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DEPARTMENT OF THE AIR FORCE

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HOUSE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE
UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

SUBJECT: CONNECTIVITY OF UNITED STATES AIR FORCE MOBILITY AIRCRAFT

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Introduction

Chairmans Kelly and Waltz, Ranking Members Courtney and Davis, distinguished members of the subcommittees, good morning. Thank you for inviting me to discuss Mobility Air Force (MAF) Connectivity, a topic I am extremely passionate about. I am joined today by Lieutenant General David Tabor, Director of Programs, Deputy Chief of Staff for Plans and Programs, Headquarters U.S. Air Force, Rear Admiral Derek Trinque, Director of Strategic Plans, Policy, and Logistics, United States Transportation Command, and Chief Master Seargent Jamie Newman, Command Chief, Air Mobility Command.

Air Mobility Command (AMC) is the only provider of Rapid Global Mobility (RGM), the basis for persistent global logistics and one of five core Air Force missions. Our Nation, and indeed the world, relies on AMC to project, connect, maneuver, and safeguard our Nation's troops as we transport the wounded home, and sustain lethality for the Joint Force in competition, crisis, and conflict. Our competitors understand the asymmetric advantage RGM gives our Nation. In response, these peer competitors are increasing their capabilities and challenging our advantage by exploiting AMC's lack of battle space awareness. Connectivity is our weak link.

What is the Problem?

Our adversaries understand RGM enables the Joint Force. Accordingly, they fully intend to disrupt RGM operations to degrade power projection. Our nation is accustomed to projecting and sustaining forces across largely uncontested environments. In this new era of strategic competition, we can no longer expect freedom of maneuver.

Over the past two decades, the DoD focused on combating global terrorism and violent extremist organizations. During that period of sustained engagement, the DoD utilized resources

to address the requirements of that conflict. This era of strategic competition is entirely different and requires investment in new technology, capability, and relevant capacity.

The threat picture has changed. In the last annual report to Congress on the Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China (PRC), the Department highlighted the PRC's advanced hypersonic missile technologies intended to strike foreign military bases and the development of beyond visual range air to air missiles and missiles more resistant to countermeasures. It cited over 180 coercive and risky air intercepts against U.S. aircraft in the region in a two-year period. It discussed the PRC's robust integrated air defense system with extensions in the South China Sea and additional PRC basing access in Cambodia. Numerically, the PRC has the largest Navy in the world with over 370 ships and submarines, including three aircraft carriers. The range and lethality of our near-peer competitors pushes AMC to operate in contested environments where our aircraft and crews lack battlespace awareness and are challenged to project and sustain the Joint Force.

The Committee may see investments such as the replacement of antiquated radios or unsecure datalinks for pilot-to-controller communications and think those constitute adequate connectivity. While these investments are critical to maintaining airspace access and the viability of the current fleet, they are not investments that support the combat mission connectivity required to survive and operate in the contested environment. There is a difference between the connectivity requirements of the tactical environment and those required by commercial aviation. Providing the latter will not be sufficient for survivability in combat.

AMC aircraft need mission systems on board to integrate, interpret and present the data to the decision makers at the edge in a relevant way to empower those decision makers if, and when disconnected. Establishing a baseline for connectivity across the RGM fleet, the Global Air

Mobility Support System (GAMSS) of enroute nodes, and contingency response forces will boost overall mission success. Ensuring RGM platforms have access to necessary information on the network will result in better integration with the Joint and coalition forces and enable adaptability in conflict.

AMC has the connectivity potential and the global presence to help the Joint Force sense, make sense, and seize the initiative faster than adversaries. At a fundamental level, the ability of AMC platforms to bolster and expand tactical data links is an untapped capability. Continued advocacy for C2 capabilities within the RGM portfolio is integral in ensuring AMC's network will remain active and integrated—enabling success for of the Joint Team.

In addition, the Mobility Air Forces' ability to support combat in Anti-Access, Area Denial environments will increase by balancing the proper prioritization of desired projects and continuous high tempo operations. AMC requires enhanced capabilities within the USINDOPACOM AOR and organic to AMC, to enhance the survivability and prevent the loss of mission generation in a future crisis.

Connectivity is the Solution

C2 needs to be the focus for improvement. Leaders cannot rely on the assumption that C2 of logistics will provide unity of effort. As the mainstay of force projection, the Joint Force assumes AMC will always be there and deliver. To date, AMC always responded to the call. Focusing on developing AMC's connectivity enables the Joint Force to act at tempo and scale, improving Joint Force survivability, meaningful maneuver, and lethality. The distances at which international operations take place, coupled with multiple areas of responsibility, continues to pose challenges in the ability for AMC and the 618th Air Operations Center (AOC) to provide C2 for deployed forces. The transition from deployment to employment creates a challenging

environment to conduct operations and C2. The quality and quantity of our connectivity equipment and ability to project and sustain the Joint Force can be the difference of life or death for our aircrews in a tactical environment.

Warfighting today and in the future demands an agile, resilient Mobility Air Force that can project, connect, and sustain forces over great distances. To effectively support the Joint Force in the future fight, the MAF must command, control, and communicate globally, navigate accurately in degraded environments, conduct logistics under attack, and operate at the highest tempo required to win. We must work to rapidly close the critical capability gaps to ensure RGM mission effectiveness in airlift, air refueling, aeromedical evacuation, air mobility support, and global C2 while projecting and connecting the Joint Force.

I have directed my staff to start incrementally implementing secure, resilient line of sight (LOS) and beyond line of sight (BLOS) airborne connectivity, compatible with the future of Joint All-Domain Command and Control and the USAF-defined Advanced Battle Management System (ABMS) to integrate with Joint air and ground nodes. Data streams need to be integrated using open architecture, federated systems on mobility air and ground assets and distilled into coherent interfaces for MAF Airmen to receive real-time C2, logistics, and threat information. Access to this information enables MAF Airmen to survive and operate in contested environments, and significantly enhances their capabilities within permissive environments.

In other words, “robust connectivity” means closing thousands of logistics chains so the Joint Force can close thousands of kill chains.

As natural innovators, AMC Airmen are moving mountains to get after this problem the best they can. They are exercising new concepts of operation and new ways of employing. I am incredibly proud of what they have accomplished, but we need to do more.

Across the Total Force, and in conjunction with our allies and partners, we conducted the largest exercise in the history of this command last year, Exercise MOBILITY GUARDIAN 23 (MG23). AMC developed new ways of doing business, better methods of working together, and rediscovered that focusing on the pacing threat leads to many wins at all levels. We charted a new course—a course that will culminate in irreversible momentum and a shift in mindset to ensure the Joint Force has the readiness for both deterrence and decisive victory.

During MG23, AMC tested and validated maximum endurance operations, safely executing extended crew duty days beyond 30 hours, to increase the potential for mass and tempo in future operations. We repositioned Air Mobility Teams from Europe to the Pacific in under 72 hours to support airfield opening, cargo loading, and aircraft servicing operations. Additionally, we integrated AMC and PACAF C-130 assets into direct support missions for PACAF fighter units to evaluate Agile Combat Employment capabilities. We also successfully conducted a palletized effects test from a C-17, using an air-drop pallet to launch standoff weapons, further proving the versatility and capability of the MAF. These were notable accomplishments; offset by the many challenges we experienced in providing C2 for a fleet in a dynamic environment and closing logistical chains in a saturated threat environment.

Lessons Learned

Through Operation ALLIES REFUGE, Exercise MG23, and again during the Israel crisis, we learned that the fast pace of information exchange demanded in conflict drives users away from systems that lack the agility to reflect real-time changes or are not accessible to all relevant users during the course of an operation. Such systems may provide robust information sharing and solid analytic capability in peacetime, but they lack the speed demanded in combat employment. Our leaders and operators need data sharing methods within the Joint Force that

can combat our competitor's ability to intercept, spoof, or disrupt unsecure and unstructured data systems. We must find new ways to make use of the speed of unstructured data with controlled risk while also working to achieve connectivity in more structured environments within our operations and with key stakeholders, including commercial, joint, and coalition partners.

MG23 highlighted the challenges we will experience while operating legacy equipment across vast distances without the necessary connectivity tools. To operate at the speed and tempo to win, we are working to ensure our teams have access to critical real-time data to sense and seize opportunities.

Drawing from our experiences during MG23, and from a campaign of experimentation, modeling, and simulation, the MAF team has created a technical-level Government Reference Architecture describing in detail what functions and features these systems should include. In addition, USTRANSCOM under the leadership of General Van Ovost, who recognizes the same need for connectivity, sponsored and summitted a Joint Emergent Operational Need to the Joint Staff.

Also, as noted from MG23, this is not just an aircraft problem. In order to properly execute Command Relations as mobility forces transition to operations within the theater, to include managing direct support of assets, robust connectivity is a crucial element to ensuring seamless integration between USTRANSCOM, the 618th AOC, PACAF Air Mobility Division, and individual force elements. The speed of today's operations requires robust and reliable connectivity for commanders to operate and adapt as required.

Perspective

I am approaching the final months of my command and have reached the end of my 34-year Air Force career. It is my firm and unchallenged belief that our Mobility Air Forces are the most

relied upon force in the history of warfare, requiring the most connectivity. It is an operational fact that our Mobility Air Forces, by their nature, are a stand-in force. In order to deploy, sustain, and maneuver the Joint Force, we must operate inside the enemy's weapons engagement zone. Robust connectivity is crucial for our air mobility assets, both our aircraft and ground support systems, to enhance our ability to tie into current Air Force and Joint battle networks, ultimately increasing their awareness to blue force movements and red force threats.

The MAF needs immediate and significant commitment. Battlespace awareness is a critical necessity for our air mobility fleet to survive against a peer adversary and effectively execute their mission. With connectivity, our air mobility enterprise will create synergistic effects for the Joint Team, allowing them to sense, make sense, and maneuver at a tempo necessary to prevail.

The overall risk to mission is palpable. History proves our Nation relies on Air Mobility to demonstrate will and readiness. Continued absence of the right type and quantity for MAF connectivity limits our ability to move forward. In conflict in a vast AOR, the mobility fleet will be a relied upon force, likely completing long sorties to move the Joint Force at relevant velocity and mass. Those precious first moments of conflict are sure to be dynamic, and it is critical that our assets have the connectivity—and therefore the awareness—to put our Joint Force in a position of advantage.

Connectivity modernization cannot wait. RGM must meet the Joint Force's requirements for meaningful maneuver. We are striving to improve connectivity in the MAF fleet by maximizing availability of existing but limited connectivity on our aircraft through subscription service augmentation and new in-vehicle equipment.

Conclusion

The ultimate goal is to establish the MAF at 100% of desired connectivity. We are running out of time and the need to act is even more urgent if we are going to be prepared when the Nation calls. My team has prepared plans to do everything we can to catch up. But the longer we wait the more risk the Nation incurs and the more expensive it will be to overcome that risk.

We plan to equip fielded forces, aircraft, and fixed facilities with the right tools to gain shared awareness and maintain decision advantage in conflict. In creating this plan, my team has been in lockstep with Headquarters Air Force's Command, Control, Communications, and Battle Management team and key stakeholders across the DoD. We are ready to execute.

It is an honor and a privilege to be with you today. In my 34 years in the Air Force, I can tell you one thing—Airmen are the Magic. Through tenacity, grit, and determination, Airmen routinely fill the gap between what they have and what they wish they had. Because of our Airmen, we are going to win. Our job is to make a fight unfair, and to give that Airman every tool and every advantage necessary to be successful.