

Bellevue Chamber of Commerce meeting  
By Vice Adm. Charles Richard | March 07, 2017

(As Delivered)

Vice Adm. Charles Richard, deputy commander of U.S. Strategic Command: Good afternoon, everybody, and thank you for inviting me over. It is terrific to be back in Bellevue. As noted earlier, this is my second time here. I was the commander of the Global Strike component in STRATCOM; I loved that tour. They asked me to come back, and we're fortunate that we did. We love everything about Bellevue and Omaha and the base.

But there may be one thing. So, I do have a Southern background; the first time I got here, I was driving down 'Generals Row' trying to figure out exactly where my house is, and I noticed that all the fire hydrants had a four-foot fiberglass pole on them, and I was sort of asking myself, 'why would a fire hydrant need a pole?' And then one of my neighbors finally told me so a snow plow doesn't hit it. But it is great to be back.

Our mission to guarantee the United States' security, being performed every day inside those gates just down the street from us, is one of the most weighty that I've had the privilege to be a part of. And I think that you all should be proud of hosting that mission as well.

I understand it's been awhile since you've heard from the STRATCOM command staff. You know, there's been a total leadership change, starting with General Hyten relieving Admiral Haney here not too long ago. So first, on his behalf, for General Hyten and myself, thank you for being our host community, and thank you for welcoming us the way you do. I've been to a lot of bases, a lot of places during my 34 years in the military, and I will point to the relationship between Offutt and Bellevue as one of the shining examples of how this is done correctly. We're both very glad to be back.

I'm here on his behalf this morning, to share his vision for STRATCOM; to reiterate the importance of our nuclear strategic deterrent mission; and to highlight how that new headquarters building is being constructed and where it will support that.

So, General Hyten, as the commander responsible for United States security, has reinstated the former Strategic Air Command motto, "Peace is Our Profession," across the command; and I applaud that. We keep that peace by maintaining a credible, strategic deterrent. You know, we do that -- the forces assigned to STRATCOM -- every day. The most powerful forces in the U.S. military, and I'd offer the only ones that you don't have to pull the trigger on for it to do its mission. And when we say that we use the nuclear effects every day, that's what we're talking about -- it's the mere potential of its use that causes people to think differently, and that is what precisely what we're about.

Gen Hyten's newly released vision and intent has three priorities. He has been able to take a very complex set of missions and capabilities and distill this down into a crystal-clear stack of things that he wants us to do.

Number one, strategic deterrence. Second, delivering a decisive response should strategic deterrence fail. And then finally, maintain a combat-ready force.

As a global, warfighting command, STRATCOM delivers strategic, nuclear effects every single day by implementing those priorities. They're designed to ensure that we deter our adversaries from ever thinking the reward would outweigh the risk of an attack on the United States.

Now of course, our nation's nuclear deterrent is only as effective as the command and control networks that enable it to function. I should pause there for a second. I did just come from the Pentagon, and I run the risk of speaking in 'Pentagon speak'. What we're talking about there is the communications capability, the circuits, the mechanisms that General Hyten uses to command his forces, to know what they're doing and ultimately, for us and ultimately for us to receive presidential direction and go out and execute it; and as a part of maintaining that into the future, it means a modern command and control facility for U.S. Strategic Command.

So you can see the building going up. It's going to support all of our missions, from C4 up through space. It's on track for occupancy in late 2018. It will serve as a visible reminder to our adversaries of our national commitment to maintain modern and effective nuclear command, control and communications capabilities.

It's going to be the worldwide headquarters for integrating our strategic forces across multiple domains. As the combatant command responsible for the most powerful strategic assets this nation has ever produced, it requires a robust capability of interdependent systems, facilities, platforms. You're talking about doing operations on land, sea, air, space and cyber domains to effectively execute these operations and provide support for the President.

It's a very complex effort and I get that. In fact, I'm kind of responsible at the command for making sure that it comes together.

I do want to take a moment to address the article that came out last month in the Omaha World-Herald that highlighted some of the risks inherent in this stage of construction. The bottom line is the building is very far along in terms of its construction, and at the risk of over-simplifying a little bit, it's time to start firing it up, right? We have to put all of the systems inside there. So the local Army Corps of Engineers lead is correct in saying that there is an amazing number of systems that have to interact, all right? And I think the term 'fraught with peril' was used in the article, which seems kinda scary. It reminds me trying to put together the grill on the garage driveway: 'I've got four screw C's and where do those go?'

Rest assured that we have a tremendous number of professionals that are engaged in putting the building together and bringing those systems up. They're operating similar systems over in the LeMay Building today. It's not like we don't have the people that designed it here who have tremendous talent, tremendous expertise in terms of accomplishing this piece of bringing that building and systems on-line. Plus we have them operating today in the LeMay Building. So in the final analysis, to build a new one that's tested and ready to go, and we just won't turn the old one off. So I have great confidence in the team led by the Navy Space and Naval Warfare

Systems Command to do the right engineering, bring this thing together, and bring that new building on line well into the future.

So, construction progress aside, that is a \$1.2 billion investment that has been made to modernize our headquarters, and it also speaks to the longevity of Offutt Air Force Base. We're proud to perform our mission here, and the responsibility that STRATCOM has to counter the most consequential threats this nation faces. That's a tremendous responsibility, and I want you all to know that I come to work every day with a great sense of urgency in terms of what we need to do to defend this nation.

Look, I can remember as a kid back in Alabama – as it turns out, the commander and I are both from Alabama, we grew up a few miles from each other – I can remember looking up in the sky occasionally at night and wondering if tonight was the night when the Soviet bombers were going to show up, or the Soviet missiles. I didn't do this often, but it did happen. I'm old enough to have done a duck and cover drill. And we did it in kindergarten, elementary school and in high school. But I have literally done this.

So let me ask you all, who in here has done something like that? For those of you may be my age, think about your children or other family members. I'll tell you my kids have never ever thought about something like that. It is not in their psyche that someone would actually consider a nuclear attack on the United States. And that is my point. That is what strategic deterrence looks like. You achieve that by having 4,000 strategic deterrent patrols. You achieve that with innumerable hours sitting in a missile silo or on sorties in an aircraft or standing watch in our Global Operations Center.

We have been so successful at Strategic Command in accomplishing our mission, we have just taken that out of the American psyche.

So the question becomes, how did that happen in my lifetime? How did we achieve that level of success?

I'd offer that for 70 years, strategic deterrence has enabled a world free of conflict between major powers. This nation has been at war for 15 years, right? Terrible war with terrible sacrifice. But that is not the same thing as a major power conflict, World War II being the last example. And that is something that I worry that we don't understand and can't remember what violence on that scale looks like.

In World War II, the planet had over a million casualties per month for four and a half years. Thankfully, we have not seen violence on that scale ever since, and hopefully we never will again.

Why is that? Why did that stop in 1945?

Some would argue, I think with some merit, that it's because we have improved cooperation between nations, right? We have figured out how to resolve our differences short of resorting to violence.

I would argue that is true, but I would also argue that back in 1945 with the advent of nuclear weapons, the consequences of settling disputes by violence became intolerable. We simply couldn't accept that and had to find other means to go about doing that.

So let me give you a better way today. General Robert Kehler, who many of you I think remember as a former commander here at STRATCOM, said this.

'While much has changed since the end of the Cold War, nuclear weapons continue to meet a critical need in U.S. security strategy and the strategies of our allies and partners. While I believe it's far too simplistic to say that nuclear weapons alone have prevented major war, the evidence is compelling that they fundamentally changed the notion of warfare between major nations in August of 1945, and their deterrent effect has constrained the scope and scale of conflict ever since.'

So I get the fact that the Cold War is over. And by the way, I kind of digress here a little bit. There's actually very few of us in the military left that even served in the Cold War. In my last job I had a pair of Navy captains that retired with 29 and 30 years of service – proud naval officers – but when they left, the next junior captain I had never served during the Cold War. There's very few of us left that have an idea of what that was like. That is well behind us in the rear view mirror.

But remember, the weapons didn't go away. There are a number of nations that still possess those weapons, and I'll tell you that I cannot recommend a defense strategy for this nation that involves counting on the goodwill of other nations. We defend against capability, not intent. That's part of what motivates me and most of the people, or all the people over at STRATCOM when we go to work in the morning.

There are still nations out there that see nuclear weapons as a tool of coercion. Russia may be the only nation on earth that can destroy us today with their nuclear arsenal, but China is expanding and modernizing; Russia's expanding and modernizing. We don't have to go back but about two days to watch what North Korea is doing in terms of their development of ballistic missile technologies, and I could just keep going and going and going.

Our adversaries expand, modernize and test in order to coerce. That coercion is the power of the nuclear weapons system, and that is why we take strategic deterrence and assurance so seriously.

Look, strategic deterrence is the most important, least glamorous mission in the entire military.

Right now, in King's Bay, Georgia, my old home, there's a submariner getting ready to deploy undersea for 77 days. If he has a wife, he's probably not going to talk to her for 77 days. If he doesn't have a wife, he's probably not going to get one anytime soon. You are really isolated.

And he, or she by the way, because there are women on submarines, is going to work very hard, and come back in 77 days to King's Bay, Georgia, and it's going to look exactly like it did when he or she left. Okay? That's what deterrence looks like.

There's submariners out there; there's men and women in missile siloes; there's men and women flying around in aircraft, many of whom leave from Offutt Air Force Base to accomplish those missions. All of them serving in this area such that we can all sit here today and not have to think about it one iota.

So not glamorous, but incredibly important and it gives us a level of security, frankly, that we have come to take for granted inside this nation.

There are 184,000 people involved in the STRATCOM enterprise. The soldiers, sailors, airmen, Marines and civilians manning our strategic weapons systems are on alert 24,7,365, standing guard, from underwater to outer space. That's what strategic deterrence looks like, and I'm very proud of their work as they do this across the globe.

What I like about Bellevue is that you all get this. You all understand what's going on behind those gates and you support it so very well. Your understanding of, and engagement with, base operations, and your hospitality towards our workforce is just exceptional. We're a better command because of the support and stability of the community of Bellevue.

And I'll tell you, with the new headquarters that's 80-90 percent complete, we're certainly not going anywhere anytime soon.

So on behalf of General Hyten, myself and our Chief of Staff, I can't thank you enough for that support. I appreciate you having me today, and I'll be happy to take a few questions that anyone has.