

**DEPARTMENT OF THE AIR FORCE  
PRESENTATION TO THE COMMITTEE  
ON  
ARMED SERVICES  
UNITED STATES CONGRESS**

**SUBJECT: STATE OF THE MILITARY**

**STATEMENT OF: GENERAL STEPHEN W. WILSON  
VICE CHIEF OF STAFF OF THE AIR FORCE**

**FEBRUARY 7, 2017**

**NOT FOR PUBLICATION UNTIL RELEASED  
BY THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON READINESS  
AND MANAGEMENT SUPPORT  
UNITED STATES SENATE**

## **INTRODUCTION**

Since our establishment 70 years ago, the United States Air Force has secured peace throughout the full spectrum of hostilities with a decisive warfighting advantage in, through, and from air, space, and cyberspace. Without pause, we deliver global combat power by deterring and defeating our nation's enemies, while supporting joint and coalition forces at the beginning, the middle, and end of every operation. Though the intrinsic nature of warfare remains unchanged, the character of war—and the approach joint forces must take to address new and changing threats—must continually evolve.

As the nation plans to counter the national security challenges posed by Russia, China, Iran, North Korea, and Violent Extremist Organizations, controlling and exploiting air, space, and cyberspace remains foundational to joint and coalition success. Today's 660,000 active duty, guard, reserve, and civilian Airmen meet these challenges by deterring threats to the U.S., assuring our allies, and defeating our adversaries 24/7/365. We provide unwavering homeland defense and operate a robust, reliable, flexible, and survivable nuclear enterprise, as the bedrock of our national security.

This steadfast watch, however, comes at a price. Conducting continuous, worldwide combat operations since 1991 has taken a toll on our Airmen, equipment, and infrastructure. Sustained global commitments and funding reductions have eroded our Air Force to the point where we have become one of the smallest, oldest-equipped, and least ready forces across the full-spectrum of operations, in our service history. The uncertainty and reduction in military funding resulting from the Budget

Control Act of 2011 (BCA) further degraded our readiness. Such fiscal uncertainty critically challenges our ability to sustain warfighting capacity, improve readiness, modernize our force, and invest in research and development to maintain our advantages over near-peer competitors.

While the Bipartisan Budget Act (BBA) of 2015 provided some relief to improve readiness and continue modernization efforts, your Air Force needs continued Congressional support to ensure we strengthen America's military to win today's fight, while maintaining the Air Force our nation needs to meet tomorrow's challenges.

### **ALWAYS THERE**

Your Air Force has been globally engaged for the last 26 years of combat operations. We relentlessly provide **Global Vigilance, Global Reach, and Global Power** for the nation...we're always in demand...and we're always there. Though our end strength has decreased by 38% since 1991, we have experienced significant growth across several mission areas.

Our Airmen provide 24/7 **Global Vigilance** in real-time by integrating multi-domain platforms and sensors across our global intelligence and command and control networks to find, fix, and eventually finish a wide range of hostile targets simultaneously across the globe. Without fail, the Air Force flies 60 combat lines of persistent attack remotely piloted aircraft (RPA) per day to support combatant commander requirements. Through our Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance (ISR) capabilities, we provided warfighters over 6,000 intelligence products per day used to identify enemy targets and trigger 70% of Special Operations Forces assaults on terrorists.

Additionally, the Air Force conducted 4,000 cyber missions against more than 100,000 targets, disrupting adversaries and enabling over 200 High Value Individual kill/capture missions. In securing our networks and digital infrastructure, 2016 saw Air Force cyber operators block more than 1.3 billion malicious connections – an average of more than 40 per second. Meanwhile, our space operators provide relentless and reliable interconnectedness for our forces, global positional awareness, global missile warning, and battlefield situational awareness.

Nearly every three minutes a mobility aircraft departs on a mission, providing **Global Reach** and access, projecting power through a network of airfields in 23 countries and 77 locations, while providing critical aerial refueling capability. In 2016, our aeromedical professionals evacuated over 5,700 patients and provided emergency medical care resulting in a 98% survival rate. Your Air Force provides unrelenting ability to maneuver, sustain, and recover personnel and assets...at home, abroad, and with our allies and partners.

With American fighters, bombers, RPAs, and Intercontinental Ballistic Missiles (ICBMs), the Air Force provides conventional and nuclear **Global Power** that can strike an enemy on short notice anywhere in the world. In Iraq and Syria, the Air Force has led 65% of the more than 17,000 coalition airstrikes since 2014, to delivering decisive firepower in partnership with joint, special operations, and coalition ground forces to defeat and degrade ISIS and regain critical territory. All while our Airmen continue to provide two legs of the nuclear triad, resource 75% of the Nuclear Command, Control, and Communications framework, deter our adversaries, and connect the President to strategic options.

Stitched together, the fabric of our Air Force weaves multi-domain effects and provides U.S. service men and women the strongest blanket of protection and the ability to power project American's full range of combat capabilities. Make no mistake, your Air Force is always there.

## **STATE OF THE AIR FORCE**

However, being "always there" comes at a cost to our Airmen, equipment, and infrastructure, and we are now able to keep only half of our force at an acceptable level of readiness for full-spectrum combat. Sustained global commitments and recent funding cuts eroded Air Force readiness, capacity, and capability for a full-spectrum fight against a near-peer adversary. Although America's Air Force remains the finest in the world, it is the smallest it has ever been. In 2013, the impacts of sequestration abruptly delayed modernization and reduced both readiness and the size of the Total Force. **We remain America's first and most agile responder to crisis and conflict, underwriting many joint operations...however, the demand for your Air Force exceeds the supply.**

The combination of decreased funding and increased military operations required the Air Force to make tradeoffs that adversely affected readiness. Since 1991, the Air Force also reduced its aircraft inventory from 8,600 to 5,500 aircraft, and today the average aircraft is 27 years old. In fact, 54% of our aircraft major weapons systems now qualify for antique vehicle license plates in the state of Virginia. The Air Force of 1991 possessed 134 fighter squadrons across the active duty, Air National Guard, and Air Force Reserve. As a result of budget reductions, our force has gradually declined to a total of 55 fighter squadrons. At the same time, we are

stressed by challenges complicated by Russia's annexing of Crimea, Chinese island-building in the South China Seas, the rapid rise of ISIL, and ongoing operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. With your help, we will build the force up to about 321,000 Airmen in 2017, but even at that size we will still be stretched to meet global mission requirements.

We also face daunting challenges in balancing readiness and modernization in our nuclear, space, and cyber mission areas. Each leg of our nuclear triad requires modernization and our responsibility to complete the near-term sustainment efforts required to sustain our current ICBM and bomber fleets, as well as modernize these two legs of the triad and our nuclear command and control systems require significant national investment through the out years.

At the same time, we are posturing our forces to fight and win a war should it extend into space, and Air Force space capabilities have never been more critical to our national ability to project power globally. The national security space enterprise, which evolved in an uncontested environment, is not resilient enough to deliver joint warfighting effects in and through today's contested space domain. As the nation's lead service for space, Airmen perform multiple space missions ranging from position, navigation, and timing and space situational awareness, to missile warning, and satellite communications.

Lastly, our cyberspace capabilities are essential to every Airman, platform, and mission. All of our weapons systems are under attack through the cyberspace domain. Accordingly, we are posturing ourselves to fight and win in today's contested cyber environment with a disciplined, integrated approach to cybersecurity and cyber

resiliency. We are working to quickly close the cyber-needs gap by leveraging public-private partnerships, especially with small businesses, to deliver the most cutting edge cyber capabilities in the digital age with agility and speed. We are harvesting cyber talent across our nation to grow our world-class cyber workforce which requires tapping into businesses and talent not necessarily recognized as part of the Defense Industry.

### **BALANCING RISK**

America's Airmen can fight and win today, and we are making sure that our active duty, guard, and reserve Airmen closest to the fight remain our most ready forces. However, our combat forces are heavily committed in our nation's current fights in the Middle East and Africa, limiting our preparation to deter and defeat skilled, near-peer competitors. We have balanced risk across the force to address our most critical shortfalls, focusing on sustaining end-strength while investing in readiness, infrastructure, nuclear deterrence operations, space, and combat air forces. Despite these efforts, current budget levels require the Air Force to continue making difficult tradeoffs between force structure, readiness, and modernization.

Budget instability and decreased funding levels, coupled with 26 years of continuous combat operations and manpower reductions, has driven Air Force readiness to historically low levels. Currently, less than fifty percent of the Air Force's combat forces are sufficiently ready for a highly-contested fight against peer adversaries—creating unacceptable risk for our Airmen, our joint partners, and our nation. Our readiness levels are currently handicapped in five key readiness elements: a shortage of trained and experienced Airmen in critical positions; capped weapon system sustainment funding; reliance on too few and obsolete training facilities and systems; insufficient flight

hours for full-spectrum training (due to operational demands); and a war-time operational tempo supported by a force sized for a peacetime environment. We must restore full-spectrum readiness to continue to provide unrelenting Airpower for the joint force.

To ensure we remain ready to defeat violent extremism as well as sophisticated, advanced threats and near-peer adversaries, we must grow the force. The active duty force will grow to 321,000 in FY17, as authorized by the FY17 National Defense Authorization Act. This includes growth across all components as well as our officer, enlisted, and civilian workforces.

Furthermore, we are targeting our efforts to address shortfalls in critical career fields to help improve readiness. We are stabilizing and bolstering our remotely piloted aircraft (RPA) community to meet combatant commander requirements. We are increasing pilot training capacity and pilot absorption, strengthening our squadrons with a host of initiatives, and adjusting our incentive pay structure to help address our growing pilot shortage.

The most acute shortage is in our fighter pilot community. We expect fighter pilot retention to suffer, as it has over the last 4 years. We ended FY16 at 723 *fighter* pilots below requirement and 1,555 *total* pilots short across all mission areas. Pilot training and retention are priorities. The increased end-strength provided in the FY17 NDAA will allow us to maximize the training pipeline and fill out under-manned units, which are vital to our recovery. We are grateful for your support to increase the pilot bonus, and we will continue to ensure our retention programs are appropriately sized and utilized.

In the aircraft maintenance field, we are short approximately 3,400 aircraft



maintainers at the close of 2016. Because of this shortage, we cannot generate the training sorties needed for our aircrews. Our maintainers must keep our existing aircraft flying at home and in combat, while simultaneously fielding new platforms with highly complicated and technological systems.

We are rapidly developing the B-21 Raider long-range strike bomber and modernizing the B-52 and B-2 bombers for strategic delivery of advanced munitions. We are bedding down our advanced F-35 multi-role fighter and enhancing our air refueling capability by entering initial production of the KC-46 Pegasus tanker. We are also modernizing the land-based nuclear leg with the Ground Based Strategic Deterrent (GBSD).

We transformed our space training and we are developing tactics and enhancing our space situational awareness and command and control systems. We are building a more resilient space architecture and strengthening our partnerships to protect, defend and operate critical national security space systems to outpace adversaries and counter any intention to deny us the use of space.

We are pivoting our communications and cyber efforts from a communications and information technology-centric force, to a cyberspace operations force of full warfighting partners who protect the mission and carry the fight to the enemy through integrated cyberspace operations. We are fortifying combat air forces by retaining, and beginning to modernize our fighter squadrons, while developing and buying required munitions for both high-end and low-end conflicts of the future.

## **LOOKING FORWARD**

Despite these efforts, current budget levels and the threat of sequestration will

force the Air Force to continue making difficult tradeoffs between force structure, readiness, and modernization that will lead to a less ready and less capable Air Force than the joint force requires. Meanwhile, the capability gap is closing between us and our potential adversaries. Our nation must continue to support its investment in its Air Force with specific focus on readiness, manpower, nuclear deterrence operations, space, cyberspace, combat air forces, ISR, and infrastructure.

### **READINESS AND MANPOWER**

To improve readiness and attain manning levels matching our mission requirements, the Air Force will assess what levels of end-strength are needed for our active duty, Guard and Reserve. We will develop plans to address shortfalls in key areas, including critical career fields such as aircraft maintenance, pilots, NC3, intelligence, cyber, and battlefield Airmen. The Air Force will consider end strength increases as it works with the Secretary of Defense to develop the FY18 President's Budget.

As we drew down active duty manpower in recent years, we have relied more heavily on our civilian Airmen's contributions, and they remain critical to readiness. Our civilians make up 26% of our Total Force—of which, 94% are in the field, providing vital mission support through weapons system maintenance, sustainment, engineering, logistics, security, intelligence, and medical functions. Currently, our civilian workforce is 96% manned. At the historical attrition rate, the civilian workforce will shrink to 93% manning level over the next four months.

### **NUCLEAR DETERRENCE OPERATIONS**

We need to maintain our nuclear capabilities and infrastructure that are the

bedrock of our national security. While our nuclear forces remain safe, secure, and effective, we will eventually require significant investment to ensure robust, reliable, flexible, and survivable nuclear readiness and deterrence well into the future.

Today, the nation must preserve our foundational capabilities (GBSD, LRSO, B-21, B61-12, UH-1N recapitalization, and Nuclear Command, Control, and Communications (NC3)) and infrastructure that underpins nuclear deterrence capabilities vital to a credible deterrent against any future threat.

### **SPACE**

We must recapitalize Air Force space systems for resilience, ensuring we can continue to operate in an increasingly contested environment. As we modernize space systems, they must be able to fight in a contested, degraded, and operationally limited environment. Additionally, we need to integrate our ground systems, modernize our space operations centers, and improve training for our space force.

### **CYBERSPACE**

The Air Force is committed to fully exploiting the cyber domain to create effects against our adversaries while simultaneously denying the adversary's advantage against friendly forces. The Air Force will leverage industry best practices, such as cloud computing and network service partnerships, both to make our network more secure and to reallocate critical cyber manpower towards emerging warfighting missions. Further, we must take a comprehensive approach to cybersecurity to protect and defend our weapon systems and data—it is imperative we treat cybersecurity as an intrinsic part of Air Force readiness. These priorities will support Air Force and joint mission assurance—command and control, weapon system cyberspace defense, information dominance, and

integrating offensive cyberspace effects into multi-domain operations.

### **COMBAT AIR FORCES**

To continue to provide unrelenting air superiority and global precision strike, we cannot accept a less than ready force. With current combat readiness falling below 50% and an ever-growing demand signal, our Air Force requires an increase in combat air forces capacity. The more diminished our combat-coded fighter squadrons, the more degraded our ability to posture and project global power for America. At our current fighter procurement rate, it will take 45 years to recapitalize our full fighter force.

We must also continue to procure the F-35 to counter rapidly advancing threat systems. Further, we must have enough munitions to counter current threats, while developing new advanced munitions to counter future threats. Finally, our forces must have access to realistic test and training ranges and investment in computer-aided live, virtual, and constructive (LVC) infrastructure. LVC capability provides opportunities to test and train against the world's most capable threats, reduces costs, and supports full-spectrum readiness.

### **INTELLIGENCE, SURVEILLANCE, AND RECONNAISSANCE (ISR)**

To meet the needs of combatant commanders, the ISR enterprise requires a sufficient number of Airmen to achieve a healthy and sustainable force structure. We must continue to recapitalize our C2ISR platforms, such our E-8C JSTARS aircraft, which provides a unique combination of airborne C2, communications, and high-fidelity moving-target surveillance capability. These capabilities are essential to finding and tracking our adversaries, conducting non-kinetic targeting, and ensuring cyber

mission assurance for Air Force weapon systems.

## **INFRASTRUCTURE**

We project airpower from a network of globally positioned bases, and we must maintain these bases as part of our strategic force posture. However, our infrastructure, particularly our installations in the continental U.S., is in excess of our operational needs. This is an inefficient arrangement with aging and underused facilities consuming funds that should be prioritized for readiness and modernization.

Investments in aging critical infrastructure such as test and training ranges, airfields, facilities, and even basic infrastructure like power and drainage systems, have been repeatedly delayed. The problem has been significantly exacerbated by the funding caps imposed under the BCA. Every year that we delay these repairs affects operations and substantially increases improvement costs. It is time for another round of Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) to allow us to reinvest funds in higher priority areas across the Air Force.

## **CONCLUSION**

Since 1947, the Air Force has relentlessly provided America with credible deterrence and decisive combat power in times of peace, crisis, contingency, and conflict. However, our relative advantage over potential adversaries is shrinking and we must be prepared to win decisively against any adversary. We owe this to our nation, our joint teammates, and our allies. The nation requires full-spectrum ready air, space, and cyber power, now more than ever. America expects it; combatant commanders require it; and with your support, Airmen will deliver it.