

**National Press Club  
Air Force Secretary Deborah Lee James  
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SECRETARY JAMES: Thank you. Thank you so much. Thank you, John, Jerry, Jane, thanks to all of you for the invitation for coming here today. And thank you for that very kind introduction as well, John. My own mother couldn't have given me a better buildup than you just gave me. I hope I live up to expectations. Congratulations as well on being elected the 108th president. I know that this club is going to continue to flourish under your leadership.

I want to begin by telling all of you it is an absolute honor for me to be here today, and this is actually my second presentation before the National Press Club. If any of you were here about 20 years ago -- were you here about 20 years ago, any of you? Come on, some of you were. All right. He's changed a lot. I look exactly the same I want to say. But I actually did have the opportunity to come in the mid-'90s when I was Assistant Secretary of Defense for Reserve Affairs, so thanks for having me back. And it is an absolute pleasure to be able to stand here as the 23rd Secretary of the Air Force and talk to you about my favorite subject of all, which is our United States Air Force and your United States Air Force.

There is just no question that our Air Force is engaged globally. And when I say globally, I'm talking from Tacoma to Tokyo, from Grand Forks to Greenland. And today I want to tell you some Air Force stories, but I specifically want to tell you some Air Force stories that are unfolding in the skies above Iraq and Syria, throughout the Horn of Africa, and across European borders.

Now I know a little something about this because you see precisely two

weeks ago today I returned from a world-wind trip to the Middle East, Africa, and Europe. And during my trip I met with senior military and civilian leaders from the United States. I had the opportunity to dialogue with quite a few of our partner nations. And most importantly at every stop I visited with our airmen. And let me tell you, our airmen are doing a fantastic job, an amazing job, each and every day helping to keep us safe, and I am proud to call myself an airman along their side.

Now in just a few moments I want to tell you a little bit about where I've been and what I learned from my trip, give you a couple of the key takeaways that I shared with our Secretary of Defense, and then also give you an overall update from my perspective on the conduct of the air campaign in Iraq and Syria. And then I want to finish up with some comments about the number one asset that our combatant commanders around the world want more of from the United States Air Force, and I'm talking here about the world of intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance -- ISR as we say -- and specifically the world of the remotely piloted aircrafts, which you heard earlier some people call drones. We do not. They have a lot of men and women who support them. We call them remotely piloted aircrafts.

So let's begin at the beginning. The first stop on my trip was the Biennial Dubai Air Show, which brings the global aerospace community together and is considered the fastest growing air show in the world. There were about 61 countries represented there, showcasing capabilities in both the defense and civilian sectors in aerospace. I had very valuable bilateral discussions with a number of our allies and partners there both in government from around the world, governments around the world, and industry. We discussed the importance of interoperability from a military

perspective, the importance of joint training in order to be able to operate in a coalition environment because everything we do nowadays is in a coalition environment. And we discussed specific foreign military sales cases and the need for additional munitions, precision munitions in particular, because you see some of our allies are running low as we collectively prosecute the campaign against Daesh and extremism.

I then travelled to Qatar and visited the Combined Air Operations Center, what we call the CAOC, where I received an update on the air campaign in Iraq and Syria from General Charles Brown who is the Commander of the United States Air Force's Central Command. I was really, really impressed with the capability of the coalition and our ongoing efforts to prevent civilian casualties; enormous care is taken to avoid civilian casualties. I was also struck big time by the complexity of the coalition - let me repeat, the coalition. There's more than 60 countries involved with this effort in one way, shape, or form, and many of these countries have competing interests and different priorities. Believe me, this trip really brought home to me that old saying of where you stand depends on where you sit.

I then travelled to Djibouti and met with the men and women who are serving as part of the Combined Joint Task Force - Horn of Africa. And there I also met with senior Djiboutian military officials. I was able to see our remotely piloted aircraft, our RPAs, newly modified with external fuel tanks, which gives them an increased range and coverage, which allows our warfighters and commanders to have a greater reach for ISR flexibility as they require. Djibouti, by the way, is all about location, location, location. Its position on the Horn of Africa allows for critical power projection, surveillance flights above the African continent in places like Libya and Somalia and

allows us to work more closely with partner nations, coalition forces, and some interagency organizations so that we can achieve the very best unified effort possible.

I then stopped in Kuwait where I visited Ali Al Salem Air Base and Camp Arifjan and then it was on to Iraq. In Iraq I saw the Combined Joint Operations Center, the CJOC as we call it, which is in Baghdad, and met with General Sean MacFarland, who is the Commanding General of the Combined Joint Task Force - Operation Inherent Resolve. I got to observe in Iraq our airmen flying combat sorties to include a live strike on Daesh combatants controlled by airmen in the CJOC. And I also had the opportunity to meet with the Iraqi Chief of Defense and the Chief of the Air Force who also spoke of their commitment to this ongoing fight.

From Kuwait it was on to Egypt where I met with the Egyptian Minister of Defense and the Air Chief of Egypt, and as you can imagine top of mind for Egyptian officials was terrorism in the Sinai and the terrible, terrible downing of the Russian airliner, which had recently taken place.

I then visited Romania and met with our senior military leaders, met with their senior military leaders, who were deeply concerned not so much about Daesh and the air war, but rather about recent Russian activity in the Crimea and in the Black Sea. So remember what I said, where you stand depends on where you sit.

And then finally, or not quite finally, Morocco. I met with military leaders and heard about their contribution to the fight in Yemen as well as their concerns about the Western Sahara.

And finally it was on to Stuttgart, which is the home of AFRICOM, to talk to our own commanders there. And I want to underscore, throughout all of this trip I had

the opportunity to see our airmen of all ranks serving our nation, doing everything from advising foreign militaries to gathering and analyzing intelligence, coordinating the movement of supplies and equipment, and even flying in combat.

So my first key takeaway from this trip and the first point that I made when I returned to Secretary Carter was that everyone, all of these partner nations with whom I'd met, they want more engagement with the United States. And there's processes to deliver that engagement, and we have got to look for ways to speed it up, to speed up these engagements.

All in all throughout the trip I had 15 different bilateral meetings and I heard requests for more training, more exercises. Many expressed interest in buying or upgrading some of their equipment. And my message back to them was always about the total package approach, what I call the total package approach, because it's not just the equipment alone. Obtaining equipment is part one of the package or obtaining upgrades is part one of the package. But equally important is part two. Part two has to do with training, which includes tactics, techniques, and procedures. And then there's part three, which has to do with maintenance and sustainability. If you have one piece or two pieces, but not all three pieces, you will not have a sustainable program overtime.

So the bottom line having talked to all of these individuals is I believe the United States is the partner of choice for all of them, but I also heard repeatedly about the challenges they feel they face in working with us to get that total package. For instance, the FMS process is lengthy and dissuades some countries from purchasing our equipment. And, of course, we have strict technology transfer rules. The process

overall is complex and it involves not only Air Force, but also other parts of DOD, State, Congress, and industry is involved as well.

So I came back recognizing that I obviously don't have the power to fix or speed it up in all of these different arenas, but I was going to try to do my best to fix it where I could. And so to that end I've directed my staff to examine how the Air Force can speed up our part of the process and work with other stakeholders to make sure that U.S. security cooperation efforts are responsive to evolving needs, such as the demand for munitions that I just told you about based on partner engagements in Syria, Iraq, and Yemen.

For example, my Deputy Under Secretary for International Affairs, Ms. Heidi Grant, is now working on producing a strategy that will identify capabilities that we would like to see our partners acquire that would allow us to better forecast and prepare for future foreign military sales activity. So this would give us a point of discussion, to be able to discuss this with allies in the future.

Likewise we're working to speed up the process by setting pre-approved Air Force technology transfer baselines for major Air Force systems. So if we get this right in the future, instead of waiting for a partner to request a particular capability and then they enter into what can be a very lengthy process to determine whether or not we can actually transfer it, this pre-approved baseline should cut the process down by weeks if not months in the future at least for certain technologies.

So this is just the beginning of our efforts. These are some of our initial ideas. We're going to be looking for other ways to speed up at least the Air Force part of this process, and I'll continue to advocate to colleagues in other parts of government

as well.

Now building partner capacity is really, really important and especially in light of our ongoing efforts against violent extremist organizations, most notably Daesh, which brings me to my second key takeaway and that is we need to keep up the fight and we need to up the pressure against Daesh and other violent extremist organizations. Now we've seen their savage barbarity across the Middle East, Africa, and Europe. And while I was travelling Daesh unleashed double-suicide bombings in Beirut killing 43, and it was within 24 hours of that that they were at it again and we saw the horrific attacks in Paris unfold.

And oh, by the way, Daesh isn't the only threat we face from violent extremism. My travels covered much of the same territory that serves as a training ground for other violent groups as well, like Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula and Al-Qaeda in the Lands of the Islamic Maghreb and Al Shabaab and Boko Haram. These are names that many of us have read about. These are all violent extremist organizations.

So collectively we have to keep up the fight and we have to up the pressure against all of these sorts of organizations. But let me now cut to the chase and get to the part that I know many Americans are wondering about, and that is just how are we doing in this fight against Daesh?

Well, I want to direct my comments principally to the air campaign because, of course, that was my focus. So bottom line upfront on this, every single senior commander with whom I spoke indicated that our strategy of degrading and ultimately destroying Daesh is proceeding at pace. Everybody indicated that air power

is getting its job done. Now, in the very next sentence everyone also indicated that indigenous ground forces now to get their part of the job done and that we also, of course, have to keep the pressure up on the political and diplomatic channels because in order to get a lasting solution, we ultimately need that diplomacy and political aspect to pay off.

Now let me go over a few of the results of air power to date. For one thing, Daesh no longer has the ability to operate freely in somewhere between 20 to 25 percent of the populated territory it held one year ago in Iraq and Syria. So we've pushed them back to that degree. We've hit their command and control centers, supply lines, destroyed equipment and training sites, disrupted their tactics, techniques, and procedures, not to mention -- and you've been reading about this one lately, some of you have been writing about it -- we've been attacking their sources of revenue.

In addition to enabling local forces to fight Daesh, coalition air strikes have taken out thousands of fighters, including key leaders, that Daesh relies on for command and control, financing, logistics, and propaganda. And, moreover, we have upped the ante in what we call deliberate targeting -- deliberate targeting. Now deliberate targeting means that we detect and identify and develop a target with sufficient time to schedule the action against them in our daily air tasking order or ATO. The ATO, by the way, is the document that contains all of the planned missions and forces and the targets planned in any given day.

So specifically we are getting higher quality intelligence. We're working more closely with some of the indigenous ground forces. And we're learning more and more about Daesh and how they operate. And all of this has contributed to more of



these so-called deliberate targets.

Now here's how the targeting works. First we study and we collect data. We evaluate existing intelligence and develop a plan to collect additional information. The pre-existing and newly derived intelligence allows us to form an assessment about enemy activity.

The second thing we do is we watch. We wait and we watch some more. We watch with our full motion video platforms, the ISR platforms, and we look for the presence of enemy activity overtime and hopefully the absence of civilian activity.

Third, we leverage our targeting strategy and decide specifically which weapon is best suited for the target. And using precision-guided munitions, we achieve the right effect on the target while always minimizing to the best of our ability the blast effects that might impact surrounding civilian facilities.

So the recent strikes against the nearly 400 oil tanker trucks is a great example of deliberate targeting, and it shows that we're going to continue to so-called follow the money and hurt them in their illicit sources of revenue. These are the same types of strikes that have allowed our coalition to shut down oil facilities, such as the Deir el-Zour facility in Syria, which I'm told accounted for about two-thirds, two-thirds, of Daesh's oil revenue. Those particular strikes were executed by F-15s, F-16s, and A-10 aircraft.

So all of these statistics and examples persuades me that the air campaign is very much proceeding at pace. We're intensifying our efforts as much as possible, particularly as the indigenous ground forces improve and particularly as we get more of these deliberate targets. But keep in mind this fight is not going to be over

tomorrow and there will continue to be complications that will present us challenges along the way.

So one clear complication of recent time is the Russian involvement in Syria. Now, what's actually going on here in my opinion is what I call a say-do gap. So on the one hand the Russians say that they entered Syria to attack Daesh. But what they are actually doing is they are focusing most of their strikes not against Daesh, but against other forces on the ground. And what they're really trying to do is prop up the regime of Bashar Al-Assad. The Russians also say that they are using precision bombing to avoid civilian casualties, but what they are actually doing for the most part is they are dropping dumb bombs, which, of course, does create significant civilian casualties because they're not as accurate and they are contributing to making what is already a terrible refugee crisis even worse.

So the bit of good news of late to report about Russia and what is going on here is that we do now have a Memorandum of Understanding to ensure safety of flight between our coalition and Russia. We hold calls, by the way, with the Russian military twice each day and we've established a common frequency to help de-conflict efforts over the area of operations. However, we do not, underscore do not, exchange any operational information such as the type of mission, operating locations, or the duration of our sorties.

Now as for the tragic shoot-down, the Turkish shoot-down of the Russian aircraft, I, too, want to join with others who've already said it and make clear that Turkey like all countries has the right to self-defense and Russia did enter their airspace. Claims to the contrary are simply not true. It's also untrue that Russia informed the U.S.

of its actions that day through the MOU process. Russia did not. The Turkish jet that tragically shot down the Russian aircraft was executing a national air defense mission, was not part of our daily ATO like I was telling you about. They were not at that point acting as a member of the coalition as part of our ATO. But with all that said, it was a very, very tragic situation and we certainly hope and have been urging going forward that both parties will deescalate the situation and find a diplomatic path forward to resolve the issue.

Daesh after all is the common enemy, and we have to stay focused and in the case of Russia they need to get focused on that threat and the challenge ahead. The other complication, I'll come back and say it again, is helping the indigenous ground forces effectively execute their missions. There's been some progress here as well, and we need to increase the momentum on this as much as possible. One success actually took place while I was traveling. And just by way of background, to the west in Syria is Daesh's so-called capital of Raqqa, and in the east, across the border in Iraq, is another Daesh stronghold, which is Mosul. Now, splitting the two, smack dab in the middle, is the town of Sinjar, which is connected by Highway 47.

The thought of the coalition was this. If we could create space by using air power for indigenous forces to attack Daesh in Sinjar, then we might be able to disconnect Daesh's supply lines and retake a key logistical node. And that is exactly what happened. Kurdish and Yazidi forces, backed by our air power, our coalition, helped sever this logistics line and take back the town of Sinjar.

And we've also seen some other smaller fighting forces unify against Daesh. Recently in northeast Syria, we had two smaller groups, the Syrian Arabs and

Kurds come together to join what we're now calling the Syrian Democratic Forces, some have called them the Syrian Arab Coalition, but this is the group that we have helped to equip, and they have recaptured some key terrain, most recently pushing Daesh out of the town of Al-Hol and at least 900 square kilometers of surrounding territory. So you see there is some progress.

Finally, as you no doubt saw, just yesterday, Secretary Carter announced that we would be accelerating a number of our efforts. Particularly, he talked some about the Special Operations world, to include sending what was called some expeditionary targeting forces to counter Daesh and also to help enable these local ground forces to become more effective. Over time, these forces will be conducting raids, hopefully freeing hostages, and gathering that all-precious intelligence, which in turn will lead to better deliberative targeting, like I described to you earlier.

Though all of this is still being worked out and the details are not final, I can tell you that such a team illustratively would certainly have Air Force members front and center and Air Force capabilities front and center. So I'm talking here typically such teams would have battle airmen as part of the team. There would be mobility forces that would transport them. There would be support from combat search and rescue and from ISR capabilities, so illustratively, you can expect that these sorts of team members would be part of such a thing.

Now, there are many, many components to an air campaign like the one I've been describing to you that make it successful, but there's probably none -- at least none that I can think of -- more important than the value of ISR. And as I mentioned earlier, that just happens to be the number one thing that the combatant commanders

want more of from our Air Force. So let me begin to wrap up by concluding with a few comments about that essential strategic capability.

Bottom line up front, the airmen who perform this essential mission are doing a phenomenal job, but over the course of my two years and talks that I've had directly with the airmen and all sorts of briefings that I have received, certainly have convinced me, and not just me, others in the top Air Force leadership as well, that this is a force under significant stress. Let me explain a little of what I mean.

Our operators in the RPA world are flying 900 to 1,100 flight-hours per year, and compare that to the manned aircraft which average 200 to 300 flight-hours per year. They're working 13- to 14-hour days, and they work pretty much 6 days per week. The spread of Daesh and other groups means that in addition to our long-standing commitments to allies and partners, we've piled additional requirements on this already strained community. We even had to take some one-off steps in the enterprise, such as literally we removed instructors from our training pipeline to accomplish operational missions. And of course, you know what happens when you take instructors out of the schoolhouse, it means you can't train up the requisite number of new people into the field that you need. So in effect, it becomes a vicious cycle.

Now, to address these issues, we've already taken some significant steps to try to alleviate some of these strains. So for example, we're going to be using contractors more in the world of RPA for non-kinetic missions, so not strike missions, but for the surveillance missions. We're going to be using more of our Guard and Reserve in this area. We've boosted incentive pay for some of our RPA pilots. We're leveraging Army ISR platforms in new ways, and we received a temporary reduction in

the number of combat air patrols that the Air Force must perform. It used to be 65; we will go down to 60 for some period of time.

So these are some of the actions that we've already taken and already announced, but we're not stopping here, because there is more work to be done. So I will tell you, stay tuned on this. I'm going to whet your appetite, but stay tuned, because we're within a week or so of finalizing and ultimately announcing a series of new initiatives designed to up the ante on this and alleviate some more stress from our RPA enterprise and improve some of the quality of life.

For example, today, there are relatively few duty locations for our RPA force to actually serve. So we're looking at expanding basing opportunities for the RPA force. We're also looking at some approaches that are designed to address this grueling schedule that many of our airmen are maintaining, and if we can get that done correctly, that will allow for a little bit more time off as well as some professional development opportunity for this category of airmen over time.

You're also, some of you are aware that we have been actively reviewing the role of our officers and our enlisted personnel in the world of the RPA, so we'll have some announcements in that regard as well; we're getting close. Ultimately, our goal in all of this is to direct some positive change from the top down. That's important, but it's insufficient. We also want to do a good job of listening from the bottom up and directing changes that come directly as suggestions from our airmen.

If you recall the nuclear enterprise matter that was referenced earlier, we did a very similar approach two years ago using what we called the Force Improvement Program, or FIP. FIP, basically, allowed our nuclear airmen, about two years ago, to

have direct access and discussions with senior commanders and offered their suggestions about what needed to change and what needed to happen. And then we took onboard many of those suggestions and implemented them.

Well, we're basically taking that same approach to the RPA force, but instead of FIP, Force Improvement Program, we're doing the Culture and Process Improvement Program, or CPIP. I mean, we are the Pentagon, we do acronyms very well, you know. So keep your ears and eyes open for some announcements in this world within the next couple of weeks.

So I hope you can see we've got a lot going on in our United States Air Force and in our military at large, many hotspots, many challenges to confront. And the reason why the U.S. Air Force is called on by so many in times of need, is because we are the greatest Air Force on the planet, but you know what, remaining the best is going to be a tough, tough challenge, because at this same point where we're the greatest, we're the smallest we've ever been in terms of our numbers since our inception in the year 1947. We're the busiest we've ever been with more frequent deployments, and our airmen are operating what is an aging force of equipment.

So going forward, that is why I am going to remain focused on our top three priorities. And the top three priorities are taking care of people, balancing readiness and modernization so that we get the right mix for today as well as the right mix of investment for tomorrow, and in light of these very tough budget times that we're facing, we have to make every dollar count. We have to be efficient.

So these are the three priorities, and because, as far as I'm concerned, underpinning all of what we do is our amazing airmen, that is why you will always find that I will put taking care of people as my number one, always, period, end of story.

And on behalf of those more than 660,000 active duty, Guard, Reserve, and civilian airmen in our Air Force, I want to thank you very much, thank all of you, from the National Press Club for tuning out today, giving me some of your valuable time. I really do appreciate it, love coming out and telling our Air Force story, and I certainly look forward to your questions.

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