The war on terror dominates DOD thinking, but the Air Force must be ready to fight across the spectrum of conflict.

Holding on Through “The Long War”

The first two F-22s of the 94th FS at Langley AFB, Va., line up on final approach. Service leaders worry that air dominance was simply taken for granted in the Quadrennial Defense Review.
The Air Force’s most senior leaders brought this blunt message to AFA’s latest Air Warfare Symposium: As a result of the Quadrennial Defense Review, the service is getting smaller, it will have to stretch out the lives of many old aircraft and keep them in service, and it will have to depend on the other armed forces branches to provide critical capabilities USAF has provided for itself in the past.

More sobering, though, was their clear expression of concern that the Air Force’s contributions to national security are either undervalued or taken for granted and certainly not funded at the levels necessary to maintain the force.

Air Force Secretary Michael W. Wynne, making his first address at the annual event, held Feb. 2-3 in Orlando, Fla., said, “I sometimes think that the Air Force plays its role so well that it becomes an assumption of the plan. ... People forget that they need to, in fact, resource it.”

Wynne observed that the core capabilities of the service—air dominance and global reach—“have been hard earned and they need to be nurtured, not assumed.” He added that, while there is now a Defense Department-wide focus on fighting and winning the Global War on Terror, the services are still obligated to prepare for all security threats.

“You will find in the QDR that we remain responsible for the entirety of the spectrum of warfare,” Wynne asserted, meaning that USAF must still be able to cope with adversary air forces, space threats, and ground defenses, and not just terrorists, insurgents, and improvised explosive devices.

These latter, “asymmetric, cross-border” threats, with their own “global reach,” have been “highlighted” in the QDR, Wynne said.

Center of the Universe

The Global War on Terror has been the main driver of all defense considerations, Wynne added, and has trumped efforts to come to grips with the need for long-term, future capabilities.

Wynne’s words: “We must recognize that everything—every requirement, every weapon system, and ultimately every dollar—[everything] we do in the future will be colored by the stark fact that today, right now, our soldiers, sailors, marines, and airmen are engaged in a bloody fight with a deadly enemy.”

Speaking on the eve of the release of the QDR, which had been taking shape for more than a year, Wynne said the review pushes the services toward even more jointness and on toward acceptance of “full interdependency,” which he asserted will signal “a seismic shift in the way we define our operations of the future.” The services will have to assume that their sister branches will be successful in their areas of specialty and will have to share facilities, assets, resources, and people.

He also noted that this was the first QDR “written in wartime.”

The major thrust of the QDR is to finally banish so-called Cold War thinking and organization from the US military, Wynne explained, eliminating the fixation on “a specific country or one type of threat,” and replacing it with a more adaptive, agile force that can shift gears rapidly.

The QDR did not abandon the whole concept of deterrence, which lay at the heart of Cold War thinking, but has replaced it with “tailored deterrence,” meant to give the President options against any threat—options that will be meaningful to that threat, whether it is a near-peer competitor such as China, a rogue power such as Iran, or stateless terrorists and their networks.

The military called for in the QDR would make a break from “bulky, industrial age force to speedy, information age stretched forces,” said Wynne.

Gen. T. Michael Moseley, the Air Force Chief of Staff, expended some of his time at Orlando explaining how the Air Force presented itself in the QDR deliberations. He said the Air Force is uniquely responsible for “two domains: air and space.” These domains, he went on, “are inherently different, but they are a continuum of activities, from one centimeter off the surface to geosynchronous orbit. That’s what we contribute.”

While the Army dominates the land arena and the Navy-Marine Corps team controls the maritime arena, airpower, said Moseley, “is not limited by oceans, by shorelines, by shallow water [or] mountains. ... It’s not limited even by distance.” Borrowing from the service’s new credo, he said, “The unique contribution [of the Air Force] in this world of interdependence ... is reflected by air- and space power ...
in the notion of delivering sovereign options or in the notion of holding a global set of activities or targets at risk.”

To be able to do so, Moseley said, is self-evidently “an inherently tailored deterrence for the leadership of this country.”

**Air Force, Defined**

According to Moseley, “global strike, global mobility, global intelligence, surveillance, reconnaissance or global vigilance define the role of an Air Force” and describe its unique contribution to the overall, interdependent fight.

The QDR highlights using information—and especially intelligence—to substitute for physical activities wherever possible. One example would be reachback, in which forward deployed forces rely on expertise and databases at home base, rather than bring people and support materiel forward. Such an approach not only saves money by reducing forward footprint, but it speeds the fight and contributes to serving multiple functions along a single electronic pathway, Wynne said.

The focus on information technologies is one reason Wynne has circulated a new semiofficial motto of the Air Force stating the service will fly and fight in air, space, and cyberspace. The service has long been “heavily invested in cyberspace,” he said, and that fact should be recognized.

Wynne also noted that “anyone can become a peer competitor with the United States in this arena.”

However, the recognition of both the threat and the need for more agile operations will force an overhaul of the methods by which USAF acquires new systems. The technology is advancing “so rapidly that our laws, conventions, and doctrine lag just a little bit behind,” he admitted. He promised a refashioning of the acquisition system, featuring better-trained specialists and a higher degree of emphasis on accountability and ethics.

From industry, Wynne said, USAF will demand better cost estimating. From itself, the Air Force will demand tougher discipline in the buying process.

“We can no longer admire our PowerPoint presentations while our programs languish, and we must stop bemoaning our challenges and take action to speed up our acquisition cycle wherever we can,” he insisted.

The QDR points out a need for “more options” from the military in dealing with everything from all-out war to disaster relief to nation building, Wynne said.

Among those additional options will be a long-range precision strike system, yet to be defined, but notionally described as a superfast unmanned vehicle able to leap long distances and able to loiter over the target area with a considerable load of weapons.

“The long-range strike airplane ... was considered in the QDR and it was considered vital,” Wynne said. “We’re investing heavily right now in all of the aspects of technology, less the platform, hoping to come together with a program and a plan sometime in the 2009 to 2010 time frame.”

The Pentagon asked the Air Force to accelerate the program, from an in-service date of 2037 to “the late ‘teens,’” Wynne said, adding, “Done deliberately and done right, I think we can bring this to fruition.”

However, he later acknowledged to The Air Force will shrink by 40,000 people, according to Gen. Michael Moseley, USAF’s Chief of Staff. He pledges to start at the top, eliminating the positions of 30 generals.

Air Force Secretary Michael Wynne said winning the war at hand is the service’s top priority, but USAF remains responsible for defeating modern and future aerial and ground-based air threats.
The Air Force Gets a Friendly Lecture on Intelligence

The Air Force has rightfully elevated intelligence to the status of an operational, fighting activity, but needs to change some of its cultural ideas about how intelligence should be valued and given resources. Until it does, the Air Force will find itself increasingly out of the intelligence decision-making loop at the highest levels.

So asserted Gen. Michael V. Hayden, principal deputy director of national intelligence. Hayden, who was formerly the head of the National Security Agency, said the Quadrennial Defense Review boiled down to a mantra of “find, fix, and finish”—the latter meaning to destroy.

He said, “Now [that] we’ve made this psychic shift, ‘finishing’ is easy, ‘finding’ is hard,” but too much of the Pentagon budget is “weighted ... on ‘finish,’” especially the Air Force budget.

“Culturally, habitually, the way we build programs, we’re still reinforcing things that we’re comfortable with, things that we’re used to,” such as bombers and fighters and airlift. That will have to change, because the shift toward increasingly precision-based attacks means that “information becomes absolutely critical to our success as a service, and I’m really talking here about us. About we airmen.”

When faced with drastic cuts to cherished programs, the Air Force saw the national intelligence budget, funded with billions, and decided to reduce its own investment in intelligence-surveillance-reconnaissance.

“They kind of look over that fence and say, ‘My God, there are tens of billions of dollars over there in that other budget. They do SIGINT and they do imagery and they do [measurement and signature intelligence]. Hey, we’ll just get it from them.’”

Hayden said he went along with that thinking to justify his own budget in the national intelligence program, but it hurt the Air Force.

Speaking as a USAF officer, he said, “We began to bleed off organic intelligence resources. There was one point when America’s Air Force’s ability to take tactical photo reconnaissance was confined to four pods sitting somewhere around the Richmond International Airport with the Virginia National Guard.”

The Air Force made the right move in equating intelligence with fighting assets a few years ago, he said.

“The Air Force in its heart took that philosophical leap into the abyss and said, ‘Intelligence is a support function. Intel is a war winner. Intel is on the ops team.’”

In doing so, however, USAF rearranged how intelligence was organized within the service, and this led to some problems, Hayden pointed out.

By putting intelligence under the deputy chief of staff for plans and operations, the service lost a two-star general to be champion for the intel function, Hayden explained.

There were other unanticipated drawbacks. The Air Force tends to focus on intelligence applications—“Your very best people are out there in the CAOC” rather than working on intel creation. That, Hayden said, has led to too few career intelligence officers and a consequent lack of representation on the war councils of the regional commanders.

Career intel officers “talk about a glass ceiling, and nobody can get beyond [colonel]. It’s led to that. [There’s] a little bit of ... whining there, but there’s some truth in there, too.”

More importantly, though, “there isn’t a J-2 [intelligence chief] in the United States armed forces on the planet” who’s a USAF officer. “All the J-2s at the commands, last time I checked, belong to some other service.”

This, Hayden continued, “tends to have an influence on how America fights wars. ... It’s got to affect the thinking of the staff and the decisions of the commanders.”

He also argued that one of the reasons USAF hasn’t “won all our arguments” in the QDR is that “the world views of those people who seem to be making the final decisions, those world views don’t quite comport with our world views, how we as airmen view the world.”

That happened, he said, because of “the lack of airmen inside this broad national function called intelligence, or the lack of airmen in influential positions.”

The Air Force has codified its emphasis on applications instead of intel creation, Hayden said, in its oft-repeated slogan that all intel should lead to “a cursor over the target.” This preference for absolute quantification will have to shift a bit toward “liberal artsy” considerations, such as the cultural impacts of destroying certain kinds of targets or the effect on an economy.

“It’s more than just the math about the right weapon at the right [designated mean point of impact]. “That cultural thing is going to be a big deal.”
and multimission-oriented that USAF doesn’t need as many, he said.

He added that aircraft also will be easier to maintain by a great margin, meaning fewer support personnel will be required to keep them operating.

These advancements also mean “because of the expected mission capability rate, we are increasing the crew ratio and testing what exactly does constitute a squadron.”

Moseley noted that the Air Force has been at war for 15 straight years—from the Gulf War that began on Jan. 17, 1991, and through various wars and military actions up to today’s combat—and the experience of that time has yielded lessons learned that provide “an opportunity to be smaller.”

Who Are Those Guys?

He said that the reduction isn’t a dangerous thing, considering that a good percentage of the force still has not and will not deploy. “If we’ve got folks in the Air Force that haven’t deployed, and we’ve been fighting longer than World War II,” he said, joking, “Who are they?”

The figure of 40,000, he continued, seems daunting, but represents a reduction of “seven or eight percent,” versus the post-Cold War downsizing that began in 1990. “We came off ... 40 percent ... in that two- or three-year period,” he said. The new cuts won’t be felt as badly, thanks to efficiencies.

He added, “We’re not going to start this at the bottom of the pyramid; we’re going to start this at the top,” and USAF will begin the cuts by eliminating “30-plus general officers.”

Better management of aircraft—in depots and on the flight line—also is providing a benefit equivalent to having more aircraft, Wynne said. He has asked Air Mobility Command to develop faster techniques for “pit stop”-style fast refueling of aircraft on the ground and in the air to reduce both the need for tankers and to get more out of operational missions. Such leaner techniques have “kept more airplanes in the sky than on the ground. ... The end result is the same as if we had added to our production rate.”

However, these successes come “with a caution, and that is our ‘wear out’ factor,” Wynne observed. The Air Force is already flying “more hours than we had planned” and officials don’t know if the increased operating tempo will seriously affect the life expectancy of its systems.

More efficiencies can be found by comparing the activities of active duty and reserve component forces and eliminating unnecessary redundancies in equipment, people, or facilities.

The QDR identified a strong need for a new global strike platform, which is be ready by 2018. Wynne said the goals of super high speed and big payload pose a tough challenge. Above is a Northrop Grumman artist’s conception.
The Air Force can live with 36 fewer B-52s, service leaders insist, as long as the remaining aircraft get sufficient upgrades. The proposed stand-off jammer electronic attack modification for the fleet has been canceled.

Wynne made a plea, however, to be allowed to use the money the Air Force has left to operate more wisely than existing laws allow. He wants to retire old aircraft that cost too much to operate and don’t offer an adequate payback for the resources they consume.

“Older aircraft ... kept in inventory beyond their useful military utility require costly maintenance and modifications to try to restore some of that marginal military utility. Sometimes this requires a complete overhaul, which yields a marginal gain overall.”

The Air Force, in the Fiscal 2007 budget request sent to Capitol Hill the following week, asked Congress to permit the retirement of 36 B-52 bombers, all F-117 stealth attack aircraft, and the U-2 fleet on an accelerated schedule, as well as all the KC-135E and C-130Es in the inventory.

Free the Air Force 839

Congress has specifically barred the Air Force from retiring “839 aircraft, or 14.5 percent of the fleet, [which] I no longer have the right to manage,” Wynne protested. No other service labors under such a burden, he noted.

However, he cheered moves by Congress to add funding to re-engine many of the 707-derived airframes USAF flies, such as the AWACS and E-8 Joint STARS, promising to run with the ball and find other savings if the new motors are acquired.

Wynne said he will order a “holistic evaluation of our large aircraft fleet” to see if the new engines could yield other efficiencies. For example, “if changing engines allows for dramatic increases in range, then will it also change deployment and expeditionary requirements? ... Ultimately, we save quite a bit in infrastructure investment.”

Moseley said that he believes the Air Force “can become much more expeditionary” and increase “the percentages of people in [USAF] who do deploy.” He said that language proficiency in Arabic, Chinese, French, or Spanish will soon be a requirement at all levels of professional military education, both for officers and enlisted, as will specialized knowledge about a given area of the world.

He pledged to slim down headquarters staffs and command and control functions, to eliminate unnecessary layers, and improve the sharing of information, both within USAF and among the services.

Moseley also promised a thoughtful re-evaluation of the intelligence aspects of the Air Force mission. The QDR focused on greater depth of knowledge of the battlefield, he said, since there’s no longer much doubt that the Air Force can destroy any target, once it has been located.

“We have the killing piece down pretty good,” he said, but “the finding piece is becoming more of a challenge.” Finding the enemy and passing that information along to fellow services and allies is “an issue of orbital systems, air-breathing systems, and a command and control net, and a completely different notion of United States Air Force intelligence, as far as capturing, assessing, analyzing, and transmitting these seemingly unrelated bits of data.”

The route to “unblinking” surveillance of areas of interest lies not just with satellites but unmanned aircraft, he added.

Moseley told reporters that the Air Force has not given up on the idea of near-space vehicles and that there is funding in the budget for science and experiments regarding such high-flying potential ISR platforms.

Wynne asked attendees—uniformed personnel as well as industry officials—to “open your mind to this new environment” of the QDR-driven force, and “work with us to figure out what could be coming next ... and how to tell the Air Force story in a way that reflects the efficiency and effectiveness across the Total Force.” He warned, though, that the service’s long-term capabilities mustn’t be neglected in the drive to win the short-term fight.

“Providing even a hint of moderating our goal to dominate the air is the kind of encouragement that our enemies don’t need,” Wynne asserted.