency, not only efficiency in the larger plans, but efficiency in day-to-day operations. And I don't know that we have that as a culture. And I think that's difficult for any non-profit organization to have that, because you don't have the pressures of a marketplace.

We have the pressures of Congress. We have the pressures of a budget, but that's very different. And I think sometimes there may be a temptation for people to say this is a cycle, it'll come back. Well if it's a cycle and it comes back, we'll never make the cultural change that we need to be able to reach down there and develop innovation and to, I hate to use this word but I can't think of a better one right now, empower our folks to make the changes in their workplaces that make them more efficient, and to get those good ideas and put them up the chain so we can help them out.

There's 1,200 Air Force instructions that a wing commander has to deal with, that he has to comply with, when he gets a major Air Force inspection. Somehow I think that somewhere in all those instructions there's probably some that are sort of stupid. We need to find those and get rid of them and give our airmen some time. But that's hard for me to do (from my end ?) because I have time to read all 1,200.

(Laughter).

Okay. Well, thanks again for your time and hopefully I'll be able to come back at some point in the future.

(Applause).

MR. HUESSY: All of you, the room has to be set up for a function immediately after this, so have a nice summer.

