Global Vigilance, Reach, and Power

The United States is the world’s preeminent military power primarily because of its superiority in air and space. Our other force capabilities are important; they are the best in the world. However, the critical advantage—the asymmetric capability that makes the great difference—is aerospace power, which has become the dominant element in armed conflict.

Strength in air and space is a fundamental requirement for the projection of US military power abroad in any form, and with increasing frequency, it is aerospace forces that lead the way.

Our continued superiority in the aerospace realm is not guaranteed, nor is our present position of leadership in world affairs. If the US defense program keeps declining, we will eventually lose our advantage.

Reductions to defense budgets and force structure have gone too far. The armed forces are stretched and stressed by operational and deployment demands in peacetime, and they are inadequately sized and equipped to carry out their wartime roles.

Readiness is flagging. Personnel problems abound. In 1999, for example, the Air Force experienced its first recruiting shortfall in 20 years. We are falling behind on force modernization. The nation is not prepared to meet new requirements now emerging, especially in space and information warfare.

The Air Force Association believes it is imperative to provide more adequately for all of the military services, but especially for the aerospace forces upon which the nation has become so reliant for global vigilance, global reach, and global power.

Global vigilance includes not only intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance by airborne and spaceborne sensors but also all of the other aerospace forces, from ICBM sites to the no-fly zones, on alert and on guard, at home and abroad, every day of the year.

Global reach allows us to put a military platform—for reconnaissance, humanitarian, or operational purposes—above any point on Earth in a matter of hours, and provides strategic mobility to rapidly position or reposition forces anywhere.

Global power is the capability to operate from regional bases overseas or to fly or strike directly from the United States on missions that range from humanitarian aid to power projection and crisis response.

Falling Short. We do not accept the presumption that the defense program cannot be increased, regard-
the Air Force, which provides about 90 percent of the assets, even though its own share of the defense budget is about the same as it was before the space program began.

Among the most urgent of the new missions is the capability to defend and attack in the information regime. We agree with the decision of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, disclosed in “Joint Vision 2020,” to raise the importance of information operations to the same level as dominant maneuver and precision engagement.

We must reach a firm decision to regard an attack on our critical information infrastructures as an act of war. Information superiority is vital to national security at the strategic, operational, and tactical levels. It is imperative that we master it to a far greater extent than we have done thus far.

**Aerospace Integration.** The demand for military space power is growing, and so is the demand for military airpower. They are complementary rather than competitive. It does not make sense to pit one against the other.

Air and space share common operational characteristics that include elevation, perspective, speed, range, and freedom from the geographic constraints of the Earth’s surface.

The best approach is an aerospace force, operating in an integrated aerospace domain that stretches from the Earth’s surface to the outer reaches of space and with emphasis on effects rather than on where the platforms fly, reside, or orbit.

Some military functions are migrating to space, and others will follow. Many of the emerging missions, especially those in the area of information superiority, will be conducted from there. Space will be the preferred domain for “low-density, high-demand” assets that are small in numbers but crucial to the support of operations everywhere.

The Air Force has been successful in that the interests of anyone, least of all the nation, would be served by creating, as has been suggested, a space force as a separate military service.

The military space program has risen from embryonic beginnings primarily because of support from the Air Force, which provides about 90 percent of the assets, even though its own share of the defense budget is about the same as it was before the space program began.

The problems in the space program are budgetary, not organizational. The solution is additional funding, not a new service.

The United States must dominate the integrated aerospace domain in wartime. We must have access and be able to operate freely there while denying those capabilities to an adversary.

When our interests in the aerospace regime are challenged—and they will be—the US armed forces must be ready to protect them. The nation will expect and accept no less.

**The Call To Transformation.** The mandate of the Quadrennial Defense Review in the coming year is “transformation” of the armed forces from the Cold War model to configurations better suited to the needs of the 21st century.

Transformation seeks to exploit the so-called “revolution in military affairs,” brought about by the combination of stealth, long-range precision attack, and information technologies. Capabilities attendant to the transformation, from precision engagement to information superiority, will be centered in forces operating in air and space.

The Air Force has found an excellent vehicle to carry out its transformation by grouping its operational elements into Aerospace Expeditionary Forces. The AEFs adapt the combat structure of the force for flexible deployment to smaller scale contingencies while preserving the capability to respond to threats and crises across the spectrum of conflict.

The long reach and precision strike of such forces have been demonstrated several times. Each AEF will package intelligence, surveillance, reconnaissance, and command and control of aerospace forces over a large region with air superiority and the capability to attack some 200 targets a day.

Transformation is further seen in the efforts to make the deployment forces even lighter and leaner than they are today. The goal is to reduce their forward support footprint by half, both by modifications to the force and by greater reliance on such concepts as “reachback,” in which some functions supporting a deployment are performed from locations half a world away. The Air Force is working to expand the battlespace an AEF can cover and increase the number of targets it can strike.

The previous QDR in 1997 never broke free of its fiscal orientation, and the main consequence of it was to cut forces, infrastructure, and programs. We strongly urge that this QDR operate at a higher level of strategic responsibility and be faithful to its theme of transformation.

**People.** Today’s active duty component is the smallest in the history of the Air Force. Nevertheless, it is hard to recruit and retain the people required to fill these diminished ranks.

Public attention has focused mostly on the shortfall in pilots, but the retention problem also extends to enlisted members in critical areas. In addition, a large technical manpower shortage now looms in the civilian workforce as half of the Air Force’s civilian employees become eligible for retirement within the next five years.

The difficulty of competing in the booming job marketplace is only one of the obstacles to attracting and keeping the people the Air Force needs. A growing number of public schools ban military recruiters and refuse to make school directories available to them.

The Expeditionary Aerospace Force concept helps relieve the hardships of the punishing operations tempo that the services have maintained in recent years. It creates stable and predictable rotation schedules, but extensive deployments and family separations continue, and that takes a toll on retention.

Recruiting and retention problems are partly a consequence of the broader economic and employment situation, but they are also the result of repeated actions over the years that led to loss of faith by the troops. These actions ranged from broken promises on medical care to personnel actions in which career people who wanted to stay were put out of the service to meet short-term drawdown goals. Some parents with military backgrounds advise their children against joining the service because of past actions such as these.
Solutions to ongoing problems will depend greatly on a restoration of mutual respect and faith, and that is going to take some time.

We note and appreciate recent improvements to military compensation, both in pay raises and in the restoration of retirement benefits. However, problems remain, especially in health care.

The government has acknowledged that it cannot meet the promise, made to several generations of military people, of medical care for life if they served a full career. Tricare, the managed care system that is supposed to deliver partially on that promise, has not lived up to either expectations or billing and must be regarded as fatally flawed.

In many respects, the health care system for retired civil servants is superior to programs for military retirees. We are told that it cannot be an option for most military retirees because that would cost too much.

The idea that the nation cannot afford to provide to military retirees the same caliber of health care coverage that other federal retirees receive is wrong, insulting, and unacceptable and shows how far we have to go to reestablish good faith.

**Total Force.** The Air Force continues to set the example for all of the services with the employment and integration of its Guard and Reserve components. These components have attributes, such as depth in experience and aircrews, that match voids in the active force. Their greater participation in active missions is good for all concerned.

Among the examples of such integration is the ongoing consolidation of training, assets, and infrastructure through collocation and other measures. The Air National Guard and the Air Force Reserve Command now provide 10 percent of the manpower deployed in each rotational Aerospace Expeditionary Force.

The Air Force Association expresses its appreciation and regard for the support of employers of Guard and Reserve members. Without their cooperation, the strength of Total Force would not be possible.

**Technology and Force Modernization.** The outlook is dire. The United States owes its military superiority to systems and weapons that were developed before the budget cuts began. This equipment is aging, is wearing out, and is not being replaced.

Failure to make orderly investments these past 10 years has now led to a force modernization shortfall estimated at some $100 billion a year. Unless it is resolved, the nation could lose much of its relative military advantage by 2015.

Research and development and science and technology programs have been shortchanged as well. We have also seen critical force modernization programs singled out, one by one, and attacked as too expensive or unnecessary.

Neglect of force modernization also harms effectiveness. It also causes further aging of the aircraft fleet, which is already the oldest the Air Force has ever operated. This, in turn, complicates and worsens problems in readiness and maintenance, which have become concerns in their own right.

Defense cutters, and some tunnel vision advocates of particular systems as well, set up false choices, such as pitting air superiority against long-range precision strike. These are not either/or propositions.

The nation got into the present predicament by pretending that requirements did not exist or that they could be deferred so the money could be spent on something else. We should not compound that mistake by making it again.

The force of the future will need intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance, command and control, attack warning, aerospace superiority, long-range precision strike, strategic mobility, agile combat support, and force protection at home and abroad. The time is now to invest in these capabilities.

**War and Other Missions.** The 1990s saw a steady drift in US policy toward intervention and engagement abroad, a tendency toward incremental or restricted actions, and more emphasis on military operations other than war.

We recognize that it may sometimes be in the nation’s interest to conduct military operations for limited objectives. However, we are concerned that the dividing line between peace and war has become increasingly blurred and that the threshold for the armed forces to enter combat has been lowered.

The nation should commit military force only when there is a clear military objective to be achieved. We should not use lethal military force to “send signals” when we are not prepared to take serious, relevant, and sustained action if our warnings fail.

The first purpose of armed forces is to fight and win wars, and it is for that purpose that they must first be organized, trained, and equipped. All other considerations are secondary and subordinate to this.

**A Force for the Nation.** The cornerstone of our strength is the capability to project power rapidly and effectively to any point on the globe, and to provide the national command authorities and theater commanders with a range of effective options across the spectrum of conflict.

We believe the nation must have a balanced mix of land, sea, and aerospace forces. We do not advocate single-dimension strategies, and we do not claim that aerospace power will be decisive in every instance. However, it is the hardest-hitting, longest-reaching, and most flexible force that the nation possesses. It is difficult to imagine a future conflict of any major scope in which land power or sea power could survive—much less be decisive—without aerospace power.

The preponderance of the nation’s aerospace power is vested in the US Air Force.

The Air Force can respond promptly to distant crises and project power from intercontinental distances. Airpower can support surface operations, but it can also achieve strategic, operational, or tactical objectives independent of surface power or with land or sea forces in support.

The Air Force can look deep, reach far and fast, penetrate hostile territory, maintain a global situational awareness, and strike with precision.

It is a force defined by global vigilance to anticipate and deter threats, by strategic reach to curb crises, and by overwhelming power to prevail in conflicts and to win America’s wars.