

Testimony of Congressman Mike Johnson (LA-04)
Submitted to the Armed Services Committee
April 27, 2017

Thank you, Chairman Thornberry, Ranking Member Smith and members of the committee, I appreciate you giving me this opportunity today to provide input today during the Committee's "member day" for the Fiscal Year 2018 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA). I am excited to advocate today about the important need to maintaining a strategic edge and reinforcing our national defense needs within this year's bills.

I have the high honor of representing the 4th Congressional District of Louisiana, which is home to Fort Polk and Barksdale Air Force Base Command - two vital military installations for our nation and our national security interests around the world. 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 which oversees two-thirds of nations Nuclear Enterprise.

I am extremely pleased 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 you will allow me to work vigorously along with you to protect these missions and ensure our national security and readiness is fully maintained.

The role of nuclear weapons continues to play an integral role in the strategies of Russia, North Korea, Pakistan, India and China – in fact, according to many reports, and evident from recent aggressive actions, 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.

Furthermore, there is open evidence that Russia doctrine contemplates the use of nuclear weapons to gain advantage in crisis. Consequently, the need for a strong, capable U.S. nuclear umbrella is growing. But over the course of only four years, from 2010 to 2014, the military budget was cut 21 percent. This happened despite the fact that the world was growing more dangerous and the stage was set for a number of Russian and Chinese aggressions against neighbors and the United States through cyber attacks, information warfare, and kinetic actions. Due to today's time constraints, I will focus primarily on two areas that I think are in desperate need of attention within the FY18 NDAA bill. Our United States Air Force and our Army components.

Nuclear Enterprise —

I would like to offer my support for the president's stated plan to prioritize our nuclear enterprise though modernizing our deterrent capabilities in the upcoming defense budget. Thankfully, despite ideological differences, Congress has taken a clear stand on expressing its support to the long-term commitment of Barksdale Air Force Base, home to the U.S. Global Strike Command and 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. This includes 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. That is why I ask that in the budget before us today, the committee strongly considers working to fund advancements absolutely necessary to upgrade and maintain a technological edge over America's adversaries.

A few areas in critical need of funding are 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. Ongoing challenges with our nations Aging Fleets including a B-52 Re-engine (Earlier this year, debate over whether to replace the TF33 engine reignited after a B-52 from Minot Air Force Base lost an engine during training. Former Air Force Secretary Deborah Lee James characterized the mishap as a “catastrophic engine failure,”), challenges in maintaining aging weapons and a robust Nuclear Enterprise Infrastructure, and needs related to developing critical Weapons Storage and Maintenance Facility areas.
2. There are ongoing much needed upgrades to our Nuclear Command, Control & Communication's (NC3), something I am thankful the Air Force has begun working on and which I know this committee has engaged in as well.
3. Lastly, improving to fund a robust set of capabilities and options. As you know, the top requirement for nuclear forces is to maintain a 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 a close watch on this is as important as ever in order to assure our allies and maintain our own defense against hostile nations.

As members of this committee you are well aware of the activity Global Strike Command oversees and its involvement in 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. 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 would 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 Nigeria. 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 in the FY18 Defense Authorization bill rest in Global Strike Command's support of missions around the world using a robust number of assets both nuclear and non-nuclear assets. A very limited review of these international missions include:

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. And Daily Bomber Assurance and Deterrence Missions in U.S. European Command and Continuous Bomber Presence Exercises in U.S. Pacific Command.

Given their importance of these ongoing missions, it is critical their needs are being addressed to the fullest extent so that they can adequately achieve mission requirements and ensure robust capabilities are maintained.

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 top Army officials.

Previous budget plans were forcing the Army to shrink at an unrealistic pace to the lowest levels in 50 years, and seriously threaten our nation's 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 accomplish their missions and achieve necessary military readiness.

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 a 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, 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, including its planned expansion of the Army Advise and Assist missions.

Unfortunately, the demands on our Army soldiers and the communities that support them are always increasing. As you well know, sometimes moves that appear good on paper can have long lasting negative impacts on soldiers quality of life and impact overall moral and readiness.

I recently was made aware of one potential such move, where the Pentagon is reviewing a proposal to allow DOD civilians to shop at military exchanges, a move that while allowing of

millions of dollars in new sales to these DOD retail outlets – would have a severe and negative impact to the surrounding communities. Often times, these communities that have invested heavily to bring off-base services to improve the quality of life for soldiers and families, and rely on revenue to keep their doors open. I plan to engage with the Department of Defense in the hope that a common-sense solution will prevail.

I hope to work with members of this committee to ensure that the Army uses the right information and the proper methodology to maximize our 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.

I hope the members here today will work alongside me in the future to address the challenges facing our nation. I look forward to doing everything I can to support the work your committee is doing to provide our military with the needs and force structure required within the FY18 bill.

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