

Commander Praises Agility that Deployed Low-Yield Warhead for SLBMs



The Ohio-class guided-missile submarine USS Florida (SSGN 728) prepares to transit the Mediterranean, Oct. 15, 2019. Some Ohio-class submarines can carry the W76-2 low-yield nuclear warhead. U.S. Navy / Mass Communication Specialist 3rd Class Drew Verbis

WASHINGTON –The admiral in command of the nation’s strategic deterrent forces defended the new W76-2 low-yield nuclear warhead before the Senate Armed Services Committee (SASC) in a hearing on Capitol Hill and praised the agile process that rapidly deployed the weapon.

The requirement for a submarine-launched low-yield warhead became a requirement noted in the 2018 Nuclear Posture Review. The result was the W76-2 warhead, which was deployed in 2019 on the tips of some Trident submarine-launched ballistic missiles carried by Ohio-class ballistic-missile submarines.

“I think it’s an example that shows that we can move fast,” said Adm. Charles A. Richard, commander, U.S. Strategic Command, testifying Sept. 17 before the SASC. “We still know how to do this. That is an example of where the threat changed, new capability was needed, we provided on an operationally responsive timeline [and] closed a potential hole in our deterrence strategy. We should be able to do that more.”

Richard said the rapid development and deployment of the W76-2 was “a type of hedging strategy that enables you to react inside what somebody is attempting to do. That enhances a nation’s deterrence by a nation’s ability to do that.”

Richard stressed that the strategic climate was changing as China and Russia began surging on their way to becoming peer competitors “that have to be deterred differently.”