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The Air Force We Need

“Doing something for a purpose...”

We gather here, as Airmen, deeply committed to the defense of our country. Whit, thank you for continuing to serve. And, of course, Larry Spencer, thank you for your leadership of AFA.

It’s been quite a year since the last AFA conference, and for that, I want to publicly thank my wingmen.

Our Chief of Staff, General Dave Goldfein, and his wife, Dawn. Thank you for your good advice, your sense of purpose and your wonderful sense of humor.

And our Chief Master Sergeant of the Air Force, Kuh-leeth Wright, and his wife Tonya... This guy just keeps fixing things. You are a role model for us all. Thanks Chief.

The World As It Is

Doing something for a purpose. . .

Sometimes it is hard to see the sweep of history, when we are just trying to get today’s work done. Which is why it is important to come together like this, to take stock of where we are, so that we can reaffirm where we need to go.

The Meuse Argonne

One hundred years ago, in the early morning of September 26, 1918, in the Argonne forest near the Meuse river, the largest American offensive of the First World War began. Fifteen divisions of fresh American forces began to break the exhausted German lines. In less than two months, the armistice would be signed and the guns would fall silent over a shattered continent. This Veterans Day will be the centenary of the end of the First World War.

Nearly 850 aircraft participated in the fight at the Meuse-Argonne. They included the DeHavilland DH-4 Liberty ... a rickety biplane made of wood and fabric ... the one aircraft America managed to produce for Col Billy Mitchell’s air attack.

Back in Washington, an Army captain named Hap Arnold had been promoted to colonel to monitor the production of those planes. What he learned was how not to mobilize and equip an air force.

After the war, America retreated across its protective oceans and demobilized. There was no stomach in America for large standing military forces. Arnold went back to being a Captain and got posted out west, demonstrating airpower by doing things like racing carrier pigeons to deliver messages.

Another veteran of that First World War was a 2nd Lieutenant named Stuart Symington, who got out and went to industry.

Two short decades later, darkness descended again over Europe and Asia. In the Second World War, America mobilized the might of its people and its industry and chose again to confront evil.

By then, General Hap Arnold was in charge of building American Air Power. Stuart Symington was one of the leading industrialists who would build the equipment needed by this new force.

After the Second World War, America came to the hard realization that the vast oceans surrounding us could not protect us.

America made a choice – a decision -- to build enduring alliances, to maintain a strong national defense and to support a system of states that would nourish vibrant free enterprise and free people.

That force was heavily dependent on America's air arm – for nuclear deterrence, for homeland defense, for power projection around the globe.

That 2nd Lieutenant from World War I who became an industrialist -- Stuart Symington -- became the first Secretary of the Air Force and worked tirelessly alongside Hap Arnold's friend and successor, Tooey Spatz, to build a permanent, well-trained air service.

In the post-World War II era, we stayed strong, we stayed engaged, and America drove forward its technical edge in air and space power, never ceding a scrap of technical know-how to our adversaries. American values backed by American and allied power, made the world a more peaceful and prosperous place.

But our dominance as a global power is not a birthright.

It is a choice, made by a nation that is a force for good in the world.

It is a choice, made by a nation that is not naïve about the existence of evil.

And new threats are emerging to which our generation must respond.

The Threat

Less than a week ago Russia began the largest exercise on Russian soil in four decades ... with more than 300,000 troops and 1000 aircraft.

On the other side of the world, China's first aircraft carrier was declared combat ready this year, and promptly sailed into the Pacific to conduct flight operations.

China has militarized islands in the South China Sea, and now all of Southeast Asia is within reach of its long-rang bombers.

Part of President Xi's plan is for China to be a top-ranked military by 2050 and President Xi is no longer bound by term limits on his Presidency.

We must see the world as it is.

That is why the National Defense Strategy explicitly recognizes that **we have returned to an era of great power competition.**

We must prepare.

The Air Force We Need

The Air Force meets the threats we face as a nation with our most basic unit, the squadron. Our operational squadrons are the combat power of the Air Force. They are the clenched fist of American resolve. Today, we have 312 Operational Squadrons.

The 142nd Fighter Squadron in Portland, Oregon is sitting alert this morning, ready to intercept any aircraft that threatens America's northwest.

The Rough Riders of the 741st Strategic Missile Squadron are maintaining our nation's nuclear deterrent at Minot Air Force Base, North Dakota today.

The 36th Airlift Squadron at Yakota Air Force Base is providing forward-based tactical airlift in Japan and throughout the Pacific.

Some of you who are not in one of those operational squadrons may be asking what is your role? What about you? Let me tell you something. I'm not on that chart. General Goldfein is not on that chart. In fact, not a single General Officer in the Air Force is on that chart.

It takes all of us to get that combat power ready and able to fight. A fist is nothing without the weight of the body behind it.

What Would It Take?

The Chief and I were asked in March what it would take for the Air Force to implement the National Defense Strategy ... to confront innovating adversaries seeking to dominate their neighbors? What does it take?

As Airmen, we should be able to answer that question.

The Defense Strategy tells us that we need to be able to defend the homeland, provide a credible nuclear deterrent, win against a major power while countering a rogue nation, all while managing violent extremists with a lower level of effort. While all of those missions rely on every service working together, each of those missions relies heavily on America's Air Force.

For the last six months the Air Force has been modeling and analyzing scenarios. We were guided by the best intelligence we have for the 2025-2030 time frame and used the most current concepts of operations from the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

This work done by the Air Staff will be combined with five other Congressionally mandated studies due over the next six months.

But we know now from analysis what everyone in this room knows from experience. **The Air Force is too small for what the nation expects of us. 312 Operational Squadrons is not enough.**

So, what will it take? 386.

The Air Force we need to implement the National Defense Strategy has 386 Operational Squadrons.

It needs 5 more bomber squadrons ... the largest percentage increase.

And 7 additional space squadrons so that we can dominate in space, where we have not been threatened in the past.

Aerial refueling will be the biggest shortfall in our Mobility Air Forces ... we need 14 more tanker squadrons.

We will need 7 more special operations squadrons ... and 9 more combat search and rescue squadrons to carry out the National Defense Strategy.

22 squadrons need to be added to our Command and Control, Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance forces.

Finally ... we need 7 more fighter squadrons ... 2 Remotely Piloted Aircraft squadrons ... and 1 more airlift squadron.

We should modernize our nuclear deterrent, but we don't see an increase in the number of missile squadrons.

Cyber would also not see an increase in squadrons, though we will develop new tools for the squadrons we have.

But it's not just larger; the way we fight will be different.

And tomorrow, General Goldfein will talk more about how we organize and present forces, how we will train in order to create multiple dilemmas for our adversaries.

We aren't naïve about how long it will take us to build the support and the budget required for the force we need.

It is a choice.

But we have an obligation to our countrymen. To tell them, as those before us have done in their time, what should be done, what must be done.

To face the world as it is, with a rapidly innovating adversary, the Air Force we need should have about 25% more operational squadrons in the 2025 - 2030 timeframe than the Air Force we have.

Restoring the Readiness of the Force

As we advocate to grow, we will continue to make the Air Force we have more ready and more lethal.

Last spring, about 50 Airmen from around the service spent six weeks together digging in to the problem of readiness.

How should we measure readiness? What are the barriers to readiness recovery and how can we eliminate them? And how can we make sure that we are putting precious dollars in the right places to make our squadrons healthy?

That work gave us a path to recovery and we are on it.

Last year, with the support of the Congress, we added 4,000 Airmen to our end strength, prioritizing fields like maintenance, cyber, and logistics. We replenished depleting stocks of precision weapons.

In September of 2016, the Air Force was short 4,000 maintainers.

By December of this year, with the funds given to us by Congress, we will have closed that gap to zero.

As a result of the actions all of you have taken, the Air Force is more ready for major combat operations today than we were 2 years ago. More than 75% of our pacing force is combat ready today with their lead force packages.

We're moving the whole force to higher levels of readiness with actions that will play out over several years, but there are also steps that are making a difference right now. We see them when we visit you.

The Bloody 100th

A few months ago, I went to RAF Mildenhall – where the Bloody 100th traces its lineage back to the 8th Air Force in World War II.

The Wing Commander, Colonel Chris Amrhein, used his readiness money to build an exercise.

They mobilized every tanker in the wing in less than 16 hours and, after an “elephant walk” to the runway, kept them flying for 24 hours of non-stop operations.

Two short months later the real call came. The United States would destroy Syria's chemical weapons development capability. And, as they say at Mildenhall: November. . . . Kilo. . . Alpha. . . Whiskey. . . . Tango. . . Golf. If you don't know what that means, ask one of your friends in a tanker squadron!

When it was time to execute . . . the weather was significantly below minimums. They needed a "follow me" truck to find the runway center line. The Bloody 100th was in the first wave, and if they didn't go, the mission would have been scrubbed.

They relied on their training, their confidence in the maintenance of their equipment . . . and they launched.

I know there are some Airmen here from the Bloody 100th, and I'd ask you to stand.

Centralized Mission Direction, Decentralized Execution

Part of being ready for the high-end fight is freeing up time in your day to do important things.

Did you know we have an Air Force Instruction on what percentage of lockers at base gyms have to be available for daily use? And it takes 4-star approval to waive the regulation?

About half of our instructions were out of date, and many of them weren't needed at all. So General Goldfein and I decided to review them. All of them. We are half way through. We have rescinded 246 Air Force Instructions and Regulations in the last 12 months.

But it won't stop at regulations. I had lunch with junior officers in Alaska and they told me about the dreaded "MIC-T", the Inspector General self-assessment checklists.

When I checked, General Said, our Deputy IG said, "The Airmen are right and then some."

So the IG is working with the Air Staff to cut the mandatory assessment checklists in half by November.

But this is about more than getting rid of bureaucratic micro-management. In a high-end conflict, we must anticipate that we will not have exquisite command and control. Communications will be degraded or intermittent. We will expect you to take mission orders and do your best to accomplish the objective.

If we expect you to fight that way in wartime, we have to treat you that way in peacetime.

This departmental reform is a warfighting imperative.

Acquisition Reform

Part of implementing the national defense strategy is buying things faster and smarter.

Airmen at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base have developed 100 predictive algorithms for the B-1 bomber to better forecast when parts will fail. We project savings of over six million dollars each year just with the B-1, and better mission capable rates as well.

We've partnered with the Navy and Army, using prototyping and experimentation for hypersonic technology ... slashing 10 years off the original development timeline.

This May we established the Kessel Run Software Experimentation Laboratory ... where 200 Airmen and industry partners are creating software solutions for warfighters in about 120 days.

They named themselves "Kessel Run", by the way, and I had to Google it to find out why.

Two weeks ago, Lt Colonel Todd Dye and his boss, General Heath Collins, tailored their acquisition program for an F-15 upgrade to save 18 months out of the schedule.

Over the past 6 months, Air Force acquisition has striped 56 years out of planned schedules in our acquisition portfolio. We are buying things faster and smarter.

Tomorrow, Will Roper will be sharing more with you about one of our next steps: one-day contract awards for innovative small businesses. We'll request short proposals on our hard problems, review them quickly and invite the best concepts to oral presentations.

Businesses invited to orals will give their pitch and if the program manager likes it, the company walks out that day with funding and a one-page signed contract.

And last Monday I was at the Space and Missile Systems Center in Los Angeles, where Airmen have not only redesigned the way their command operates, they have striped years out of program schedules for a dozen major projects.

Space

With respect to space, let me share a few thoughts with you.

The President directed the Defense Department to establish a sixth branch of the armed forces for space.

America is the best in the world at space and our adversaries know it. The threat to our space capabilities is growing. We can no longer view space as a function; it is a warfighting mission. We have been charged with making sure America dominates in space, and that is just what we're doing.

Last Friday, the Air Force delivered a proposal to our colleagues in the Department of Defense on the responsibilities and structure of a new Space Force.

As Airmen, we have a responsibility to develop a proposal for the President that is bold, and that carries out his vision.

In February, when the President sends the Fiscal Year 2020 budget to the Congress, it will include a proposal for a new military department.

A new department will require legislative action and funding from Congress. If approved by the Congress, it will mean a new Service Secretary with all of the needed authorities to organize, train, equip and develop space forces as a separate and successful department.

But we don't need to wait for legislation to continue to accelerate defensible space. There are actions that the Air Force can take immediately, without further action from Congress.

We are moving forward with the restructuring of the Space and Missiles Systems Center so that we buy space systems faster and smarter.

We are working with the Joint Staff under the guidance of the Secretary of Defense and the President to establish and support a unified combatant command for space that puts a warfighter's focus on space operations.

The Space Rapid Capabilities Office, which was recently established by Congress, provides a mechanism to continue to accelerate special programs of high national priority.

The Air Force is fully committed to ensuring the United States continues to lead in space.

The President has brought space into the spotlight. Dominating in space has now become kitchen table conversation. . . and that will benefit this country.

Pilot Training Next

While the Air Force is driving forward restoring the readiness and lethality of the force, buying things faster and smarter, and strengthening our space forces, in the end, the most important thing we have is people, and the ideas our Airmen have to make things better.

In Austin, Texas five Airmen from Air Education and Training Command had an idea.

Lt Col Paul Vicars, Lt Col Eric Frahm, Lt Col Gabe Arrington, Lt Col Justin Chandler, and Major Scott Van De Water are testing a new way to train pilots with virtual reality simulators.

I visited the team in June, and the results so far are promising.

Learning the old way, when they start out, student pilots are typically able to fly just 10 minutes or so of an hour and a half training ride, with their instructor doing the rest. But if they get a lot more practice and instruction in virtual reality, the students are flying about 90% of their first rides, shaving weeks off training.

Lt Col Vicar and some of his team members are here today. The Pilot Training Next simulators are down in the Expo center. I expect there will be a long line, but go try them out!

386

I want to thank all of you for what you are doing to build a more lethal and ready Air Force, to field tomorrow's Air Force faster and smarter, and to support building the Air Force we need of 386 operational squadrons.

The Chief and I, and the leaders of this magnificent force cannot possibly do this alone.

One hundred years ago, above the battlefields of France, Billy Mitchell learned the lessons of massing air power in battle, establishing air superiority in support of ground operations, and striking independently. In his time, he was the advocate for the Air Force we need.

Now it is up to us -- all of us -- to do the same.

To tell our story.

When Ronald Reagan called for a 600-ship Navy, he said, “America's strength is the bedrock of the free world's security, for the freedom we guard is not just our own.” Freedom is worth protecting. You know that, because you made a choice. . . To do something for a purpose...to be Airmen.

God bless you all and may God bless the United States of America.