



17 September AFA Speech
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General Mike Hostage
AS PREPARED FOR DELIVERY

I'm privileged to serve with more than 140 thousand active duty, civilian, Air National Guard and Air Force Reserve Airmen who provide dominant combat airpower around the world, ensuring our Nation's security. They are our greatest treasure – extraordinarily innovative and skilled – without question they are the source of our combat capability, providing effective airpower anytime, anywhere, in support of our national security strategy.

As leaders, we have formed with them and their families a sacred trust – to do all that we can to ensure they are resourced, equipped and trained to do what our Nation asks of them.

As we look toward the Combat Air Forces in the 2020s, we must commit ourselves to three things that are foundational to our Airmen's ability to deliver dominant combat airpower when and where our Nation demands it.

First, we must acknowledge the critical role Combat Air Forces, the CAF, will continue to play in advancing our Nation's interests. The impacts of the current

fiscal calamity on CAF modernization will not obviate the expectation that we, when called upon, must deliver dominant combat forces to the Combatant Commander.

Second, the CAF needs to be restructured following more than a decade of shaping to support the counterinsurgency wars of Afghanistan and Iraq. It is my view that the Air Force's Global Power mission, conducted principally by the CAF, is challenged today by more risk than either Global Reach or Global Vigilance.

Third, ACC's ability to provide relevant combat forces to the Combatant Commander will, in the coming decades, hinge on recapitalizing to a robust fifth generation fleet. Our aging CAF legacy fighters, despite constant capability improvements, will eventually cease to be a relevant combat force.

Before I address each of those three in more detail, I want to go back to our Airmen...as the Chief of Staff highlighted earlier today, they are the ultimate source of our combat capability. The women and men of Air Combat Command possess the knowledge, creativity, and drive to overcome highly complex and dynamic challenges whenever and wherever the Nation asks. They are informed by a rich history, beneficiaries of a unique air-mindedness, highly adaptive to new concepts,

and eagerly receptive to the possibilities inherent in science, technology, and human ingenuity. CAF Airmen can synthesize seemingly disparate elements in creative ways, providing innovative solutions for the Combatant Commander. They are the most sophisticated and precious resource we possess.

Our imperative in ACC is to maintain an environment of mutual respect and trust for our Airmen— that imperative is critical to providing effective combat forces and foundational to the Command’s mission.

In addition, we also owe our Airmen the proper equipment, training, and skills required to conduct the missions our Nation calls upon them to do. Sadly, sequestration continues to impact our Airmen – uniformed and civilian – stymieing the Command’s ability to adequately train and equip them. Sequestration impacts morale, erodes combat readiness, and ultimately limits options for Combatant Commanders.

If sequestration persists, our Airmen will be held back in training to conduct the very missions they joined the AF to perform, potentially creating an element of disillusionment within our Force—again the most precious resource we have. Our

imperative, however will remain, to provide mission-ready forces to Combatant Commanders, accepting that some of our units may not be immediately available, requiring some amount of time to get fully trained for combat. To send them forward anything less than fully combat ready would be morally corrupt. Put simply, to deal with the sequester, our training focus will be placed on those Airmen filling our most critical mission sets, regrettably leaving many others only partially prepared.

It is our moral imperative to ensure forces that deploy are fully ready, not partially ready. Sending Airmen into combat without the training they need, without the equipment, parts and capabilities they need to be fully effective is unconscionable – our Nation and our Airmen deserve better than that.

Make no mistake; the role of the CAF over the coming decades will be critical, likely more critical than ever before. We must always be ready to provide dominant combat airpower for America, despite our current fiscal constraints. In my judgment, the US national debt, and its associated budget repercussions, remain the most significant threat to our national security. More than two decades of sustained global engagement and combat operations have imposed tremendous stress on our

service members and equipment. At the same time, the economic means we rely upon to underwrite our global security posture are becoming increasingly constrained and it seems will remain so for the foreseeable future. Therefore, the context in which past decisions were made has changed, and we are now being forced to make decisions impacting long-term force structure based upon short-term fiscal constraints.

ACC's ability to provide dominant combat airpower underpins our Nation's ability to pursue and protect its vital interests, and without it, all other military options and instruments of power become less credible. The CAF's global power capabilities are critical to holding targets at risk anywhere on the planet and ensuring freedom of action for Joint and Coalition forces in contested environments. Specifically, dominant air superiority has been enjoyed by the US and its Allies since the middle of the last century. It has come to be expected that our forces don't worry when they hear the sound of jet noise overhead...they know it is ours. That luxury does not come for free and will not persist unless we, the United States Air Force, continue to make it so.

The Nation can no longer afford to take such capabilities for granted as has been done for the past two decades. Our Nation expects the CAF to prevent, deter, and defend against aggression aimed at America and its allies, and when called upon, to help secure victory regardless of the type of conflict. This expectation will continue to expand as our Nation transitions out of Afghanistan and rebalances its focus to the Pacific.

Despite the clear need for dominant airpower, the current and potentially the future fiscal environments are forcing the CAF to become smaller, further exacerbating our ability to provide operationally effective combat power. Force structure decisions being made today will impact tremendously the CAF's future relevancy, measured explicitly by its ability to influence the decision-making calculus of potential adversaries. By consequence, if our future force must be smaller, then it must be vastly more capable. The next generation of Airmen must have the next generation of combat equipment to defend our Nation and advance its interests.

Although we can't predict with certainty the time, location, or circumstance in which US policy-makers will call for the use of military power, we must be prepared to respond across the spectrum of conflict, meeting the full range of security

challenges. Today, the Air Force is globally engaged...with the world-wide demand for ACC's distinctive capabilities remaining very high, despite the withdrawal from Iraq and pending withdrawal from Afghanistan. Every indication I see tells me that the high operations tempo of the past two decades will remain the norm as we move into the post-OEF world.

The constant demand for our distinct capabilities includes our low supply/high demand combat rescue assets. The mantra of our rescue forces, "So that others may live", is well known and respected around the world. Air Force Rescue has been operating with deploy-to-dwell ratios that are at or near unsustainable levels for an extended period of time. While the Airmen within these career fields have performed their missions magnificently, remaining at these operational tempos has caused our fleets to age at accelerated rates, posing significant challenges to the long term viability of our critical rescue fleet. Again one of the things that makes our Air Force special is the sure knowledge that we will not leave an Airman behind. It is part of what makes us great and what allows our forces to venture into the unknowns of combat. Therefore, we have another moral imperative to retain sufficient numbers of well-equipped combat rescue forces in the future, despite any fiscal challenges.

From potential high-end major combat operations against near-peer adversaries to low-end low-intensity engagements, ACC must be ready to leverage the unique characteristics of airpower – speed, range, precision, flexibility, persistence, and lethality. These characteristics offer unparalleled combat effects, able to be appropriately scaled and tailored to meet the needs of Combatant Commanders around the world.

In March 2011, ACC demonstrated its ability to flex across the full range of military operations. During that month, B-1s, with the help of the Air Force Targeting Center, demonstrated the reach of Global Power by successfully attacking targets in Libya from Ellsworth AFB, SD in support of NATO Operations, while remaining committed to COIN operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. Our Airmen have performed magnificently over the past decade, but now we must look to the future and prepare our Airmen to face new and different challenges.

Before marching bravely into our future, it is wise to be mindful of our past, noting, in particular, how the CAF evolved in the face of several challenges over the past 60 years. During the final phases of WWII, US Army Air Forces dominated the

skies against the German Luftwaffe and the Imperial Japanese Army Air Service. Superior aircraft like the P-47 Thunderbolt, P-51 Mustang, B-17 Flying Fortress, and B-29 Superfortress delivered air superiority and a crushing bombing campaign in support of Allied Forces. Yet as the War ended, the newly formed Air Force, challenged by a new, formidable Cold War adversary, transitioned away from prop-driven aircraft and began to restructure for the jet era. The timing of this transition proved crucial during the Korean War as the Air Force required a jet able to match the higher- and faster-flying, Russian MiG-15. The F-86 Sabre, and our superiorly trained pilots, proved to be an effective counter to the MiG-15, amassing a kill-to-loss ratio of nearly 2 to 1.

Then, again following many arduous lessons from the Vietnam War, Tactical Air Command wrestled with the grueling task of restructuring its combat forces for the future. While we aggressively engaged and shaped the continued acquisition and modernization of third generation fighters, to include that period's F-4s, F-105s, and F-111s, we determined the weapons and performance characteristics associated with these platforms would not assure us the degree of dominance our Nation would demand in future decades. As a result, we conceived the next generation of fighters, the fourth generation – the F-15, F-16, and A-10.

Many of the decisions to pursue these aircraft were made in the waning light of a costly war in Vietnam and during equally challenging fiscal times at home. Despite these challenges, we prioritized the future of tactical dominance; most importantly, the future of air superiority. The results have been overwhelming – the US and its Allies amassing a 104 to 0 kill-to-loss ratio for the F-15C, our preeminent air-to-air fighter over the 70s, 80s, and 90s. It is this degree of dominance that has allowed us to maintain air superiority above friendly forces for 60 years. While it is satisfying to trumpet this accomplishment, it is more important to recognize that past accomplishments provide no future guarantees.

Our fourth generation fleet, built to defeat an imposing Soviet force, displayed its utter dominance during Operation Desert Storm, providing decisive air power against Iraqi air and ground forces. This performance validated the hard decisions made in the 60s and 70s by displaying to the world the potential speed and lethality of synchronized combat air power. While truly an historic episode in air power history, there are those who question the need to retool the CAF, citing the success of Desert Storm. I would remind us all that Desert Storm occurred 22 years ago—a lifetime in the realm of weapon system innovation and advancements. The formula

for strategic irrelevance begins with expecting future security while basking in past success.

Today we are at a crossroad, similar to that faced by our leaders more than 50 years ago. Our fourth-generation aircraft have far surpassed their original design service lives and now face underfunded or cancelled modernization efforts. In the next 5 years, our pilots flying fourth-generation aircraft will be faced with the daunting challenge of countering very advanced enemy systems with fighters and bombers that will not have kept pace with the rapidly evolving operational threat environment.

Over the past decade we intentionally modified our CAF aircraft to meet the demands of the protracted counterinsurgency fights in Iraq and Afghanistan. The need for persistent ISR and responsive close air support proved to be essential elements of Operations Enduring Freedom, Iraqi Freedom, and New Dawn. The constant overwatch and tactical support provided by CAF air power to our brave troops on the ground have galvanized their trust and strengthened our joint effectiveness. A decade from now, the CAF's ability to maintain this trust will

require additional modernization for the F-22 and recapitalization of our legacy aircraft with a full fleet of F-35s.

After more than a decade of focused CAS and ISR overwatch in Iraq and Afghanistan, it is time we allay the high-end mission risk being assumed by the CAF. The Nation's ability to project Global Power is predicated by the relevancy of its combat air power. A relevant CAF, ready to operate in highly contested environments, must have an adequate number of technologically advanced aircraft and operators trained to execute these high-end missions.

Today, we again stand at a critical juncture. Our 5th generation fleet, particularly a full fleet of F-35s, will provide the precise retooling required by the CAF. By 2023, a modernized force of F-22s operating in concert with a robust fleet of F-35s will mitigate the risk currently imposed on the CAF, ensure the trust built with our joint partners, and, more importantly, afford our nation the ability to project relevant combat air power. Our need to restructure does not eschew the significance of our contributions in the mission areas of ISR and CAS developed in Afghanistan and Iraq. Rather, it acknowledges the historical parallels between where we are today, with the periods following World War II and Vietnam. Now, as then, it is time for us to

restructure...to prioritize programs that allow the CAF to execute full-spectrum operations in highly contested environments. Our Nation's security demands the CAF maintain these higher-end capabilities and skill sets.

The total air dominance we've enjoyed over the past decade in Iraq and Afghanistan existed in part because of an unchallenged net-enabled battlespace. We cannot assume this in the future. In fact, our potential adversaries have invested significant capital and innovation towards countering our air dominance. In the coming decade, both new hardware and training will be required to counter symmetric and asymmetric threats to our forces. To ensure continued air dominance, ACC has embarked upon a readiness project designed to ensure our Airmen can operate in an advanced threat environment where all elements of the domain are contested.

Readiness Project-2 is a program under which we are changing the paradigm of how our force trains. The certainty of our communication links, our pervasive datalinks, our far-seeing radars, and incredibly accurate GPS systems have bred generations of aviators who know little of the old-school TTPs of chattermark, no-radar procedures, and counter-radar jamming. As we exercised our incredible

capabilities since the onset of Desert Storm, our adversaries have taken careful note and have been investing in asymmetric ways to deny us these systems. The training plan called Readiness Program-2 ensures that our Airmen practice routinely, how to deal with the momentary or prolonged interruption of any or all of these unique capabilities. Our adversaries should know that such asymmetric attacks will not stop us; they will only make us mad. We will not be stopped, and will continue to bring lethal combat power.

When I served as the CFACC at Air Forces Central Command, I saw firsthand the extraordinary impact of our ISR and mobility Airmen. I flew with MC-12 crews and supported our ground partners with vital real-time intelligence; I also flew with C-130 and C-17 crews who airdropped food, fuel and ammunition resupplies with exceptional precision to forward operating bases in Afghanistan. Those Airmen, their skills and their unique capabilities are unmatched. However, we can't afford to be lulled into a sense of complacency in which we believe those great Airmen will have the same freedom of movement in the contested environments we anticipate in the future – that would be irresponsible.

As we move toward 2020 and beyond, we anticipate our potential adversaries' capabilities to continue to grow and concentrate on achieving an asymmetric advantage— which is why we need to focus the CAF on those higher-end skill sets to win in contested environments. We've grown accustomed to freedom of movement of our ISR and mobility assets. In tomorrow's contested environments, we simply won't have that luxury – those capabilities will require robust air superiority support or they face being neutralized in the earliest stages of a war.

Our 4th generation fighters, as well, do **NOT** have the ability to operate without significant risk in an advanced threat environment. For the United States to operate in environments that are becoming increasingly contested by our adversaries around the globe, in line with the DoD strategic guidance, the Air Force must continue to invest in capabilities critical to our future success, like the F-22 and F-35 – capabilities that will enable other members of our team, like our ISR and mobility Airmen, to project power despite the contested environment. Fiscal constraints will require the CAF to balance force structure with new capabilities and game-changing technologies to ensure lethality and survivability.

When I first took command of ACC, it was my goal to balance modernization and recapitalization in order to ensure the CAF was prepared for the challenges of tomorrow. This balance required me to look at recapitalizing our fleet through the development and purchase of new weapon systems. At the same time, I had to continue modernizing our legacy fleets through upgrades designed to extend service life and enhance combat capabilities. Our current fiscal environment will likely force me to make the hard decision between recapitalization and modernization. If the Department says it can no longer support both, I must pick one or the other...and to me, recapitalization is what makes the most sense. I realize that means accepting risk in the near term, but the alternative is arriving in the middle of the next decade with a now 45-year old fighter fleet and most likely no remaining domestic fighter production.

Our potential adversaries' increasing capabilities will require us to have fifth generation capabilities to enter the battlespace. A modernized fourth generation fleet by itself will be irrelevant against those capabilities. Potential near peer adversaries are using modern technologies to build advanced aircraft, surface-to-air, and air-to-air missiles—all with increased range and enhanced capabilities. As Gen Welsh noted back in mid-July...it's not just our peer or near peer adversaries who

will use these capabilities....over 50 countries around the world fly Chinese or Russian top-end fighters. These developments will degrade our ability to operate most 4th generation CAF assets, so we must rebalance investments to equip our Combat Air Forces to meet the developing threat.

Back in July the Chief said, “The F-35 Lightning II JSF is imperative to the future of the Air Force. Upgrading the existing fleet may save money, but will not make it competitive.” He went on to say, “A 4th generation aircraft meeting a 5th generation aircraft in combat will be more cost-efficient, [but] it will be dead before it ever knows it’s in a fight.” Let me say that again – it will be more cost-efficient, but it will be dead.

5th Generation fighters possess distinct capabilities not found on our current combat platforms. These 5th Generation capabilities dramatically reduce an enemy’s ability to successfully engage our force. The F-22 and F-35 **must and will** underpin the CAF for decades to come. Our 4th generation capabilities have served us well, now it’s time for the 5th generation assets to take the CAF reins.

The F-22's attributes of stealth, supercruise, maneuverability and integrated avionics ensure our ability to project power anywhere on the globe; including in anti-access and area denial environments. Simply put, the F-22 fleet, combined with complimentary capabilities from our joint partners, allows us to "kick down the door" and enable joint operations in the most demanding environments that exist now and in the foreseeable future. The F-22's multi-mission capabilities allow us to seize the initiative, achieve air superiority, attack those who challenge us in the skies and to defeat those who would challenge us from the ground. Despite its pitifully small numbers, the F-22 contributes significantly by protecting the joint force from attack and enabling the joint force to conduct offensive operations.

We remain committed to the continued advancement of F-22 combat capabilities and the long-term success of the F-35 program. Our national defense priorities emphasize Asia/Pacific and the Middle East, while also maintaining our commitments in Europe and with allies and partners around the world. We must continue to deter and defeat aggression of peer and near-peer adversaries in highly-contested environments while continuing to acquire F-35s in sufficient quantities to enable a robust 5th generation fighter force. The programmed purchase of 1,763 F-35s is not a luxury; **it is a national security imperative**. As Clausewitz once said, "In

tactics, as in strategy, superiority of numbers is the most common element in victory.”

Fiscal constraints are driving the CAF to a smaller force, but it must be a more **capable** force with the ability to operate in, and eventually control, denied and degraded environments. This will only happen if we recapitalize our fighter fleet to the full complement of Lightning IIs. This will not be an easy task...we will likely be forced to choose between modernization or recapitalization... unfortunately we are being told we can't afford to do both.

In Air Combat Command we recognize that the fiscal and threat environments are constantly evolving. We also recognize our Airmen are our asymmetric advantage. By understanding the enduring role of the CAF, the historic need for our restructuring, and the imperative to grow our 5th Generation fleet, we'll enable our Airmen to deliver the Dominant Combat Airpower America expects.