

WITNESS STATEMENT
Sea Power and Projection Forces Subcommittee
House Armed Services Committee

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Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, it is a privilege to have been offered this opportunity to talk with you today about the value of long-range strike bombers to US national security.

US bomber capabilities are withering. Today, the US has fewer than 100 combat ready bombers with an average age of 38 years and not even 20 of those (the newer B-2s) can penetrate enemy airspace and deliver the necessary firepower joint commanders need. The older bombers are simply not survivable in the face of modern air defenses. The newer B-2s remain potent, but are few in number. And while the Air Force is planning to build a new bomber, the Long-Range Strike Bomber (LRS-B), the 80-100 aircraft number being discussed is simply not enough.

The LRS-B is truly a national security bargain when one considers the range of missions this one platform will provide. Unlike most military systems, which are designed to provide utility for a small number of missions, bombers provide value in times of peace, crisis, and conflict. And bombers have demonstrated their ability to remain viable for long periods of time. They are inherently adaptable. Other platforms can perform similar missions. However, it takes many different platforms combined to cover the full gamut of bomber capabilities. Long-range strike bombers serve as a global strike and sensor platform which are distinctively capable of providing a range of effects against dynamic targets anywhere on the globe using their own organic queuing. They also serve as a powerful tool for diplomacy. Let me briefly highlight the range of missions bombers perform.

First, there is strategic (nuclear) stability: In addition to traditional nuclear deterrence and assurance, long-range bombers provide the president a range of conventional and nuclear options, offering both decision time and space that are critical for crisis stability and escalation control in situations involving other nuclear actors. This capability is unique to long-range bombers. A Rand Corporation analysis found that long-range bombers are more effective than short-range fighters or missiles for stabilizing a crisis and managing escalation. Bombers also reduce the impact of a nuclear competitor developing a revolutionary capability to counter the effectiveness of US ballistic missiles.

Bombers play several critically important arms control roles: they provide a valuable hedge against a possible nuclear arms treaty weapon breakout, an adverse geopolitical shift affecting

the balance of nuclear forces between the United States and its nuclear competitors, or a catastrophic technical failure in another leg of the Triad.

Closely related to strategic nuclear stability, bombers also provide global stability, that is, the ability to influence situations around the globe operating from garrison bases. Such actions include providing a show of force or a demonstration of commitment to an ally or friend. All deployable military forces can operate globally, but bombers are unique in their ability to provide conventional global effects without first deploying. Stealth bombers are not only used in conflict against the most valuable and most defended targets, but they can also be used to prevent conflict. It was just about two years ago that the North Korean regime was rattling its sabers, threatening both our allies in the region and Hawaii with long-range missile attacks. The US needed to send North Korea a very clear message but the options were limited. The message: We can reach out and strike you from anywhere in the world ... and we can do it quickly.

Two B-2 stealth bombers were called in. These aircraft flew 6,500 miles from Whiteman Air Force Base in Missouri, dropped bombs on a test range in South Korea, performed a low approach at one of the bases in the ROK and flew back to the US. The weapon in this case, a photograph, sent a message--a strategic message--which the US published in the media at the time of the flight: "The United States is steadfast in its alliance commitment to the defense of the Republic of Korea, to deterring aggression, and to ensuring peace and stability in the region. The B-2 bomber is an important element of America's enduring and robust extended deterrence capability in the Asia-Pacific region." In short, the stealthy B-2 not only fights wars, it also stabilizes dangerous situations.

Flying the two bombers to South Korea was also a reminder to the Chinese that North Korean actions have consequences. By operating from the sanctuary of the US homeland, the US was able to quietly signal that we were taking North Korea's threats seriously, but escalation was not necessary. The two bombers were capable of carrying a total of 160 individually targeted, GPS-guided weapons, a strong signal that war with the United States would not end well.

Finally, bombers provide regional stability, long considered a primary mission for sea power forces. Long-range bombers and maritime forces complement each other exceptionally well in conducting this important mission. Long-range bombers provide combatant commanders a range of conventional and nuclear options operating from regional or CONUS bases, and can be readily integrated with other United States and partner capabilities to influence the decision calculus of regional actors. It is worth noting that bombers today provide the primary extended nuclear deterrence capability in the Pacific.

The regional stability mission requires additional discussion. Although this committee is well aware, few others know that a rotational force of bombers have been deployed to Guam since March 2004 providing continual bomber presence to support stability in the region. The bombers and supporting forces were initially deployed because the Pacific carrier strike group was re-tasked to support Operation Iraqi Freedom. Since this committee understands well the

strains of maintaining rotational forces, it is important to recognize that the Nation needs to procure bombers to not only replace the aging B-1 and B-52 fleets, but also to provide additional force structure to round out the U.S. Air Force expeditionary capability. There is currently not enough bomber structure to meet today's combatant commanders' needs. 100 bombers should be considered the minimum initial procurement quantity. Substantially more aircraft will be needed to replace both the B-1 (63 aircraft) and B-52 (76 aircraft) fleets and meet the demands of the combatant commanders for bomber forces in support of their operations. This also means that the current fleets must continue to be modernized even as the LRS-B is brought into the Air Force inventory.

Bombers also play an important role in providing combatant commanders the foundation for operational campaign alternatives where US air forces, often in partnership with coalition air forces, empower indigenous ground forces to defeat otherwise more powerful adversaries. In examples such as Bosnia, Afghanistan, and Libya, stealth and standoff munitions proved critical to the success of these operations, and were used extensively until the adversary defenses were degraded, and other forces could be used safely and effectively.

The importance of bombers for joint theater operations such as interdiction and theater strike is well known, but improvements in technology have made them invaluable as close air support platforms. Bombers have provided other direct support to ground commanders by employing their sensors for surveillance and reconnaissance purposes. Its payload and persistence makes it uniquely effective for a broad range of theater operations.

Bombers also support the homeland defense mission: They keep combat abroad, far from U.S. territory. They also leverage their long range and onboard sensors to support the U.S. Navy and U.S. Coast Guard in the conduct of maritime surveillance off our coastlines, and they have demonstrated their ability to effectively engage maritime targets.

Bombers additionally provide the President and other senior national leaders the foundation for a range of strategic alternatives by facilitating the use of national partner instruments of power to achieve national objectives. A very good recent example can be found with the Kosovo operations where airpower was used to convince Mr. Milosevic to negotiate an end to Serbian operations against the Albanians in Kosovo. Once again, stealth aircraft and standoff weapons were critical to the conduct of the initial operations and were employed until the adversary defenses were sufficiently degraded for other aircraft to operate effectively.

Finally, the long range strike bomber will play an important role in denying competitor strategies; in particular, operating as the foundation for a family of global strike systems, the LRS-B will impose substantial cost on adversaries attempting to contest US access or deny our ability to conduct expeditionary operations in support of friends and allies. Manned platforms will provide flexibility and resiliency, particularly in contested spectrum and information environments. Stealth degrades and disrupts the effectiveness of anti-access, area denial (A2/AD) strategies; standoff and electronic warfare capabilities complement stealth by complicating adversary defenses.

Use of open architectures and open mission systems will allow the long-range strike bomber to incorporate new technologies and adapt easily to evolving changes in the threat environment. Also noteworthy, Air Force operators have repeatedly found ways throughout history to employ their systems in ways their designers never imagined. The Nation can expect similar examples of innovation and ingenuity once the LRS-B is fielded.

Study after study has shown that bombers do more than simply strike targets. Bombers offer structural stability for both conventional and nuclear scenarios, provide the most flexible component of the US strategic Triad and are the best way to reassure allies of our commitment to extended deterrence. In other words, the bomber is more than just a strike and sensor platform; it is also a powerful tool of diplomacy. Long-range stealth strike capabilities provide the Nation practical alternatives for global security and regional stability, and provide combatant commanders increased effectiveness in the conduct of joint operations across the full range of conflict. They are absolutely critical for our national security, and because of their versatility, provide the Nation exceptional value.