

NATIONAL PRESS CLUB BREAKFAST WITH GENERAL MARK WELSH

SUBJECT: U.S. AIR FORCE CHIEF OF STAFF GENERAL MARK WELSH WILL DISCUSS THE FUTURE OF THE AIR FORCE

MODERATOR: MYRON BELKIND, PRESIDENT OF THE NATIONAL PRESS CLUB

LOCATION: NATIONAL PRESS CLUB BALLROOM, WASHINGTON, D.C.

TIME: 9:00 A.M.. EDT

DATE: THURSDAY, APRIL 24, 2014

(C) COPYRIGHT 2008, NATIONAL PRESS CLUB, 529 14TH STREET, WASHINGTON, DC - 20045, USA. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED. ANY REPRODUCTION, REDISTRIBUTION OR RETRANSMISSION IS EXPRESSLY PROHIBITED.

UNAUTHORIZED REPRODUCTION, REDISTRIBUTION OR RETRANSMISSION CONSTITUTES A MISAPPROPRIATION UNDER APPLICABLE UNFAIR COMPETITION LAW, AND THE NATIONAL PRESS CLUB RESERVES THE RIGHT TO PURSUE ALL REMEDIES AVAILABLE TO IT IN RESPECT TO SUCH MISAPPROPRIATION.

FOR INFORMATION ON BECOMING A MEMBER OF THE NATIONAL PRESS CLUB, PLEASE CALL 202-662-7505.

MYRON BELKIND: Good morning, and welcome. My name is Myron Belkind, I'm an Adjunct Professor at the George Washington University School of Media and Public Affairs, a former International Bureau Chief for the Associated Press. And the 107th president of the National Press Club.

The National Press Club is the world's leading professional organization for journalists committed to our profession's future through our programming. With events such as this, while fostering a free press worldwide. For more information about the National Press Club please visit our website at www.press.org. And to donate to programs offered to the public, to our National Press Club Journalism Institute, please visit www.press.org/institute.

On behalf of our members worldwide I'd like to welcome our speaker, and those of you attending today's event. Our head table includes guests of our speaker, as well as working journalists who are club members. So if you hear applause in our audience I'd like to note the members of the general public are attending so it's not necessarily a lack of journalistic objectivity.

I'd also like to welcome our C-SPAN and public radio audiences. You can follow the action on Twitter using the hash tag npclunch. After our guest speech concludes we'll have a question and answer period. I'll ask as many questions as time permits.

Now it's time to introduce our head table guests. I'd ask each of you to stand briefly as your name is announced. From your right, from the audience's right, Patrick Hoste, Air Force reporter Defense Daily, Yaseem L. Sabawe, Washington correspondent for the Kuwait News Agency, Jean Tye, friend of the speaker from the Ft. Meyer Chapel and a Press Club member, Isaac Bell, Aide de Camp to the Chief of Staff, Mark Schantz, Senior Editor, Air Force Magazine, Lieutenant General James Jackson, Chief of the Air Force Reserve, and guest of our speaker. Jerry Zaremsky, the Washington Bureau Chief of the Buffalo News, Chairman of the MPC Speaker's Committee and a past National Press Club president. Skipping over our speaker for a moment, Eric Meltzer of the Associated Press and the Speaker's Committee member who organized today's event. Thank you, Eric. Lieutenant General Stanley Clark, Director of the Air National Guard and guest of our speaker. Paul Shinkman, National Security Reporter of U.S. News and World Report, Kevin Wensing of Wensing Enterprises, and Jonathan Booth, Air Force veteran, member of the National Press Club's American Legion Post 20, and the Commander of the D.C. Department of the American Legion.

[applause]

Since becoming the 20th Chief of Staff of the U.S. Air Force in August 2012, General Mark Welsh has had a consistent presence in the headlines. Faced with budget cuts after the effects of sequestration, Welsh announced plans to cut the A10 Thunderbolt 2 and U2 fleet, a move not popular with all members of Congress. He is not entirely unsympathetic, telling the congressional subcommittee, "Every major decision reflected in our budget proposal hurts. Each of them reduces capability that are combatant commanders would love to have and believe they need. There are no more easy cuts. If a planned A-10 combat jet retirement(?) isn't allowed to go through, the entire B-1-B Lancer Bomber fleet and 350 F-16 fighter jets may face the chopping block according to a top budget office." But cutting any F-16's isn't a move the General says he wants to make.

Welsh also generated headlines a year ago when he blamed the sexual assault activity in the military under "hookup culture among young people." Nevertheless he and his Secretary of the Air Force created a special counseling program for victims of sexual abuse. Since its implementation earlier this year there has been a 33% increase in assault reports and prosecution.

Before his appointment Welsh was Commander of U.S. Air Force forces in Europe, and oversaw the operations of the Air Force base in Ramstein, Germany. Please join me in welcoming to the National Press Club U.S. Air Force Chief of Staff General

Mark Welsh who will talk about the future of the Air Force with continued budget constraints and the latest on the battle to combat sexual abuse.

GENERAL WELSH: Myron, thank you so much for the introduction, and congratulations on your appointment as the president. But more importantly on a remarkable career in your chosen profession.

Ladies and gentlemen, thanks for letting me be here. This is actually pretty cool. I get to do a lot of stuff in this job, but I still feel like a little kid when I get to do it. I'm at the National Press Club, Pretty amazing. You guys have kings and queens and heads of state and movie stars and sports icons and kingpins of the financial world. You did pick the wrong morning to come, because you get me and J.J. and Sid today.

Let me thank them for being here. J.J. Jackson, Chief of the Air Force Reserve, and Sid Clarke, the Director of the Air National Guard have been tremendous partners for me in t his job, along with General Frank Grass who's the Chief of the National Guard Bureau. One of the things we've worked very hard at over the last year is bringing our total force together in a way that reflects how well they fight together at the front end of our business. We'll continue that effort. It's just a way we have to do business. But it wouldn't be possible without their help and support. And that's why I asked them to join me today. We'd be glad to talk about that later if you'd like to.

This is a fascinating time to be in the U.S. military actually. And it's a great time to be an American airman. And it is always a privilege to be the Chief of Staff of the United States Air Force no matter what's happening around you. Your airmen are very proud of why they are. They're incredibly proud of what they do. And they're incredibly good at doing it. Their biggest frustration, actually, is that most folks don't really have any idea what that is.

A good friend of mine is Lieutenant Dave Goldfein who's the Director of the Joint Staff. And Dave actually has an analogy that I will shamelessly steal this morning. I used it at CSIS in a presentation last month, and I think it describes exactly how the Air Force is seen.

When you walk into a room and you look at a light switch on the wall, unless you're an electrician you really don't have any idea what's behind the wall. But every time you flip the switch the light comes on, every single time. That's kind of the way our Air Force is. We don't do a whole lot of things in a world that are visible to you every day. But we have, for example, we have 600 strategic airlifts sorties every single day around the world. That's one every two and a half minutes, every hour of every day of the year. We have almost 130,000 airmen who make that happen, moving people and equipment around the world.

I have never heard the question asked in Washington, D.C. as we look at options and moving patriot batteries to some country, or moving a brigade combat teams in another country, or moving marines to the Black Sea, or whatever we're talking about, the question, "Can we get it there?" never comes up. Never even heard it whispered. Which is an incredible complement to the people who do this business.

When people start to think about using a precision guided weapon somewhere on the planet, if they're an American military member, they don't worry about whether or not the satellite constellation that makes that possible is operating well that day. You don't worry about it when you start your car. You don't worry about it when you look at your cell phone to see what the time is exactly from the signal you're getting from space. We operate eight satellite constellations and 77 satellites. We have about 25,000 airmen who do that around the clock, every day, all day and they support military operations all over the world.

We have two-thirds of the nation's nuclear triads sitting alert right now. It's the wallpaper of national security strategy. Has been for a long, long time along with the Navy's nuclear submarine fleet. They don't ask for a lot of recognition, but they do the job very, very well. They're getting attention right now. We can talk about that as well if you'd like.

When we decide to send a B-1 from the American Midwest to Libya to kick off Operational Odyssey Dawn, and drop 16 joint direct attack munitions onto every shelter on an airfield in one pass, and then land somewhere on the other side of the globe, refuel, rearm and hit another base coming back home, a second target set, nobody really asks, "How do you do that?" That question doesn't come up. When we decide to send a B-2 launching from the American Midwest to be a show of force in South Korea, nobody really asks how that comes together. But if you think about it for a second, it's pretty spectacular. Think about the intelligence, the air refueling requirement, the command and control requirement. How does all this happen? Who's doing that?

They're just kind of in the background making things happen every single day. There's a great TV commercial, a golf commercial where the tag line is, "These guys are good." You've probably seen that. So are my guys. They're incredibly good. Luckily, our combatant commanders know that too. And so the demand for what the Air Force provides is on the rise. Unfortunately, the supply's going in the other direction. And that's what we're facing with a sequestered level budgets we're looking at in the future, and the decisions we're having to make.

As Myron mentioned every recommendation we're making these days does hurt. It's taking capability or capacity away from combatant commanders, things that they believe they need, and things that we would like to provide but just won't be able to in the future because we have to be part of the solution for the nation to the budget deficit.

We got that. And we're figuring out how to wisely move forward keeping our Air Force balance as we downsize it over time.

We're reducing capability in every one of our core mission areas. That's the reality of it. Every single one of them. We're cutting our modernization programs by 50%. We're protecting a couple of key programs that we think we have to recapitalize, the KC-46 tanker, the F-35 and the long range strike bomber for operational reasons so that we have a viable Air Force ten years from now, which is also part of our job. Not just being ready to operate today.

We're doing everything we can to maintain that balance between ready to do the nation's business today and being capable of doing it ten years from now against threats that are clearly getting more capable in some areas and getting more complicated in others.

Even with the balanced budget agreement it's important to remember that the reason this seems so dramatic to people is that three years ago an FY-12, if I just pick a year out, the projected budget for FY-15 for the Air Force was \$20 billion dollars higher than we actually have in our budget. That's about 20% of our overall budget. And so changing from a plan even three years ago that had projected funding and training and for structure at that level to one that is going to be \$20 billion a year lower from here forward is a significant adjustment. That's why the changes seem so dramatic. But if they're not done it will get worse in the future.

It's hard to make a \$20 billion dollar reduction per year without making some significant change. And so trimming around the edges as we put together our budget proposal just wasn't going to work. We had to look at some pretty dramatic things. Myron mentioned the A-10 fleet. One of those dramatic things was cutting fleets of aircraft. So let me tell you why we ultimately decided to recommend that fleet, since it's come up already. The decision has come under fire from several sectors, but there's a logical reason we got to that point. Let me briefly explain it to you.

We have five mission areas in our Air Force, just five. We've done the same five core missions since 1947 when we became an independent service. We've added space superiority in as part of the first one. That's the only new thing. The way we do them has change, do these missions has changed. The domains we do them in has changed. We do air space and cyber domains now, but we do the same five missions. So we do air space superiority, we do global strike, ISR, air lift and command and control. That's it. We're not that complicated.

So in air space superiority we are taking cuts in this budget. But a few weeks back we kept our F-22 . The F-22 is kind of the hinge pin of air superiority for the United States of America. Not just for the United States Air Force. Air superiority is

foundational to the way we fight wars as an American military. Without it you can't maneuver on the ground, you can't maneuver at sea. You have to have it. And all of our war fighters know that.

And so only one service can provide a theatre's(?) worth of air superiority. Only one has the capacity and the command and control capability to be able to do this. When we capped the buy of F-22's it meant that we had to support them with some other kind of airplane to provide the theatre's worth of air superiority. And for the near term until the F-35 is on board and able to assist it's the F-15C. Now we are cutting F-15's out of our fleet this year as part of the budget cuts. But we can't eliminate the entire fleet of aircraft or we can't do the air superiority mission. And our combatant commanders won't accept that. So cuts, but you can't cut a fleet there.

And fleets let you save big money. You get rid of logistical infrastructure. And all the back supply channels, all those things that cost a whole lot of money. So if you get that air superiority maybe it's ISR that we can eliminate, fleets of airplanes with, because we have fleets there too. But if you ask the combatant commanders their number one shortfall, year after year after year, is ISR capability.

We are already taking ISR capability in this budget. We're cutting every mission area. But they would not support us cutting anymore than we already have projected. So maybe we could take it out of global mobility, cut our airlift fleets. We talked about that. I talked to Ray Odierno, Chief of Staff of the Army, and said, "Okay, we're getting smaller. You're going to get smaller as well. Can we cut our airlift fleet more than we planned to kind of align with that force size for you?"

And he said, "We're going to be smaller. We're need to be more flexible. We need to be more agile. No, I wouldn't support you cutting the airlift fleet."

"Okay, so we can't cut the airlift fleet, what about the tanker fleet?" "Well, we looked at that. We looked at cutting the KC-10 fleet. We looked at the impact that would have on the operational scenarios that we face. We looked at cutting an equivalent amount of money from the KC-135 fleet. It would take about three times as many KC-135's as the number of KC-10's to get the same savings, because you can't get rid of the logistical infrastructure behind it if you don't take the whole fleet.

In the analysis it showed us that you could get rid of the KC-10 fleet, it would be less impactful than getting rid of the KC-135's. Because if you take three times as many KC-135's you flat can't do the job anymore. Without the KC-10's you could, but it would be ugly, and you would not have any flexibility whatsoever. We finally decided the impact of that was just too big on all the services and the combatant commanders compared to other options that we looked at.

So airlift wasn't a good place to go. So command and control, maybe we can cut systems there. The only service that can do command and control on the theatre scale is the Air Force. Missile defense, air operations, ISR activity, whatever it might be, nobody supports cutting that for long. So we're down to the strike platforms. We don't control the policy on the nuclear business. So going after nuclear platforms is not part of our purvey.

We need about 80 to 100 bombers to do nuclear deterrents and to do any predictable expected campaign kind of flying with a bomber fleet and a large conflict, which I hope we never have to do. But if we have one you better have 80 to 100 bombers or you can't do them both. That's about how many we have today. They're aging but we got the right number. We can't go smaller. Our number of squatters is below our standing requirement today. So now you go into the tactical strike platforms, the B1, the BA10, the F15-E or the F16.

We looked at a 10 fleet, because we can save \$4.2 billion dollars by divesting in the A-10 fleet. Not because we want to divest the A-10 fleet. But if we save \$4.2 billion dollars, we also looked at saving \$4.2 billion dollars by cutting F-16's out of the fleet. It would take about 363 F16's to do that. That's 14 squatters F16's. We could cut the F15-E fleet. We could cut the entire B1 fleet. We could push up 35's outside the future year's defense plan and buy them later, which drives costs in lots of other areas by the way. But we could do that.

And we could just ground a whole bunch of squatters today and make it look like last year on our flight lines with airplanes parked and nobody flying them. So we looked at all those options. We took each one independently, and we ran it through an operational analysis, a very detailed operational analysis with the tools we use for all our typical war planning in the Department of Defense against the standard DOD scenarios. And we came very clearly to the conclusion that of all those horrible options, the least operationally impactful was to divest the A-10 fleet. That's how we got there.

It's not emotional. It's logical, it's analytical. It makes eminent sense from a military perspective if you have to make these kind of cuts. Nobody likes it. Not me, nobody. But we've also worked very hard as part of that to put together transition plans for the units that are in those airplanes now.

One of the things that Sid and J.J. and I spent a lot of time on in our planning routinely, and that these guys, Sid in particular, spent a ton of time on in this budget, was looking for those Guard and Reserve units impacted by losing the A-10, is there a plan where we can move other hardware into the Reserve component to transition those units in the missions that are viable for the long term. Because that's what we own our Reserve component.

So we do have a plan to do that. If we don't divest the A-10's from those units, the plan will come unraveled. We will not have for structure at the right time to migrate into those units, and we'll start the planning over again. So everything in this entire chain of events is hard. The balance is pretty delicate. The cuts are real. The issues are serious, and they deserve serious consideration.

So let me stop there, and I'll be glad to talk to you about any of those things. I'll be glad to talk to you about the budget further, about the total forced integration. We can talk about sexual assault. We can talk about anything you'd like to talk about. And if I need help I'll call on Sid and J.J. who are smarter and much better looking.

Thank you again for the opportunity to be here.

[applause]

MYRON BELKIND: The Air Force is looking for a guiding concept to build and modernize around. And you've mentioned recently your belief the U.S. Air Force should focus on strategic agility. In practical terms what does this term mean? And how difficult it is to implement in this budget climate?

GENERAL WELSH: The concepts actually pretty simple. It's just hard to get there. By strategic agility I'm referring to agility of everything from thought to training to education to the decision process, as to acquisition and to operational activity. We have to change the way, a little bit, that we do everything in order to get to this point. And I think it's a long term journey. Now all of you know that we have a lot of processes inside the department, inside the government that none of us would consider agile. But if we look forward, if we try and solve this in a budget cycle, we can't do it. That's the difference. We really have to start by making a concerted effort to look at the long term, for the solution.

We're trying to change the way we do strategic planning in the Air Force. We're starting up a strategic planning organization that will focus on strategic planning and on long range resource planning. The idea is that we will have a living, breathing strategy document that has three pieces to it.

The first one is the call to the future. It's the priorities for science and technology, for research and development, for development of new concepts, for human capital development, for new approaches to training and educating our people so our people are capable of being strategically agile.

There's also a 20 year piece of the strategy which is a master plan, a single Air Force master plan. Right now we have 12 aligned under core function leads. The problem with that is you end up with 12 different plans for the Air Force. They compete in lots of

ways, both overt and covert, and we need to bring that together into a single master plan where we can make the prioritization decisions as an institution that allow us to be realistic about funding going forward. That master plan will have a 20 year forward look. It will be bounded by projections of resources. So if we expect the resources will be at this line, we're not going to build into the plan anything that will push us above that funding line. And if we add something in that drives us above the line, we take something out that keeps it balanced.

And the third piece will be a ten year balanced budget. We're going to balance it every year. In the first five years will become our future year's defense plan. But we've got to stop pushing costs into the future and assuming money will fall from heaven, because that's not going to happen for the foreseeable future. We've just got to start balancing our books kind of like you do at home.

MYRON BELKIND: It is well known you are an A-10 pilot with several hundred hours of time in that airplane. Has this impacted your response to calls for the A-10's to be replaced by the F-22 or the F-16? And is there any willingness on your part to try and keep at least a few of these aircraft around for specific close air support missions overseas?

GENERAL WELSH: Yes, we looked at every option we could. Here's the problem. I mentioned that you don't make big savings unless you cut fleets. If we took, for example, the A-10's that have all been re-winged in the last few years and put new wings on the airplane as part of the continuation of the aircraft, if we kept those aircraft, just those and divested the rest of the fleet, we'd save \$1 billion dollars. Because it's all the infrastructure that drives the big cost.

So the difference between \$1 billion and \$4.2 billion is significant. That pays for half our flying hour program each year for example. And so we just decided not to do that because we can't find billions of dollars of savings in many places in this budget.

This is not about the A-10 not being a great airplane and not doing great work; it's about where can we take operational risk going forward? Where can we create savings? And how can we start transitioning the Air Force into thinking about the threat and the environment we will have to operate in ten years from now. The A-10 will not be part of that solution in a high threat environment. And what the budget is doing to us—I mentioned we were cutting capability in every mission area, it's eliminating our ability to have airplanes, systems, people who only operate in a single environment.

MYRON BELKIND: If the Air Force is presented from cutting the A-10, what are its second and third options to achieve the same savings?

GENERAL WELSH: Any of the options I mentioned before could happen. People are suggesting for example we could cut 363 F16's. If we did that the other missions the Air Force is accountable for, the major missions that we do in a theatre of operations, and God forbid a big conflict, would be almost impossible to achieve. Because the A-10 can't do those missions. The F16, the F15-E, the B1's can do close air support. They've been doing it extensively alongside the A-10 in Afghanistan and Iraq for the last eight to ten years, thousands and thousands and thousands of sorties, very successful sorties.

The problem is that the A-10 can't do the job as those airplanes can do on the rest of the battlefield. We save big lives on our battlefield as an Air Force by eliminating the enemy's will to continue the fight, by destroying their command and control networks, eliminating their ability to logistically reinforce the fight in the front lines. By keeping their Reserve forces from moving forward to rejoin the fight. By eliminating their second echelon and operational Reserve so they never engage U.S. or coalition troops on the ground. That's how Air Forces save big lives on the battlefield.

We also do it by providing the air superiority I mentioned which gives our forces freedom to maneuver and freedom from attack. That's what Air Forces do in a significant way to shape a battlefield. Then we also do close air support. And we have a number of airplanes that can and do perform close air support very, very well.

MYRON BELKIND: This year's fiscal 2015 budget, much like last year's, continues an interesting trend as far as aircraft procurement in the Department of Defense. The Navy's buying more aircraft than the U.S. Air Force and the Army isn't far behind. The Air Force is retiring its force structure and not buying aircraft. While planning to combat sequestered related cuts, what do you say to the airmen who joined the Air Force to fly aircraft? Is help on the way?

GENERAL WELSH: You make it sound as if the Navy and Army are expanding. And I don't think that's the case either. Airmen who join the Air Force join it for lots of reasons initially. They find when they come in the door even if it wasn't the pride that attracted them, it hooks them. They get very proud of who they are. They get very proud of what they do, and how well they do it. They get very proud of the people they stand beside, just like the folks in our other services.

Now, I have a son who's a Maine Infantry Officer. He's the same way. He just could not be prouder to come to work every day, and work with the people that he gets to work with every day. And that's what our airmen are looking for. They are looking for the opportunity to be good at what they do. That's the one thing that will cause them to walk away.

One of the things that we are trying to do in the Air Force is we are trying to balance our force at a size where we can afford to train and operate it. We didn't choose the law that was passed, but it's a law. In '16 we will return to sequestered levels of funding, according to the law. If that happens we cannot operate and train our Air Force at the size we are at now. We have got to downsize. Our people understand that, although it's tough on them.

It's a horrible environment to be operating in, worrying about who's going to be there next year, who's not going to be there next year. We're trying to do forced management this year so that we can reduce the size as quickly as we can and then get past this trauma in the next 12 to 15 months. And whoever's in the Air Force at that point in time, we start to focus on the future. So that's the approach we're trying to take, Myron.

MYRON BELKIND: In the longer term, the Air Force is buying a new tanker and procuring a new bomber in the coming years. It also wants to step up F-35 recapitalization in the coming years by many times today's rate, and also move to procure a new JStar's replacement by the end of the decade. That is an unprecedented modernization curve in the history of the service, not taking into account the large and growing expenditures related to space. How will the service manage all of this?

GENERAL WELSH: Well, first we have to manage it realistically. One of the keys to strategic agility, in my mind, is taking an honest look in the mirror routinely, and making sure that you can afford what you're planning to do. We think the budget we submitted this year is a step toward managing this in a way that's fiscally responsible over time, not just over the next year or next five years.

All the things you mentioned are in the current plan. We're not asking for new money for them. We're not trying to raise the budget line to get it. It's in the plan, even at these reduced levels.

What it means, though, is in our military judgment those are the things we need to be successful, not just today but ten years from now against the threat as we see it. What we can't do is maintain everything else that we would like to keep going and still be able to make that transition. That's the dilemma we're facing. Do you want a ready force today, or do you want a ready and modern force tomorrow? That's the tight rope we're walking.

MYRON BELKIND: General Welsh, you've mentioned a few times the U.S. Air Force should begin looking at what it wants in a six generation fighter As in a successor to the F-22, what are the attributes of an aircraft like this? And is it really fair to call such

an aircraft a fighter when it will likely be just as vital as an ISR and network asset beyond just a straightforward air superiority fighter.

GENERAL WELSH: Maybe not, Myron. I don't even know that it's an airplane. What we have to start looking at is what does air superiority look like 30 years from now? Let's go back to that strategic planning document and the call to the future. I don't know what it looks like. But we better start thinking about it because it takes us a long time to deliver because we don't have that strategic agility and acquisition so far. Not just in the Air Force but in our government.

And so we've got to start figuring out what does air superiority mean because it's still going to be required 30 years from now. And the Air Force is still going to be responsible for performing the mission and providing it for our combatant commanders. So if we don't start thinking about this at this point in time, I think we're being irresponsible. But I wouldn't try and characterize it or describe it. I have no idea yet what it's going to look like. What it even is. Whether it flies or whether it's a combination of things. Just don't know.

MYRON BELKIND: Drones are an increasing part of the Air Force's mission. Yet they are very controversial. What would you say to critics who argue that drones be personalized killing?

GENERAL WELSH: First of all, they remotely piloted aircraft that we fly-- you know, I'll get the party line, and Gerry told me I'd have this opportunity to mention that we don't call them drones. We've got an awful lot of people behind these things. And the people who operate them are very proud of what they do, too. We don't have anything flying around, deciding to fire weapons or drop weapons on something as a hunk of metal doing its thing. That's just not what happens. We have people in the loop in every level of the process of flying remotely piloted aircraft. About 97 to 98 percent of what we do with remotely piloted aircraft may be even higher during some time periods, is purely intelligence collection.

Our RPA fleet is not a huge percentage of the United States Air Force. It's less than 10 percent of our aircraft today. And it's not going to dramatically change in the near future. There are an awful lot of things that you can't replace about the sensor Myron carries on his shoulders. We don't have the platform yet that can fly into a battle space and determine, in about two seconds, what his brain tells him is going on in the arena. And, until we have that sensor, we will always have men and women in the battle space.

And so we should look at how do we best use unmanned capability in ways where unmanned capability has the most effect? And, if you plan to collect intelligence over a particular area for long periods of time, then don't limit yourself by the human body in a cockpit. That's where remotely piloted aircraft have been used extensively up until this

point. If you want to track things 24 hours a day, then remotely piloted aircraft work well for you. If you want to make quick decisions based on a picture of the battlefield, it's the wrong type of technology to use today. If you want to carry nuclear weapons, if you want to move your families around, I'm not sure I'm ready for a remotely piloted aircraft to do that yet.

So the idea is, what does the technology allow you to do? And then, what should you do? That's the debate we have internally on remotely piloted aircraft. Should they get bigger? Should they get smaller? What will technology and resources allow, will help inform that. We will probably move more freight in the United States of America, not in the military side of the house, but in the commercial side of the house. When we do that, the ability to move things with remotely piloted aircraft will start to explode. That will change the game in the RPA business.

Right now, we still can't fly multiple RPAs in the same air space under FAA control, not just in the U.S., but also national airspace controls in other nations. Don't know how to track them, manage them, organize them, because they're all being operated independently by people in different locations. And so we've got to figure that out. The FAA is working with the military and with states to do that today, in multiple locations around the United States.

So this industry is going to grow. As the industry grows, it's important for the Air Force to be the leading edge of the technology. That's what we do. We were founded on technology. We have people who are drawn to it. They understand it. They employ it incredibly well. And they're unbelievably innovative with it. And so that's what interests us most about the remotely piloted aircraft future.

MYRON BELKIND: In the light of the recent GAO report on the mental health of drone operators, who are overworked and have little access to psychologists, according to the report, how does the U.S. Air Force view the recommendations? And how will they be implemented?

GENERAL WELSH: The GAO report actually, it's a great read, because it describes-- it gives you a good picture of a community. Now I think they covered 2006 to 2012. And so the information in there is a little bit dated. There have been some changes made during that timeframe that are having an impact now.

If you look at the results of some of the focus groups that are counted in there, you will see some of the focus groups tell you that they don't believe there is a problem with promotion rates today in the community. They do have access to medical care and counselors. All that has changed as a result of the effort we've been making over the last four or five years. So I think we're just progressing.

This career field is new. Remember, we're at the right flier stage of remotely piloted aircraft, basically. We're just getting started. And the rapid, rapid expansion between 2006 and 2000-- today, in the remotely piloted aircraft business as a result of the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan, has been dramatic. We didn't have a community of people who were up and operating and fully mature in some other system, and then we just transitioned to RPAs. We built this community on the fly.

In 2008 we had, I believe there were 21 orbits of these RPAs. And the people associated with them now are approaching, you know, the new target is 65. We hope to make that 55 instead to save a little money and reinvest in our other areas of the ISR fleet. But that's the way we've been growing. And that is a huge investment of people and of cash to try and meet the needs in Iraq and Afghanistan, and the needs of the counterterrorism conflict around the world.

And so, all that happened with a group of people who were stressed to begin with. They were under pressure from this rapid expansion. They were conducting combat operations. There was a lot of pressure on this community. And we have to make sure we're treating them the right way from here forward. So I think there's lots of good lessons learned in the GAO report.

MYRON BELKIND: Why did the United States wait for so long to develop technology for a next generation rocket engine for launch?

GENERAL WELSH: I think when we purchased the engines we're currently using for heavy launch, which is a real issue today, the Russian-designed and built engines, the RD-180, I think it was a great product. It was a cost-savings. It was an efficiency that we could gain by purchasing en masse. And, they've been very, very successful. We can't afford to forget that. And we just hit 100 straight national security space launches, which is a spectacular success story.

And so, one of the things we have to be very careful about in any decisions in the space launch arena, is first do no harm. And make sure that, as we transition, we transition in a smart, meaningful, dedicated kind of to detail way. And I think that, clearly, it's a good time to look at what is the future of heavy space launch and propulsion? We support fully the assessment that we're undergoing right now, to try and determine the best way forward for that. I think the Air Force and the nation will be well served by this.

MYRON BELKIND: With NASA's loss of the shuttle program, how does America's smaller role in space affect the U.S. Air Force and its mission?

GENERAL WELSH: Our mission hasn't been dramatically affected by the shuttle-- NASA losing the shuttle mission. The things we do in and through space have

not changed dramatically over the last 10 years. We've just gotten better at it. We've gotten a little more technically proficient. We're expanding our knowledge of the actual environment and looking at the missions required for the future. You know, there is a change in technology and space that's going on. There's a change in capability by nations around the world. And it's going to be very important for the United States and the United States Air Force, as part of that, to keep up with that technology growth and, if possible, get ahead of it.

As opposed to reacting to something that other nations do in space routinely, with new technology development or new capabilities that are there, we should be trying to lead turn things. We should be trying to drive the activity instead of just being in a responsive mode. And that's what we've been trying to do. The cost of platforms that operate in space are growing just like costs of platforms that operate on sea and in the air. And we've got to factor that in to looking to new ways to do business. The way we've been doing it is not going to continue to be the right way.

And so, this idea of miniaturized sensors, smaller packages moving into space, different types of orbits, different approaches, whether it's disaggregation or it's riding as passengers on commercial platforms, whatever it might be, we've got to be strategically agile enough to think of new ways of getting at an old problem.

There are some things where we demand full security, full confidentiality, the ability to operate 100 percent of the time no matter what happens. But that doesn't have to be everything every day. And costs will drive us out of that mindset if nothing else does. So we need to get moving in that direction. And I think our folks in the Air Force Base Command are doing that now.

MYRON BELKIND: Lieutenant General Johnson of the Air Force Academy has had to make elimination of about 10 majors in response to the cuts that were mandated under the new fiscal year '15 budget cuts. How do you feel about this heavy duty impact to the academy's mission? And, is it possible for the endowment of considerable underwritten fund to help offset some of this academic and outside cutting mandated by the defense budget?

GENERAL WELSH: What General Johnson has done since she arrived at the academy is she's taken a hard look at the Air Force Academy at what product it is designed to produce. We helped her by kind of outlining that requirement for her. What do we expect a graduate of the academy to be, and to be able to do? She has then started an effort that she is calling the essence of the Air Force Academy, of USAFA, the United States Air Force Academy. And the idea is to determine exactly what is it that we have to do incredibly well at the academy to produce that graduate.

Some of the major cuts you're talking about are an effort within the academy to refocus their priorities and to focus resources on the things that mean the most, in terms of that essence. The specific cuts were not directed by the Air Force or anyone else. And, in fact, Michelle knows that there were resources available to help her if she needed them. But she's trying to manage her own funds and be part of the solution as well, which she believes is part of her responsibility as one of our commanders. And I completely agree with her.

At every level of our Air Force, people are making these decisions. This is sequestration. We need to get used to it.

MYRON BELKIND: General Welsh, you are one of only a couple of chiefs who graduated from the Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs. How has that affected your thoughts toward the problem of sexual harassment the academy has been experiencing? And how do you feel they are progressing toward dealing with this problem once and for all?

GENERAL WELSH: I am a graduate of the academy. I'm a proud graduate of the academy. But my thoughts on sexual harassment were really formed by growing up as the son of the world's greatest mother, and the brother to five incredible sisters. They pretty much shaped my moral fabric on issues related to respect between the sexes at a very young age.

My family is a family, because of my parents, that shows respect for each other all the time. We always have. We love each other. We respect each other. And the idea that you would not act that way to people of another gender is just beyond my comprehension, quite frankly. So that has formed my views on this much more than being at the Air Force Academy.

My experience at the Air Force Academy was without women in the actual cadet wing. We didn't have women when I attended. And so, I have worked there since, but I was not a cadet in that environment. But whether it's at the Air Force Academy or an Air Force wing anywhere on the planet, or it's in the town outside the front gate, this is unacceptable behavior, period. The difference in the last couple of years in the Air Force, in the discussion on this topic, is palpable. And if you haven't visited an Air Force wing, talk to the people on the base about the discussions they're having at the lowest levels, airmen up, then you don't really understand how this environment is changing.

Now trust me, I'm not claiming victory. We'll claim victory when we have victory. So we'll celebrate when the number is zero. And I don't think that will happen in the human domain. So what we have to make sure is that we are doing everything possible to prevent environments that lead to things worse than harassment, even. But it starts with lack of respect for individuals. It starts with lack of understanding that

inclusion is a strength of ours. It starts with lack of understanding that diversity must be a strength of the United States Air Force. Those are the things we're focused on.

We've had a lot of visibility and activity in the higher end crimes that occur. But really, it starts with human behavior toward other humans. And we're spending a lot of time and energy on that to include new training programs in basic training, lots of education, and not all major Air Force programs, some of it's just directed stuff where we're going to sit down and talk with five or six people, 30 minutes a month, within space, just to talk about what it matters to you. What do our core values mean to you as an aircraft crew chief, or as a trainer, or as a classroom instructor, or as a finance officer? And get people to know each other.

Every airman in our Air Force has a story, every one of them. The ones who are in uniforms, the ones wearing coat and ties to work, and the stories are spectacular. Some of them are inspirational. Some of them are a little sad. But they're unique. And, until we know the stories, we just can't take care of the airmen the way we should. So that's the drive. I tell everybody I meet in our Air Force, learn the stories.

MYRON BELKIND: One more question in this area. Senator Kirsten Gillibrand argues that commanding officers do not have the training to always properly handle complaints of sexual assault in the military. What makes you confident that all of the commanders in the Air Force are prepared to deal with such cases when they are not trained prosecutors?

GENERAL WELSH: No one. Commanding officers in the Air Force, leaders of industry, nobody is fully prepared to deal with every issue related to this area. There are just too many of them to comprehend. Every commander in the Air Force is, however, advised by a trained prosecutor. And here is a fact. We pulled every court martial case in the Air Force for the last three years. We did this about eight, nine months ago. Over those three years, we had, I believe the number, and I could get this wrong but I'm close, 2,411 court martials. Of those 2,411 court martials, there were 25 instances where the commander did not agree with his judge advocate general's recommendation on the proper disposition of that case.

In 13 of those cases, the judge advocate general asked the higher level commander to review his recommendation. And the higher level commander accepted the JAG's recommendation. In 12 they did not. They supported the lower level commander. So in 12 of 2,411 cases, which is a pretty small percentage, about 0.5 percent, actually, we did not have agreement between the commander and the JAG on the best way forward, in 12 cases. One of those was a sexually rated case.

So the idea that the commanders aren't trained, and therefore you don't take the right action, is an interesting discussion, but it's not true. It doesn't happen. It just doesn't

happen. And so that logic doesn't track well with me. I'll tell you what I do like. I love Senator Gillibrand's passion on this issue. While I don't agree with her on this particular point, I love her passion on the issue and the passion of a lot of members of the United States Congress, because we are making changes. We can make changes in the future with their support.

And, by the way, some of them have a lot of experience in this arena, including the legal arena. And they've got great ideas. Special victims counsel, which the Air Force is getting credit for implementing a year ago, was an idea that came from the United States Congress, a great idea. And it's been a huge, huge program for us. So I think this is a partnership, but it has to be a partnership going forward. People tend to focus on the differences. But the support we can give each other in this arena is what will make us successful.

MYRON BELKIND: How have the Iraq and Afghanistan wars affected the Air Force's role?

GENERAL WELSH: Actually, they haven't changed our role at all. We've gotten better at supporting low intensity conflict, the counterinsurgency fight, just as all the services have, because that's what we've been focused on. We have made huge, huge developments in tactical air lift and tactical air drop. Most people don't know the precision air drop capabilities of the Air Force have come leaps and bounds forward in the last 10 years. We used to need about a 600 yard square drop zone to drop things into in the battlefield environment. Now we can literally land something on this head table. It's pretty incredible.

We have the ability, now, to move patients from a battlefield in Afghanistan to full trauma care centers in the United States, who the trauma-- director of trauma at the UCLA Medical Center told me, one day, he wouldn't move from room 110 to 111 in his hospital because he couldn't stabilize them long enough.

The medical advances over the last 14 years, in battlefield care all the way to critical care transport to revolutionary surgical techniques and new technology have been absolutely stunning. And I think, over time, will just be a signal achievement of people in the Air Force over the last-- and the entire joint medical community over the last 10 or 12 years.

The core missions of the Air Force haven't changed at all. We're still doing them all. You're just not reading about them in the paper. They're happening all the time. It's the light switch. We're still doing all those other things all over the world.

MYRON BELKIND: Put into scale the herculean effort put before the Air Force in drawing down from Afghanistan. What if there is a full withdrawal by the end of

2014? Does the current infrastructure there allow for this? Or would you need to build it up?

GENERAL WELSH: We have the ability to do the draw down. The planning has been in place. General Joe Dunford has done a fantastic job, I believe, in putting together a transition plan that covers lots of different options. We have been-- We have airmen in the middle of this retrograde plan, figuring out how to move key equipment out of the country, how to sort it in the country, where do you store it, where do you move it, how do you sell it, if that's the game plan.

We have an ability to surge air lift, both tactical and strategic air lift under U.S. transportation commands leadership to move equipment and people rapidly. The big issue for the Air Force is, will we be allowed to continue training the Afghan Air Force? The aviation industry in Afghanistan is an opportunity for that country. It's an industry that could be incredibly successful and meaningful for them in that region. But it hasn't been robust in the past.

Their Air Force will lead that effort. Their airmen will lead that effort. And, if we have the chance to train them to a level where they can be a fully operating, sustainable Air Force over time, with the ability not just to fly airplanes, which they do very well, but to manage infrastructure and systems and logistical trains and those things, I think it helps the country's ability to develop an aviation industry over time. That's why we'd like to stay engaged. But, if we come out, by the end of this year, clearly, that effort will not continue.

MYRON BELKIND: Your biography does not mention any reference to your time serving under then-CIA director Leon Panetta. You served him during the raid on the Bin Laden compound in Abad-Abad, Pakistan. Do you recall any of the details as to how this raid was decided on, and what the decision process was to keep the photos of Bin Laden under the shroud of secrecy? I'm sure you've read the papers.

GENERAL WELSH: No. [laughter] In fact, I wasn't there when the raid occurred. I left a while before that.

MYRON BELKIND: Do you think this raid and aftermath permanently hurt our military, political and diplomatic relationship with the government of Pakistan? And what do we have to do to repair this relationship?

GENERAL WELSH: Yeah, I'm just not in a position, Myron, to understand the damage of the relationship with the government of Pakistan. I'm really not in that information network right now. I'll tell you this. One of the things that we do do in the military, though, is we try and make connections with our service counterparts. I do know the Pakistani attaché here in the U.S. I have met with the Pakistani-- I have the Pakistani

ambassador coming to meet here within the next couple of weeks. We are trying to arrange a visit for me to visit Pakistan and meet with the air chief, also to invite him here to the U.S. so I can meet with him.

One of the great things about the military is that there really is a kind of a common understanding between nations of people who do the same things, whether it's banking, finance, military, or whatever. With airmen it's really kind of a unique thing. I don't know why, but we just kind of connect. And Sid and J.J. will tell you the same thing, because they've met with airmen all over the world, and flown with them. There's just a connection that happens very easily.

And so, while we may not be-- the military may not be the pillar of an international relationship or a bilateral relationship between the United States and some other country, we certainly can be part of the connective tissue. And we'd like to be that with Pakistan.

MYRON BELKIND: Several weeks ago Secretary James and yourself announced the dismissal and retirement of ten command level captains and majors from the Malmstrom Air Force Base Missile Command for cheating on a routine periodic proficiency test. What has happened to this testing regime? And what changes are being considered and implemented to make sure this climate of cheating does not continue?

GENERAL WELSH: The people who were relieved and who resigned were all lieutenant colonels or colonels. It was the wing commander, the group commander, the deputy group commander, and then the squadron commanders of the missile squadrons at Malmstrom. None of those people were actually involved in the cheating. The concern was that they didn't realize the cheating was occurring. Each of the squadrons had about 40 percent of their people involved in this, to include a large number of instructors on the base. So basically, the commander of 20th Air Force, General Jack Weinstein, lost confidence in his commanders to manage the environment and to create an environment that required to be successful and to maintain all of our core values as they moved forward.

And so, the changes that have been implemented have actually been implemented at that level. The Secretary and I are not telling them what to do. The commanders involved, General Weinstein at 20th Air Force, General Stephen Wilson at Air Force Global Strike Command, put together a command directed investigation. They put together some formal focus groups. They formed a major effort called the Force Improvement Program, where they brought people from every part of the nuclear community together with experts and advisors from outside, including people from other services and from outside the military, to look at every part of the enterprise and see if there is a way to start making changes that will have meaningful effect.

Over the last six or seven years, we've done 20 different studies on the nuclear community. The Air Force didn't just start focusing on this about two months ago. Of those studies, we have taken about 1,056, I believe is the number, but it's 1,000 and some recommendations that have already been completely implemented. One of the things that was not highlighted is this idea of cheating in any of those studies.

But some of the other issues that we've found in all these focus groups, and the look at General Wilson has taken, were identified before. And we had made partial movements to fix these things, but obviously not extensive enough. And so we now have 300 additional recommendations from this internally developed focus group effort. And we are going to march down the solution sets, one at a time, figure out where we can put resources, where we should put resources, where do we have the most impact.

A lot of the smaller things that are aggravating people, that have made them frustrated in the community, are already being changed. We're trying hard to eliminate an idea of you can never make a decision. Your most senior boss always has to be the one making the call. There are a lot of things we ought to be doing in that business at the lowest levels of authority. And we're trying to push it there.

We've looked at the environment for training, for testing, as a small example. We have made the monthly test that the crew members take pass/fail as opposed to scoring them, which was kind of the underlying concern of the crew members, is that if you don't score 100 percent, you're seen as not being competent enough to move onto other jobs. And so the only assessment your commander has of you is your test score every month, which is a pretty tough environment to be operating in.

And so that's already been changed. And there will be a lot more changes as we move through this. But the goal is to, number one, take that on and look in the mirror, admit where we are, and then let's change the game. Let's just change the game. Our people deserve better than that. The people who cheated, the people who were breaking the law, breaking our policy and rules intentionally, they don't have a future with us. That's not how we operate.

MYRON BELKIND: Peering into the crystal glass, are you seeing signs from Congress that sequestration levels will not return in 2016?

GENERAL WELSH: I am not seeing any indications of that.

MYRON BELKIND: What is the Air Force's backup plan if it loses access to the GPS constellation?

GENERAL WELSH: One of the great things about the GPS constellation is it does bring a lot of redundant capability. It is disbursed enough that it is very difficult to

remove the GPS constellation. We are, however, have been looking at partnerships with other nations who also have navigation type systems. We're also looking at technology in the future that uses different ways of precision navigation, things that we think would be useful, whether the GPS system signal is denied, or whether the system is compromised, or whether we can't develop coalition or allied partnerships that allow us to use their systems everywhere in the world we don't have immediate access.

So, lots of efforts going on in this regard. I'm pretty confident about precision navigation in the future. But we have to have a varied menu of things to choose from if we want to guarantee the ability to use it. And we have become reliant on it. We have to be able to navigate precisely, to set timing precisely, to operate the way we are operating as a U.S. military around the world.

MYRON BELKIND: We are almost out of time. But, before asking the last question, we have a couple of housekeeping matters to take care of. First of all, I'd like to remind you about our upcoming events and speakers. May 27th, Donald Trump, chairman and president of the Trump Organization. And on May 28th, Ben Carson, neurosurgeon and author.

Next, I'd like to present our guest with the traditional National Press Club mug. General, I don't think we could call it Air Force Blue, but it is a pretty rich blue.

GENERAL WELSH: It's a nice blue. [laughter] Thank you.

MYRON BELKIND: Thank you so much.

GENERAL WELSH: Thank you so much.

MYRON BELKIND: Thank you so much. How about a round of applause for our speaker. [applause] Thank you all for coming today. We are adjourned. [side remarks] Excuse me. I made a-- I thought we had a perfect breakfast. And I forgot the last question. [laughter] Which I'm sure the General will want to respond to. As an 810 pilot, what's the most annoying thing about flying commercial? [laughter]

GENERAL WELSH: I better think about this one. [laughter] You know actually, there is nothing annoying about flying commercial. As I get older, the problem is, it's just not as comfortable as it used to be. [laughter]

MYRON BELKIND: Thank you so much.

GENERAL WELSH: Yes, sir, thank you.

[applause]

MYRON BELKIND: Thank you again. We are adjourned for real this time.

END