

Preserving a National Asset: Air Force Airpower

THE US Air Force is America's indispensable instrument for dealing with a turbulent, threatening, and uncertain future. Air, space, and cyber power offer unmatched range, speed, flexibility, and combat punch worldwide. These attributes have given our nation military options that do not require large force commitments on foreign soil or in contested waters.

The Air Force will continue to provide these capabilities into the foreseeable future. However, that task is becoming more and more difficult. The nation must understand that years of underinvestment, and continuous wartime operations since 1991, have severely taxed this world-class capability and placed its future capability in jeopardy.

The need for change is manifest. Several times during its more than 100-year history (predecessor organizations included), the Air Force has transformed itself to meet demands of a suddenly changed environment. It did so at the end of World War II and, more recently, in transitioning at the end of the Cold War from a force largely in garrison to a rotational force frequently operating from temporary bases throughout the world—while maintaining its strategic nuclear capability. Now, USAF must change again.

The United States Air Force is still the world's strongest and most respected air and space force. However, sequestration has hit the armed services hard. In the latter part of Fiscal 2013 (ending Sept. 30), sequestration will have forced an overall defense cut of \$41 billion. The Air Force share of this was \$10 billion—a huge number. That cut came on top of a nearly \$2 billion war-funding shortfall. For the Air Force, the sudden reduction in funding produced serious deficits in readiness accounts affecting its ability to carry out its assigned missions.

Americans cannot take for granted the Air Force's significant contribution to US military might. Possession of a powerful air and space force is not a birthright. The operational supremacy we have long enjoyed in the air is threatened by the emergence abroad of advanced integrated air defenses, fifth generation fighters, long-range

ballistic and cruise missile forces, cyber weapons, and space systems. The US generally and the Air Force specifically face challenges from heavily armed and unpredictable rogue states, nuclear-weapons states, and transnational terrorist groups.

The Air Force Association (AFA) believes that maintaining the best Air Force in the world is vital to our national interests and security. There is no choice but to carry through on buying the cutting-edge capabilities already

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developed but not yet fielded, including the F-35, Long-Range Strike Bomber (LRS-B), and KC-46. China and Russia are catching up fast. They are gaining greater access to advanced defensive systems and offensive capabilities. They are not standing still, and neither should we.

For Airmen, the common thread in the past decades of action has been the determination to achieve military goals in the most effective, efficient manner possible while exposing US forces to the least extent required to meet the country's goals. In an era of austerity, air and space power is precisely the type of cost-effective capability in which the nation should invest.

AIR FORCE CHALLENGES

The question is how long the nation can count on having this kind of capability. Today, our Air Force faces numerous readiness challenges. Cuts from the Budget Control Act of 2011 coupled with additional across-the-board cuts from sequestration have had a devastating effect on the Air Force. Because of restrictions on where cuts can be made, and the inability of the service to move funds from low to higher priority needs even

where funds are not fenced by statute, a disproportionate impact is felt in readiness and training.

The Air Force is now taking a huge amount of risk in this area. The Air Force's operation and maintenance budget came in \$4.4 billion short because of the sequester. Air Force depots have deferred the induction of more than 100 aircraft and engines for required maintenance, creating backlogs that will take years to work off, even if the money needed is available—and chances are, it will not be.

Sequestration-related cuts are also causing hardship for Air Force civilians, who have been furloughed approximately six days in 2013. Moreover, many of the uniformed men and women who support the Guard and Reserve are dual-status civilians who have been furloughed even though they are the backbone of readiness for Guard and Reserve forces. The sequester will result in a loss of millions of man-hours of labor in 2013 alone. Civilian Airmen are mission critical in many areas, especially in the reserve components at the maintenance depots. Other sequester impacts included:

- Elimination of some 200,000 hours from USAF's flying program—a cut of about 18 percent.

- Termination of some classes at the Weapons School at Nellis AFB, Nev., and cancellation of Red Flag, the premier US and international airpower training exercise series, for the remainder of the year, along with several other international exercises.

Reduced flying hours, lost exercises, and the related curtailment of flying operations is causing severe, rapid, and long-term combat readiness degradation. Estimates are that it will take between six and 12 months to bring curtailed units to mission ready status. We have been down this path before, and we have paid the price in terms of reduced readiness, increased accident rates, and the unnecessary loss of lives.

The Air Force Association believes that Congress must end sequestration and strengthen USAF air, space, and cyber forces by passing a budget from which Air Force planners can invest

adequate funds in training to avoid increasing mission risk.

One unnecessary drain on resources is the excess infrastructure the Air Force is directed to maintain; as the Air Force shrinks in manpower and forces, the number of bases it operates on must also shrink. The Air Force submitted, as part of its budget submission, a request for a Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) Commission. According to a 2004 study, there was at the time, 24 percent excess infrastructure within the Air Force. If the Air Force budget is to continue to get smaller, the Air Force must be given the flexibility to spend its scarce resources where it will do the most good. Modernization cannot be sacrificed, especially at the cost of maintaining unneeded infrastructure.

AFA supports a BRAC Commission to reduce unnecessary infrastructure and help pay for needed modernization.

INDUSTRIAL BASE CRISIS

The nation requires a healthy and thriving private aerospace industry. Today's aerospace industrial base is a major national asset. It not only produces weapons and other systems to support a superpower's military needs but also creates an annual trade surplus of some \$53 billion and creates hundreds of thousands of jobs in the United States.

Even so, the defense industry is no longer the great "Arsenal of Democracy" that churned out vast quantities of aircraft, tanks, warships, guns, and other materiel in the past. As a result of America's massive post-Cold War military drawdown, the defense industry has contracted and consolidated. Today, the US has fewer than 10 major aerospace companies (down from more than 50) that are capable of competing for large programs.

Defense industry jobs, skills, and capabilities once lost can only be recovered with a huge outlay of money when a modest ongoing investment could keep them thriving. The US is becoming increasingly dependent on other countries for all sorts of parts and capabilities. Foreign competitors are starting to edge out US companies for some US contracts because they have more robust capabilities, better technology, and lower prices.

The near-term future of our military industry base is grim. The US cannot afford defense cuts that result in irreversible damage to our industrial base.

AFA urges the Administration and Congress to work together to establish a strategic plan to identify the most vital elements of a robust defense industrial base and the steps, to include funding, needed to maintain its strength.

TOTAL FORCE: MORE IMPORTANT THAN EVER

Looking ahead, it has never been more important for the Air Force to maximize the strength of the Total Force. Active, Guard, and Reserve components are increasingly integrated—training, deploying, and conducting the full range of missions together as a Total Force. We must continue to ensure that our Active, Guard, and Reserve mix correctly balances the

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strengths of each component and meets our strategic requirements and fiscal demands.

This commitment extends past the Air Force, for it is important to recognize that successful employment of the joint team demands the global vigilance, global reach, and global power Airmen bring to the fight. The Air Force faces many challenges, but, working as one team, it will continue to provide effective, efficient policy options for our nation's leaders.

The Air Force Association highly values these citizen Airmen members of the Guard and Reserve and acknowledges that, without their sacrifice and contributions, American airpower would be far less capable than it is today. We support all reasonable initiatives that will further capitalize on the caliber of this Total Force team.

EDUCATION IS THE FOUNDATION

AFA continues to support a comprehensive national strategy for strengthening science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) education in the United States. AFA's National Youth Cyber Defense Competition—CyberPatriot—is the most ambitious of its kind in the nation, attracting young people to STEM through an exciting competition. More than 1,200 teams of high school students in all 50 states, DOD Dependent Schools in Europe and the Pacific, and students from Canada registered

for last year's competition, learning valuable cyber security skills and being drawn to a meaningful STEM activity. At the request of educators nationwide, AFA is expanding its CyberPatriot program to include middle school students for the first time. We believe reaching students sooner will allow us to shape their academic and career paths sooner, and it will allow us in particular to draw females and other underrepresented populations to STEM more successfully.

AFA supports the promotion of good citizenship and community development through strong support of Air Force Reserve Officers' Training Corps (AFROTC), Junior ROTC, and Civil Air Patrol (CAP). These groups foster citizenship development and service to our nation and also provide valuable aerospace education and training to young American men and women. We believe strongly that funding for these critical programs—upon which a strong future for our nation is predicated—must be sustained.

We encourage the creation of public/private partnerships that support and sustain such programs, which are needed to educate, excite, and motivate students to pursue studies and careers in the military, cyber world, and other STEM disciplines.

Education is a key element of AFA's mission. We urge government, industry, and AFA's peer organizations to increase this focus on the future need for STEM professionals.

Americans have always believed its armed forces will be capable of defeating adversaries across all domains—air, space, cyber, sea, and land. Further, Americans expect its Air Force to be the best in the world. AFA firmly believes the nation must support the needs of our Airmen and their families and provide the best equipment possible—in sufficient quality and numbers and at the time needed—to protect our nation.

The Air Force Association will continue to unapologetically promote a dominant United States Air Force and a strong national defense, to demand respect for Airmen and for our Air Force heritage, and to help in any way possible to make sure we provide for the common defense. That is our pledge.

This editorial is extracted from the Air Force Association's full 2014 Statement of Policy, which is available in its entirety at <http://www.afa.org/AFA/Publications/StatementofPolicyTopIssues>.