

2015 Air and Space Conference

**Leading Airpower in the 21st Century
September 16, 2015**

MAJOR GENERAL BARRETT: Good afternoon everybody. On behalf of the Air Force Association, welcome once again. The topic of this address is leading airpower in the 21st Century. Our speaker is the Assistant Vice Chief of Staff and Director, Air Staff, Headquarters U.S. Air Force, Washington, D.C. He also serves at the Deputy Chairman of the Air Force Council, and is the Air Force accreditation official for the International Corps of Air Attachés. Prior to his current assignment, he served as Commander, U.S. Air Forces Central Command, Southwest Asia. In that capacity he was responsible for developing contingencies plans, and conducting air operations in a 20-nation area of responsibility covering central and southwest Asia.

Each of you should have a copy of his bio. After a short presentation he will take questions. Notice on your chair you should have a question card,

please fill those out and get them to the aisles, and we'll get those in front of our speaker. We're very pleased to have him with us. Please welcome to the stage General John Hesterman. [Applause]

GENERAL HESTERMAN: Mark, you told me there were going to be 20 people here. So I'm guessing looking at the crowd that a lot of you thought you were coming to hear the Vice Chief of Staff, so let me apologize. One thing about having vice in your job title is it means you don't get to control your own schedule. So you guys get me. And the good news for you is I didn't have time to develop the 45-minute diatribe and PowerPoint slides that I would have, given a little bit more. But what I'd like to do is talk to you a little bit today mostly about the job that I came from, since I actually know more about that, than the one that I'm doing, at least at this point. And then I'll be happy to take your questions.

First let me tell you, as satisfying as that job that I came from was, it's really nice to be home. I still can't quite get over how green it is. You

know you've been living in the Middle East for a couple of years when you're surprised by rain, weekends are a novelty, and two days in them is really cool. We had three the other day, that was awesome. And it kills me to say this, but after Riyadh and Oman, and driving in Doha, traffic around here is pretty friendly.

The reason I'm here is because in my capacity as the Director of the Air Staff I was sitting in a staff meeting, waxing I'm sure not particularly eloquently, about how complex and difficult the role of Airmen in the current fight in Iraq and Syria is right now, and yet what an incredible job that they're doing. And somebody told me that I should give that little talk to a broader audience, so I can't think of a better audience than the aerospace nation we have gathered here. And it's truly great. I see a lot of friends in the audience. Please remember I said that, when it comes time for questions.

But let me tell you a little bit about what

your Airmen have been doing. And I'll start with this, your Airmen are magnificent. They're superb. They're better than we've ever been. And I know most of you know that already. And that's true all over the world. I'm going to focus a little bit on the AOR that I just came from, just because I'm a little bit more familiar with that they've been doing. And I'll tell you what I walked away from that from, and then you can ask me about that.

But I want to be clear about a couple of things, first of all, in Iraq and Syria your Airmen have been responsible for virtually every victory on the battlefield. They've been taking the enemy off the battlefield at a rate greater than a thousand a month for over a year. They've delivered supplies and food and water to people that needed it in places like Mt. Sinjar and Amirli in Iraq, and Kobanî in Syria. And then they taught the Iraqis how to do it, so that they could do it for themselves. They did that in a couple of weeks.

They're responsible for our allies retaking

significant portions of territory in both Iraq and Syria. And this next one's important. They're also the reason the Iraqi government has a little bit of time to get their governance in order. They're the reason that the Iraqi military, with our help, has the time to reorganize and fight back and take their country back.

They're also the reason the international coalition of some 60 nations has the time to get after the other international lines of effort, stemming foreign fighter flows, making sure that we combat their IO campaigns, crushing their terrorist financing, stabilizing the territories that have been liberated now, and the humanitarian work that goes along with that. All of which are going to be necessary to defeat this enemy. I'm going to call them Dash, because that's what I'm used to. I mean ISIS. I mean ISIL, all the same despicable terrorists.

But let me back up just for a little bit here and talk about airpower in this conflict. So

back in August, your airpower coalition stood up in a little less than a week, August of last year. The week after that we were matching and exceeding the levels of effort in Afghanistan, only airpower can do that. With that kind of speed and on that kind of scale. And we are part of a big joint team, and it takes all of it to get anything done. But I'll tell you this, without airpower at the low-end, high-end of warfare the joint team fails. Period.

The other thing about this conflict is it's a little bit different than some we fought at least in the 32 years or so that I've been hanging around. And I know most of you guys know this, but going after a nation-state, taking down IADS, going after a fielded army, our youngsters can do that in their sleep. It's not that hard. This enemy wrapped itself around the population before we ever got a chance to start. So we had to set up a 24/7 watch over the battlefield so that we could kill them wherever we could find them. The good news about that is your folks are really good at it.

They hit the target over 97% of the time. And they do it with an unprecedented level lack of collateral damage or unintended casualties. And I will tell you first of all, it's literally the most precise, least amount of unintended damage conflict in the history of air warfare, without a doubt. And there's a couple reasons that's important.

The first one is, is because it's the right thing to do. It's what separates us from the guys that we're fighting. He'll happily kill anybody that isn't them. The other reason is we can. We can have a significant impact on the enemy, you know, kill them at a great rate, and not kill people we don't mean to. It's also necessary. Some of those other lines of effort, that are necessary to get after this hybrid enemy require more than just us, which means you have to keep a coalition together.

And when you have a coalition of Sunni Arabs, and a coalition of western democracies, whose populations won't tolerate civilian casualties on any kind of scale. And the reason I know that, is because

I spent the better part the last year hanging around at CHOD conferences, Chiefs of Defense conferences, and ministerials, and every single time the leaders of those governments came by and thanked us for the way we were prosecuting this campaign, because it was the only reason they could stay. The good news is your guys are good enough to get after the enemy and play by those rules.

And it's a growth business. The last two months in Iraq and Syria have been the most kinetic on record. I like to think it's because they were well taught, but it's probably just because they're really good. And just let me give you an example, last Tuesday, we emptied three B-1 over Iraq and Syria. Eighty targets in 20 minutes on IED storage areas in Ramadi. That's significant. Your guys are good at this. The intelligence community is coming together. We're turning a lot of that exquisite intelligence that they have into finite target sets.

The tough part about before is we didn't start with those target sets. You know, that target

set never existed for the type of enemy that we started fighting against right away. It doesn't mean we can't get after it. It doesn't mean it isn't a growth industry, it truly is. And the guys are making that happen as we speak. But I just wanted to give you a little bit of perspective about why that's true.

And let me tell you something else about airpower, and again, and don't misunderstand me. Unleashing airpower, the way that our airpower advocates talk about it, is exactly the right thing for us to be discussing and for us to get after. But I just wanted to let you know the biggest advocates of airpower right now are guys, like Tony Thomas, the Joint Task Force Commander. Because without us, he can't get after the HVI stuff that he's after. It's James Terry, it's Lloyd Austin.

Let me tell you a little story about General Austin just for a second, just because this audience will appreciate it. And this actually predates what we've been doing over there for the last year or so, but just by a little bit. He was sitting at the head

of a table, at Al Udeid, at the Combined Air Operations Center and on one screen was a data link of about 70 different airplanes flying around from Nellis range, simulating a contingency operation that we were doing there. There was a JFEC on the screen from Shaw that was doing the U.S. only portion of this particular exercise. There was a target picture, real-time from a classified source that was 8,000 miles away. And right outside the door we were doing a very robust and significantly large air and missile defense exercise, you know, protecting the Arabian Gulf. You know, a standard Air Force exercise day.

So this six-foot, seven-inch infantryman gets up from the table. He says, "Kid," that me, "come with me." Okay. He's a big guy. I did what he said. And he got into the office. He's a fairly stoic guy, anybody that knows him. Here's what he did. He went, "Oh, dear God. I had no idea. I had no idea the Air Force could do what it does. And, John, the American people don't know how good the Air Force is." And then he called General Welsh and

apologized to him for taking the Air Force for granted for the first 39 years of his career. True story.

So the only reason I tell you that, is because that's how good your Airmen are. And, again, convincing one Army general that the Air Force is good is not the right answer, but by God the fact that we did it was pretty cool. But this audience can convince a lot of people of that. And that'll be important.

The rub of this is the policy path that our nation has chosen, is to assist the Iraqi government in training and developing their force so they can fight and take their country back. That may be the only long-term way to do it. I don't know. But what that means for us is that we're going to be at this for a while. Because there's no plan out there that doesn't ask for airpower in significant numbers for the entire plan. That plan takes three or four years.

So the thing that's interesting for us, as an Air Force, is we're going have to lead our way through that. We'll have to provide that airpower for

this as it goes forward. But that's the low-end of warfare. The stuff we're doing now is not fighting China. It's not fighting adversaries that have significantly more capability. But we have to be able to do that, which means that our nation's going have to pay for both the high-end and the low-end. And we're going have to train our incredible Airmen to do both. And our nation's going to demand that we do both.

I know y'all know that. The only good news in that part of this discussion is our Airmen, even though there's less of them than there's ever been before, they're better than we ever were. So all us old guys in the room, it's not even close. They're really good. They get the mission done every time. They get it done in ways that I never thought of. CAOC was great. If I asked a question three guys showed up, they told me the answer, and then they told me the question I should have asked, and then they answered that. Every time.

The only thing about these great Airmen is

we have to keep them. And in order to do that we have to one of two things. If we're going to meet this demand signal we either have to temper it, or get more of them. And while we're doing that we have to take care of them and their families, and we have to get them the realistic training that we all got that made this Air Force great. I never went into any kind of conflict that I wasn't ready for. We can't do that to them either.

Again, I know in a big way I'm preaching to the choir here. The reason I'm saying it is because we're going to need all your help. We have to be able to do both. We have to give them the training. We have to give them the equipment. And we have to develop them and take care of them in a way that they stay with us. Sounds obvious. It's really hard. Anyway, I wish they could have all seen the Chief's speech yesterday, they be signing up in droves, but you guys know that already.

All right. I'm going to stop talking. Like I said, the good news for you is that's all I had

planned, because I thought I was sharing the stage. But it didn't quite work out that way. Remember that you like me, and ask whatever questions that you want.

Sir?

MAJOR GENERAL BARRETT: Thanks, Kid. Well we have some good questions for you. All of them easy. So I'll start off with a really easy one. I think I could even tell you who this might have come from. How can we get the leadership in Washington, D.C. to allow us to launch a full air campaign, so we can finally sever the head of the snake?

GENERAL HESTERMAN: I don't know. But I think what we can do is, you know, the thing that's tricky about this is turning our exquisite intelligence capability into targetable data. That's what you need to get after an enemy like this. We're getting better at that. But, in my humble opinion, our ability to do that had atrophied a little bit before we started this campaign. So it doesn't mean we're not watching them closely. It doesn't mean we can't get after them in significant ways. We can do

that really quickly, by the way, and if you guys want to talk about that, I'm happy to.

But what I think we need to do, is I think we need to robust our ability to turn all the actionable intelligence we have into data that where we can get after this enemy in a robust way. And then we can utilize all the airpower that we can bring to bare.

MAJOR GENERAL BARRETT: Here's another softball. What about the Air Force and its mission execution, not only in that area but globally, keeps you up at night?

GENERAL HESTERMAN: I didn't hear you. I'm sorry.

MAJOR GENERAL BARRETT: I'm sorry. What about the Air Force and its mission execution globally keeps you up at night?

GENERAL HESTERMAN: Virtually nothing about its mission execution. I mean that's the thing we're good at. Having enough of it. I watch our leadership having to make really tough choices. In my humble

opinion, we ought to pay for all of it. I mean when we talk about -- there's nothing that we do, no conflict that we're in, that isn't dependent on airpower. And all realms of it. I mean no other service in the joint environment can do the things they need to do without what we do. We have to keep making that story known. We have to make sure that people pay for those things that we need. And we have to tell them what we're not going to be able to do, if they don't pay for that. Our leadership does that pretty rigorously. We're all going have to do it, if we're going to get their attention, I think.

MAJOR GENERAL BARRETT: Has the strike approval chain helped or hurt our ability to bring the fight to the enemy?

GENERAL HESTERMAN: My position on that is we are able to get after the enemy very, very quickly. And in the times that we don't -- I guess what I would want people to understand is the environment on the ground there is not clear. It doesn't take at any time at all to get permission to put a bomb on the

ground. And if it's self-defense, if they're shooting at people that we know and love, and we're watching that closely, we can attack right now. I mean nothing stops self-defense ever.

The tricky part about this is the number of times that the initial call on the enemy on the ground was incorrect, more than a hundred by the time that I left the theater. And that's not because these guys aren't really good, it's because it's really difficult to tell a bunch of folks that are dressed the same, and pretending to be each other, or at least they're pretending to be the Iraqi army. And, frankly, the Iraqi army had some work to do just in organization to figure out where they were. So in order to make sure we weren't killing the wrong guys, every now and again you had to let the Iraqi army do their thing and figure out where their folks were. That can be a little frustrating. That's not changing the strategic course of this battle, by any stretch of the imagination.

But I will tell you, as I stated, we're taking

the enemy off the battlefield at a great rate. And you do don't do that by not killing them where you find them. Sometimes you have to wait for them move away from the mosque or the school, or the innocent people's homes that they're hiding in. And some guy might fly home frustrated because he didn't get to kill him. But the guy that shows up right after him probably does get to kill him, because that's the only way you get to those kinds of numbers and he's not dissatisfied at all.

So I think the hard part about this one is identifying who the enemy is. They're hiding in a big way. It's not stopping C.Q. Brown and the coalition air team there from killing them, by the way, those numbers are going up not down. But that's the reason that every now and again it takes a little bit longer. That's the reason that, you know, we're very, very careful about it. Can you imagine, if even some percentage of those times we'd kill a bunch of Iraqi soldiers. That coalition would have unwound in a week. And we need it, to do what we're doing.

MAJOR GENERAL BARRETT: I believe this question is a boots on the ground question. Is the current policy use only air operations against ISIL handicapping the coalition's effort and prolonging their defeat?

GENERAL HESTERMAN: I think there's a lot of opinions on this. The trick about boots on the ground is for one boot on the ground that you're getting fighting, there's about ten pairs of boots on the ground to support that guy. So if you want to make that kind of commitment. That is a way to do it.

I think that the strategy that they have is they're going let the Iraqis fight for their country and take it back for themselves. And, again, we've been at this a couple different ways. That might be the right way to do it. It just takes a while. And they're not going to go nearly as fast we want them to. For us, that means we're going to be at this for a while. And we have to figure out a way to do that.

But, if you're asking me if putting a bunch of U.S. soldiers back on the ground in Iraq is the

right answer, I don't think our nation will tolerate it.

MAJOR GENERAL BARRETT: From your recent experience, how do you feel about your preparedness, and how the Air Force prepares leaders to function at the operational level of war; you being a JFACC?

GENERAL HESTERMAN: Well, I mean we can always get better at it. So let me just start with that. But we've been doing this for a long time now. And the one thing about being in this environment is everybody there has been there before for the most part. So the communication across the joint force is outstanding. I mean a lot of the tensions that used to be there before, a lot of the, "I don't trust you," organizations that were built even in places as recent as ISAF don't exist as much anymore. So Airmen are sitting right there at the table, and they're taking that advice and giving the limited resources we have, they're executing it pretty damn well.

But the broader question here though we may need to start organizing ourselves a little

differently. I mean there's no reason at all why an Airman can't be the CENTCOM commander, or can't be the JTF commander, or can't be parked at the head of the table for all these things. We all know how to do this now. Having this conversation about who's in charge, and oh by the way, when we were going to roll into Syria the first time, AFCENT was the supporting commander. The guy calling all the component commanders together to talk to him about how we're going to do this was me. We just didn't go.

So people ask me sometimes in the job that I came from, why I wasn't the JTF commander. I'll tell you the answer to that. Because that guy spent six or seven hours of his day trying to galvanize the Iraqi government and army into doing things that are going to be necessary to realize the policy position that we've taken. The AFCENT commander is busy fighting in Afghanistan and Iraq and Syria and pointing at Yemen and ready to fight across the Gulf. I'm not saying an Airman can't do that, they could do it easily, just not that Airman. He's got more to do.

MAJOR GENERAL BARRETT: If we defeat ISIL, or when we defeat them, how do we prevent the next terrorist group, paramilitary, what have you, from taking their place?

GENERAL HESTERMAN: I would have written my book, if I knew the answer to that. I do think that as we communicate, you know, nations are figuring out that we have to talk to each other. You can't stem foreign fighter flows. You can't stop financing. You can't even get after information operations, unless you have a multinational whole of government effort. Which is one of the reasons keeping the coalition together is so important. But we're going have to be diligent. And we're going have to pay really close attention. And I wish I had a better answer than that.

MAJOR GENERAL BARRETT: What is your assessment of Russia deploying forces to Syria? And what are the risks and will the Air Force adjust to operations, or have to do operations if the Russians start flying combat missions?

GENERAL HESTERMAN: I think anybody that's ever paid any attention to Syria has walked away with the conclusion that this is going have to be a negotiated political settlement. I don't think anybody's going to fight their way to victory in Syria, personally. And that said, does it make it more complicated? Of course it does. I mean is it clever on their part? Probably. It certainly makes sure they have a seat at the table when the negotiation starts. But I'm not real concerned about -- if I were the operational commander I would be concerned clearly about misinterpretation about some sort of unintended consequence. But those guys aren't interested in being in the air against the United States. Not there. That's not what that's about. They're going to defend that regime, and they're going to do it by making sure we don't get too close to them.

But it makes the situation far more complicated. At the end of the day, a bunch of diplomats are going to have to sit down and work that

out. And who knows, maybe it'll be easier to talk to Russia than it is the Assad regime, I don't know. It doesn't make it easier. I don't know if it makes it worse or better.

MAJOR GENERAL BARRETT: You discussed about the solution set has to be with the forces there, and the governments there. We train the Iraqi forces for years in OIF and they collapsed pretty quickly when challenged. What do you think is different this time?

GENERAL HESTERMAN: Well I don't think they're afraid to fight. I do think that they can be made into a capable force. I think that there are a number of sectarian, tribal, government, pick an adjective kinds of issues they have to work through there. I think what they need to get after is their operational level of government. I think they have to be able to galvanize their troops and have somebody that they trust taken them forward into battle.

And you'll note, that every time there's a competent ground force with the help of coalition airpower they win. Every single time. So I think

that's what they have to get after. I think we have to concentrate on their operational level leadership. You're a little bit out of my expertise here. I'm not a trainer of the Iraqi army, but that's what I walked away from that conflict believing.

MAJOR GENERAL BARRETT: Could you talk a little bit about some of the support, or non-kinetic aircraft and forces that are helping that fight, specifically electronic combat, Compass Call, for example?

GENERAL HESTERMAN: What can I say about them? They're magnificent. They do really good work. And I can't really talk in a ballroom stage, in a hotel much more than that. But the entire airpower enterprise, I mean what is it 600 million pounds of fuel that's been passed. I mean the fact that, my fighter pilot friends are going to get anxious here, but what makes us a superpower is we can pick anybody ourselves up and put them wherever we want to, anywhere in the planet. We have the greatest mobility force in the world.

You know, our ISR force, when we get to use it in the way that Air Forces know how to use it, is wildly effective. That's a little bit of a rub that we still need to teach our other service members. Is when we stack that stuff up in the ways that we know how to, we get to answers very, very quickly. As opposed to the 24/7 requirement for situational awareness, which really means FMV that we battle all the time. I mean we got to get past that. But I can stand up here all day and cheerlead for our APR capability, I mean they're incredibly good. And the thing that always stuns me is whatever we asked them to do they did it sooner than I thought. I mean walking up to an airlift guy and saying, "Can we drop a bunch of food and water on this place tonight?" And they're going, "How about early this afternoon?" Okay. Kid you not, that's how it works. They're really good. And they hit every target they go after.

And the whole coalition does that. If you're an industry guy, by the way, interoperability, and munitions, and systems, I'd write that down.

MAJOR GENERAL BARRETT: Speaking of the coalition, how much engagement building partner capacity in relationships did you do in that previous job, and was it enough?

GENERAL HESTERMAN: The hardest part about that is our system, because of the way it's designed, takes a really long time to deliver any of those things. So it's frustrating for some of our partners. But when you go to war together, it knocks down a lot of those barriers. So I talked about the first time we were going into Syria. The first conversation I had with the Saudi Air Chief was on a Thuraya phone in a parking lot. Which seems kind of goofy when you're standing next to a CAOC, one of the most exquisite command and control facilities on the planet. By the time we got into what we're doing now, all those guys could pick up a secure phone and talk to me on it in real-time. The action officer for that was the CENTCOM commander. Sometimes it takes that to make those things go faster.

But the first thing you always get asked in

coalition warfare, and that's what we do now, is who's going with you, and you talk to those four guys, and I'll talk to these three guys, and every level of our government is doing this at the same time. The only reason you can do that, is because guys like North, and Hostage, and Goldfein, had relationships with those folks. So when you call them up they actually take the call. And then when you say you need to come with us, or you're making a strategic mistake for your nation, they actually believe you and they come.

And then to keep the coalition together, you have to give them something worthwhile. Their nations are taking a fairly significant risk of people, and capital, and equipment, and you have to make it worthwhile for them. You have to give them, you have to show that they're making an impact against the enemy so they can go back and continue to justify why they're there. And some of these guys are coming from a long way, as you know.

Every time we go to fight together we wish we'd been better at what you just asked me about,

because now we're looking for interoperability. We're trying to talk to each other. We're trying to understand the weapons that our coalition partners are using so we can have them make the impacts that we need them to have. So in my humble opinion you can't go fast enough in improving the speed and accuracy of those kinds of things, or getting the intelligence you need to.

If you're going to go fight with somebody, you ought to be able to tell them what they're doing. So the first time you say, "Hey, come with us. Here's the one target you can look at." They're just not particularly interested in that. So that's something that we have to get better at, because pretty well convinced this is the way that warfare for at least the generation we're growing up, that's how we're going to do this.

MAJOR GENERAL BARRETT: So in that line, how do we better prepare our Airmen for those kind of coalition operations and for our folks to quote drink tea and engage globally to build these coalitions?

GENERAL HESTERMAN: You know I don't think that's as big a problem as we think, because unlike some of us, where the first time you got to do that is when you were a fairly senior guy, the folks that we're growing they do this all the time. They're used to being with coalition partners. I can't tell you when you're putting an air campaign together and the Emirati walks in, and the American walks in and they know each other, it's pretty impressive.

Oh by the way, just for fun, one of my favorite nights is, you know, it's two o'clock in the morning on the first night that the GCC coalition's going into Syria. And the Emirati one-star that's sitting next to me at the head of the table, his four ship had just gone through and laid waste to every target that they were after. And I went, "Man, they're pretty good." And he said, "Yeah, she's awesome." And I, of course went, "What'd you say?" So for the father of a 17-year-old daughter, that was just cool.

But, I'm just telling you that those kinds

of things happen because we've socialized a lot of what we do at a very young age. So I'm not real concerned about that. I think these guys are going to be able to sit down at the table and do just fine with our coalition partners.

MAJOR GENERAL BARRETT: One of the things we saw, and continuing through the air campaign, is the F-22 employed there. Obviously, probably not quite as anti-axis kind of a role for that kind of airplane, but the ability to do all the other stuff it does, things that the F-35 will be about to do, can you talk about that a little bit?

GENERAL HESTERMAN: Yeah. I mean it's incredible capability. And we did send it places we weren't going to send other, just to keep the risk down. Oh by the way, when I left, I think their hit rate was 100%, which for an air to ground guy, makes me really happy, just because they could. But any time we did anything important, whether that's the Task Force sneaking a hostage out, whatever we were doing, you can bet the F-22 was in the middle of it.

Every single time. And they're really good. And they were often the mission commander, because they have situation awareness that nobody else has, which they're really good at sharing.

So, again, I can't say enough good things. It would be better if people understood how comprehensively helpful those kinds of aircraft are and no matter, even when you're doing low-end kind of stuff. I mean they're incredible.

MAJOR GENERAL BARRETT: Cool. Do you foresee the capability to effectively run an air operation center by GCC nations in the near future? And how vital is that to our national interests in the future?

GENERAL HESTERMAN: Well, I think the thing that's important about that is they're going to do it whether we like it or not. So the more we can be interoperable with what they're doing, the more we can help them with the way that they do it, the more that we can be involved in those processes, the better understanding we'll have of what they're doing. And

I'll tell you I parked my CAOC commander in the Saudi AOC just to make sure that we could give them as much help as possible. Mostly to make sure they were killing the right folks and not doing anything that would be untenable for us.

But, again, conflict makes those kinds of things go faster. But I think that the best way to do that, I used to tell them all the time, I don't really care where the headquarters is, as long as we can all talk to each other. And that's part of this systems interoperability thing. It's the coin of the realm, truly. The beauty of this is we can do this from Shaw. So if they want to do their work from Riyadh that's okay with me. We just need to make sure we can talk to them.

MAJOR GENERAL BARRETT: This question perhaps goes to more about what you're doing now in the Air Staff. How should we balance rebuilding readiness with meeting COCOM demands for our shrinking and heavily tasked combat air forces?

GENERAL HESTERMAN: I think if you listen to

our Chief talk, he will tell you, we've lived with this notion that we're a requirements based force for a long time, but we're not. We're a supply based force, because you can only do with what you have. I think the reality of that we need to get our hands around. And then we need to very clearly and very concisely tell them what we can and can't do with the decision that they're making. But the good news is there's a lot of really smart people that are leaning into that pretty hard. We'll get to the right answer.

I remember, and I'm not trying to be trite about this, but my father used to come home when I was a little kid and tell me the Air Force is going to hell. Didn't quite happen that way. We're pretty good. Doesn't mean that we don't have significant challenges that we need to go after, it just means that we're going have to pay really close attention. But I'll just stop talking.

MAJOR GENERAL BARRETT: So along those lines, as we seek to lessen the RPA cap requirement across the globe in order to get the training pipeline

and all that working, how do you see that affects where you just came from and GCC demands on that force?

GENERAL HESTERMAN: I think we have to temper our demand signal. And, again, I think the demand signal though is largely driven by this 24/7 FMV requirement that some people, frankly, just don't need. We're going have to get wiser about how we do that. I also think we're going have to get -- we all know where a lot of these assets are. We can't let people hold onto them and only the Air Force be responsible for the ones that everybody gets to use. That's silly. So we need to pay a little bit of attention to that, as well.

MAJOR GENERAL BARRETT: How active are the A-10s overseas and when will they start drawing down in deployments?

GENERAL HESTERMAN: I didn't hear you, I'm sorry.

MAJOR GENERAL BARRETT: I said how active are the A-10s overseas and when will they start

drawing down in deployments?

GENERAL HESTERMAN: Not the force provider,
I don't know.

MAJOR GENERAL BARRETT: Okay.

GENERAL HESTERMAN: But how active are they?
Like every other asset we have over there we utilize
them 24/7. And they're great. And we all knew that.
And in this kind of warfare they're particularly
great. I will you, you guys know this, but CAS is
relative. I mean if the A-10s right there, that's the
one I want. If I'm 200 miles away, that's not the one
I want. Doesn't go fast enough. If I'm a special
tactics operator, I want a B-1, because it's going to
stay for 12 hours and drop 50 weapons. It is what it
is.

The argument that Chief is making very
clearly here is we have to have an airplane that can
fight in all the places they're going to ask us to
fight. I don't think we should have to make a choice
in that. I think we ought to pay for both. But
that's an old guy coming from the field speech. So

somebody has to make hard choices there.

MAJOR GENERAL BARRETT: There are some pundits that take a look at the number of sorties flown, number of weapons dropped in prior air campaigns, especially in that region, and say because of that comparison, the air campaign that we're doing in Iraq and Syria is ineffective and inefficient. How would you answer that?

GENERAL HESTERMAN: Well, I mean it's clearly not ineffective. It's the every good thing that's happened in there is a result of that airpower capability. Oh by the way, we're dropping, per sortie, we're dropping about five times the rate that we did in Afghanistan over the last ten years. Nobody was getting too excited about that. As it turns out, they're getting better at this, they drop about half the time. But when you're there 24/7, this isn't taking off in waves of airplanes a couple times a day, against target folders that you're holding in your hand. This is being there the entire time so that when the enemy shows itself, or a friendly force

forces them into the open we can kill them, you have to be there the entire time. It's not unreasonable at all to be flying at the rates, or dropping at the rates that we are. Can we drop more? It's a growth industry, as I said. We're getting after more and more targets.

MAJOR GENERAL BARRETT: Could you comment on how our Airmen are holding up mentally with all the deployments and the fight that's going on now?

GENERAL HESTERMAN: Yeah, they're doing great. But it wears on you. And some of these folks have been back over and over and over again. And we do have to figure out how to temper the demand signal or make more of them, or we're going have a problem. That's always been true. But for the most part they are exceptionally proud of the incredibly good work that they're doing. And they're really, really good at it. But it would be wrong to say that they aren't tired.

MAJOR GENERAL BARRETT: This next card is more of a statement. The Kid, thanks from your fans

in the second row.

GENERAL HESTERMAN: There's nobody in the second row. [Laughter]

MAJOR GENERAL BARRETT: Well, General Hesterman, thanks so much for your presentation and for baring with me and the questions. On behalf of the Air Force Association, please accept this gift as a token of our appreciation. [Applause]

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