

## **Editorial**

**By**

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### **Will Strategic Arms Reduction Reduce Malmstrom?**

Before an enthusiastic audience in Prague last April, President Obama declared “America’s commitment to seek the peace and security of a world without nuclear weapons.” In his speech, the President declared America has a historic opportunity to lead by example. According to President Obama, other countries will follow the U.S. to “global zero” if we begin—unilaterally—to “reduce the role of nuclear weapons” in our national security strategy. Since April, the President and his chief negotiators have worked tirelessly to sign a new Strategy Arms Reduction Treaty with Russia, which will enact his promise to further reduce America’s nuclear arsenal. The new treaty will almost certainly mandate the decommissioning of some of America’s 1700 to 2200 operationally deployed nuclear warheads. This could well lead to reductions at Montana’s Malmstrom Air Force Base, home to one-third of the U.S. ICBM force.

President Obama’s optimism seems appealing at first blush. Creating a degree of geopolitical stability eliminating the need for nuclear weapons is a praiseworthy ambition. However, we simply do not live in that kind of world, neither now nor in the foreseeable future. The nuclear threat from North Korea, Iran, and terrorist groups grows everyday, especially since Russia continues to proliferate nuclear technology to terrorist-supporting regimes. Despite President Obama’s idealism, now is not the time to further reduce America’s most effective and least expensive nuclear deterrent: the 450-missile ICBM force.

The 150 Minuteman III missiles maintained, operated and secured by the men and women of the 341<sup>st</sup> Missile Wing at Malmstrom Air Force Base are critical to the United States’ ability to provide credible deterrence against our would-be enemies while extending that deterrence to more than two dozen allies and friends overseas. The 450 single warhead, geographically dispersed, nuclear-hardened missile sites prevent an enemy conducting a successful disarming attack. For such an attack, an enemy would have to expend multiple warheads to eliminate each single-warhead ICBM. The scale of any such attack, and the devastating retaliation it would trigger, would make the attempt irrational. Additionally, the ICBM force has consistently demonstrated extremely high readiness and reliability.

The ICBM, with its constant alert presence, also affords unparalleled flexibility for decision-makers in a time of crisis, providing the President maximum decision-making time. This is all accomplished for less than one-fifth of one percent of the total 2010 Defense budget.

Malmstrom Air Force Base plays a key role America's national security. Yet, Malmstrom could face potential downsizing or closure as President Obama pushes toward his goal of eliminating America's nuclear weapons. As the ferocity of the fight by Montana's Congressional representatives to protect the base indicates, the Great Falls economy and community would be permanently altered by a base closing. At least 40% of the city's economic development is directly linked to Malmstrom, which makes an economic contribution of \$372,867,000 to the surrounding communities each year. In addition to the 4,000 military and civilian personnel who work on the base, 1,547 additional jobs are indirectly supported by its operation. Malmstrom Air Force Base is interwoven into the Great Falls' social identity as well: eleven percent of Great Falls' schoolchildren are military dependents, and 1,900 military men and women chose to live off-base in the Great Falls community.

President Obama's commitment to "global zero", while apparently disregarding the very real data clearly indicating the growing threats from Iran, North Korea, and terrorist organizations, appears to be ill timed and somewhat reckless. In light of the increasing world threats, coupled with an inability to accurately predict the future, the 341<sup>st</sup> Missile Wing -- alert-ready since October 26<sup>th</sup>, 1962 in the midst of the Cuban Missile Crisis--with its 150 safe, secure, and responsive ICBMs remains effective and absolutely essential in today's world and for the foreseeable future.

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