

**Statement before the
Senate Energy and Water Appropriations Subcommittee**

“US Nuclear Modernization and the LRSO”

A Testimony by:

John J. Hamre, Ph.D.

Former Deputy Secretary of Defense

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138 Dirksen Senate Office Building

Chairman Alexander, Ranking Senator Feinstein, distinguished members of the Energy and Water Appropriations Subcommittee, thank you for inviting me to appear today to discuss U.S. nuclear modernization and the long-range stand-off (LRSO) cruise missile. I am especially honored to be on a panel with my old boss, Dr. William Perry, who I have admired greatly for over three decades and my very good friend Frank Miller who devoted a career to the important details of strategic forces and arms control.

Mr. Chairman, I have not been tracking closely specific nuclear programs in recent years. Therefore, I had to do considerable homework to get ready for this hearing. Permit me to share with you the primary conclusions I have developed in the course of this research and in preparation for this hearing.

First, the United States has had air launched cruise missiles in operation for three decades. The current air-launched cruise missile (ALCM) fleet is rapidly approaching the end of its service life. We have depended on ALCMs as part of our overall deterrent force for 30 years, and the Obama Administration has concluded that this remains an essential component of a deterrent force going forward.

Second, the new ALCM will have a refurbished warhead. We are not building new warheads for the new ALCM. We are refurbishing existing warheads, and making them more tamper resistant and reliable, two highly desirable attributes, especially given the age of the inventory.

Third, the Obama Administration requested this program and has fully funded it in its long-range budget. The program was approved by both the House and Senate Armed Services Committees, and I believe has been approved by this Committee. This tells me there is a solid consensus in the Congress to support the program proposed by the Obama Administration.

Fourth, the LRSO program fully conforms to the START treaty that was negotiated in 2010, and ratified by the Senate and signed by President Obama on February 2, 2011. Indeed, when President Obama lobbied to secure passage of the START treaty, he committed to modernization of the ALCM fleet. This is a relatively rare area where the Obama Administration and the Congress are in agreement and have worked together. Defunding the LRSO program at this time would fundamentally shatter the consensus that was created to secure passage of the START treaty.

Fifth, the START treaty gives a highly favorable position to the United States concerning airborne deterrent assets. Individual bombers, despite the load-out of weapons they carry, are counted as single warheads against the overall warhead limit. That is a huge advantage for the United States if we ever have a new round of strategic arms reduction talks with Russia. If we were to abandon LRSO, we would abandon one of the few advantages we bring to a negotiation. Our bombers could theoretically deliver gravity bombs, but they would not survive the air defenses on their way to the designated targets. The LRSO insures that the airborne element of the triad remains valuable for deterrence and valuable in a future negotiation. We would seriously cripple ourselves in advance and put ourselves in a disadvantageous position if we were to abandon LRSO at this time.

Sixth, airborne nuclear weapons are the least provocative weapons in a nuclear arsenal. Intercontinental missiles—whether launched from land or sea—can be launched with no visible mobilization, arrive in dozens of minutes and cannot be recalled. Airborne nuclear weapons take hours and even days for mobilization (depending on the alert status of bombers), are visible to opponents when we undertake mobilization, require hours in flight, and can be recalled. Airborne nuclear assets are the least provocative and the least destabilizing weapons in our inventory. Just as important, they force an opponent to invest in extensive defense capabilities that pose no threat to us and our homeland.

Seven, we have had cruise missiles in our operational force for three decades. We have also had conventional cruise missiles in our force for three decades and have used them extensively. There is no known instance in history that our use of conventional cruise missiles was misinterpreted as a nuclear attack by Russia or China or any other country for that matter. The reason is that military intelligence makes attack assessments in the context of a broad range of factors—the political context within which military activity takes place, patterns of observable military activity that provides additional context, etc. So theories of sophisticated military establishments being confused by the introduction of LRSO into the deterrent force is quite implausible.

Eight, defense spending on nuclear deterrent forces is now at historically low levels. In the 1970s and 1980s when I worked full time on these matters, strategic forces consumed about 10% of the Department of Defense budget. Today they consume about 3.5% of the DoD budget. At the height of the modernization program for all nuclear forces—8-10 years from now—strategic forces will consume about 6% of the DoD budget, and then will quickly return to the 3-4% norm. Personally, I think it is worth 3-4% of the defense budget to deter nuclear war.

Nine, I have heard arguments that the LRSO capability is threatening because it gives the United States a capacity to launch a decapitation strike against Russia or China. In an earlier phase of my career, I spent a lot of time on nuclear targeting. I know a good deal about how targets are identified, characterized and assigned to various attack systems. America has never had a nuclear option for “decapitation” of an enemy, at least not since I started studying this in detail in the mid-1980s. Indeed, we have always sought to insure there was competent control on the side of our opponent so we can limit the scale of the war. That is why we put in place the “hotline”. The least likely way to conduct a decapitation strike is to use a slow-flying airplane in isolation. No military planner would ever contemplate that as a plausible option. These arguments are made up by amateurs who have alarmist dreams that they want to hype for a political agenda.

Conclusion

So let me conclude by saying that I feel there is only one legitimate reason to have nuclear weapons—to deter their use. And because nuclear weapons are so dangerous if they fall into the wrong hands, we want as few of them as possible, and with the most advanced safety standards. I strongly believe that we should have additional rounds of arms reductions with Russia and China. Cancelling LRSO now would hugely damage any chance we have for

additional rounds of reductions in nuclear weapons. It would shatter a consensus developed in the Congress for START, and it would abandon one of the key leverage points we have in future negotiations.

I am glad that you have held this hearing because America needs to look at the facts, not the hype, about our defense programs. There is too much hype. I hope the facts I have presented are helpful to the committee.