

Op-Ed
by

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and

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Central Montana Defense Alliance,
the New START Treaty,
and Family

While Senate committees debate the "New START" treaty with Moscow, there is no lack of informed opinion out here in America's heartland.

More than 10,000 military and civilian personnel work across 34,000 square miles in five Western states, including our own, to operate and support the Minuteman weapon system. If the "New START" treaty is ratified by the Senate, Defense Secretary Robert Gates promises that America will keep "up to 420" of the 450 missiles.

Our delegates have promised the CENTRAL MONTANA DEFENSE ALLIANCE that Malmstrom AFB will see negligible impact resulting from the new START Treaty. Although that is somewhat reassuring, the CENTRAL MONTANA DEFENSE ALLIANCE continues to fight to maintain the ICBM leg of the deterrent triad. We all know the current ICBM force is divided into three wings of 150 missiles each. ICBM reductions have already happened three times before; in the 1990s with deactivation of three ICBM wings; recently at F.E.

Warren with the deactivation of the 400th Missile Squadron (Peacekeeper), and closure of the 564th Missile Squadron here Great Falls, Montana.

Additionally, any ICBM or launcher reductions would signal to both the military and industry the ICBM is a force in decline. Whether intended or not, a reduction of even 30 missiles may send a message that would make it harder to attract the talented, top-ranked people required and could very well undermine the long-term stability of this critical national security program.

The single-warhead ICBM force brings the most stability and safety to an uncertain world. Our land based ICBM force provides potential enemies a target of 450 ICBMs across 34,000 square miles in the heartland of the United States impossible to destroy with a first strike, while giving the President maximum time for crisis decision-making. It is for this reason alone the Defense Science Board calls our single-warhead ICBM “highly stabilizing.”

ICBMs are also a remarkably cost-effective deterrent. By 2012, Minuteman will have nearly completed a fifteen-year, \$8 billion sustainment and modernization effort that keeps it operational beyond 2020 and with further, modest investments, effective through 2030.

Finally, we must retain all 450 ICBMs is because they are irreplaceable, and a decision to scrap even one launch site is irretrievable. Russia continues to modernize its nuclear weapons. China continues to add to its nuclear arsenal of unverified size. Yet the United States remains the world’s only nuclear power that has chosen to allow its ability to manufacture new nuclear weapons to lapse.

To relinquish the heart of the remaining deterrent would risk leaving America and its allies defenseless.

During the Cuban Missile Crisis, President John F. Kennedy called ICBMs America's "ace in the hole." There is no good reason to toss away even one of our 450 aces in the hole!

The current mission at Malmstrom AFB is job one. But the Central Montana Defense Alliance continues to work for needed appropriations to improve housing, recreation services, training, physical fitness facilities and more. We are continuing our efforts to acquire the E-Medical Records program with Malmstrom AFB as one of two finalists awaiting a decision on location. We are partnering with the County and the Chamber of Commerce on the 2nd Ave beautification project. You never get a second chance to make a first impression and we believe it's in our community's best interest to make a great first impression regarding the entryway to Malmstrom AFB.

Some wonder why so much effort is put toward Malmstrom AFB? The answer is pretty simple. We have already defined the critical role of the ICBM leg of the defense triad. In addition, we fully support the men and women who selflessly serve our great nation. We also recognize that Malmstrom AFB provides approximately 40% of our local economy. Its not rocket science to realize the importance of their presence in terms of dollars.

But, how do you measure the presence the military and their families in our community? They are our neighbors, they attend our schools, they work in

our local businesses, attend our churches, volunteer countless hours to the welfare of our community, and much, much more. To put it another way, they are an integral part of our Great Falls family.

The Central Montana Defense Alliance is doing an outstanding job fighting not only for Malmstrom AFB but the Montana Air National Guard and our next article will talk about what we are doing for the Montana Air National Guard.

We have challenges on the horizon and we will continue to fight to keep jobs and missions in Great Falls. Supporting our military and their missions are our privilege and should be everyone's responsibility. If you would like to support the Central Montana Defense Alliance and what we do as a contributor or as a member, please feel free to contact the Great Falls Area Chamber of Commerce.

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