Stop the New Intercontinental Ballistic Missile

The United States currently fields 400 nuclear-tipped Minuteman III intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs) in land-based silos at Malmstrom, Minot, and Warren Air Force bases stretching across Montana, North Dakota, Wyoming, Nebraska, and Colorado. Despite a recently-completed, multibillion-dollar, decade-long program to extend these missiles’ service life, the Air Force is moving ahead with plans to develop a new, replacement ICBM—the Ground Based Strategic Deterrent (GBSD). The country’s struggle to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic highlights the urgent need to rethink national security and budget priorities, including this costly, dangerous, and unnecessary new weapon.

As soon as this summer, the Air Force plans to award a contract to Northrop Grumman—the sole bidder—in what will likely be the largest Pentagon development contract ever awarded uncompetitively. House Armed Services Committee Chairman Adam Smith (WA-9) has called the decision to move forward with the sole-source contract “very troubling.”

The GBSD project should be stopped because:

» **A new ICBM is costly.** An independent Pentagon study estimated that the GBSD will eventually total $85-$150 billion. The lack of contract competition will likely escalate total costs even further. Even at a $100 billion total program cost, each of the planned 400 deployed missiles would cost $250 million apiece—all to sit mutely in their silos for decades or else unleash intolerable nuclear destruction.

» **A new ICBM is unnecessary.** As sea-based nuclear weapons have allowed for a stronger deterrent due to their invulnerability and undetectability, ICBMs have become obsolete—especially given that development of new nuclear submarines and bombers are also underway this decade.

» **A new ICBM is dangerous.** Land-based ICBMs are always on high-alert status, putting extreme pressure on the president to quickly order a launch if there are indications of an incoming adversary strike against the missiles’ vulnerable silos. Land-based ICBMs not only increase the likelihood of sliding into nuclear war over a false alarm, but they also explicitly invite adversaries to consider a nuclear first strike against the American heartland—a dangerous strategic rationale that endangers both American lives and our shared environment.

Congress should stop the Ground Based Strategic Deterrent missile before it’s too late.

Contact:
Anthony Wier
anthony@fcnl.org

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