

The next Chief; A full plate; Second in charge; Base makes waste

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AND NOW, THE GOLDFEIN YEARS

Assuming a smooth confirmation process, Gen. David L. Goldfein will succeed Gen. Mark A. Welsh III as Air Force Chief of Staff around July 1. Goldfein has only been a four-star general since August 2015, when he became vice chief of staff.

An Air Force Academy graduate and career fighter pilot, Goldfein comes to the job with impressive credentials. From the summer of 2013 to August 2015, he served as director of the Joint Staff, one of the most important three-star jobs in the military and a traditional stepping-stone to four-star rank and either a Joint Chiefs or combatant commander post. Prior to that, he commanded US Air Forces Central Command, and before that he was the operations chief for Air Combat Command.

Goldfein has commanded fighter units at multiple levels and was executive officer to Gen. Michael E. Ryan, former Chief of Staff, when Ryan was commander of US Air Forces in Europe.

He goes by the call sign “Fingers” and describes himself as the last pilot to train to fly the F-117 Nighthawk stealth attack fighter. As commander of the 49th Fighter Wing at Holloman AFB, N.M., he presided over the type’s 2008 retirement.

Goldfein flew 40 combat missions in the F-16 during Operation Desert Storm in 1991.

As commander of the 555th “Triple Nickel” F-16 squadron at Aviano AB, Italy, in May 1999, he was one of two Air Force pilots shot down during Operation Allied Force, brought down by a Serbian surface-to-air missile. Even though he ejected and parachuted safely to the ground, he was quickly located by Serb ground forces and narrowly escaped capture with the help of an MH-60G Pave Hawk rescue helicopter crew. He annually sends the rescue unit a bottle of Scotch in appreciation and keeps in touch with members of the crew that saved him.

His list of airplanes flown includes the MQ-9 Reaper remotely piloted aircraft and the MC-12W, a converted business turboprop used in Afghanistan and Iraq for intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance work. Goldfein also flew combat missions in Afghanistan.

In 2001, he wrote the book *Sharing Success, Owning Failure: Preparing to Command in the 21st Century*, a leadership primer for new squadron leaders.

The last vice to become Chief was Gen. T. Michael Moseley.

Pentagon sources said Goldfein was not the service’s initial choice for the top job, which for a time was expected to go to Air Force Space Command chief Gen. John E. Hyten. The choice of Hyten would have highlighted the growing importance of space and a change from the unbroken tradition of pilots—and almost exclusively fighter pilots over the past 35 years—in the Chief’s position. However, Defense Secretary Ashton B. Carter is said to have wanted a combat pilot with

Middle East experience at the helm of the Air Force during the ongoing air campaign against ISIS.

AN INTIMIDATING AGENDA

At a late April press conference, Carter praised Goldfein as “a tested warrior” and “one of the most proven strategic thinkers across our joint force,” singling out his “deep knowledge of a region where the US Air Force is now carrying out the vast majority of air strikes” against ISIS. Carter said that Goldfein, while air boss at US Central Command, “advanced the integrated ... missile defense” of the Persian Gulf region and “developed the Gulf Command Air Operation Center, working closely with nations who are today our critical partners” in the anti-ISIS campaign.

Carter said Goldfein proved to be a “consensus builder” during his time on the Joint Staff.

“We go back quite a ways,” Carter said. “I’ve seen how Dave’s strategic approach and his management skill have helped the Air Force maintain investments in near-term readiness while making sure that we continue also the Air Force’s vital modernization efforts.”

Air Force Secretary Deborah Lee James said that as vice chief, Goldfein played a “major role in developing our Air Force budget” and in “developing the Air Force’s input and contribution to the Third Offset strategy, and also has worked tirelessly to increase our capabilities in all three of our war-fighting domains” of air, space, and cyber.

Goldfein will inherit substantial challenges from Welsh. The Air Force has struggled to balance its “fight tonight” readiness with the need to modernize large blocks of its fleet all at once. The replacement of aircraft in practically every mission area—from fighters, bombers, and tankers to surveillance, command and control, and trainers—has been too long postponed, and the Air Force’s legs of the nuclear triad are overdue for recapitalization. Collectively, the situation has become known as USAF’s “bow wave” of modernization.

During Goldfein’s tenure, the Air Force may have to set new acquisition priorities and reset its ambitious timeline for re-equipment.

Meanwhile, USAF cut its ranks of airmen too deeply in recent years, trying to free up money for readiness and hardware, and must now grow its uniformed force again without much new money to do so.

As all of that unfolds, the specter of sequestration haunts Air Force plans, and the service suffers from a thorny relationship with Capitol Hill. Its poorly explained plans to retire the A-10 and U-2, as well as other controversial approaches to living within its means, along with dustups over the C-27 and the Air National Guard, have left Congress skeptical of USAF’s

motives and methods. Goldfein will have to rebuild USAF's credibility with lawmakers while winning the resources to accomplish the massive modernization required.

At the same time, the Air Force is carrying the bulk of the anti-ISIS air campaign—and achieving success against stated objectives—but seems not to be getting either the credit or commensurate resources that go with that level of effort.

Goldfein will be joining a rare all-new crew on the Joint Chiefs of Staff, with all the service Chiefs, Chairman, and vice chairman having changed out in a single year's time.

RIGHT-HAND MAN?

Lt. Gen. Stephen W. "Seve" Wilson, deputy chief of US Strategic Command, is the likely nominee to receive a fourth star and take over as vice chief of staff from Goldfein.

Wilson has been a bomber pilot and commander at multiple levels during his 35-year career. He led 8th Air Force and then Air Force Global Strike Command before taking the No. 2 job at STRATCOM.

Pentagon officials said his knowledge of the nuclear mission was a big factor in Wilson becoming the top candidate for the vice job, given the major nuclear modernization effort now getting underway.

New nuclear systems needing to move through development and testing and into the field include the Ground-Based Strategic Deterrent ICBM, the new B-21 bomber, an upgrade of the B61 bomb, and the new Long-Range Standoff missile, or LRSO (which will succeed the 1980s-vintage Air Launched Cruise Missile). Wilson, who has more than 4,500 flying hours—some 680 of them in combat—has been a vocal advocate of re-engining the B-52 bomber fleet.

Wilson commanded the 379th Air Expeditionary Wing at Al Udeid AB, Qatar, from July 2009 to July 2010, supporting the last stages of Operation Iraqi Freedom. While he'd been considered a candidate to succeed Adm. Cecil D. Haney as commander of STRATCOM, it's now believed Air Force Space Command boss Gen. John E. Hyten is the top contender for the unified command position.

As vice chief, Wilson would represent the Air Force on a number of joint service committees, notably the Joint Requirements Oversight Council.

BASE MAKES WASTE

A fresh Pentagon report confirms what DOD leaders have been saying for years: The services have far too many bases and not enough people and gear to spread around to them all.

In the report, the Department of Defense urged Congress to end its strident refusal, in each of the last five budget cycles, to allow a new round of base realignment and closure (known in Washington, D.C., as BRAC).

The April "infrastructure capacity analysis," sent to the leaders of the committees overseeing defense, was topped by a letter from Deputy Defense Secretary Robert O. Work, who said the military overall has 22 percent excess capacity distributed as follows: Army 33 percent, Air Force 32 percent, Defense Logistics Agency 12 percent, and Navy seven percent. The analysis, Work explained, "compared base loading from 1989 to base loading in 2019 using 32 metrics" of infrastructure.

The last time the Air Force comprehensively measured its own base capacity, it estimated it was 20 to 25 percent heavy on installations and pleaded with Congress to let it slim down so the operating cost savings could be put toward badly needed airmen and modernization.

As DOD leaders have "repeatedly testified," Work wrote in the cover letter, "spending resources on excess infrastructure does not make sense," especially when so many defense combat needs are going unmet.

The report was a partial response to Congress' directive in the Fiscal 2016 National Defense Authorization Act, approved last November, to conduct a full-out analysis of future basing needs against "probable threats." Work said the full analysis is coming, but that the results so far show "significant excess capacity exists to warrant" a BRAC as soon as possible. The partial report was rushed to Capitol Hill early so Congress could consider allowing a BRAC in its Fiscal 2017 defense authorization deliberations.

The Pentagon said it's saving about \$14 billion a year as a result of previous base closings and could save billions more in short order if another BRAC is approved. (See "Editorial: Too Many Bases, Not Enough Air Force," p. 4.)

Moreover, in his cover letter, Work said, "Under current fiscal constraints, local communities will experience economic impacts regardless of a congressional decision regarding BRAC authorization. This has the harmful and unintended consequence of forcing the military departments to consider cuts at all installations, without regard to military value." The better alternative, he said, is to close or realign facilities "with the lowest military value."

In recent years, Congress has complained that the up-front expense of closing bases, moving their assets, and doing industrial cleanup afterward has cost more than the country could bear during wartime. Moreover, members charge that the speed and amount of payback has been less than the Pentagon estimated.

Reacting to the April report, Rep. Mac Thornberry (R-Texas), chairman of the House Armed Services Committee, complained that it wasn't what Congress asked for. Congress, he said, directed the Pentagon to assess base capacity needed in the future, and not against what it was in 1989 (although that was the comparison year for previous BRACs). The approach taken assumes a military "far smaller than anyone thinks is wise," Thornberry said through a spokesperson. If the military is required to grow to meet future threats, there won't be enough bases to handle the increase, he said. However, the Pentagon report said growth that would strain even a reduced base structure was unlikely, given fiscal limits on defense spending even in wartime, and the estimates of excess capacity are already "conservative."

In submitting its Fiscal 2017 budget to Congress in February, defense leaders said it's so urgent to close bases and stop wasting resources that they may have to do it without a BRAC, and that would be even more painful.

"In the absence" of a BRAC authorization, the budget documents say, "the department will explore any and all authorities that Congress has provided to eliminate wasteful infrastructure." It didn't elaborate on what those measures might be, but Air Force Secretary Deborah Lee James has said there are emergency actions available to the services to mothball bases or put them in caretaker status. 