



Inaugural Event
Forward Operating Base (FOB) of the Future at the
Basic Expeditionary Airmen Skills Training site

The Honorable Deborah Lee James

Secretary of the Air Force

Tuesday, 22 March, 2016

Alright, I like the sound of that – all in unison, that really is a wow moment. Good afternoon as well to General LaBrutta and the community leaders who are here with us today... all of the distinguished visitors and most of all to our fantastic trainees. Thank you for joining us as well. It is a great pleasure for me to be back here in San Antonio. It is great to see all of you now that you are day two in the BEAST.

Are we tired yet is what I want to know. (Crowd responds: “No, Ma’am!”) You’ve got a ways to go; so fatigue must not have set in quite yet.

I want you to know General Welsh, Chief Cody, and I can’t wait to see you graduate and join the ranks of the greatest Air Force on the planet. In everything that we do ... every decision that we make ... really revolves around safeguarding you, the men and women who volunteer to defend our Nation and our way of life. As well as around our nation and the way of life. This is the profession of arms; this is what it’s all about.

Now, my job as the Secretary of the Air Force, is to organize, train, and equip the Air Force, and I want you to know my top three priorities are: taking care of people, balancing readiness and modernization for tomorrow, and making every dollar count... Making sure we are the most efficient Air Force we can possibly be with the taxpayers’ money. Now part of priority number one, which is taking care of people means making sure that each and every one of you are ready to fly, fight, and win in the air, in space, and in cyberspace.

Many of you, all of you in fact, will eventually deploy in your careers and BEAST will help prepare you for the challenges you will face downrange. And boy oh you boy, do we ever have challenges now-a-days confronting the US military, confronting the United States Air Force. I am sure everyone assembled here today has heard of the

terrorist group called “ISIL”, or at times we call them ISIS. Well I want you to know I don’t call them ISIL or ISIS. I call them Daesh; that’s another name for this group. The reason I call them Daesh is because I heard they don’t like that name, and if they don’t like that name that means I do like that name. And so they are Daesh, and you know what else? We, the United States Air Force, have really stepped up the pressure against this group this year flying more than 55,000 combat sorties. That’s together with our joint forces, our coalition partners, but make no mistake about it the bulk of that work has come from the United States Air Force. Our team has been doing a fantastic job. If you think the days are tough here, let me tell you, there’s nothing quite like a 500-pound bomb to ruin your day. And our Airmen...the same family of warriors that you will soon join...have shouldered that effort against this terrorist group called Daesh.

Of course, Daesh in the Middle East isn’t the only effort that we have underway. This is a terrorist group and their affiliates that is popping up in different locations around the world. Most recently if you have seen the news there has been an attack in Brussels for which they have claimed credit. There are dozens of people who have been killed at an airport, more than a hundred who have been injured. And indeed I am sorry to report that we have an Airman and his family that were injured in this attack. It is happening everywhere, and we have to be vigilant. And if that’s not enough we have Russia who is continuing to foment trouble in Europe. They’ve complicated the situation in Syria, and they’ve announced their intent to modernize their nuclear weapons. Speaking of nuclear, our experts detected an illegal North Korean nuclear test earlier this year, as well as a test rocket launch.

And then another thing, we’ve been continuing to see worrisome Chinese activity in the South China Sea—they are building artificial islands over coral reefs, despite the fact that there are overlapping claims to the territory from five other nations in the region, and in January, they landed an aircraft on a newly-built runway on one of these islands. And to add to this if that’s not enough, China, Russia, and North Korea pose significant cyber threats to U.S. interests.

Now I know many of the trainees here today are pretty darn good with computers, smart phones, and technology so you won't be surprised to be told that we have very significant, growing threats in both cyberspace and space. And indeed I had a chance to talk about that with a group downtown, the AFCEA, the Air Force Communications Electronics Association, earlier today.

And finally there's one overall level of threat that I want to bring to your attention, and that relates to energy. One of the biggest challenges our Airmen face on the battlefield is secure access to energy—the energy that we need in order to accomplish our mission. Now natural disasters, terrorism, political instability...all of these can impact our access to energy and jeopardize mission effectiveness.

So on in on, ladies and gentlemen, there's a lot going on. There's many many worldwide complications and threats, and here's the bottom line: our Air Force is fully engaged in every region of the world, in every mission area, and across the full spectrum of military operations. And soon all of you will be as well.

Now we can't predict the future--every time we try we seem to get it wrong...but at least my crystal ball tells me one simple fact. And that is the next 30 years will tend to look very different than the previous 30 years that we have just come through. Our military's technological superiority is being challenged today in ways we've never experienced before, and we have to be prepared to do a range of missions, we need to get ahead of the curve when it comes to the enormous and very rapid change that we're seeing. I am talking about changes in technology, changes in different nations and groups acquiring weapons, changes in how we communicate with one another.

You are our future. You are the generation of Airmen that will help us adapt faster than our adversaries. You are the Airmen that we are counting on ultimately to deliver to us what we call "strategic agility."

Now, the good news is the Airmen—just like you who have come before you—have time and again solved tough problems in the face of what seems like overwhelming odds. You see our service, your service, was founded on innovation: it is part of our DNA, its part of our makeup and it's where our Airmen thrive. And it's in this spirit that

I'm so honored to be included in today's event and to help launch the Forward Operating Base (FOB) of the Future.

Now by way of background, our United States Air Force is the largest consumer of energy in the U.S. Federal Government, the largest, bar none.

This means we have a very big energy bill to pay. How big you might ask? Well, in FY14, we spent almost \$9 billion...that's billion with a "B"... in electricity and fuel costs for Air Force operations. Most of which by the way went to pay for jet fuel, and that's a lot of money.

Most importantly, every aspect of the Air Force mission depends on a reliable supply of energy. Let me put it to you very simply, without energy, we can't fly planes, transport our Airmen, or power our bases. Energy is a very big deal.

The FOB of the Future demonstrates the benefits and increased capabilities associated with alternative energy using solar arrays, advanced batteries, micro-grid techniques, and smart power controllers. It also shows energy efficiencies through heating, ventilating, and air conditioning, lighting systems, and shelter insulations.

Through solar panels on your tents, enhanced insulation and environmental controls, and energy storage and management systems, we're creating "nanogrids" that reduce the amount of fuel our expeditionary base requires by more than 85 percent. And if we extrapolated this approach to an air base the size of Kandahar Airfield in Afghanistan, we could save 532 thousand gallons of diesel fuel a year. And that's a big savings.

Through renewable and advanced energy techniques, we can ensure our bases have the power to execute their missions, even when traditional energy resources are disrupted. And most important of all, we created this project here at the BEAST because we wanted to instill an energy culture, an energy awareness in our Airmen right from the beginning, right from the time of your basic training.

And so today, by the power invested in me as the Secretary of the Air Force I hereby declare that the FOB of the Future at BEAST is open for business.

Assured access to energy isn't just a requirement for our Airmen in forward operating environments. No absolutely not. These same technologies, the same self-sustaining approach, and energy-aware culture that we're demonstrating here at BEAST these are just as important across all of our bases including all of our bases here in the United States. You see we must create mission assurance through energy assurance, mission assurance through energy assurance.

Historically, our electric grid has been very reliable but is increasingly at risk from sophisticated cyber incursions, physical attacks, and extreme weather events that could produce prolonged, widespread outages. Just last December, the Ukraine suffered a debilitating cyberattack on its electric grid...and many, including myself, are worried that such an attack could happen to us right here at home or elsewhere to our military around the world. A prolonged disruption is simply not an option for the Air Force as this would interrupt our ability to execute our missions. Access to electricity is just as critical to our remotely piloted aircraft, to our space assets, and ISR missions as runways are to combat sorties. And that's why earlier this month, General Welsh and I established the Air Force Office of Energy Assurance, which will be a central program office dedicated to developing strategic energy agility on our installations. The Air Force Office of Energy Assurance will take an enterprise-wide approach to identify and facilitate energy projects that provide resilient, cost-effective, and cleaner power to Air Force installations.

Through innovative technologies and business models, we intend to create new ways to operate which is in line with our Air Force Future Operating Concept that lays out our vision for how we'll operate overall in the year 2035. So stay tuned one and all for as we roll out new initiatives and projects across the Air Force.

Now of course, the Air Force isn't the only organization that sees the importance and value of clean energy. Around the country the clean energy economy is growing, and it is growing in an incredibly quick fashion. In 2015, the solar industry added workers nearly 12 times faster than the overall economy, growing to more than 200,000 workers. And I'll bet many of you did not know that Texas produces more wind

energy than any other state, nearly 18 gigawatts of installed capacity and that's enough power to power more than 3.6 million U.S. homes.

And here is one more interesting fact, Veterans make up more than 10 percent of the solar workforce and are an essential part of the clean energy economy. Now it was no surprise to me when I continue read on—clean energy companies find the leadership experience and technical skills that our military personnel and veterans possess to be incredibly valuable to them. And many veterans by the way consider working in clean energy arena to be a second way to serve our country.

Now all that is good and well, but we think we can do even better. That's why the President established the Solar Ready Vets initiative in 2015 as a joint venture between the Departments of Defense, Energy, and Labor and the Veterans Administration. This program provides essential skills to transitioning service members to prepare them to be able to work in the future for solar companies. Solar Ready Vets pilot programs have already been launched in military communities around the country. And in fact, our Air Force will graduate its first students from Hill Air Force Base in Utah. That's going to be happening in just a few days.

Moreover, these pilot programs have been extremely successful. In fact, I'm told that every graduate from the program has been interviewed by more than one company. Now what's all this got to do with San Antonio you might be wondering? Well I am about to tell you. I'm very proud to announce today that Joint Base San Antonio will be the next base to host a Solar Ready Vets program. So congratulations JBASA.

In closing, I want to impress upon each and every one of you that energy is integral to everything that we do in the Air Force. Our installations are critical to Air Force and joint military operations around the world, and our networked Total Force requires uninterrupted access to energy to fulfill our missions. And as I said before and all you have to do is read your morning media, we are a very, very busy Air Force. More resilient, cleaner, cost-effective energy resources, utilizing innovative technologies, will play a vital role in ensuring that we remain strategically agile to meet the demands of today and to also prepare for the challenges tomorrow.

Most importantly I want all you trainees to know, that we are counting, we are counting on all of you. We're counting on your best efforts. We're counting on your new thinking, your hard work, your passion, your commitment to our Air Force core values...your commitment to taking care of one another. We are counting on all of you to help keep us what we are today and that is the greatest Air Force on the planet.

Thank you, one and all, and aim high Airmen, aim high.