



DEPARTMENT OF THE AIR FORCE
HEADQUARTERS TWENTIETH AIR FORCE (AFGSC)

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MEMORANDUM FOR EACH MEMBER OF THE ICBM ALERT FORCE

FROM: 20 AF/CC
6610 Headquarters Drive, Suite 1
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SUBJECT: The ICBM Alert Force

The ICBM Alert Force--operators, maintainers, and those who secure and support--has fought its war of deterrence every day for over 50 years. As a member of Twentieth Air Force, you are contributing to a mission which is not only of the utmost importance to the security of the United States and its allies, but arguably a mission that underwrites strategic stability around the globe. The purpose of this message is to remind you of some key facts about our mission and the importance of your role in it. I am often reminded that our ICBM professionals are now servicemen and women who did not grow up during the Cold War, when the need for a robust ICBM force was often taken at face value. The need for a strong ICBM force operated, maintained, secured, and supported by our nation's finest Airmen is as vital today as yesterday. What follows explains why.

a. **Our Objective.** The United States does not have a monopoly on nuclear weapons. Moreover, there exists in the world nations who do not share our interests as well as those who actively seek to do us harm. America's ICBM Alert Force guards against the worst-case threats to our country. Some suggest the nature of present international relations is such that the extreme dangers of the Cold War no longer exist and thus standing nuclear forces should be quickly and significantly reduced or eliminated. While it is important for the nation to have this dialogue, such commentary is often anchored on the present day *intent* of rising and great powers and often appears to overlook *capability*. In our business, we must be concerned with both intent and capability. Indeed, present hostile intentions may not exist, but nevertheless many nations are not close allies or partners and several possess or are seeking nuclear capabilities. The ICBM Alert Force's primary objective is to keep the least-likely, worst-case scenarios from ever occurring. In short, keeping the least-likely, worst-case scenarios unlikely is our mission. This may not sound sexy, but it is as vitally important today as it was during the Cold War.

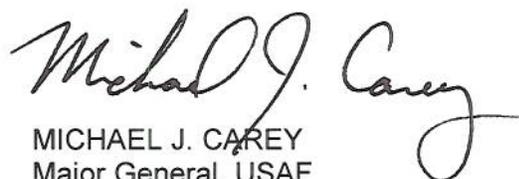
b. **ICBMs and the Triad.** The ICBM Alert Force is one leg of the nation's nuclear triad of land-based missiles, submarine-launched ballistic missiles and manned bombers. This triad has been maintained for decades as the ultimate guarantor of the nation's security. The current ICBM Alert Force of 495 dispersed launch control centers and launch facilities presents a very high hurdle for any nation wishing to disarm the United States. In fact, as nuclear weapon numbers decline, the value of our sovereign-based, dispersed force will continue to present adversaries with a near impossible targeting challenge. The number of weapons required by an adversary to disarm the ICBM force would all but exhaust their ability to prosecute attacks against the other two legs of our triad. Moreover, even if an adversary came to believe an attack against the ICBM force could be successful, the alert posture of our systems is such that the attacker could not guarantee that a devastating response would not be launched even if all their aim points could be successfully struck. Our robust warning and command and control capabilities guarantee senior decision makers the ability to promptly execute the ICBM Alert

Force against our adversaries should it become necessary. Further, while the enemy is concerned with disarming the ICBM force, the other two legs of the triad remain.

c. **Your Role.** As members of the ICBM Alert Force, you are charged with providing two guarantees. The first is to safely operate, maintain, secure, and support the force in such a manner that in peacetime, the force remains safe, secure, and effective—free from accidents or miscalculations. This means strict adherence to procedures and maintaining the highest proficiency levels. The second guarantee you must provide is that when ordered by the President of the United States to execute the Alert Force, you will produce nuclear yield on-time and on-target against the nation's adversaries. The first guarantee is about being outstanding stewards of the most destructive weapons on earth. The U.S. public and the world rely on you to fulfill this guarantee without fail. The second guarantee is about sending a clear message to our leaders that you are ready, willing, and able to defend this nation during its most extreme crises. The second guarantee also instills in the minds of our adversaries the belief that the ICBM Alert Force will effectively counter the most egregious acts of aggression. In short, this second guarantee is about deterrence. Whether you secure, maintain, support, or operate our weapon system, your role in deterrence is significant.

d. **ICBMs and Stability.** Your peers in the F-22 or F-15C communities know, as you do, what it is like to train aggressively for conflict. But, like you, their skills have not been employed in combat recently. This does not mean, however, that they have not been *used*. Adversaries recognize the skills of these Airmen and the air superiority they can provide. As such, many adversaries choose not to fight our strengths. Like the air superiority mission, the ICBM Alert Force is *used daily*. And history since 1945 suggests our nuclear forces have had a stabilizing effect on the world stage. While conflict remains a part of the global landscape, since the advent of the nuclear weapon, the great powers have not engaged head-to-head in large scale war—conventional or nuclear. Many believe this is due to the presence of our nuclear forces which cause nuclear armed great powers to pause prior to heading down a path to superpower conflict, always aware of where head-to-head conflict could lead. Or, said another way, the presence of our weapons forces adversaries to choose means less catastrophic to achieve their aims. Winning conflicts without fighting is our objective in the nuclear business, but make no mistake, winning conflicts in such a manner can only be accomplished through credible forces and focused Airmen.

e. **Heritage of Global Power.** In 1944, the Army Air Force stood up Twentieth Air Force for the unique role of strategic bombing in the Pacific Theater. In the words of one historian, "The Twentieth Air Force is different. Its shoulder patch is a heraldic symbol of its world theater. In a global war it alone of the Army Air Forces is truly global. Its unique character has been determined by the unique character of its weapon." Those words, written more than 65 years ago, are still applicable to the Twentieth Air Force in the 21st Century. The ICBM Alert Force stands ready to provide strategic bombardment on order. Your weapon and your mission are truly unique in the American military as your posture is about preventing war. Be proud of your contribution to the nation and be mindful that your activities and the activities of the thousands who support you are keeping the peace.



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