

*Lt. Gen. James M. Kowalski  
Commander  
Air Force Global Strike Command  
Barksdale Air Force Base, La.*

*Lt. Gen. James M. Kowalski is Commander, Air Force Global Strike Command, Barksdale Air Force Base, La. He is responsible for organizing, training, equipping and maintaining all U.S. intercontinental ballistic missile and nuclear-capable bomber forces. The command's mission is to develop and provide combat-ready forces for nuclear deterrence and global strike operations to support the President of the United States and combatant commanders. The command comprises more than 23,000 professionals operating at various locations around the globe. The command's six wings control the nation's entire inventory of Minuteman III intercontinental ballistic missiles, B-2 and B-52 bomber aircraft.*

*General Kowalski entered active duty in 1980 through the ROTC program at the University of Cincinnati. He has held a variety of operational commands, including a bomb squadron, an operations group, a bomb wing and an air control wing.*

*His contingency and wartime experience include command of the 2nd Operations Group when they deployed B-52s for combat during operations Noble Anvil and Allied Force, and command of the 28th Bomb Wing when they deployed B-1Bs for Operation Iraqi Freedom. From January 2003 to May 2003, General Kowalski commanded the 405th Air Expeditionary Wing in Southwest Asia where he led a combined wing of B-1Bs, E-3s and KC-135s to provide strike, battle management, and air refueling for operations Iraqi Freedom, Enduring Freedom and Southern Watch. His previous staff assignments include Headquarters Air Combat Command, Headquarters U.S. Air Force and the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Prior to his current assignment, he served as Vice Commander, Air Force Global Strike Command.*

Q1) Why was the command established and what is the mission of AFGSC?

A1) Air Force Global Strike Command (AFGSC) stood up on 7 August 2009 to provide a clear line of authority and responsibility for Air Force nuclear deterrence and global strike forces. Our command's mission is straightforward—to develop and provide combat ready forces for nuclear deterrence and global strike operations to support the President and the Combatant Commanders. The command is responsible for B-52 and B-2 bombers, Minuteman III intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs), UH-1N helicopters, the Air Launched Cruise Missile (ALCM) and gravity nuclear weapons. On all these systems we are the “lead major command” meaning we have planning, programming and budgeting responsibility to ensure all these systems, and operational and support units, meet the Combatant Commander requirements. That gives us most of the “organize train and equip” toolkit we need to balance current operations, sustainment, and modernization. While we are responsible for two of the three legs of the nuclear forces triad, we also have an important conventional global strike mission as seen with the recent employment of B-2s in support of Operation Odyssey Dawn in Libya, and our B-52 deployments in support of the Pacific Command's Continuous Bomber Presence mission.

Q2) What is the command's current status?

A2) For the headquarters, we reached full operational capability last September and are continuing to mature. This was the first new major command in the Air Force in 27 years, and there was a lot of disruption to long-running processes when mission and functional oversight responsibilities moved from other major commands (MAJCOMs) to AFGSC. Only a few of the people who were working in these offices made the move to Barksdale AFB, as a result our stand-up required a steep learning curve, leadership patience with that curve, and a lot of reach-back. We're still continuing the work of building and reinforcing the staff processes. But those challenges came with a great opportunity—no one could say “that's not the way we do it here” since we'd never done it before. It gave us a chance to look at processes in the other MAJCOMs, pick the one we thought worked best and use that as the baseline for our own continuous improvement efforts. People who came to our command that first year had an incredible amount of latitude to establish the kind of office and processes they thought would work best and also the authority to change it as manning improved or requirements evolved. That staff flexibility is a part of our headquarters culture we'd like to retain.

Now we have a lot of metrics we use to track current status across our subordinate units, but success has to be measured by achieving repeatable behaviors consistent with the culture we want. Those behaviors are discipline and professionalism. If we're getting those right at all levels, then a lot of the things we want to see such as compliance, accountability, force development, continuous improvement, and pride will follow. Over time those behaviors create a self-sustaining culture that embraces the special trust and responsibility of nuclear weapons. We're not there yet, but we've got the right people and the right tools. We're also working closely with other organizations such as Air Force Material Command and the Air Force Nuclear Weapons Center, through a variety of programs and initiatives.

Q3) What were some of the key logistical accomplishments involved in standing up AFGSC?

A3) I can point to three that probably have the greatest impact. The first would be meeting the challenge of standing up a new MAJCOM headquarters while also restructuring our standards for accountability of nuclear weapons related materiel (NWRM) across the Air Force. We implemented new NWRM inventory processes and procedures, to include a new global data management system and physical inventory accountability every six months at all locations. We're able to ensure the security of tens of thousands of components due to our continuous oversight of nuclear related materials. At any given time we can track exactly where weapons components are, whether they are in transit, storage, maintenance or operations.

Another area where we've made a difference is establishing General Officer Steering Groups for the B-2, B-52 and ICBM weapon systems. These steering groups provide focus on warfighter concerns and priorities for each weapon system. Wing commanders, headquarters leaders and weapon system experts from across the Air Force meet to address sustainment and modernization issues and they have the authority to make decisions to solve those problems.

A third success is the team concept we adapted from Air Combat Command to work our weapon systems. Each of our major systems, B-2, B-52 and ICBM, have a "Weapon System Team" that is cross-matrixed from the staff functionals responsible for maintenance, requirements, funding, modifications and program issues. These teams are the central clearinghouse for all weapon system issues from AFGSC units, senior leaders and external agencies and by having them work together we improve communication and shorten the bureaucratic distance between need and solution.

Q4) Are you currently right-sized for your mission?

A4) This is a three part question—is the HQ right? Are we the right size for nuclear deterrence? And can we meet our conventional mission?

Since the headquarters was established from scratch, we used current functions and DoD/USAF requirements to determine manning. We benchmarked from the other AF MAJCOMs but knew we wanted a lean command that would be able to focus on unit performance. My experience has been that some of the workload in large headquarters is self-generated. They can become good idea factories where people spend time working on headquarter staff issues rather than responding to needs from the unit level. We constantly reinforce to our headquarters team that their only measure of merit is the success of our units. We believe every airman in our command wants to succeed, so if a unit is having problems it is in some way traceable back to our headquarters, be it a lack of resources or manning, inadequate training, weak oversight, or poor personnel selection. We want a headquarters that feels responsible for the units and their performance. Currently we have a staff of about 800 and we're still building to an end state of about 1000. Most of the remaining hiring is for government civilians so if any of your readers are interested, they should keep an eye on the USAJobs website.

With regard to our nuclear deterrence mission, we've got about 23,000 people in the field at two numbered air forces and six wings supporting US Strategic Command with 450 ICBMs and B-2 and B-52 bombers. The ICBMs are on daily alert and the bombers are able to quickly generate to alert status. Some of the changes implemented after the Schlesinger Reports on the nuclear enterprise included identifying key nuclear billets for prioritization by our personnel community and robbing specific career fields such as nuclear weapons and missile maintenance, bomber crew chiefs, and intelligence officers. We've also set up a recurring process through our Human Capital Management initiative so we can continue to monitor the health of critical career fields.

For our conventional mission we've found some areas that require additional attention such as our air operations center but many of the changes we made for our nuclear deterrent mission also improved our conventional readiness.

Q5) From a budgetary perspective, what can you do to become more efficient and reduce costs in your operations? Have you begun implementation of any processes as a result?

A5) There are short term and long term actions we've taken. In the short term we're implementing DoD and HAF efficiencies while also reviewing our major operational and support muscle movements to see where we can get equivalent military effectiveness at lower cost. One recent example was a change in how we execute our bomber rotations to support USPACOM at Andersen Air Force Base, Guam. While we didn't save money for AFGSC, our restructured logistics support and aircraft rotations saved almost \$14M annually in costs to DoD. For the long term we can use this economic crisis to develop a force that thinks about how to do their jobs "faster-better-cheaper." Militaries rightly think first about effectiveness, but often don't bring efficiency into consideration early enough, if at all. We don't have free market competition driving us to reduce costs or improve quality at all levels in our organizations, so to get the improvements we need we need to work on the organizational climate. We'd like a climate where

people are incentivized in a way that thinking about improvements becomes a habit. That can have enduring impacts at all the organizations they move to over their career. We get some of the best people our nation has to offer, but I don't think we listen to them very well. The people who have the best ideas on how to do things faster-better-cheaper are those doing the work and their supervisors. But their ideas are often stifled by rigid processes and middle and senior leadership. We need to respond to good ideas with "Yes, if.." instead of "No, because..."; then we need to have the metrics and the recognition and reward mechanisms so our people know we're serious. Within AFGSC we're taking small steps with a test program called "Strike Now" that brings ideas to the headquarters level. This demonstrates my commander's intent about creating climate of improvement and gives us a redundant path so no supervisor is a single-point-of-failure to getting good ideas up the chain.

Q6) Flooding has been an issue in many places around the country. Has it caused any disruptions or changes to the way you conduct operations?

A6) Our Airmen stationed at Minot Air Force Base, N.D., were impacted by recent historic flooding in the city of Minot and neighboring communities. While the core missions at Minot AFB were not directly affected, over 1,200 Airmen and their families were displaced. Relief and recovery efforts are still underway as most people are only now getting back into their damaged homes. This will be a long term recovery effort with our community partners and we've seen our team respond across the command to support our airmen and all the people in the Minot area hurt by this flood.

Q7) What are some of the long range bomber and ICBM sustainment issues you face in your effort to keep the force combat ready?

A7) All our systems face, to varying degrees, problems ranging from vanishing vendors for spare parts to worn-out handling and test equipment. Accordingly, one of our top priorities at this command is to address sustainment and modernization through the programming and budgeting processes, for both the missile and the bomber forces.

With the Minuteman III, we're currently engaged in a nearly seven billion dollar, multi-year program to refurbish or modernize the system from nozzle to nose cone. Major upgrades include an overhauled rocket motor propellant; new guidance system electronics; a post boost vehicle life extension; updated communication capabilities; new environmental control systems; and enhanced launch facility physical security measures. These measures will extend the Minuteman III into the decade of 2020 and we're also studying the requirements to extend the system well past 2030.

Our bomber upgrades include improvements to radars, defensive management, and communications. We're also providing a digital backbone to the B-52 to allow it to better integrate into current and future joint forces, and we're modifying the bomb bay to expand the types of weapons the B-52 can employ.

Q8) What is your vision for the future?

A8) We're a nation whose roles and responsibilities demand a military unsurpassed in power projection. That means an enduring need for the nuclear Triad to manage risk as we seek to reduce the nuclear arsenals, and for a conventional long range strike force able to deny any potential adversary safe haven. From that strategic view comes three challenges for AFGSC: First, continue the work of developing a culture that embraces the special trust and responsibility of nuclear weapons. Second, we've got to do this while not losing our competence in conventional operations. And third, we have to enhance and sustain our current force while modernizing for the future. That future include capabilities such as conventional prompt global strike, a replacement for the ALCM, a penetrating long range strike bomber, and the follow-on system for the MMIII.

Q9) What would you like to say to the men and women of Air Force Global Strike Command?

A9) We recently celebrated our two-year anniversary as a command, and thank each of our airmen, civilians, and their families for their tireless efforts to ensure the safety, security, and effectiveness of the nation's most powerful weapon systems. The discipline and dedication to the mission of our team has made a difference for the Air Force and the nation, and reflects our motto--"to deter and assure."

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