



America's Air Force: Always There

A narrative for 2017 and beyond

Current as 27 January 17

What Airmen do for America, our Allies, and the Joint Force

For the past 70 years, from the evolution of jet aircraft to the advent of the ICBM, satellite-guided bombs, and remotely piloted aircraft, the Air Force has been breaking barriers as a member of the finest joint warfighting team on the planet. We have been protecting the homeland, providing two legs of the nation's nuclear triad and providing unrivaled air, space and cyber dominance across the globe. The nation, our joint partners and our allies rely on the Air Force to control and exploit air and space. We ensure freedom from attack, the ability to attack at the time and place of our choosing, and the ability to operate freely in peacetime and wartime. In modern war, no other nation has achieved such an asymmetric advantage. We describe what we do for the nation through the concepts of "Global Vigilance, Global Reach, and Global Power."

Global Vigilance: On today's battlefield, American Airmen have built a real-time global intelligence and command and control network that can find, fix, and finish the smallest of targets, to include those individuals who wish to do our nation harm. As the nation's lead service for space, Airmen operate multiple satellite constellations, which range from GPS and space situational awareness, to nuclear warning, and protected satellite communications. Cyberspace operators build, secure, operate, and defend our critical networks and mission systems, and are ready to take offensive actions in, from, and through cyberspace.

Global Reach: The Air Force ranges the globe rapidly to respond to a crisis, or deliver critical supplies or personnel to any location on the planet. Airmen remain engaged 24 hours a day, seven days a week, with aircraft taking off every 2.8 minutes somewhere around the globe. Mobility Airmen are in 23 countries at 77 locations operating a global system of airfields and enabling access for allies and joint partners. It is the strength and reliability of our mobility forces that provides timely response and what makes the U.S. military a truly global force. Additionally, persistent engagements by our highly-skilled special operations forces enhance critical relationships and secure global access at a time and place of our choosing.

Global Power: The Air Force can strike an enemy on short notice anywhere in the world with American fighters, bombers, RPAs (Remotely Piloted Aircraft), and ICBMs. Air Force special operators conduct counter-terrorism missions daily, while our nuclear force provides the foundation for deterrence. Airmen provide two legs of the nuclear triad and are responsible for resourcing 75 percent of the Nuclear Command, Control & Communications framework that connects the President to the triad.

Because of the changing nature of warfare, our Airmen can fight from just about anywhere, at any time. In the U.S. alone, 27,000 Airmen are engaged in operations from surveillance to flying bomber sorties against ISIL. As well, more than 100,000 Airmen are standing watch around the world, in deployed locations and at bases from Korea to the Arabian Peninsula.

The Current State of the Air Force

Although America's Air Force remains the finest in the world, it is as small as it's ever been. Many envision our Air Force as being every bit as large as the one that helped win Operation Desert Storm in 1991. But the reality is quite different. At the start of 2016, our numbers stood at 311,000 active duty Airmen, down from more than 500,000 during Desert Storm—that's a 38 percent decrease.

For 26 years, the Air Force has conducted continuous combat operations, resulting in a growing toll on Airmen, their readiness, and equipment. That force in 1991, which featured 134 fighter squadrons across the active duty, Air National Guard, and Air Force Reserve, has gradually declined to a total of 55 fighter squadrons today. We've also become more reliant on our Air Force civilians to provide critical mission support functions. Though we will build the force up to about 321,000 in 2017, even at that size it will still be far too small for the myriad tasks America's Airmen perform daily around the world.

The Air Force also reduced its aircraft inventory over this same period from 8,600 to 5,500, and today the average aircraft is 27 years old. At the same time, the nation faces a resurgent Russia and a rising China powered by new warfighting approaches and ultra-modern weapons. And, our historically small Air Force keeps a watchful eye on North Korea and Iran and multiple other hotspots around the globe.

Air and Space superiority are not American birthrights. They must be fought for and won. Yet today's Air Force is the smallest and oldest in our history, despite a global security environment where airpower is in even greater demand.

What We are Doing to Ensure the Most Capable Air Force within Current Constraints

America's Airmen are ready to fight and win today. We also ensure that our active, Guard and Reserve Airmen closest to the fight remain our most ready forces. However, our combat forces have invested considerable time and training into our nation's counter-terrorism effort, limiting our preparation for battle against skilled, near-peer competitors.

To ensure we remain ready to defeat terrorists as well as sophisticated, well-equipped militaries, we are growing the force. The active duty force will grow to 321,000 in FY17 and to 324,000 in the following years. Growth will be balanced across all components as well as our officer, enlisted, and civilian workforces. Furthermore, we are targeting growth in critical career fields to help improve readiness. We are stabilizing and bolstering our remotely piloted aircraft (RPA) community while continuing to meet combatant commander requirements. We are increasing pilot training capacity and adjusting our incentive pay structure to help address our growing pilot shortage. We are rapidly developing the B-21 Raider long-range strike bomber and modernizing the B-52 and B-2 bombers for strategic delivery of advanced munitions. We are bedding down our advanced F-35 multi-role fighter and enhancing our air refueling capability by entering initial production of the KC-46 Pegasus tanker. We are also modernizing the land-based nuclear leg with the Ground Based Strategic Deterrent (GBSD).

We are posturing our forces to fight and win a war should it extend into space. We transformed our space training and we are developing tactics and enhancing our space situational awareness and command and control systems. We are building a more resilient space architecture and strengthening our partnerships to protect, defend and operate critical national security space systems to outpace adversaries and counter any intention to deny us the use of space.

We are pivoting from a communications and information technology-centric force, to a cyberspace operations force of full warfighting partners who protect the mission and carry the fight to the enemy through integrated cyberspace operations.

We are fortifying combat air forces by retaining, and beginning to modernize, force structure for our combat fighter squadrons, and developing and buying needed munitions for both high-end and low-end conflicts of the future. Moreover, we are working to revitalize squadrons across the Air Force as the most essential level of command. The **squadrons** are where readiness is generated and sustained, where Airmen and families thrive, and where the missions of the Air Force will succeed.

We are focused on strengthening the development of joint leaders and teams who better understand the synergy of air, space, and cyber power and how to synthesize the capabilities the air component brings with the other elements of joint and national power.

As the service that delivers the majority of the command and control elements for regional and trans-regional campaigns, we are developing the next level of multi-domain, multi-mission C2 for the future. Winning in future high-end conflicts will depend on which side can command and control forces in a degraded and contested environment, while denying the enemy the ability to do the same.

Where America's Air Force Needs To Go

Despite these efforts, current budget levels and the threat of Budget Control Act restrictions will force the Air Force to continue making unacceptable tradeoffs between force structure, readiness, and modernization. All this, while potential adversaries are closing the gap and will begin to outpace America's Air Force in critical warfighting areas. **Our nation needs to increase its investment in America's Air Force in the following areas:**

Readiness: In the face of declining readiness levels among all of the military services and ever-increasing global threats, it is essential that the Air Force match force structure to the missions we are relied upon to perform. Some key investment areas include our nuclear enterprise, space—which is becoming increasingly threatened, cyber, aircraft maintenance, intelligence, and our combat and mobility air forces, which are in such high demand. To improve readiness and attain manning levels matching our mission requirements, *the Air Force must increase our active duty, Guard and Reserve end strength, to include growing active duty end strength to 350K, while stabilizing our civilian workforce.*

Nuclear Deterrence Operations: As long as nuclear weapons exist, the United States must maintain a modern and resilient nuclear deterrent. *Today, the nation must invest in foundational capabilities (GBSD, LRSO, B-21, B61-12, UH-1N recapitalization and NC3) and infrastructure that underpins nuclear deterrence capabilities vital to a credible deterrent.*

Space: *We must recapitalize Air Force space systems for resilience, ensuring we can continue to operate in an increasingly contested environment. As we modernize space systems, they must be able to fight in a contested, degraded, and operationally limited environment. Additionally, we need to integrate our ground systems, modernize our space operations centers, and improve training for our space force.*

Cyberspace: *The Air Force must shift from a 20th century network-centric infrastructure to a 21st century data-centric infrastructure, leveraging commercial sector cloud and network services which enable us to reallocate critical cyber manpower towards emerging warfighting missions. This will support Air Force and Joint Force mission assurance—command and control, weapon system cyberspace defense, information dominance, and integrating offensive cyberspace effects into multi-domain operations.*

Combat Air Forces: *The Air Force must build advanced capabilities to gain and maintain air superiority. We must grow to at least 60 ready fighter squadrons to meet tomorrow's demands. We must also implement the full program of record for the F-35, and acquire enough munitions to counter current threats, while developing better new munitions to counter future threats.*

Infrastructure: *As Airmen, we project airpower from a network of globally positioned bases and must focus on maintaining this trans-regional access while modernizing and recapitalizing critical infrastructure. At the same time, we must also reduce outdated and unnecessary facilities excess to need. It is time for another round of Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) to allow us to reinvest funds in higher priority warfighting areas.*

Always There...

If the past two decades have taught us anything, it is that the demand for air, space, and cyber power is only growing. Our nation and our allies crave it, and that means we must ensure America's Airmen are resourced and trained to fight alongside the Army, Navy, Marines, and Coast Guard—the joint military team—to meet national security obligations. Air and space power allows this team the freedom to operate from the Arctic to Iraq to the farthest reaches of Asia and South America. *Taken together, this is the essence of "always there."* In every mission, in every domain, and in every location... Airmen are essential to our nation's success.

Today, we remain the finest Air Force in the world. However, our relative advantage over potential adversaries is closing rapidly and in some cases it has closed. We must be prepared to win decisively.

We owe that to our nation, our joint teammates and our allies.



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Quick Facts

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For the past 70 years, from the evolution of jet aircraft to the advent of the ICBM, satellite-guided bombs, and remotely piloted aircraft, the Air Force has been breaking barriers as a member of the finest joint warfighting team on the planet. We have been protecting the homeland, providing two legs of the nation's nuclear triad and providing unrivaled air, space and cyber dominance across the globe. The nation, our joint partners and our allies rely on the Air Force to control and exploit air and space. We ensure freedom from attack, the ability to attack at the time and place of our choosing, and the ability to operate freely in peacetime and wartime. In modern war, no other nation has achieved such an asymmetric advantage. We describe what we do for the nation through the concepts of "Global Vigilance, Global Reach, and Global Power."

Global Vigilance:

- Financial transactions, irrigation systems, your smartphone, and nearly two-thirds of all weapon systems used to fight ISIL employ the Air Force's GPS technology on a daily basis.
- Air Force intelligence provides 6,000+ intelligence products per day used by warfighters to eliminate enemy targets and trigger 70% of special operations assaults on terrorists.
- Global Air Force sensors and satellites are part of a sophisticated network tracking more than 23,000 man-made objects orbiting the earth every day (some at speeds in excess of 17,500 mph) to help protect and defend the space capabilities that our national leadership, warfighters, and civil and commercial users the world over depend on.
- Air Force-operated space-based sensors cast a wider net than all international news networks combined—providing 24/7 total global coverage for missile warning, nuclear and other threats.
- Since Sept. 11, 2001, fighter jets have responded to more than 6,000 potential air threats in the U.S.—the equivalent of more than one threat per day—and have flown more than 69,300 sorties, defending America's airspace.
- In 2016, Air Force cyber operators blocked more than 1.3 billion malicious connections, an average of more than 40 malicious connections per second.

Global Reach:

- An Air Force mobility aircraft takes off somewhere around the world every 2.8 minutes.
- Improvements in aeromedical evacuation processes and care have produced the lowest lethality rate in recorded conflict. When today's wounded warriors reach a hospital in theater, they have a 98% survival rate and can be returned to the U.S. in three days or less. In Desert Storm, the survivability rate was 75%, and it took 10 days for the return.
- The Air Force delivered 695 million pounds of cargo in 2016 to our troops and partner nations—a weight equivalent to 100 Egyptian pyramids or the Willis (Sears) Tower in Chicago.
- In 2016, the Air Force assisted 27 African countries in developing and growing skills such as airport sustainment, aeromedical evacuation and aircraft maintenance.
- In 2016, the Air Force transferred 1.2 billion pounds of fuel via aerial refueling—enough to drive an average-sized family sedan around the globe 215,000 times.
- 1st Air Force launches an aircraft an average of every 36 minutes in support of air defense, training, firefighting, search and rescue, and other homeland defense missions, in partnership with the Civil Air Patrol, DoD, federal and state agencies.
- The Air Force transported 888,000 passengers in 2016—roughly the population of San Francisco.

- The Air Force Reservists who are the nation's Hurricane Hunters flew 75 missions into 13 storms in 2016, tracking active hurricanes, improving forecast accuracy by 35%, and providing increased warning time for potential evacuations.
- The Air Force partnered with state and local agencies to help extinguish raging fires during 139 missions across the United States in 2016.
- In 2016, the 24/7 operations of the Air Force Rescue Coordination Center monitored more than 7,500 incidents and assisted in saving 346 lives.
- Operating in austere front-line conditions, elite Air Force Special Operations Surgical Teams treated 1,191 patients—252 requiring major surgery—saving 628 lives of coalition and partner forces.

Global Power:

- With an average of more than 70 flights per day, Air Force aircraft have participated in 65% of the 17,000+ coalition strikes against more than 31,900 ISIL targets in Iraq and Syria.
- The Air Force provides two-thirds of the nation's nuclear triad—450 Intercontinental Ballistic Missiles (ICBMs) and 76 nuclear-capable bombers—and 75% of the Nuclear Command, Control & Communication (NC3) framework connecting the President to the triad.
- U.S. Air Force F-16s stand ready 24/7 just 45 nautical miles south of the North Korean DMZ—roughly the same distance between Langley, Va. and Baltimore, Md.
- On alert 24/7, Airmen keep the nation's most responsive leg of the triad ready to go—450 ICBMs which, in 30 minutes or less, can reach targets up to 6,000 miles away (more than twice the distance from New York to Los Angeles).
- In light of North Korean provocations, the Air Force flew six flexible response missions over the Korean Peninsula in 2016 featuring B-52s, B-1s, F-22s and F-16s, demonstrating our commitment to defending our allies.
- In 2016, the Air Force deployed a contingent of F-22s to Europe, with forward deployments to Lithuania—80 miles from Kaliningrad, Russia—providing assurance to our NATO and European allies of our resolve to combat Russian intervention and aggression, and demonstrating our ability to provide air dominance anywhere in Europe.
- The Air Force deployed a Close Air Support solution to the warfighter in just six months: the Advanced Precision Kill Weapon System II, a high-precision, low-collateral weapon that increases the weapons loadout for both the A-10 and F-16.
- The impactful joint capability of our Air Force Special Operations Command was showcased by elite Special Tactics Operators embedding with 169 Joint ground SOF teams across the globe.
- Every year, the Air National Guard rotates 4 units totaling 48 F-16s to support Pacific Theater Security Packages.
- Given that \$5.7 trillion of trade and 50% of the world's oil transits the South China Sea annually, the Air Force maintains a constant presence in the Indo-Asian-Pacific region, conducting 180 bomber missions over the airspace every year, demonstrating U.S. commitment to regional security and ensuring freedom of navigation and stability for the global economic system.

Always There...

The demand for air, space, and cyber power is growing. Our nation and our allies crave it, and that means we must ensure America's Airmen are resourced and trained to fight alongside the Army, Navy, Marines, and Coast Guard—the joint military team—to meet national security obligations. Air and space power allows this team the freedom to operate from the Arctic to Iraq to the farthest reaches of Asia and South America. ***Taken together, this is the essence of “always there.” In every mission, in every domain, and in every location...Airmen are essential to our nation's success.***