

USAF's top leaders see airpower as the instrument and the product of strategic change.

The New American Way of War

By John T. Correll, Editor in Chief

GEN. Ronald R. Fogleman, USAF Chief of Staff, believes that a "new American way of war" is emerging. Traditionally, the US has "relied on large forces employing mass, concentration, and firepower to attrit enemy forces and defeat them in what many times became costly but successful battles," he said at the Air Force Association's Air Warfare symposium in Orlando, Fla., in February. Now, however, technology and circumstances are leading to unique military advantages, particularly in airpower, that can be employed "to compel an adversary to do our will at the least cost to the United States in lives and resources."

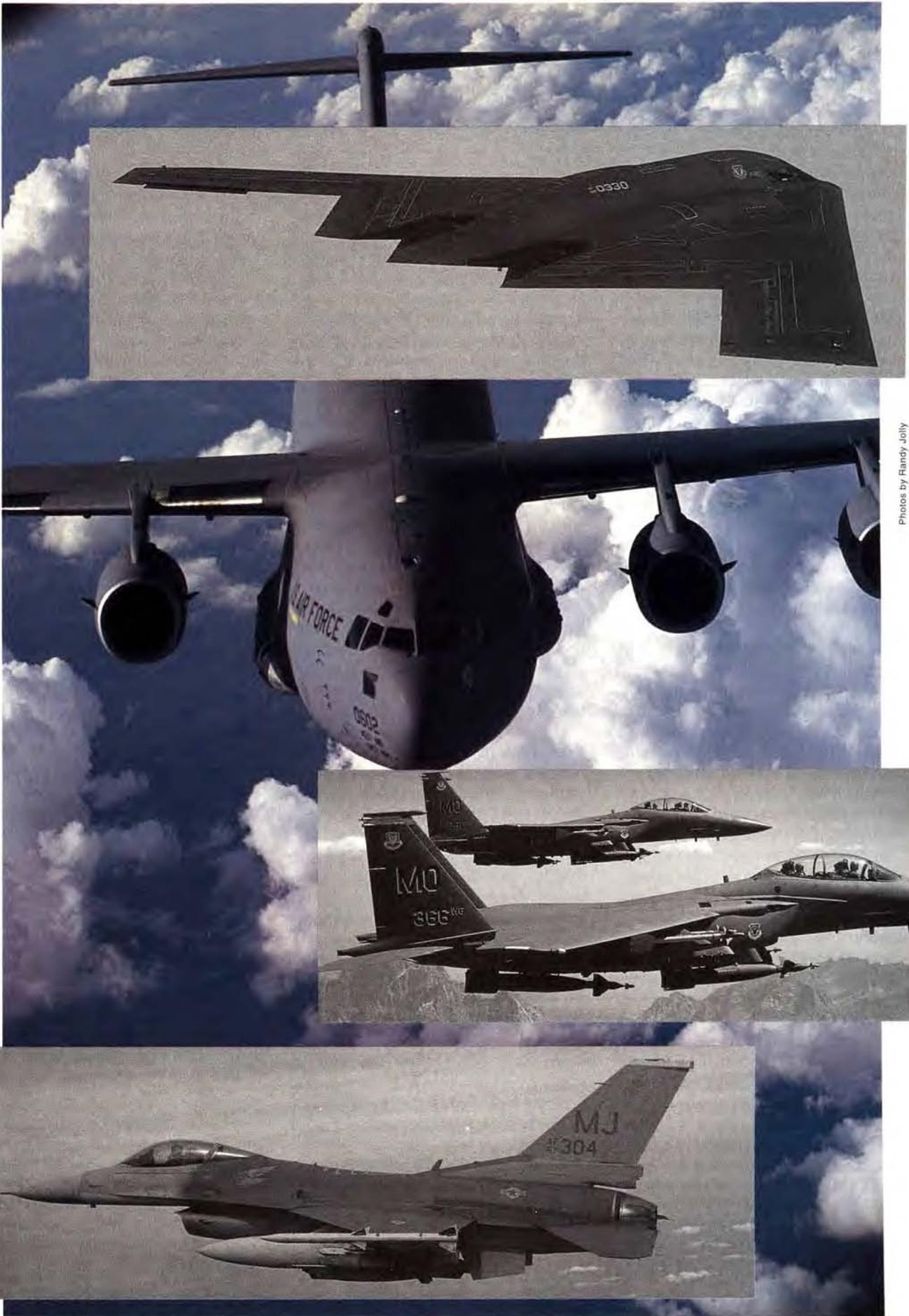
We have an obligation as well as an opportunity, General Fogleman said, to make the transition from "brute force" attrition strategy to "a concept that leverages our sophisticated military capabilities to achieve US objectives by applying what I'd like to refer to as an asymmetric force strategy."

Secretary of the Air Force Sheila E. Widnall pointed to USAF's contributions to the national security strategy of engagement abroad and "enlargement" of democracy around

the world and said that "those contributions themselves shape the Air Force of the future." Looking back from the vantage of years hence, she said, we will see the "profound impact" of the Air Force's humanitarian and training missions and in the other international contacts that occur daily. "I never cease to be amazed at the ability of our twenty-year-olds to represent the US effectively in Bosnia[-Hercegovina], work closely with their Russian counterparts on a peacekeeping operation, or help build schools in El Salvador."

International contacts also have direct military utility. For example, Secretary Widnall said, in the successful air campaign against the Bosnian Serbs last fall, the cooperation of coalition air forces functioned as "a glue for the political consensus needed to see that operation through to completion."

More and more, General Fogleman said, "whether it is a hot crisis or a crisis in development," the national command authorities "turn to our military establishment because it is one of the few elements in our government that has consistently



Photos by Randy Jolly

demonstrated the ability to respond and make things happen.”

Among the factors making the new American way of war possible, he said, are “the extended range, the precision, and the lethality of modern weapon systems that are increasingly leveraging and leveraged by an agile C⁴I [command, control, communications, computers, and intelligence] capability that enables warfighters to analyze, to act, and to assess before an adversary has the capability to act.”

In the Gulf and in the Balkans

The Air Force’s most recent combat experiences—the Persian Gulf War of 1991 and Operation Deliberate Force last year in Bosnia—were previews of the asymmetric force model. In the Gulf War, General Fogleman said, the US and its partners in the allied coalition initially “looked at attacking the frontal strength of Iraq’s army, which was then occupying Kuwait” but wisely passed up that approach and “chose to capitalize on the coalition’s asymmetrical advantage in airpower to attack [Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein’s] strategic and tactical centers of gravity.

“The coalition conducted a concentrated forty-three-day air campaign [that] took away Hussein’s eyes, attrited his forces in the field, rendered his command and control relatively ineffective, destroyed his war production capability, and denied vital supplies to his troops. . . . This operation prevented a bloody slugfest on the ground while allowing coalition forces to safely prepare for an offensive that engaged a badly degraded enemy force with the asymmetric strength of our ground forces. The result was a 100-hour ground offensive that concluded the Gulf War.”

Another example of asymmetric force immediately followed the Gulf War with the use of airpower to enforce UN sanctions against Iraq. “For over four-and-a-half years, the United States and its allies have leveraged our advantage in airpower, both carrier-based and landbased, in southwest Asia to achieve political objectives without placing large numbers of young Americans in harm’s way,” General Fogleman said. “This has been an air occupation of Iraq.”

Prior to Operation Deliberate Force

in 1995, command authorities in the Balkans had constrained the use of airpower rather than using the asymmetric advantage of it. “We could only conduct limited area attack operations, and so the airpower that was being applied in the air-to-ground role had very little political linkage,” General Fogleman said. “In fact, for many of us airmen, it was very reminiscent of what we had seen in Vietnam.”

That changed with Operation Deliberate Force in August and September. It was conducted with a coherent strategy that “gave airpower the freedom of maneuver to attack the full range of targets that were carefully selected to reduce the Bosnian Serb military advantage,” General Fogleman said. “Allied air forces took down the Bosnian Serb air defenses, and they launched extraordinarily precise air strikes that deprived the Serbs of vital warfighting resources while minimizing collateral damage.”

Late last year, Secretary of Defense William J. Perry recognized what airpower had achieved in the Balkans and said, “Deliberate Force was the absolute, critical step in bringing the warring parties to the negotiating table at Dayton, [Ohio], leading to the peace agreement.”

Precision, Information, and Airlift

Several characteristics of modern airpower stood out starkly in the Deliberate Force campaign. The first of these was precision.

“Deliberate Force extended a trend that began with the Vietnam War—in which about 0.2 percent of our weapons expended were precision—and continued in Desert Storm where, contrary to the general perception of its having been a ‘video war,’ only about nine percent of our bombs were precision guided,” Secretary Widnall said. “In Deliberate Force, more than sixty percent of the bombs dropped by the NATO force were precision guided.”

The significance of precision weaponry went beyond the straightforward military value. In what Secretary Widnall described as a “media-intensive environment,” limiting collateral damage was crucial. “The NATO air operation was operationally robust, but it was politically fragile. With the first report of civilian casualties, the entire operation would have

been put at risk, but that report never came.”

The campaign also demonstrated “information dominance,” she said. “We have employed the E-8 Joint Surveillance and Target Attack Radar System, a modified Boeing 707 with its moving-target indicator and synthetic aperture radar, to take incredibly detailed real-time pictures of Serbian movements and encampments. The NATO commander enforcing the separation there has taken to slapping those pictures down in front of the Serbs during their meetings to say, ‘See, you can’t do *anything* we don’t know about!’ This is powerful. It’s like playing poker and being able to see all the cards against an opponent who knows that you can do just that.”

Despite terrible local weather conditions, forces and equipment were inserted rapidly into Bosnia by US Air Force strategic airlift, which Secretary Widnall termed a “unique national treasure.” As the airlift drew to a close, she was struck by “the ease with which we had just executed a mission that no other nation on Earth could even attempt.”

In Deliberate Force, she said, “we affirmed the utility of air forces in providing options for our national policymakers. Over the years of our growing involvement in the war in the former Yugoslavia, this nation had used political tools—economic tools, diplomatic tools—all to no avail. The nation’s air forces provided a military option at relatively low risk with a real prospect of success. And that option paid off.”

Working With the Constraints

General Fogleman noted three major constraints that make it difficult to continue with old-style force-on-force attrition strategies.

■ **Fewer forces.** The nation no longer has the large military force structure it once did. What the armed forces do, they must do with smaller numbers.

■ **Casualties and collateral damage.** “Americans have come to expect military operations to be quick and decisive so that our troops can return home quickly,” General Fogleman said. The public is not tolerant of casualties or of firepower that hits in the wrong place.

■ **The “CNN effect.”** Horrors of war are transmitted in real time into

homes by television. Operations that are not precise, efficient, and focused could lose public support in a hurry.

It is the Air Force's intention to "provide advanced capabilities that will give us responsive, precise, and survivable capability to implement a new American way of war," General Fogleman said. "These same capabilities will help minimize casualties on both sides. They'll reduce the CNN effect. And they'll allow us to wage war in a way that corresponds to what appears to be the values of American society vis-à-vis what they are willing to accept on the battlefield."

Airpower, he said, "will also provide a tremendous leverage to resolve future crises rapidly at low cost. All of these developments point to a significant increase in the role of airpower in achieving our nation's security objectives using asymmetric strategy."

Time-Phased Modernization

The Air Force, General Fogleman said, is pursuing a "balanced, time-phased modernization program" to "field air and space systems that will bolster our ability to execute a new American way of war well into the next century."

In the near term, he said, the Air Force is buying the C-17 "to address the nation's most pressing military shortfall—strategic lift." The investment in the C-17 has already paid off in Bosnia, where the C-17 delivered large loads like those carried by C-5s and C-141s to airfields that, up to now, could not be used by an airlifter larger than the C-130 intratheater transport. Eventually, the Air Force will replace a fleet of 250 C-141 airlifters with 120 C-17s.

"In the midterm of our modernization plan, we are upgrading the capability of the long-range bomber force and procuring a family of autonomous precision weapons to leverage the range and payload of that bomber force," said General Fogleman. This summer, he noted, the B-2 bomber will be equipped with the GPS-Aided Targeting System/GPS-Aided Munition that will enable the stealth bomber to target sixteen aimpoints independently on a single pass. "We're beginning to change our thinking from how many aircraft does

it take to destroy one target to how many targets can we destroy with one aircraft," General Fogleman said.

Also working for the midterm are an expendable launch vehicle "that will provide assured, affordable access to space," the Spacebased Infrared system to support theater missile defense, and the CV-22 tiltrotor aircraft for special operations forces.

The long term will bring two systems that General Fogleman declared to be "truly revolutionary"—the F-22 fighter and the Airborne Laser (ABL), which will strike from hundreds of kilometers away to intercept ballistic missiles in the boost phase. "The Secretary and I were recently briefed by an independent review team that foresaw no showstoppers in developing the Airborne Laser, to include fielding a demonstrator by 2002," General Fogleman said. At a press conference in Orlando, Secretary Widnall pronounced progress on the ABL to be "a genuine ten on a scientific Richter scale."

Asked whether USAF's plans for the asymmetrical power strategy include nonlethal systems, General Fogleman said it definitely includes such nonlethal systems as air mobility forces, but "if we're talking about gooey gunk being dropped in bombs or something like that—I'm not too dewy-eyed about gooey gunk."

Models and Metrics Fall Behind

"Too many people, to include professional airmen, still conceive of airpower in terms of functional stovepipes—fighters, bombers, space, intel, and so on," General Fogleman said. "We've got to come to appreciate airpower for what it is: a collection of unique capabilities that exploit the control of the air and space medium to gain a powerful advantage in time and mass and position and awareness in pursuit of national security interests."

Analytical models and metrics have not yet caught up with operational practice. "The current attrition models that assess the results of force-on-force engagements, based on force ratios and territory lost or gained, aren't really very relevant with forces that are employed in accordance with asymmetric strategies," he said.

General Fogleman said there is no longer any question of "individual

services attempting to develop the resources to win the war on their own or the individual services trying to get in on the action for the sake of being in on the action." At the same time, he added, all indications "point to a significant increase in the role of airpower in achieving our nation's security objectives, using asymmetric strategy."

In theater conflict, the unified commander in chief (CINC) develops a war plan to strike at the enemy's strategic and tactical centers of gravity. "While these may vary as a function of the enemy, these centers generally include things like the leadership elite, command and control, internal security mechanisms, war production capability, and one, some, or all branches of the armed forces—in short, it's the enemy ability to effectively wage war," General Fogleman said.

The Air Force's role is twofold. "Theater commanders count on us to support them with ready air and space capabilities, often on very short notice," General Fogleman said. The other task is to think and plan ahead. "By their very nature," said the General, "CINCs tend to focus on dealing with near-term developments." By statute, the services are responsible for organizing, training, and equipping forces, and it is up to them to take the longer view.

"They've got to anticipate the capabilities that the CINCs of the future will require," General Fogleman said. "The services have got to articulate and advocate those capabilities. The Air Force has got to stay in front of this effort because we offer so much to the nation in this respect."

It is difficult to imagine an asymmetric strategy, pitting US strengths against the weaknesses of the adversary, in which airpower would not be paramount.

As General Fogleman said, "Once the United States decides to engage, and our naval forces are steaming to the theater of operations, and our ground forces are being transported to the affected theater, the Air Force can be employing airpower to achieve theater situation awareness, to stop aggression in its tracks, to attack vital strategic targets, and to seize control of the air to make sure that the later arriving forces arrive in a benign air environment." ■