

Major General Steven Kwast

AFA - Air and Space Technology Exposition

"Air Force QDR"

17 September 2013

Maj. Gen. Kwast: Thank you.

We're going to dispense with the normal protocol where you have to write questions down. Think about your question and I want you to ask it during my presentation if you feel so moved. I want this to be a conversation. This is about answering your questions, not about giving you a speech.

I'll tell you what, he was saying in the introduction that this is an important time. Well, it's important in many ways and it will touch on things you've heard hopefully as you've been listening to our Chief, our Secretary, and others speak today from Krauthammer to some of the former Secretaries. We are in a unique time, and because we're in a unique time even this QDR is different.

So we'll start with the fact that this QDR is going to be something a little unexpected. If you were a student of QDRs in the past you saw a full year program, sometimes more. It was deep and covered every subject and it was extensive. Then it turned into a nice glossy that was then usually ignored by the Congress, but there was great value to conversation.

But let me take you back to why this QDR is going to be a little different. It's going to be more focused than past QDRs. It's not going to take a full year. In fact the deep work we're going to be doing in this QDR is going to happen over the next few months and we're going to be taking to the President the draft in January and then delivering it to Congress in February. That's how quickly this will happen.

There are a number of reasons why this year is a little different in that regard. The first is that we have a new Secretary who wanted to first do a Strategic Choices and Management Review. Now truth in advertising, there was no strategy, no choices in that Strategic Choices and Management Review, but that's not meant to be funny. That was just the way it was designed. It was designed to look at where the decision space might be. Because in an institution as large as the Department of Defense if you don't take a look every once in a while at what your beasts looks like, you lose track of how it's grown. It's gotten fat in this area, it's gotten skinny in this area. Or in our case in two decades of warfare with the Air Force, it's gotten fat everywhere. It's gotten out of balance. So we took a look at that work across the entire Department of Defense, and now QDR is beginning with that as a foundation, that insight.

The other factor is that we are in sequestration times where an unconstrained strategic review is interesting but not as practical as you might need. So even though we are looking at strategy from an unconstrained perspective initiative, we are very quickly moving down to the practical side of this where we are looking at end states, we are looking at ways that we approach this so that we are affordable with sequestration level funding as the law described, which is very difficult because when you have to give up as much money as the department has to give up in the early years, you cannot get to that money with most of the traditional things. The only place you can go to get the money appropriately is readiness and programs.

We in the Air Force are at a juncture where we have concurrent programs coming due at the same time -- the KC-46, the Joint Strike Fighter, the Long Range Strike Bomber, the Nuclear Enterprise, the B61, to the LRSO. You name it, you've got major programs that are existential to what the Air Force does. So here we are with a sequestration.

So the expectation part of this QDR is don't expect the QDR to transform the Air Force for you; don't expect it to reinvent the Air Force for you in the language. It will be politically constrained because in 2014 there are elections up for grabs and there's a lot at stake and the only way you do transform these things, the only way you take big bold steps is if Congress is willing to take some risk with you, and there's not a huge appetite right now for that type of risk. So just expect the fact that this QDR may not deliver a transformational bold step to the Air Force to just walk through that open door. But then again, QDR has never done that in the past.

What you should do is pay attention to the conversation and the words and retransform and reinvent our Air Force ourselves. We have a lot more authority to do that than you might think. That's a little bit of what I'd like to explore today.

I'm here to tell you that we have lived through 20 years of spending a lot of money, doing a lot of different things, and in rushing money to a problem it will inevitably build you something that does not have the elegance of sustainability, the elegance of the logistics backbone. The elegance of all the parts harmonized and normalized and standardized so that you can do big operations on large scale sufficiently. So we suffer from unaffordability, unsustainability in the Air Force in just about everything we do.

So my pitch to you is this. Just as I saw the SCMR, the Strategic Choices and Management Review this summer, and as I've

seen unfold in the QDR, this is fertile ground for air power. And it's fertile ground for air power because this strategic environment, this world we live in is changing and moving and has changed more than we might even recognize, as a natural attribute to air power tend to gravitate towards that world in a very natural way. And that played out in the SCMR. If you take a look closely at the guidance that came out of the Strategic Choices and Management Review, you saw that it was not a technical peanut butter spread across the services. You take ten percent, you take ten, you take ten. There was a profound acknowledgement that the priorities that this department has are fulfilled more by the Air Force and air power than by other things.

Now everything counts and everything is important. But by proportion, we deliver things that this nation needs.

It's quite simple. When you take a look at our world and how it's changed, you see our President needing to act more quickly in the strategic environment in order to shape events so that an event that's happening somewhere in Eurasia doesn't slingshot back into [inaudible] 24 hours later. The concept of a stitch in time has become more and more important as our world has changed. And the Air Force and the way it has a readiness model of being able to produce capability anywhere on the globe in a timely manner is an attribute that this President, present and future presidents, will reach to as an arm and an extension of policy to politics more and more as we go down the road.

Our job is to find ways of providing that capability affordably. And this is where it gets hard.

How do you provide affordable capabilities in the five core vision areas when you're shackled on either side? You've got Congress that won't appropriate if it's not the same old, same old; you have OSD that just wants this; you have COCOMs that just want ISR or that. You feel constrained. Well, I'm here to tell you that it requires you to start breaking some paradigms.

When you think about our Air Force and this architecture that we are living with, it was born out of World War II. It was born out of an era that was an industrial age globally. It was born out of an era where nation states talked to one another but there was not the sea of travel and information that we see now. You had a world where the technology at the time and the politic, the geopolitical dynamics of our globe shaped the organize, train and equip the Air Force, the architecture and skeleton we currently live with.

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Our job in this room and in this conference and in this moment in time is to take steps that take us from the industrial age into the information age and that means letting go of precious paradigms that have emotional baggage attached, and cultural change takes time. It takes decades.

But we all ought to start asking ourselves some of these important questions because affordability is going to be the key to the kingdom and the future years, and we just cannot afford to keep pouring more money, millions of dollars in multiple years, building capabilities that an adversary or a potential adversary can steal away in months, a good programmer, at a fraction of the cost.

This dynamic is nothing new. You all see these signs. But the hard part is asking yourself questions that help you break these paradigms.

For example, why do we still train pilots like we did back in the '50s and '60s? You've got to ask yourself that fundamental question. Why do we still do it? Having lived that life and been a commander of a training squadron I can tell you that when I got there and I observed that I asked myself that question. But in decades where there's plenty of money to be given to support the fight, you aren't forced to ask those tough questions because human beings, human nature doesn't change unless it's forced to. That's just the way we're built.

So here's what I sorry about right now with QDR, and my charge, to define the vision and to help the Air Force break paradigms and move to the information age, my prayer is we do not look back on this time 40 years from now and see it as an opportunity to be transformational and we didn't take those steps because we were not courageous enough, we were not bold enough, we didn't have the vision.

I want us to be bold. But we also have to be practical and realistic. If we are too bold and the political dynamics do not allow you to be bold, if you are too strategic and too visionary, and the corporate process within the Air Force is not sufficient for that vision or that action, you can disintegrate the essence of this vehicle we call the Air Force and you can do it more harm than good.

So the trick here is to give the patient the medicine they need without killing the patient. It's like chemotherapy. It hurts. It kills some parts. But it heals the patient.

We are in those times right now where we need every able-bodied Airman to think about how we break old paradigms and start

looking at approaches that help us do the things we do more affordably.

We do not turn away from the indispensability that we have already created in our DNA for the joint fight, for the coalition fight, for the interagency fight. That is all good, but it's unaffordable. Especially in light of sequestration.

This is our crisis. Yet I suspect that we haven't been doing our homework strategically to think about where we need to be, what is the next step, and we're scrambling to ask ourselves the question, how do we afford to provide air superiority anywhere in the globe at the time the President needs it, whether it's for a few seconds or for a few months? And do it orderly. How do we lift stuff, whether it's troops or whether it's humanitarian goods, food packets, or bullets to a point in the globe where there's not an 8,000 foot strip and a logistics line of roads and rail and vehicles to get the stuff there? How do we pick it up again when we are done shaping an event so that it moves into the political or statesman role? And do it in a way that's affordable. How do we provide command and control as a spinal cord of networks that allow anybody from any country, any interagency partner, any service to join the fight as the coalition of the willing and bring their app and they can contribute what they have, so they don't see what they shouldn't, we can't see what we shouldn't, but we can play together? Because we have truly started on a path of interoperability and interdependency and plug and play in a way that we have not in the past.

This theology of parochial, proprietary structures to solve independent problems has served us well for 66 years, but my friends, the enemy has gotten a score on us and they have literally imposed a cost-imposing strategy on us that we have to break out of.

So as I think about this I also reflect on one of the ways we have historically gotten out of these dilemmas and that's called innovation. But what I see is I see the field of innovation that is tactical and operational, that allows for discovery of different fields of science and technology, research and development, that literally lets us stumble upon things that we can say hey, that looks pretty good. Maybe it will fly [inaudible]. But what I would propose to you is we have not done a good job as an institution of doing strategic innovation where we intuit the most wicked our President is going to have 20 years from now and we start collecting the resources to probe [inaudible], to explore and to innovate and to protect for failure at the corporate level so we actually start pushing technology towards our strategy.

Right now technology bubbles and good things happen. Clever people do very astounding things, creative things, to solve problems. But we do not protect failure at the scale required to push technology towards our most strategic problems. One of the symptoms of that is we still keep doing things the way we've done them in the past. We don't seem to take large steps because we feel constrained if we can't.

So my charge to you in this environment at AFA where we have the players that truly can help us innovate is to encourage the collaboration that's going to have to be a part of our future, to read the documents that are being published by our leadership in the Air Force, describing the vision and helping us intuit the problems our President and our nation is going to have in 20 years and start encouraging industry, partner one to another. Partner with Congress, partner with OSD, partner with the Air Force to shape and funnel the resources and the political capital to protect failure so we can prototype and innovate and break paradigms.

I will tell you my personal view. This QDR will be somewhat disappointing in the fact that it will not transform any one of the services, but if we are bold within our Air Force we can find those avenues of transportation and we can lay them out in a way that is slow enough and practical enough to not strip ourselves from those constraints we have, but revolutionary enough to break the paradigms of the past and really take the Air Force into the information age.

This is ours to solve. This is our generation's to solve. Do not be one of those that in 30 years from now you look back on this moment and you say you know, I had the opportunity to be bold; I had the opportunity actually to articulate something that was innovative. But I was afraid. I was afraid I'd get fired. I was afraid that people would laugh at me. I was afraid that I would be ineffective at getting it done. That not the time we live in.

This is a time for heroes. This is a time for visionaries. This is a time for people to see this moment for what it is. If this crisis is not big enough to get our nation to truly look at some of those fundamental paradigms that we currently live under that are broader than the Air Force, I guarantee you with history as a teacher that that crisis will come and at a minimum we better be ready, intellectually and strategically, for that moment.

So we grab it when it comes and we can deliver something for America that only we can deliver. Be damn proud of what you are as an Airman because you have made yourself indispensable through

all of the innovation, the leadership, and the kind of Airmen the Chief was talking about earlier. But don't rest on those laurels, and do not rest on somebody else being the one to stand up and be bold. It's got to be you. Each and every one of you in your own way in your own right, and if we do that collectively we might have a fighting chance of arriving at a future where the Air Force takes its rightful dominant role in the world, where nations will never be able to dominate like they have in the past because of the sea of information sharing and the way you're connected. But we can dominate it because we can act to shape defense anywhere on the globe as an Air Force so that evil players are held accountable and friends are reassured and nobody behaves irresponsibly in the global commons, so that economic good is close to America and America's economy stays strong so we can do it all over again.

So thank you for letting me have a few minutes to talk to you. That gives you a sense for where this can go. The QDR is one step in that direction, but it requires you [inaudible] with the ideas, the innovation and the strategy that gets folded into these kinds of documents and takes our republic as America on the slow journey to transformation.

Thank you very much and I appreciate your questions. I'll open it up to the floor.

Question: [Inaudible] sequestration and budget [inaudible] the Air Force. This is a challenge that for several years, beginning with the competition and so forth. Have you looked to the private sector for a new concept in that area?

Maj. Gen. Kwast: That's a great question, and we have. In fact industry and corporations have provided [inaudible] of examples of how we can innovate, but the key with innovation is that it does apply differently to different organizations depending on how they're structure and we do have certain shackles on us that don't allow some of the agility and flexibility that comes with some of the models out there. But we lash up those lessons that are essential, the lessons that you need good rebels in your organization so that not everybody's drinking the Kool-Aid and you have people that are willing to speak out and have no fear. That are naturally aggressive in the good sense of the term, for they question everything. You need failure, and you need to protect that. Not only in the political sense where you still promote people even though they are visionary and they are questioning their [inaudible], that you promote those people. You also [give] the financial proof. We have this covenant with Congress and with OSD, you have money sufficient to [inaudible]. There are basics of innovation that need to happen, that we need to embrace in the Air Force. Right now our innovation is strong

but it's at the tactical level, it's at the operational level. We in times of constraint where there's not enough money [inaudible] on innovation that helps us in creative ways. We need to funnel that money to some of our big strategic problems and that's the muscle that is being created as it was back in the inter-war years.

Question: General, you mentioned [inaudible] and being able to [inaudible]. You also mentioned that [inaudible] with the QDR that's going out. Is there a reason that we are not as the Department of Defense making the QDR that [inaudible] statement and taking the big step that -- even taking it to Congress what we think it should be instead of [inaudible].

Maj. Gen. Kwast: The answer lies in the comment I made just after that, and that is the political constraints. So QDR is a political animal. There's no two ways around it. It's shaped by the Congress. It's shaped by the President. It's shaped by our political masters. It can only go where that focus allows it to go and that focus is on finding a way, moving forward with the Defense Strategic Guidance as a foundation, and finding a way to have a strategy sufficient to this world by adjusting some of the end states, some of the ways, but in marginal ways, in ways that are essentially the same structure, just smaller, maybe the approach just a little bit different. So those are incremental smaller ways, and the reason big changes aren't happening is because there's not political appetite out there for that.

So as military stewards we're part of that rich tradition where we serve our political masters. We go where they tell us and we do what they ask and whether we ask the question, we propose the option and when the answer comes back different we have a choice. We can either hang up the uniform and go serve in another way or we help them get it right. This is [inaudible].

Question: Thank you very much. I'm [inaudible] for the Air Force. [Inaudible] I have three quick questions for you. Those of us who live out in the boonies, retired in North Carolina, who just read the Early Bird. I had the impression that Secretary Perry and General Abizaid were [inaudible] the QDR. Could you comment on that? A lot of times the leadership determines what the strategic framework and context is going to be for the QDR.

The second thing is, when I looked at who did the SCMR, it was the CAPE. It wasn't policy. To me, being brought up here in General [inaudible]'s time, that we had strategy first and then you kind of thought about what the appropriate plug and play systems were going to be to help you execute the strategy. I don't see where the CAPE gets involved with doing policy work and where policy was kind of [inaudible].

The third thing, the SCMR, Secretary Hagel said the first priority is air dominance. What is the difference from your perspective between air dominance and air superiority? We heard our Chief talk about air superiority. Is there an internal shift going on that we need to be talking the lexicon of air dominance versus air superiority?

Maj. Gen. Kwast: Great. Let me knock those out.

First, is Perry and Abizaid as the leaders, the way this commission is set up is they review the QDR and then they advise Congress on their [inaudible]. So they are not part of the architecture of QDR or the framework. That's done by the Secretary of Defense in consultation with the President. That's already been done. This commission is separate, it's independent, and we feed with them, we talk with them, we keep them updated on everything. But they did an independent review, like a Red Team, looking at the QDR and then giving advice to Congress on where it went, where it didn't go, how it's good, how it's bad, those kinds of things. That will explain that.

The second question is a good one because every good strategist knows that you start with strategy so you expect policy from that. There are two dynamics that played out on that one. One is kind of the politics behind the scenes in OSD; but the second thing is this sense of fierce practicality. The SCMR was not meant to be a strategic look. It was kind of misnamed. It was an attempt for Secretary Hagel to kind of see where the money was, to kind of understand where the potential for decision space is, and the strategy will come next.

That's why it came around, because it was really a drill to find out where the money is, then take a look maybe at some of the [inaudible] analysis. If you have this many here, here's what it costs; and if you have two carriers, what it would save you. It was an exercise that was that simple. But that was a lot of work because it's a lot of water to cover. That answers your second question.

The third question with regard to?

Question: Air dominance.

Maj. Gen. Kwast: There is no agenda behind the scenes there. Nothing has changed. It's true that air superiority and air dominance have subtle differences, but the intent here is that the priority Secretary Hagel has talked about is the fact that wherever you go in order to understand what's going on, whether it's ISR or boots on the ground or you name it, wherever you go,

you need to be able to make sure you survive. If you die going there, or when you get there, you can't accomplish any mission. So this ability to control the air and space sufficient so that you can do what you need to do is the essence of the idea. So air superiority is one thing where you get there and if you have air superiority, you can do the job. Dominance has another connotation where there's nothing anybody can do at any time to take that away from you. Air superiority, if they came with a whole armada you might have to move away and then come back and regain air superiority at that time. So we can have that more detailed conversation about the use of the words but there's nothing behind the scenes going on. Air superiority is defined as the ability of the Air Force, whether it be for two seconds or two years, to go control the air and space required for the nation to accomplish its mission no matter what that mission is.

Question: [Inaudible] care about [inaudible]. [Inaudible]. You mentioned possibly [inaudible]. [Inaudible] the Air Force can make that Congress [inaudible]? And in what format [inaudible]?

Maj. Gen. Kwast: Air Force 2023 is part of the strategy, it kind of gives us the visual of where we're going and then it allows us to make [inaudible] that take us on the path to that point.

But with regard to your question of what else can we do, what we can do is things that we'll propose. For example, there are aircraft out there that have that we are over-invested in. Let's take a look at some of the things for the COIN fight. We have built up an entire infrastructure of permissive ISR that was very good, very capable in Afghanistan and Iraq, but it doesn't work as well in Asia, South America, or Africa. It was really built for that specific permissive environment and its [insecurity]. But in order to afford the way the strategy has shifted, we need to let go of some of those things.

So permissive ISR would be one of them. As the money shrinks there are other things we need to let go of. But it's important to note that you cannot break paradigms overnight. Part of our task is to never fail. So you have to be ready for any kind of expected event that might come your way in the global environment.

So for me, the real transition here is not to necessarily go after and try to gun down different paradigms out there as a way of saving money. What you do is you start slowly building things that have the attributes that allow you to survive in the unexpected future, because we're always bad at predicting that future. If you build things in the Air Force that are resilient, so they can survive whenever they go somewhere, that are flexible so that if the mission you need to accomplish is something you

never dreamed of like a B-1 doing CAS you can still do it, that it's adaptable so that it can change and morph over time because it was built with an open architecture and the ability to adapt. If you build these attributes into everything you do, then whatever the future gives us, you can form and fuse and swarm those capabilities in those different entities or programs to the problem set and still find a way of achieving success. That's where the operational and tactical creativity and innovation comes in. The B-1 doing CAS is one of those innovations at the operational level, at the tactical level.

So the pathway to success is not necessarily going into Congress and saying I want to break the paradigm of training the pilots the same way I did in the '50s. That happens over time. But you can start by really vigorously questioning every program, asking yourself questions. What have we done to build in open architecture so that this thing is adaptable, flexible and resilient. And everybody can join, and it can use multiple methodologies and have multiple missions it can do because it has those attributes. Those are ways of slowly migrating to an information age from an industrial age without compromising the potential of succeeding in past and present and potential future conflicts.

Question: General, [inaudible]. I wanted to [inaudible] technologies and [inaudible].

Maj. Gen. Kwast: Thank you for the question. That's one of the journeys that we have to go. And this is a comment you've heard me make where I've said we have more authority than we might think at shaping some of these pathways. That's one of them where we have some authority.

There is no reason why we cannot drive [inaudible] requirements documentation. The attributes that we need to make sure that we've got plug and play across the world and that we are [inaudible]. There are ways of protecting intellectual rights and proprietary rights and the right for a company to make money and put people to work defending the nation yet still have a collaboration, the interdependency, interoperations and the commonality required in the future. But we've got to hold ourselves accountable and make sure we're disciplined at writing those requirements, and that industry starts slowly retooling and readjusting so they realize that the best business case they have is building something that everybody wants to join, nobody can do without, and that that is where the money's made, not in hanging on to a stranglehold of a certain proprietary software that they hope will be updated and refreshed in the future. That methodology is unaffordable. We cannot keep bringing in

[inaudible] every two years as a way of doing business at 100 million a pop. It just is unaffordable.

So this is a new day and it has to build in slowly because these changes take time. It's a cultural change. If you move too quick, you kill the patient. It's like we [inaudible] nation of oil. You can't do it overnight or people will starve. You've got to do it slowly. So this is a methodical approach that gets after the end state you describe but it requires all of us looking at what we do and what we contribute to that to find ways of win/win where we win and industry wins. That's the only way we get through this.

Question: I feel very positive about our Air Force, particularly innovation at the tactical and operational level. [Inaudible]. Who on the Air Staff representing Airmen makes the [inaudible] strategic policy? Whose desk does that reside on? That's the piece I honestly don't know.

Maj. Gen. Kwast: Yes, sir, and this is part of the Chief's work that he talked about his briefing, a reorganization of the Air Force. Both the staff and the MAJCOMs. There are several elements of this that are I guess first principles. One of them is to move from what we have in the past, which is a programmatically nature leadership head of this corporation that is collaborative in nature, and moving it more towards a strategically driven head with teeth into the engine room, into the programmatic, and into the MAJCOMs and innovation would sit there with the strategy.

Now that is still an open question that will be debated, so that is my opinion. But I'll tell you, when you talk about innovation, you don't want to attach innovation to balancing your checkbook in a program. You want to attach innovation to strategy.

So as he builds a strategic head for this Air Force which is tough work and not easy, so there's no magic solution here. This change will include innovation at the strategic level like we have not seen in the last few years.

Question: -- sourcing our Air Force dollars [inaudible]. [Inaudible] and other places. There is a reservoir of folks that can then be, should be put to work doing this. But if we haven't been doing this we don't get it. That's where I think we can build.

Maj. Gen. Kwast: This is how you can help. So as you watch these organizational changes start to take place over this next year, and the Chief has said this on many occasions, tapping into

the network of counselors that are a part of that strategic innovation, that really push technology towards our strategy instead of hoping technology, we'll stumble our way out of these [inaudible], that is the only way we're going to get to an affordable place that gives our President options in 2030. The only way.

It's a great question. It doesn't exist right now and it needs to exist.

For all of you who are going to write papers, make sure you don't steal the joy away from people who want to hope that this QDR will be really something transformational and innovative, okay? I will tell you that it will be a step in the right direction and that you will see air power taking its rightful step in that journey because there is, again, there is a subtle deep goodness that's happening, both with SCMR and QDR where air power is reasserting its rightful place in the minds of our policy-makers. Even the simple fact of helping educate OSD as to the attributes of readiness that the Air Force provides that no other service provides. One of the questions was why doesn't the Air Force just go to tiered readiness? But after that conversation happened there was a profound slapping of the table, that the Air Force model is the right model for the nation and we will not touch that because it is so essential to our strategic environment. There's one of the outcomes of SCMR you don't see in the papers that is great goodness for the Air Force. QDR will be the same. So logically, the footnote, it's an incremental step. It's prudent, it's practical, it may not be what the mavericks of the nation or the Air Force might want, somebody who's transformational, someone reinventing, but that's not how our nation works.

Our nation doesn't fail fast and it doesn't succeed fast unless there's a crisis. And this crisis of sequestration isn't quite big enough to have a revolutionary QDR, and that's okay. But be ready intellectually for if that moment were to be [inaudible], I want the minds sharpened, I want the strategies honed, and I want the [inaudible] to hold paradigms intellectually ready to go so you have a sense of the art of the possible and we can go there as quickly as our nation needs so American people of the future are not denied the air power they deserve because we stayed vigilant and aggressively [targeted] and speaking our minds and reminding our policy-makers and our leaders of the art of the possible.

Thank you all very much for your time. God speed to you as you go forward. And find a way to make a difference. Find a way to be that good rebel in your organization that doesn't let people get soft and lazy. Be that rebel.

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Thank you.

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