

The Future of American Airpower
Remarks by General David Goldfein Chief of Staff of the Air Force
At the American Enterprise Institute

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GENERAL GOLDFEIN: Thank you and thank you to AEI for putting on this forum. It is really a great opportunity to talk about the Force and the Joint Force and where we're heading. I see in the crowd a lot of friendly faces that I served along with, flown with and worked with overseas. Great to see you, it has been a while.

So let me talk a little bit up front just to set the table about what I know will be a really rich discussion about your Air Force.

One of the challenges that we face as a service is actually articulating and explaining to the American people what it is that we do as an Air Force because quite frankly we do so much and so much of it is under the radar that it is sometimes taken for granted. So I want to take an opportunity to really just talk about what is your Air Force, what is the air component do for the nation and the Joint Force.

I'll start off by telling you I'm a guy that took six years to get through the Air Force Academy so engineering is not my strong suit. So much of what we do is assumed capability that I'm concerned as a service chief that it becomes a little bit like a light switch. So again, back to my Academy days, I couldn't explain to you right now how these lights work. I know it has to do with bulbs and wires and power but the one thing I know is that there is a switch over there on the wall and when I flip the switch the lights come on. So what I've come to understand over my career and adult life is that light switches equal light. I don't know exactly

what goes into it but it always happens. So I've come to assume that I will always have light. So much of what the Air Force does beneath the surface produces light and produces capability and produces key functions for the Joint Force. So when you think about the Air Force you've actually got to start by thinking about it in terms of what we do deployed in place.

So we've got over 200,000 Airmen right now that are defending the nation and you've got to start with the nuclear enterprise. So the Air Force has two legs of the Triad. We're responsible for 75% of the nuclear command and control to ensure that we connect the Commander in Chief with that capability. This is a Force that we developed in the early sixties. When you go out to missile fields it is actually fascinating. It was designed and built in the 60's. It was upgraded a little bit in the 80's and we really haven't touched it since. So we have Airmen right now as we speak defending the homeland and that nuclear deterrent underwrites every military operation on the globe. Whether you want to talk about the diplomacy that we have out there, whether we want to talk about what we're doing in the fight against ISIL and the nuclear deterrent, there is a straight line between what we're doing with the nuclear deterrent and safe secure reliable nuclear deterrent and what we do across the globe.

We became the stewards of space in 1954 when a guy named Bernie Schriever started developing the rocket enterprise and that has expanded now to the point where we as an Air Force are responsible for 12 constellations. Everyone who is on a laptop right now or who is on a cell phone and you take a look at the signal that you're getting, I'm here to tell you're getting that signal because I've got airmen right now at Schriever Air Force Base keeping those constellations alive and operating. So when you take a look at the Joint Force and what we do across the globe, we have become heavily reliant on the space capability and the space enterprise and what it does. Then you extend to cyber and what we do in the

cyber domain, what we do with intelligence surveillance, there are over 35,000 Airmen who are deployed-in-place that are doing the business of taking all the one's and zero's that we collect, all the data, and turning that into quality information. Right now, as we sit, we've got Airmen on alert at the four corners of the globe. There are Airmen right now at Andrew's Air Force Base that are on strict alert to defend the homeland and scramble when required. All of these Airmen are contributing to the homeland defense and the challenges we face deployed-in-place. It is important to understand that because these are Airmen that I would not deploy forward if a contingency occurred because they are doing their mission at home. I could give you no better visual than what we're doing at Creech Air Force Base to give you an example of how we are fighting from home station but having great impact on the current fight.

Then you take a look at what an Air Force does deployed forward, and it starts with our global mobility forces. Just shy of every three minutes, an aircraft is taking off or landing somewhere on the globe to deliver critical supplies or personnel somewhere on the globe. I would argue that we are a global force because of our global mobility. Many of those bases that we're operating out of from a number of bases across the globe right now are in under governed spaces where security is an issue and we have access to those bases because our special operators are there making the relationships happen and ensure that we have access to those bases.

We have global strike capability which means we hold targets at risk for the nation. We hold targets at risk for the President not only from the global strike capability that we would fly from the homeland, but the strike capability that we have that we are deploying downrange. The extended deterrents that we do for the Pacific and certainly the air superiority mission that we are responsible for. So whether you want to talk about striking forces and the fight against ISIL, securing

the homeland, providing all of this capability, the reality is you can't find a mission that Joint Force performs where an Airman is not engaged and essential for success. So, we're always there. That is a tough story to tell sometimes because it is such a broad case.

When you take a look at our Air Force and look at the state of it today the challenge we face is that most of those missions have grown over time, and if you look at our 70 year history, as missions have expanded the Air Force has grown. And while we've gone through ups and downs, the reality is until about the last 25 years we've had commensary growth in the service as missions have expanded. But then we've hit a turning point and much of American thinks that they still have the Air Force of 1990. The reality is, if I would have been the Chief in 1990 I'd be speaking to an Air Force of over a million, just shy of a million Active, Guard, Reserves, and civilian Airmen. Today, I've got about 660,000. If I would have been speaking to an Air Force in 1990, I would have had 134 fighter squadrons from which I would deploy 34 forward to fight in Desert Storm. I've got 55 total today across the Active, Guard, and Reserve. If I would have been talking earlier, I would have looked at 11 wings and 36 squadrons to provide deterrent value supporting the NATO Alliance in Europe. Today, three wings, 9 squadrons total. We are just not the same Air Force.

So what has happened is, missions have grown and I project they will continue to grow, space, cyber, ISR, nuclear. These are not going to come down. So we have 50,000 Airmen leave the Air Force while missions have grown, so we've had a math problem. That's why you hear me talk about the fact that where we sit today as an Air Force is we're too big for the resources available but far too small for what the nation demands of it and what the Joint Force requires. But we're not just sitting back and admiring the problem. We're moving out on some key initiatives that we're working on. I've called them Chief Focus Areas. I'm

hoping we get into some discussion on them during the Q&A. The one thing, the first thing we're looking at is the core structure in our Air Force where Airmen thrive, where families thrive, and where we build readiness, and we have innovation is at the squadron level. So with all of these fits and starts and decreases over time I'm concerned about what the current state of the squadron is - where the mission succeeds or fails in the Air Force. So we're taking a laser focus on that and I'll talk more about that during the Q&A.

We're looking at talent management in the Air Force. Today's Airman spends a significant amount of time in a functional area mastering that functional area in air, or in space, or in cyber. The future Airman, I believe, has got to come to the table when they have the U.S. Air Force on their tap, they understand all three and they understand the operational integration of all three because they've been exposed to all three. And they understand not only how air space and cyber come together but how to combine those with the land component, the maritime component so we can sit at the table and ensure that we are producing Joint plans and bring all those components together for the Commander in Chief and Secretary of Defense. So we're looking at developing, how we strengthen the development of Joint leaders and teams. The third one we're focusing on is multi-domain command and control. I'm focused on that one because I believe future conflict, the victors will be those who can command and control their forces, who can have a resilience cyber secure network that they operate on, that they can produce multiple dilemmas for an enemy. At a speed that the enemy can't counter and deny the enemy the capability of doing the same, that's going to win. That's a core mission of the United States Air Force and so we're leading the efforts when we think through that.

So we're an Air Force right now today that has a plethora of missions that we perform every day. There are so many of these missions that we do that if the

light didn't come on, if the switch was flipped and that light didn't come on it would fundamentally change the way we have to operate as a Joint Force. So it is a great opportunity here today to get a chance to talk about it.