

**Secretary Heather Wilson
United States Air Force**

**Project for Media and National Security
George Washington University**

Defense Writers Group

16 May 2019

DWG: I'm reliably informed that while you are welcome to ask questions about Iran, the Secretary actually won't be able to tell you anything newsworthy about it. So feel free, but it won't be as productive as other questions might. I'm told.

Why don't I start if I may, ma'am, with the classic question at this stage in one's career, I guess, could you offer us maybe a couple of things that you're, accomplishments that you're the happiest with as Secretary, and could you also offer us a couple of things that you are going to be telling your acting successor he probably needs to be the most concerned about in terms of the Air Force going forward.

Secretary Wilson: Let me start out with that.

When I came aboard, both driven by the things the President was saying as well as Secretary Mattis at the time, we identified five goals that we were going to focus on. The first one was to restore the readiness of the force, and we've significantly restored the readiness of the force to win any fight, any time. We are not through, but we pulled together a team of airmen, about 50 airmen from around the service to come up with a plan to accelerate the recovery of readiness of the force, and we are more ready today than we were two years ago. And 90 percent of our pacing units, those front-line units that would be called upon to halt any attack anywhere in the world are ready to fight tonight.

So I think that is a significant accomplishment, but there is

Wilson - 5/16/19

more work to be done.

We also with respect to readiness and also just where we need to go as an Air Force over the next five to ten years, I'm very pleased I the work that we've done on answering the question, what is the Air Force we need to implement the National Defense Strategy. It's significantly larger than the Air Force we have.

So the study that identified that we really need in the 2025-2030 time frame about 386 operational squadrons to be able to do the nation's business.

So restoration of the readiness of the force was the first goal we set.

The second one was cost-effective modernization. There's a bow wave of modernization that the Air Force is going through and we knew that we had to do it cost effectively because the money that we're given, every dollar that we're given was earned by somebody else and entrusted to us to defend the country.

So we started a number of things, and Will Roper has led that effort I think effectively as the Assistant Secretary for Acquisition. We've stripped about 93 years out of Air Force schedules for acquisition just in the last 11 months. Our goal was 100 years in 12 months, so we're not quite there yet but we've got one more month to go. And this is unnecessary schedule. So every program manager looking at their programs and figuring out are there steps that they could take out so that we only buy tailored suits, we don't buy suits off the rack, if you will.

We did things like reduce the time to contract for small businesses. Initially from an average of 180 days down to 90 days, and then we said all right, can you break the system? Can you really change the system and give us a one-page contract that we can sign in one day and swipe a credit card to give a progress payment to a small, innovative business, and then we did it in New York at Pitch Day. With an average time to contract of 15

minutes. And the fastest time was three minutes to do business with the United States Air Force. So changing the way in which we acquire systems. We got more than a dozen prototypes and experiments going on, taking advantage of new authorities given to us by the Congress to be able to accelerate capability from the lab bench to the warfighter faster.

So we've really taken advantage of these new authorities, and we've done some major procurements. The T-X trainer. The KC-46 delivery. The replacement for the UH-1 helicopter. Moving forward on the Ground-Based Strategic Deterrent, the GPS satellites, launch services. All of those we've been moving forward over the last two years with major milestones or decisions on procurement. All of them very competitive. All of them not a single successful protest to an Air Force procurement program of our major procurements in the last two years. And because of successful competition, just in those four major procurements that we had -- GPS, a replacement for the helicopter, PX-Trainer and launch services -- we saved \$17 billion below the estimated cost position in the independent cost analysis. So competition works.

A third goal that we set was to drive innovation to secure our future. We completed a lengthy analysis of our science and technology strategy and we issued a new science and technology strategy which is now in the process of being implemented, and we did something that really was innovative but wasn't something we initially looked at. Our Assistant Secretary for Installations and Environment, John Henderson, a really wonderful civil engineer, pulled together an Infrastructure Strategy to change the way the Air Force is maintaining its bases. We fight from our bases, and for a lot of people maybe infrastructure is boring, but it's where a lot of money goes. He figured out that we were spending our money inefficiently, and where we could get more money for every dollar we spent. We implemented that strategy and if we follow it over a 20 or 30-year period we will see a significant improvement in the quality of our bases at lower cost.

So driving innovation was the third goal.

The fourth was to develop exceptional leaders to lead the world's most powerful teams. The focus on people has been something the Chief of Staff Dave Goldfein and I have really tried to put forward, revitalizing our squadrons, getting support back in our squadrons so that our operators can focus on their work and not on administrative work.

Stripping out a lot of the busy work in the Air Force. We launched an initiative to strip away Air Force Instructions that were too proscriptive or inconsistent or out of date. In the last two years we have rescinded over 330 Air Force Instructions. That's about 75 pounds of paper, and I know that because every one we rescinded they gave me a copy of and I've been keeping them in a pile in my office. The pile is now over four feet tall. Every one of those regulations that was out of date or overly prospective amounted to time taken away from airmen doing things that were productive. So stripping away things so that we can focus our leaders on things that matter.

We changed a lot on professional military education, completely revised the promotion guidance to try to align with what we really value. We implemented a Talent Marketplace to give airmen more control and input on their assignments so that they can guide their own careers and balance career and family. And we're on the cusp of, we've done about 18 months of work on looking at how we do promotion categories. And the Chief and I will kind of send that out probably next week to launch about a four-month dialogue with the Air Force, taking a look at that. It would be a major change in the way in which we evaluate and promote officers.

The final thing was to deepen our alliances and attract new partners. And while we've done a fair amount of work there, you asked me in the end of your question what work is left to be done. Some of that I highlighted in those four things. There's a lot that's been launched, some that's been accomplished, more work to always be done. But I think if there were areas where we

Wilson - 5/16/19

still have much more to do, it is looking at our alliances. We do a lot now in exercises, in training, in exchanges, in the State Partnership Program between our Air Guard and countries around the world. But I think there's more opportunity there. We're really just starting to revise and update our strategy towards alliances and what we as an Air Force need to be doing so that ten years from now our alliances are stronger and our allies are able to protect themselves, and they're deeply aligned with each other and with us.

So that's a few things.

DWG: I'm interested that your stress for the future is on alliances. Just a casual reader of the press would suspect that our alliances are in bumpier shape over the last couple of years than they were previously. Do you think that's the case? Or do you think there are, is there a road forward that's going to work for this administration to strengthen its alliances in ways that are meaningful militarily?

Secretary Wilson: Every day in the fight against ISIS there were 28 countries contributing to the fight, and the alliance very often comes together first in the air. There's a common language among airmen, and it's amazing to me the number of people around the world who are leading or who are members of air forces who were trained in the United States with America's airmen. The NATO Joint Jet Pilot School is at Sheppard Air Force Base in Texas. You go to Luke Air Force Base, you will find countries there training and accepting their F-35s. The Singapore Air Force buys its F-15s at Mountain Home Air Force Base in Idaho. That's where they're stationed.

So the depth of connection between America's Air Force, and not just our close allies like the Canadians and the Brits and the Australians and the Kiwis, but emerging allies and partners too.

I mentioned to you two weeks ago I was in Poland and they have a very strong desire to deepen their relationship with the United States Air Force. So I think the relationship between airmen and

Wilson - 5/16/19

the strength and continuity of connections between our air forces is quite strong and we will continue to build upon that.

It's not just commonality of equipment and interoperability. It is the ability to rapidly form task forces and do things together that none of us can do alone.

DWG: Yasmin.

DWG: Obviously the Air Force has done a tremendous amount of work in hypersonics. Like the tactical boost side and the hypersonic air-breathing weapon concept which are going to be flying early this year. But would you say that enough is being done in hypersonic technology? The threats that are going on in the world. Where are places that we can accelerate? Things that you've encountered that you've seen happen here.

Secretary Wilson: I think all of us are concerned about the threat of hypersonic weapons against the United States because of their speed and their ability to maneuver.

One of the things that we did very early on, and when I look back -- you asked if I'm in a reflective mood. Not quite yet. I've still got a lot of stuff to get done in the next two weeks. But one of the things that I think we've benefited from tremendously over the last two years is a very unprecedented closed cooperation between the three military services. Secretary Esper, Secretary Spencer and I get together for breakfast every two weeks, but it's evolved even beyond that. Initially everyone was surprised we'd get together every two weeks because I guess that just hasn't really happened in the past. It's even more than that. We probably are in touch with each other every day on something -- by email, text, phone, in-person. And one of the early things we did was take a look at research and development, and particularly hypersonics was one of the first ones where the Navy had funded a piece of research that the Army did.

The Army research was more successful, the test was more successful than the Air Force one, but to use it on a submarine

Wilson - 5/16/19

they would have had to shrink the diameter of the missile that the Army had tested. So, honest to goodness, this happened in a meeting with the three of us. Secretary Spencer of the Navy said do you think you could drop this thing off of a B-52? I said well, maybe. What we did was we signed, within weeks, a Memorandum of Understanding that said work together, use the best technology, share results, and go fast.

I remember when Will Roper walked into my office and rolled out this diagram of a hypersonic test vehicle that had Air Force developed rocket motors with an Army shell, and they actually had kind of color coded all the pieces of where they came from. It was a true integrated effort. As a result of that, we accelerated a test by five years.

So I think we are doing things together and pushing this forward. I don't think we should be naïve about what we're facing, particularly Chinese investment in the hypersonic technologies. They've identified it as one of the things that they are prioritizing, and I think we need to pay attention to that.

DWG: Sivvy Lontom of AFP.

DWG: You spoke about the strength of the alliances. Do you think there is a chance Turkey will drop its contract with Russia for S400s? And if not, do you think they should get [inaudible]?

Secretary Wilson: It's possible. The diplomats are continuing to work on that. But the S400 is incompatible with having the F-35. We are continuing to train the Turkish pilots at Luke Air Force Base, but we don't think that we can deliver those aircraft into a country that has the F400 which was designed to try to defeat the F-35 and other airplanes like it.

So the discussions and the diplomacy is going on and we hope that that's successful, because Turkey is a long-time NATO ally.

DWG: So you think there is a chance that can work?

Wilson - 5/16/19

Secretary Wilson: Hypothetical. [Laughter]. Perhaps.

DWG: Sandra.

DWG: Thank you, Madame Secretary.

On the changes that you're making for the promotion system, on these competitive categories will there be a space category? And if so, do you think that will address the criticism from the Armed Services Committee that you've heard many, many times, that the Air Force promotes pilots and not so much space officers. What do you see happening?

Secretary Wilson: There are six categories in the draft that we will circulate to the airmen for them to react to. I have to emphasize that it's a draft. There's been a lot of work on this, a lot of analysis of it, but it is a draft.

One of those categories is space and missile operations. I'm trying to remember all six off the top of my head, but there's air operations and special operations is one; space and missile operations is one; combat support is one; the future force is one, which includes acquisition, research, development, tests and evaluation; information operations is one -- information and information warfare; what's the other one?

Voice: I'll come back to it, ma'am.

DWG: Space will not be a stand-alone?

Secretary Wilson: Space and missiles. Just to explain a little more what we're talking about here in the background, most of -- the other services have more categories where they look at people and compare them for promotion. IN the Air Force we have lawyers, doctors, dentists who have their own promotion categories and what we do is we promote to need. A doctor's career path is very different from another line in the Air Force person.

Wilson - 5/16/19

In the Air Force we have those categories, but then 87 percent of the force is in a large category called line of the Air Force. And what we are seeing is that we very often at the lieutenant colonel or colonel level, we just kind of trust the law of large numbers to give us the expertise we need, and we may not have enough colonels in cyber or lieutenant colonels in logistics or somebody that's coming along who eventually is being groomed to be the leader of one of our laboratories.

So we're looking at how do we develop people giving them the experiences they need to be successful in different areas so that we have exceptional teams at every level, and not everybody's career is going to look like everybody else's, and it doesn't have to.

So we're going to propose that we break the line of the Air Force category at least at the middle grades into six subcategories. We've done a huge number of iterations on this, looking at the promotion pools at major and lieutenant colonel and mock boards and those things to see what the impact would be, to see if the groups are large enough to have meaningful promotion and so forth. And we think we've got this right, and we've got a lot of input from the major command commanders and others. But we also think that it's a really big change, so we're going to take it out to the force, get a lot of input. Post on it, blog on it, comment on it, have panel meetings on it, and then probably make a final decision on where we go in October.

The answer to your question, it may address, it's not particularly designed to address an issue identified by some critics on promotion rates for space officers. It is intended to make sure we develop our people the way they need to for their careers and for the needs of the service.

DWG: Would it be helpful if you have a space category, would it be helpful in terms of bringing more people in to the Space Force if there is a Space Force in the future?

Secretary Wilson: I don't think that will make a difference

Wilson - 5/16/19

there. That won't have an impact. But it will help us develop people.

Think about this for a second. For the future force, if you're an acquisition officer or research development test and evaluation, your assignments should be different than somebody who's a logistics officer. At some point you're going to need to get a PhD. How do we build that into your career without saying well, you know, you're now off cycle for your promotion or something? We need to be able to have the flexibility to develop exceptional teams of people with all kinds of background to be successful at every level in the Air Force.

DWG: Scott, Federal News Radio.

DWG: Good morning, Secretary. Thank you.

This actually kind of falls into what I'm about to ask. You've seen two really important occupations -- the maintainer force and the pilot force -- sort of go through this crisis and we've had to use certain authorities to recapitalize them. For the most part that's worked.

Do you think the Air Force, the current personnel system that you're working in, is sustainable for mid-career? You've kind of bent the personnel system but you haven't broken it yet. Is it on its way to kind of doing that? What do you see as the future of personnel?

Secretary Wilson: Interesting. Two years ago we were 4,000 maintainers short in the Air Force. That was really a result of sequester and we had to really cut deeply the size of the force, my predecessors did. We have gone in my time here, correct me on these numbers if I get them wrong. What was the starting number, do you remember? But it's over a two to three year period, so up through the end of FY20 which is the budget that's on the Hill today. We will increase the end strength of the Air Force by 30,000 people. We've really focused on putting them in the squadrons and filling the holes in our units. Maintainers was a

Wilson - 5/16/19

big, obvious hole. We were 4,000 maintainers short two years ago. As of December of last year we were zero maintainers short in the active duty side.

That means we've got a lot of maintainers with one, two or three years of experience. So seasoning those maintainers and getting to the craftsmen at their work is the challenge today.

So we filled a lot of holes in our formations which has helped on readiness. Readiness is first and foremost about having enough people tonight to go fight.

On the pilot side, we have stemmed the decline. We put a lot of emphasis on retention, but that alone is not going to solve the problem. You also have to increase the production of pilots, and we have three years ago started training roughly a little more than 1100 pilots a year. We are on track in FY20 in this future budget year we're working on the Hill with, we'll train close to 1500 pilots.

So if we train 1500 pilots a year and stay there steady state, we will recover from the pilot shortage.

The biggest challenge on recovering from the pilot shortage is not going to pilot training, it's the absorption and seasoning of pilots in units because you have to have enough force structure to be able to take the newbies into your squadron and get them trained up on their systems and so forth.

So I think those things have helped.

You asked particularly about mid-career, though. I think the biggest thing that we've done to change the personnel system is the Talent Marketplace. For those of you, I had them show me what we're really doing. It's really a new software program, and we're doing it in a DevOps way. So we're iterating with it. As of February, all officers are doing their assignments through Talent Marketplace. And basically all the assignments are open for this summer and officers can go in and say all right, I'm

looking for assignments for major, from my logistics specialty. I've got a kid with special needs. We're joint spouse, so you check all of those things and then look at the options and what's available and bid on them. First, second, third, fifth choice. You can see who the commander and supervisor is there. And the supervisor can also see who's bidding on their jobs. You can see how many people have put that first choice. Everybody wants to go to Eglin for that logistics job. Maybe I can get at least close to my folks if I also put Moody Air Force Base and that will give me two hours away. So you get more transparency and more choice.

They then close the system, so for about three weeks while the supervisors look at it, and then we actually stole -- we borrowed, we got permission -- to use the algorithm they use for medical school residency matching, and try to optimize the assignments for the entire force to get as many people as we can their first choice.

It's more transparent. It gives airmen more control over their assignments. And more than anything else, that is an issue for an airman at mid-career, is balancing work and family, getting some control, and still meeting the needs of the force.

I think that is the biggest change to the personnel system. The ones that we haven't been able to accomplish yet and are probably going to need some legislation are shifting to make it easier to go from Active to Reserve or Guard and back to Active again. Almost full time and part time. People have stuff that happen in their lives. They have priorities they need to deal with. Their mom is sick. Or they need to throttle back for a few years. It should be easier for someone whom we have put millions of dollars into training to take a little bit of a pause and then come back in. We shouldn't make that as hard as we do. So that's one of the pieces where it's bent, but we've got to change that system and that's yet to happen.

DWG: Pat from Jane's.

Wilson - 5/16/19

DWG: Hi, ma'am. I was wondering if you can explain how you balance the risk of Dr. Roper's approach to a next generation air dominance with the aircraft you will have now or in 15-20 years.

Secretary Wilson: Say that again.

DWG: How do you balance the risk of Dr. Roper's disaggregated approach to next generation air dominance with the aircraft we have now? Or when the system rolls out.

Secretary Wilson: I'm not sure I understand your question.

DWG: I guess we aren't sure exactly, you don't know what the next stealth is going to be; you don't know what the next groundbreaking technology is going to be, but one of Dr. Roper's fundamental concepts for his vision of next generation air dominance is a disaggregated approach. Swarms, the math instead of a high performance aircraft. I was wondering if you could explain how you are balancing the risk in this as you think about what you want.

Secretary Wilson: It's not just Dr. Roper, obviously. The Air Force has decided that we're not trying to build a next generation aircraft. We are trying to advance critical technologies which might lead to next generation aircraft.

One of the mistakes I think people make on huge development programs is that they put too many miracles in the program plan, and then when one of them doesn't work you have a failed program. That's not our approach. And I think it's actually a far less risky approach to identify the critical technologies that we're seeking to advance and rapidly iterate on them, and when we want to or when we're ready, put them into a system.

So I think that's a much better approach.

DWG: Could you explain what technologies that you're working on that you think might be groundbreaking, or things that you're experimenting with?

Wilson - 5/16/19

Secretary Wilson: Absolutely not. [Laughter].

DWG: Nothing like software defined radios, or things like that?

Secretary Wilson: Absolutely not.

DWG: All right.

DWG: Dmitry from TAAS.

DWG: Good morning, Madan Secretary. I wanted to ask you a follow-up on Turkey and the F-35 program. It's been reported that Turkish participation in the program has been essentially suspended by the U.S. So I wanted to ask you for an update if this is a fact, if you suspended the process of transferring anything to Turkey. And if you asked the Turks to suspend, to essentially stop doing whatever they were doing, producing parts for the aircraft, giving them to you, all that. Where things stand now.

Secretary Wilson: I think, as I said, we are continuing to work on this diplomatically, to try to resolve the issue concerning the S400. And we are hopeful that will be happen.

From the Air Force point of view, we are continuing to train their pilots at Luke Air Force Base in Arizona.

DWG: Are the Turks still producing parts for the aircraft?

Secretary Wilson: You would have to ask the Joint Program Office. They're the ones who handle the contracts. Our approach is to continue to work with the Turks to train their pilots and to support the diplomatic engagement.

DWG: And if it comes to the U.S. ending their participation in the program, do you foresee a lawsuit on their part? How do you think the thing's going to result in the end of it comes to that?

Wilson - 5/16/19

Secretary Wilson: I'm sorry, I couldn't understand.

DWG: If it comes to the United States deciding to actually stop Turkish participation in the program, how the whole situation will be resolved in the end, from their point of view?

Secretary Wilson: We are continuing to support the diplomatic engagement with Turkey to resolve this situation so that Turkey can participate in the F-35 program without a threat to our aircraft existing in the same airspace.

DWG: John Donley, CQ.

DWG: Thanks again for doing this.

I'd like you to step back a little and talk about cyber. Talk about the Air Force, if you'd like but talk about America in general, the Defense Department and the country as a whole. Give us a status report of how you think we're doing right now in terms of protecting our systems and being able to go on offense.

Secretary Wilson: I probably can't help you as much on the national, more than just as an informed citizen on the national level. But I can tell you what the Air Force is doing. We have about 1700 cyber operators. We provide 39 cyber mission teams to the combatant commander.

Our approach to cyber, and you'll notice this in the study we did on the Air Force We Need, is not to increase the number of cyber squadrons, but constantly iterating on the development of more tools for them.

We also are shifting; we have some trained cyber operators who are working in communications squadrons. For example, there's one in the Pentagon, when my email doesn't work he comes to fix my computer. That's probably not a good use of his talent. Actually now it's a her. She just switched this week. So we are shifting in a lot of our bases to Enterprise IT as a service. So contract out the basic, as most businesses do, the basic kind of

provision of computer service, IT service and support, so that we can use our trained cyber airmen to defend our networks and our systems and to train themselves in cyber operations.

Cyber is increasingly integrated into the fight and it's fascinating. We talk about the F-35 being a game-changing system, and it is because it integrates everything. One of the things that's amazing about, you know, you go out to Nellis and watch the training there, and there was, one of the big exercises last year there was a Marine captain who was leading the exercise. As he's going out to his F-35 they're firing up the jet, and before has wheels in the well off the runway he has a complete integrated picture in front of him, not just of the air picture but cyber, space. So he is able to call audibles from the air, knowing what the cyber effects are on the range. So it's an integration of cyber into the warfight that gives it a real multiplication advantage.

DWG: That all sounds great, but in a broader sense do you think that DoD, like the Air Force, has stepped up to the plate enough on this issue and the way we think about it? For example, when you talked at the beginning you listed a lot of systems and programs they're working on. They're all hardware systems. We think about the next war as being fought with hardware, but it may largely or even entirely be fought in cyberspace.

What I'm asking is from a bigger picture perspective, do you think our heads are in the right place on this?

Secretary Wilson: I worry about two things. One is we don't have enough airmen who really understand cyber. And I'm not talking about our cyber warriors who are pretty exceptional. But if we have an airman on the line who's an avionics tech at Mountain Home Air Force Base, I want him to be cyber cognizant, almost as we are literate in other ways. So raising the level of understanding and competence on cyber across the entire force.

I would also say while I didn't highlight it in my opening, probably one of the biggest shifts we've made in acquisition is

Wilson - 5/16/19

the shift to development ops or DevOps for software. We're no longer buying software like we buy hardware. So rapid iterations of software drops in weeks rather than years. That's a real change.

Now do I think that the threat is significant? Yes. Do I have a real cognizance or confidence that we will be able to prevail in a cyber domain? That's not my area of expertise. But I'm not sure I'm the one to really answer that question from a national point of view.

DWG: Amy McCullough, from Air Force Magazine.

DWG: Thank you. There was a GAO report that came out recently that assessed the health of the service's depots as poor. The report didn't have the most recent data. I think it went up through fiscal 2018, but it's significant at a time [inaudible]. They start of talking about raising [inaudible] as you're trying to improve the readiness of the fleet.

So I'm wondering if you can give me your assessment now of the depots.

Secretary Wilson: I read that report. I think it was talking about, at least my recollection of the parts that were related to the Air Force, it was talking about the capital equipment at the depots and whether it was modern enough and those kinds of things. So there's probably some legitimacy to it, old tooling. Old tooling and we're also fixing old airplanes. The average age of the fleet is significantly higher and it gets back to the need to recapitalize constantly in an equipment-related force.

I will say, though, I visited all the depots now, and when you look at the way they're operating now compared to the way, according to them anyway, they were operating ten years ago on using a technique that they call the art of the possible, how many operations can they do simultaneously to move an aircraft through the depot and really strip down maintenance to the very bones of the aircraft, and then building it back up. How can you

compress that cycle?

Because, if you've got 100 aircraft and they have to go into depot and it takes 365 days, and I won't do the math in public, but it takes 365 days to get through depot maintenance. If you can shrink that to 180 days, you effectively have bought more aircraft because you don't have aircraft sitting in the depot.

So acceleration through the depot has significantly changed. So I think I'm really pleased at what I've seen. I think it started in Oklahoma at Tinker, but it's now the standard tool at our three depots in Utah, in Robbins Air Force Base, and then at Tinker.

DWG: So you don't think that the issues that that specific report highlighted the fact that all your efforts to get F-22, F-35, F-16 up to that 80 percent mission capable rate --

Secretary Wilson: The 80 percent mission capable rate, particularly for the F-35 and the F-22 were not really a depot level maintenance issue. The depot maintenance issues had to do with the capital equipment in the depots that was identified by the GAO. The low observable maintenance issue, particularly for the F-22s and the mission capable rates of the F-22s are being impacted by two things. One is, we had a Cat-5 hurricane hit Tindall Air Force Base, so we are still this summer doing permanent change of station to have people catch up with aircraft, get people moved to where the missions now are. By the way, well, let me get back to the supplemental here quickly, but so the F-22s will be affected by that. Their readiness will be affected by that. And then just the technique of low observable maintenance. So we have very high standards for low observability which means we fix things when the skin of the aircraft has a problem. It takes a long time on the F-22 in particular, to cure that exterior. So there is a time factor related to the materials that's very difficult to overcome.

A final thing about the supplemental, since you mentioned the F-22 and Tindall. The hurricane hit Tindall in October. The

Wilson - 5/16/19

Secretary of the Navy was just down in Florida and we had breakfast on Monday. He walked into breakfast and he said, and of course they're recovering from the hurricane that hit LeJeune as well. He said I had no idea. He said Tindall Air Force Base is so much worse than it was at LeJeune. He said this is eight months later, and it still looks like a disaster zone. He's right. There have only been five times in U.S. history that a Category 5 hurricane has made landfall, and the eye of the storm went right through Tindall Air Force Base.

The Senate has said, Senator Shelby has said he's going to try to get the supplemental on the floor next week and out of the Senate by Memorial Day. It's really important that we do that. We've borrowed money from all the rest of the Air Force to minimally recover at Tindall. But we rely on, our insurance company is the United States Congress and we rely on the supplemental to be able to recover.

DWG: Tony Capaccio, Bloomberg.

DWG: I'm going to try an Iran question, putting your head on in terms of train and equip.

What capabilities does the B-52H bring over there? What capabilities does the B-52H, high profile deployment to the AOR, what does that bring to the fight? It's a third generation bomber that's good in the Cold War, but can you talk a little bit about what actually does it bring capability wise? And what role does the F-22 and the F-35 play over there in terms of this bomber task force, in terms of flying patrols with them as a signal to Iran? Again under your train and equip hat.

Secretary Wilson: My responsibility is to organize, train and equip ready forces for presentation to a combatant commander. For the United States Air Force, we project power around the world at moment's notice. In the case of the B-52s, it was a little over 50 hours between when the tasking came and when we had B-52s on the ramp in the Middle East. I'm very proud of our airmen who were able to say we're up and we're there.

Wilson - 5/16/19

So that's our responsibility, and we respond to the requirements of the combatant commander, and beyond that I won't --

DWG: Well capability wise. It's an old bomber that's been facelifted quite a bit, but is it supposed to scare the Iranians? This 40-year-old bomber going over there . I'm trying to get what facelifts are on this aircraft that would enhance our capability?

Secretary Wilson: You probably want to talk to Jane's when you leave. They'll probably give you the details on the B-52H. I wouldn't want to face us.

DWG: Can I ask an Air Force One question. This sucked up a lot of your time in 2017 and into 2018. As you leave, what's the status of the cost, schedule and performance of Air Force One?

Secretary Wilson: I think we're on schedule on that one, and that actually didn't take up a lot of our time. We have a very good program office and Duke Richardson's done a very good job with that. I think we're on track.

DWG: Courtney, Inside Defense.

DWG: We've heard that some of the early work of the Space Force Task Force is looking at recommendations to let [inaudible] transfer from the services into a future Space Force. I know that those recommendations are not out yet, but from your perspective does the Air Force expect or desire to maintain a certain cadre of space personnel within the Air Force that wouldn't transfer to a space force? And can you talk a little bit about some of the things that are at play in that discussion?

Secretary Wilson: Sure. We have a task force that we set up to do all of the detailed planning for the establishment of Space Force, obviously pending the outcome of legislation. One of the things that I've worried about in the development of this proposal is that if there's something passed we wouldn't be ready to move out. So we have a two star general who's heading up a

Wilson - 5/16/19

task force of about 15-20 people or so with Army, Navy and Air Force participation, but primarily airmen to do the detailed planning for the establishment of a space force and to look down to, you know, they gave us an update a couple of weeks ago now, looking specifically at the tasks that would have to be done and down to the individual positions and the 200 people that would stand up as an initial Space Force Cadre 90 days after the passing of any legislation.

So we are doing the detailed planning for what it would take to stand up this force.

We're working through all of the details, but the general concept is yes, if the President's legislation passes, those people in the Air Force who are currently space people would transfer into the Space Force under the United States Air Force. But we are working through all of the detailed planning. There's a heck of a lot of it.

Interestingly, those first, that first 200 cadre, if you will, that would stand up in the 90 days after the passing of the legislation, most of them are not space operators. They're finance people, lawyers, personnelists, the people who would change all of the funding lines and figure out how to get orders for everybody. They're civil engineers and the real property managers, and all the people that are necessary to create an organization.

The general that's planning this is doing a great job, and I'm really glad that that planning is underway.

DWG: This might be too in the weeds, but then is it logical to expect then that that personnel at Air Force Space Command or at Schriever, bases that are focused on space would logically transfer to a Space Force?

Secretary Wilson: Yes, I think if the President's legislation is passed, yes. I think that's a reasonable expectation.

Wilson - 5/16/19

DWG: And do you think the process right now, just to establish a Space Force, could benefit from more time of studying the concept? There's [inaudible] on the Hill to give more time to DoD and to Congress to develop a plan. Do you think it could benefit from more time?

Secretary Wilson: Our approaching the Air Force has been to, you know, we recognize that there's a lot of work that had to happen if the President's legislation passed, and so we put together a task force to do that planning work so that if the President's legislation passes, it's a phased approach, but within 90 days we would identify by specialty code what kinds of people we would need to be able to stand that up. If there's one thing that the airmen do well, it's do planning. So General Crosier's task force is doing a very good job.

DWG: Zach, CPI.

DWG: Earlier you talked about the threat from China in particular with the hypersonic research, and Will Roper's been very direct about threats from China and Russia related to artificial intelligence investment. There's been a lot of talk about cyber threats. I'm wondering, the discussion of that sort of [inaudible] is very helpful for getting additional funding from Congress, but it also can risk creating an arms race by signaling to other countries that they need to invest further, that there's going to be this competition.

Do you think that that threat is being accurately assessed given some of the historical norm towards over-hyping potential adversary capabilities? Do you think that we have under-invested, the U.S. has under-invested in those technologies and that the threat is greater than has been previously discussed? Do you think we're moving towards an arms race now in those areas?

Secretary Wilson: First of all, I'll reject your premise that it's been overstated in the past. But no, I don't think. Our responsibility is to see the world as it is and to develop the

Wilson - 5/16/19

capability to defend this country and our vital national interests. I have no interest in nor a proclivity towards exaggerating the threats that we face. We try to be really clear-eyed about them, and as a service that's our responsibility.

So no, I don't think that we're, I don't remember your word. Hyping. I don't know what your word was, but exaggerating the threat. We're trying to assess it and project what it might be in the 2025-2030 time frame because as the Secretary, and as the Secretary and Chief team, our responsibility is to train and equip for today, but we also are preparing the force that our successor's successor will be fighting with in 2025-2030. So we try to project as accurately as we can where the world is going and where capabilities are going so that we can anticipate that and prepare. Or as Wayne Gretsky would say, skate to where the puck is going, not to where it is.

DWG: The other part of that was do you think we're moving towards an arms race in those areas given the increased investment from some of those key countries?

Secretary Wilson: Again, I reject your premise on the way you look at the world. Our responsibility is to assess the threats, develop strategies to meet those threats to protect America's vital national interests in five key missions. To defend the homeland, to maintain a safe, secure nuclear deterrent, to be able to deter and defeat a near peer adversary while we deter a rogue state, and to manage violent extremism at lower levels of effort. Those five missions are given to us in the National Defense Strategy, and the Air Force is in the forefront in all five of those missions.

So there's no arms race part of this. What we are doing is seeking to protect the country in those five ways, in those five missions.

DWG: Carlos Munoz, Washington Times.

Wilson - 5/16/19

DWG: You mentioned there's a naïve kind of sense in regards to hypersonic [inaudible], but some of these other threats writ large. Can you kind of get more into that? Like how much [inaudible] either within the building or on Capitol Hill --

Secretary Wilson: I don't think I used the word naïveté.

DWG: Well, the quote was, you mentioned that you don't think we should be naïve in the way we're basing in terms of hypersonics. My question is, that sort of, that sentiment, I guess, is that something that you're running into? Or is that a challenge posed to developing counters to hypersonics, other future threats from either inside the building or on Capitol Hill?

Secretary Wilson: No. I don't think there's, maybe I need to clarify what I said. I think the threat is growing. It is serious and significant, and China in particular is putting massive amounts of resources into artificial intelligence, not just for national security purposes but for commercial purposes, and hypersonics for national security purposes. I think we can't be naïve about the threat. So it was more an admonition than a characterization.

One final thing because I'm helped, the six categories. Air operations and special warfare was one; nuclear and missile operations is two. So I screwed this up. You can quote me on that. [Laughter].

So air operations and special warfare was one; nuclear and missile operations is the second. So space is not with missiles. I had that in my head.

Voice: It was in an earlier version.

Secretary Wilson: So nuclear and missile operations is two. Third is space operations, so it's on its own. Fourth is information warfare. Fifth, combat support. And sixth, force modernization.

Wilson - 5/16/19

And on the force size question, we've gone from 660,000 airmen to 690,000 airmen. And that's Active, Guard, Reserve and Civilian.

DWG: Defense Daily, Vivian.

DWG: I wanted to ask you about the light attack program. You're planning to buy a few of two different types of aircraft, but then there are plans to experiment further with other aircraft, other systems. So for you, what is the end game for the light attack experiment at this point? And how has the goal changed and progressed since you started it two years ago?

Secretary Wilson: A couple of things. One is, while we initially started testing aircraft, we quickly realized that it was almost as important to get the network right on which those aircraft were riding. So it's not about the platform, it's about the ability of the platform to connect. So the second year one of the things we experimented with successfully was a fully exportable network, so there's no ally that can't, there's nothing in it that would be limited in terms of export.

We also believe that we're doing light attack to enable alliances and partnerships. And so what we're trying to do by buying three aircraft at Nellis and putting another three at Holbert is creating a place where our allies can come fly with us, check out the equipment, understand what we're doing, and we're also in this next year working with industry to assess what the global market is for both turboprop, turbojet, turbofan, manned, unmanned systems, with our potential allies and partners, so we get a better idea.

One of the big reasons for us to buy this is to enable our allies to do the same. And we recognize that not allies may want the same thing, so we just need to understand that more.

I think the Chief feels pretty strongly, and I think he's probably right, that if we had moved forward on a buying decision this year, we probably would have made a mistake. We needed to know more. So we'll continue the experiment this year. We'll

Wilson - 5/16/19

buy those six aircraft and then try to get a real better assessment on our allies and what they want.

DWG: So how long would you extend this experiment before making a decision?

Secretary Wilson: In our budget we've laid in I think two years of experimentation and then we get a chunk in there for, it's still in the five year defense plan for procurement. I think it's in the fourth year.

DWG: Secretary Wilson, thank you so much for your time. Welcome to academia.