

The 2017 Statement of Policy

The future holds uncertainty, the potential for aggression, and in too many spots around the globe, conflict and war. To protect American interests, the Air Force must be technologically advanced, lethal, and with the capacity to meet challenges anywhere in the world. Current adventurism by both Russia and China is evidence of the diminishing currency of credible American deterrence.

The core functions of the Air Force have remained constant. Air Force capabilities are the enabling foundation of modern joint and coalition force operations. The Air Force is an indispensable partner in the entire spectrum of joint operations.

However, the Air Force is at a critical turning point. Adapting to the rapidly changing and insatiable demand for ISR, USAF built a 35,000-person ISR enterprise over the last 10 years, while simultaneously cutting the Air Force by 50,000 people—essentially an 85,000-person cut to other critical Air Force mission areas. Moving people from one mission area to fill another critical area is no longer possible. The Air Force will be short 700 fighter pilots by the end of 2016 and the number is expected to increase to a thousand a few years later. Currently, pilots receive only half the flight time and operational exercises they would have received decades ago. This is a readiness and morale issue that is not acceptable.

At the same time, America's potential adversaries are growing bolder and rapidly closing the technological superiority gap the Air Force has enjoyed for generations. Adversary integrated air defense systems (IADS) have created regions where older fourth generation airborne systems, like the F-15 and F-16, are limited. Adversary aircraft, air-to-air missiles, and airborne electronic attack and electronic protection systems are advancing.

The Air Force must be able to deter future aggression, and if deterrence fails, prevail in the combat environments of tomorrow. Recapitalizing our aging fleet with fifth generation aircraft is therefore crucial. America simply cannot accept the inherent risk of maintaining declining numbers of older weapon systems while adversaries roll out competitive systems. Fifth generation airborne systems provide a wider variety of options for a given warfighting challenge, preserve the tech-

nological advantage of the United States over near-peer threats, and serve as a force multiplier by increasing situational awareness and combat effectiveness of legacy airborne systems. A steadfast commitment to recapitalizing fighter; bomber; tanker; trainer; combat search and rescue; intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance; and command and control aircraft is essential to fulfilling the Air Force role in the National Defense Strategy and America's leadership on the world stage.

We must also invest in the infrastructure that produces operational capability such as: training ranges; test,

The Statement of Policy was adopted by the delegates to the AFA National Convention Sept. 18, 2016.

simulation, and ground infrastructure; and nuclear maintenance and storage facilities. We must invest in our base infrastructure that houses and supports our Airmen and their families. We must divest excess infrastructure in order to nearly match footprint with our actual force structure.

Our nuclear forces must be recapitalized to ensure the vitality of the nuclear deterrence mission—to maintain both Air Force bomber and missile components of the nuclear triad. If we are to maintain nuclear deterrence, we must invest in infrastructure, personnel development, weapons development, storage, and safety to ensure each remains viable.

Space capabilities remain indispensable to America's ability to deter aggression and to execute the entire range of military operations around the world. However, our space capabilities are facing growing competition from Russia, China, and other countries. It is imperative to invest smartly to sustain space domain mission assurance, including resilience, self-protection, and rapid reconstitution of space systems.

We must also establish and maintain a robust capability in the cyber domain. Without doing so we expose our networks to cyberattack, and will lose our ability to attack and exploit the networks of our adversaries when necessary.

Our essential technological edge is

strongly connected to advancements in science and technology. Targeted but critical investments must be made in emerging technologies like hypersonic propulsion, additive manufacturing, and advanced materials to preserve the technological edge that USAF has enjoyed for over six decades.

Finally, the effectiveness of today's Air Force hinges more than ever on the quality, training, and dedication of its Airmen. Through 25 continuous years of combat operations, our Airmen and their families have steadfastly served our nation. We must honor our commitments to them and to all veterans and retirees who served honorably. Our Air Force people continue to be an unparalleled, distinctive advantage over all our potential adversaries. We must ensure they remain the best educated and trained and give them the opportunities and tools needed for successful careers.

The Air Force Association unequivocally declares that America requires a dominant United States Air Force as the critical component of a strong national defense. The service in most need of repair is the Air Force.

We are operating a geriatric Air Force that is becoming more so every day. Bombers and tankers over 50 years of age, trainers over 40, fighters and helicopters over 30. At current purchase rates it will take over 100 years to recapitalize our force when the Air Force is smaller than it has ever been.

It is time to raise the topline of the Air Force budget to meet the needs of the National Security Strategy—not let arbitrary budget caps drive the strategy. The Air Force must return to the strategy-based force America needs, not the weakened Air Force that results from arbitrary budget reductions.

We stand for and respect our Airmen, their families, our veterans, and our Air Force heritage. We pledge that we will do all that we can to guarantee that the Air Force provides for what the Constitution of the United States declares is the reason we have a government: "to provide for the common defense."

This editorial is extracted from the Air Force Association's full 2017 Statement of Policy," which is available in its entirety at www.afa.org/publications/statementofpolicy