

Testimony of Congressman Mike Johnson (LA-04)
Submitted to the Appropriations Subcommittee on Defense
March 8, 2017

Thank you, Chairwoman Granger, Ranking Member Visclosky, and members of the committee, I appreciate you giving me this opportunity today to provide input for the fiscal year 2018 Defense Appropriations. I am excited to advocate today about maintaining a strategic edge and reinforcing our national defense needs.

I have the high honor representing the 4th Congressional District of Louisiana, which is home to Ft. Polk and Barksdale Air Force Base. As I'm sure you know, Fort Polk is home to the Joint Readiness Training Center and Barksdale is home to the Global Strike Command - two vital military installations to our nation and our national security interests around the world.

I am extremely pleased, that President Trump has promised to ensure our brave men and women in uniform have the resources they need to accomplish their mission. As we begin to rebuild our military strength, I hope to work vigorously to protect these missions to ensure our national security is fully maintained.

The role of nuclear weapons continues to play a role in the strategies of Russia, North Korea, Pakistan, India, and China – in fact according to many reports, these countries are increasing their reliance on and modernizing their capabilities (land, air, and sea-based nuclear forces). At the same time, it is clear that Iran has not given up its nuclear ambitions.

In fact, there is open evidence that Russia doctrine contemplates the use of nuclear weapons to gain advantage in crisis. Therefore, not surprisingly the need for a strong, capable, U.S. nuclear umbrella is growing. Despite the fact, over the course of four years, 2010 to 2014, the military

budget was cut 21% while the world grew more dangerous and set the stage for a number of Russian and Chinese aggressions against neighbors and the United States both through cyber, information, and kinetic methods. Due to today's time constraints, I will focus primarily on two areas that I think are in continued need of attention. Our United States Air Force and Army components.

Nuclear Enterprise —

I would like to offer my support for the President's stated plan to prioritize our nuclear enterprise through modernizing our deterrent capabilities in the upcoming defense budget. Thankfully, despite ideologically different positions, Congress has taken clear stand on expressing its support to the long-term commitment of Barksdale Air Force Base, which is home to U.S. Global Strike Command and is responsible for the majority of the Nuclear Triad and Enterprise.

First, I want to recognize the important and good work being carried out by the Air Force, including the decision to elevate Global Strike Command to a four-star Command, an effort that has already begun to demonstrate important rewards. Unfortunately, I was discouraged to see that some recent budgets, fell short of fully addressing items for specific Air Force needs related to improvements at Global Strike Command. However, In the budget before us today, I would ask that the committee strongly consider working to fund advancements necessary to upgrade and maintain a technological edge over America's adversaries.

A few examples of areas the Air Force needs additional funding in order to have maintain a strategic edge in its robust capabilities include upgrading nuclear communications facilities, addressing the challenges of a B-52 Re-engine, and the future of the B-21, among others.

Specifically, today I would like to highlight three important areas related to ensuring our nuclear

enterprise receives the necessary attention in this upcoming Fiscal Year's budget. Moving forward I look forward to working with the Committee and its members to address:

1. Address ongoing challenges with our nations Aging Fleets, which includes a B-52 Re-engine/ and challenges in maintaining aging weapons and a robust Nuclear Enterprise Infrastructure, including needs related to developing critical Weapons Storage and Maintenance Facility areas.
2. Much needed upgrades to our Nuclear Command, Control & Communication's (NC3), something the Air Force has begun working on and which I know this committee has already begun to engage in.
3. Lastly, is improving robust capabilities. The top requirement for nuclear forces is to maintain survivable, and ready nuclear force that is capable of deterring our enemy and if necessary surviving a surprise attack. Given today's foreign climate, the need to keep our eye on this is as present as ever for both assuring our allies as well as maintaining our own defense, against hostile nations.

As members of this committee you are well aware of the activity Global Strike Command oversees providing a wide array of strategic deterrence, global strike and direct combat support. The Bomber Command, 8th AF in charge of our aging fleet, and Missile Command, 20thAF in charge of the United States Intercontinental Ballistic Missiles (ICBM's), are critical to our deterrence and global strategy. Given their importance, it is vital to ensure that needs are being met appropriately in order to adequately achieve mission requirements and ensure robust capabilities are maintained.

As Secretary of Defense James Mattis recently stated when speaking about maintaining a safe and secure nuclear deterrent, “we must ensure a war that can never be won will never be fought...” In the event that maintaining a capable and robust nuclear option was not suffice enough to justify attention, these assets also play a major role in our ongoing fight as terror states continue to grow and expand beyond threats to Iraq, Syria, Yemen, and Nigera – Global Strike Command has played an important role in our national security strategy to address new and emerging kinds of threats.

A few short examples of why these should be prioritized, specifically, Global Strike Command is supporting missions around the world using B-1’s B-52’s and B-2’s to support international missions including:

1. Operation Inherent Resolve for U.S. Central Command, Joint Interagency Task Force South (JIATF South) (counter-trafficking) for U.S. Southern Command;
2. Operation Odyssey Lightning Exercises such as JUST HAMMER for U.S. Africa Command;
3. In addition to the above, Global Strike Command is responsible for daily Bomber Assurance and Deterrence Missions in U.S. European Command; and Continuous Bomber Presence Exercises in U.S. Pacific Command.

Army

Lastly I would also like to speak briefly about the needs of our U.S. Army. In the past two months, I have held a number of meetings with corresponded with to top Army officials,

Previous budget plans were forcing the Army to shrink at an unrealistic pace, to the lowest levels in 50 years, and are threatening to seriously impact our nations long term ability to carry the fight forward. These changes were not only impacting the top-line end-strength numbers but were also impacting the Army's ability to meet the demands placed on them.

I am proud to represent Fort Polk, Army base which has continued to solidify its footprint as a multi-pronged home for military affairs with vitally important state of the art Joint Reserve Training Center (JRTC), and contains units that serve invaluable training for Advise and Assist roles as well. The JRTC provides soldiers the training and flexibility necessary to carry out the demands placed on them, and win. The exercise scenarios learned here replicate many of the unique situations and challenges a unit may face while deployed. However, in addition, Fort Polk is the only Combat Training Center that also trains and deploys combat units, making it uniquely suited for a number of upcoming Army plans.

I hope to work with members of this committee to ensure that as we and the Army reverse recent misguided force structure cuts that it is done with the right information and uses the proper methodology to maximize existing resources and appropriate facilities, including existing training units and facilities related to Brigade Combat Team (BCT) activities, before any decisions on changes are made.

Moving forward, I hope the members here today will agree to work allow me to work alongside you to address the challenges facing our nation. I look forward to continuing to do everything I can support these critical items in terms of military construction needs and force structure.

Again Madam Chair, I appreciate this opportunity to show my support for our men and women in uniform, and I yield back.