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WHY SECRETARY RUMSFELD'S PLAN TO MODERNIZE THE B-1B BOMBER FORCE IS NECESSARY

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As part of an ongoing effort to upgrade and strengthen U.S. national defense, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld recently proposed a plan that would reduce the size of an outdated B-1B bomber force by one-third, consolidate the remaining fleet in two bases (closing three bases that have fewer than 10 planes each), and upgrade the remaining B-1Bs with savings produced by these moves. This plan is necessary to meet the current strategic requirements of the U.S. armed forces. It will upgrade the capacities of a fleet that is now technologically inadequate and eliminate costly inefficiencies. When completed, the plan will ensure that the United States has the necessary aircraft to meet its near-term requirements by providing the U.S. Air Force with 60 highly capable long-range strike aircraft.

Despite generating savings of \$165 million in 2002 and total projected savings that are as high as \$1.5 billion, Secretary Rumsfeld's request quickly drew fire from Members of Congress, especially those whose constituencies would be directly affected by the base consolidation. The House Armed Services Committee passed an amendment to the 2002 defense authorization bill that would prevent these reductions from taking place. Those who oppose streamlining and upgrading the B-1B force may be yielding to considerations that are short-sighted and parochial, even though it is

clearly in the interests of America's national security to move forward with the plan.

Why Streamlining and Modernizing the B-1B Force Is the Right Thing to Do. While the current B-1B fleet is inadequate to fulfill its role, it is neither financially realistic nor strategically necessary to replace the entire fleet with modern B-2s or next-generation long-range bombers. An option that is both affordable and prudent would be to modernize a portion of the B-1B force, introduce additional B-2s, and begin work to develop a bomber with even greater capability. Reducing the current B-1B force by one-third and reinvesting that money in the remaining force is necessary because:

- Both near-term and future strategic requirements demand a modernized B-1B force. One of the emerging dangers facing the United States is an enemy that can challenge America's access to forward-basing areas and hold

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regional combat assets at risk. Modern, long-range bombers are vital in this environment because of their ability to strike high-priority targets such as air defense batteries, command-and-control infrastructure, and missile batteries in any region of the world, from any region of the world. Yet America's current bomber force cannot meet this need. It consists of 76 1950s-era B-52s, 93 outdated B-1Bs, and only 21 modern B-2s. The Air Force does not plan to purchase a new bomber until 2037, by which time the B-52 will be nearly 90 years old and many new threats will have emerged. In order to address even currently existing threats, the Air Force must implement a bomber modernization strategy. A good first step would be to reduce the B-1B fleet and upgrade the remaining planes.

- **The current capacities of the B-1B force are insufficient for its role.** Since the Cold War, the B-1B's technological limitations have prevented it from being used effectively. In fact, it was not used at all during the Persian Gulf War and only in a very limited way during the Kosovo conflict. Although the bomber was originally designed to deliver nuclear payloads, that mission was removed in the 1990s as war planning shifted away from fighting nuclear war with the Soviet Union to fighting conventional wars in different regions of the world.

As currently deployed, the B-1B has to fly very near its targets to deliver its ordinance, and its radar jamming capabilities are not very effective in shielding the plane from an enemy's radar. This inadequacy has crucial consequences in light of the worldwide proliferation of highly advanced air-defenses, as evidenced by Serbia's hit of an F-117 during the 1999 Kosovo campaign and Iraq's continual harassment of allied fighters over the United Nations-imposed no-fly zones over northern and southern Iraq.

One of the upgrades to the B-1B will give it more advanced radar jamming capabilities. In addition, a modernized B-1B force will be able to carry a full array of modern weaponry, including long-range missiles that give it the capacity to strike from far distances, as the B-52 can. The ability to deliver its ordinance from afar will allow the bomber to return to its base for reloading and return to combat more quickly. Thus, fewer bombers will be required to deliver the same amount of ordinance.

- **Consolidating the base infrastructure is cost-effective.** Secretary Rumsfeld's plan calls for consolidating the existing five-base B-1B infrastructure to two bases. Currently, there are 40 B-1Bs at Dyess Air Force Base (AFB) in Texas and 26 at Ellsworth AFB in South Dakota, but only seven at Mountain Home AFB in Idaho and nine each at McConnell AFB in Kansas and Robins AFB in Georgia. This dispersed basing infrastructure entails costly and duplicative facilities, spare parts inventory, and personnel. Consolidating to the two major bases in South Dakota and Texas will eliminate unnecessary maintenance costs.

Conclusion. American leadership now faces the tremendous challenge of accomplishing a transition from forces that were appropriate during the Cold War era to those that will provide adequate defense for the nation in a dangerous and unpredictable future. The controversy over the Administration's plan to consolidate and modernize the B-1B fleet indicates that this endeavor will involve many difficult and controversial decisions. Though it is but one step in a long journey, streamlining and upgrading the U.S. B-1B fleet will provide capabilities vital to the effectiveness of our current defenses. This is a prerequisite for developing a new generation of capabilities that will enable the U.S. armed forces to maintain America's position as a global power far into the future.

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