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Lt. Gen. David A. Deptula (Ret.):

It's hard to see you. I want to make sure everyone gets a chance and gets seated, but good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. I'm Dave Deptula, Dean of the Mitchell Institute for Aerospace Studies, and welcome to our panel on building capacity today while innovating capabilities for tomorrow. Now for over 30 years, modernization of the Department of the Air Force has been deferred due to other US Department of Defense priorities.

In fact, the Air Force's budget has been less than the Navy and the Army's for the last 30 years in a row when you take into account actual monies allocated to the Air Force. The result of anemic funding for new aircraft and spacecraft combined with higher than expected usage of current aircraft has badly worn Air Force hardware and its personnel. Because of the combination of these realities, the US Air Force today is the smallest, the oldest, and the least ready in its history.

Our Air Force has less than half its fighter force and only one-third of the bombers that it had in 1990, yet its latest proposed budget divests about 1,000 more aircraft than it buys over the next five years, which will create an even smaller, older, and less ready force. Now the reason it's planning to do this is because current and future Air Force budgets are not at the levels required to meet the needs of our defense strategy.

At the same time, both threats and demands for Air Force capabilities and capacity by the war fighting combatant commanders are growing. The fact of the matter is that the nation requires much more from our Air Force than the resources allocated to it allow. So the Air Force is in a jam. It's forced to do the only thing within its power it can do, and that's divest current force structure in an attempt to invest in future requirements.

Unfortunately, this approach generally has not worked as the Air Force has no control of the money it saves through divestments. It all goes back into the US Treasury and it's not earmarked for future Air Force spending. So decades of this kind of square corner that the Air Force has been put into were the result of inadequate budgets that are exactly what's forced it to choose between modernization, force size, and readiness.

Unfortunately, the increased demand for Air Force capabilities without adequate investment has resulted in the reduction of all three to precarious levels. So the challenge is what's the plan to build back our Air Force to the capacity necessary to meet the challenges specified in our defense strategy while also innovating to better prepare us for the threats of tomorrow? Now I'm extremely pleased to introduce to you the panel that we've assembled to dive into this challenge.

We have Representative Kai Kahele from Hawaii, Representative August Pfluger from Texas, and retired Colonel Mark Gonzo Gunzinger. Congressman Kahele is in his first term in office and represents Hawaii's Second Congressional District. He currently serves on the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee, and the House Armed Services Committee. He's a combat veteran, a C-17 pilot, and commissioned officer in the Hawaii International Guard, where he continues to serve as a lieutenant colonel at Hickam Air Force Base.

Congressman Pfluger is also a freshman in the House and represents Texas' 11th Congressional District. He's a colonel in the Air Force Reserve and spent 20 years on active duty flying the F-15C Eagle and the F-22A Raptor. Matter of fact, we actually used to fly F-15 together at Hickam Air Force Base in Hawaii. Mr. Gunzinger is the Director of Future Concepts and Capabilities Assessment at the Mitchell Institute. He's a retired colonel in the United States Air Force with more than 3,000 hours in the venerable B-52, the youngest of which is over 60 years old.

Gonzo also serves as a director on the National Security Council staff as a Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for force planning and in other DOD leadership roles. So thank you all for being here, taking the time. They made an effort to get over here because a vote in the House. So I appreciate you being here on time and offering your thoughts on this important critical issue. What I'd like to do is ask Gonzo to come upfront. He's my co-author on our latest report, Decades of Air Force Underfunding Threaten America's Ability to Win.

He'll give us a brief overview and then we'll dig into discussion with our senior Congressional Representative. So Gonzo, over to you.

Col. Mark Gunzinger (Ret.):

Next slide, please. So let's start with why we wrote our report. We've all heard for years the Air Force has been saying that its aircraft inventory is the oldest and smallest ever. The sad truth is every year, that's been correct. 30 years of underfunding has created a high risk Air Force that is not sized for peer conflict and other defense strategy requirements. Now that's a problem for all the services because no joint force operation can be conducted without the capabilities the Air Force and the Space Force can bring to the fight.

So as you see on this slide, this little red triangle, the Iron Triangle, the Air Force has been caught in that deadly triangle for years where it's had to trade off its readiness to help fund some modernization. And our trade-off is capacity to help maintain this readiness and so forth, so on. The problem is the Air Force cannot break out of that triangle without more resources, plus it's readiness is already too low, it's already traded off its capacity, and we cannot further delay its modernization because its aircraft are simply too old.

So we present an evidence-based approach for why DOD should increase funding for the Air Force. Next, so this is a snapshot that represents the Air Force inventory trends starting in 1989. You can see by 1999, both bomber and fighter force had been decreased by about 40%. The third columns are today's inventory, and the fourth column are primary mission aircraft only assigned to combat squadrons after subtracting task training and other non-combat tails.

Now the last columns, we apply mission capable rates. So you can see any given day we've got about 59 mission capable bombers ready to support global operational requirements. As the oldest Air Force aircraft are about 29 years old across the board, its F-15s and F-16s have hit the 30-year mark. And of course you already mentioned, B-52 and KC-135s, over 60 years old. But the real point is fighting China with a force that is this old and does not have enough stealthy aircraft and does not have enough capacity is going to drive attrition rates that we haven't seen since World War II, and the Air Force doesn't have the inventory or the trained air crew to replace those losses.

Next, so this illustrates how that force might stack up against a defense strategy which requires the Air Force, the size of its forces for homeland defense, nuclear deterrence, peer conflict, and to deter a lesser aggressor elsewhere. And those are all additive requirements. So we added up that demand in the third columns, and you see the Air Force runs out tails before it runs out of requirements.

And then the fourth column, we added capabilities needed to credibly deter, if necessary, a fight in Russia that takes advantage of us being engaged against China in the Indo-Pacific. And you can see we simply lack enough iron. And just a foot stop, no other service can make up for these shortfalls. No other service can respond from outside the Pacific theater within hours to begin to blunt a Chinese invasion on Taiwan or in the South China Sea, and then halt and then win.

Next, so our report addresses a DOD practice that paints a false picture of the Air Force's budget. We're talking about pass through funding, which is appropriated as part of the Air Force's budget, but the

service cannot use the organized training equipment that goes to other non-service organizations. The dark blue line shows the Air Force budgets that DOD has reported to Congress, which includes that pass through. And pass through practice also obscures how resources are allocated to the services.

Next, the light blue line, we took out the pass through, and that's the Air Force's real budget and pass through in the last budget was 40.1, about \$40 billion. The next budget is about \$40.1 billion. That's a lot of money. \$40 billion could buy 400 F-35s, just to provide little context. So next slide, we took the pass through out of the Air Force's budget and we put it where it belongs, into DOD's other funding category, which goes to defense agencies and other non-service organizations. And that's the purple line. From that, you can see at times, well, for over a decade, the Air Force wasn't even third in the queue behind the Army and Navy. It was fourth behind other DOD organizations.

Next. Y'all heard of Valley of Death? Well, this is real world what Air Force is investing in S&T, RDT&E, and its procurement budget. You can see the gap there. As Secretary Kendall says, "Hey, it's easy to start an S&T program. When it comes time to actually acquire those technologies, there's no money left. And that's what this is showing. We're not buying new iron, new capabilities.

Next, going down one more level, this shows the Air Force's new aircraft procurement only has been flat despite the shift towards deterring China and Russia, despite the shift toward great power competition, it's averaging about 7% of the Air Force's budget any given year to buy new combat aircraft. 7% the Air Force's budget to buy new combat aircraft.

Next, and just for context, this compares the Air Force's new aircraft buys with the Navy's. And you can see once again, the Air Force has been in trail. Why? Again, budget. Last slide. So to wrap up, we make five recommendations to help break this budget driven spiral toward a hollow force. First, shift pass through to DOD's non-service budget line, so decision makers can have the right site picture of resources the Air Force actually receives.

DOD and Congress should also prioritize funding for capabilities and forces that are most capable of defeating Chinese aggression. And since that fight, the Indo-Pacific will be predominantly in the air space, cyberspace, and at sea, that's where that new funding should go. And that's going to require real Air Force budget growth, which should be used to immediately begin reducing risk by buying next generation systems that are already in production.

And finally, we can talk about this a little more with the Air Force to benefit from a forced sizing construct that explains to Congress, "This is the force we need to execute the defense strategy and this is what we can afford given our budget," and a delta between is risk.

Lt. Gen. David A. Deptula (Ret.):

Well, thanks for that rundown, Gonzo. What I'd like to do now is turn this over to our Representatives, Kahele and Pflugger. So whichever one of you would like to go first.

Rep. Kaiiali'i Kahele (D-Hawaii):

I'll defer to Texas.

Rep. August Pflugger (R-Texas):

Finally, some bipartisanship that works. That's a good thing. First off, to AFA, thank you for hosting this. I mean, it's a great conference to begin with, but to see so many active duty personnel, reservist Guardsman that are out every day doing the job, I applaud you and your service, your family's service is very important to those of us on Capitol Hill.

It's recognized by us, but thank you for that. To the Mitchell Institute, General Deptula, you have an incredible advocate for air and space power right here. And the conversations that General Deptula, Gonzo, and the personnel, the men and women who are advocating for air power, for space power, for what we know is just an insatiable appetite and demand from our country and from our partners and allies, this institution here does a great job of getting down to the details and then being strategic with where we need to go.

And I think we can all admit that we are facing an incredible threat environment right now around the world. Probably more complex than we've ever seen, and I used to think that it was more complex since World War II, but I don't know that that's true anymore. It might actually be more complex than we've ever faced. You look at what happened in Ukraine, you see the major powers that are acting in ways that are aggressive, what's going on with violent extremism, not just in the Middle East, but throughout the rest of the world.

The cyber domain is as active as it has ever been for malign reasons. And then you look at China and the Chinese threat and the threat of Xi Jinping's legacy resting upon reunifying China and Taiwan. And these are real impacts. They're real threats that we face. And when it comes to the ways that the Department of Air Force can not only deter, but if needed defeat, we have to be clear eyed about it. We have to be realistic.

We I don't believe have recovered from what the negative effects of sequester and the patchwork of continuing resolutions that have gone on across the river from the Pentagon, and those have been a real threat to our own security because it lacks predictability, it lacks planning, and it doesn't allow what decision makers in the Pentagon need to be doing to address those threats, to take a threat-based approach to force planning, like was just so eloquently mentioned here. Obviously, pass through is an issue.

It's a threat that faces decision makers because the story needs to be told in a way that mentions that insatiable appetite, that demand for air power. When anything pops up around the world, what is the first phone call that's made? It's to air power. It's to space power, it's to the Department of Air Force. The political capital needed to send an airplane is not nearly as high as that would be required for boots on the ground or any other method or other department or other domains. So we have to be clear-eyed about the threats that we're facing, and really the solutions, I think come down to a couple of things.

Number one, our request from the other side of the river is that the Department of Defense, the Department of Air Force move at the speed of relevancy to face these threats. No longer can we afford to have 15, 20-year programs like I was part of in the F-22. We have to move at the speed of relevancy when it comes to acquiring new weapon systems and getting them into an operational level of service.

Number two, on the other side of the aisle, the threat of a CR, which we are facing right now yet again is real. And it prevents that predictability on the budgeting, it prevents the levels... \$777 billion was the 2022 NDAA and now we're over \$850 billion. And that doesn't account for inflation and we need to be addressing those inflationary pressures, but we are committed to making sure that we can avoid those CRs. I can't speak for my other 433 colleagues, but there are those of us who are working to avoid that situation to allow policy makers inside the Department of Defense and Air Force to do what's needed to deter.

So I know there'll be plenty of other questions. I'll pause there and hand it to my good friend and partner-in-crime, Kai Kahele.

Rep. Kaiiali'i Kahele (D-Hawaii):

You took away everything I was going to say. No, aloha. And it's great to serve here with Congressman Pfluger, and same thing, how you opened, General Deptula, Gonzo, Mitchell Institute, AFA, another fantastic conference and convention celebrating the 75th anniversary of our Air Force. Can I call you August?

Rep. August Pfluger (R-Texas):

I think Photo.

Rep. Kaiali'i Kahele (D-Hawaii):

Photo? Want to go with Photo? All right, we'll go Photo, call sign. What Photo and I bring to the Hill is a perspective that does not exist, or it exists in a limited capacity, and it's being able to represent an experience and a skill set from the perspective of the United States Air Force that does not exist really on Capitol Hill, and in the authorizing and the appropriating committees where it's really, really important.

So for myself, I serve on the HAS committee on the subcommittee on Tactical Air, Land, and Readiness. I'm the only member of the HAS committee assigned to INDOPACOM that's currently wearing the uniform. Another thing that's unique to both Photo and I, we still wear the uniform. I'm in the Guard, he's in Air Force Reserves. So we continue to bring that perspective to the Hill, and I hope over the next 30 or 40 minutes, we can shed a little bit of light onto what some of our colleagues are thinking when we have these discussions with them, especially on the appropriating and the authorizing committees. What are some of the challenges that we see when the Secretary of the Air Force and the Chief of Staff of the Air Force come to the committees to present their budgets based on the requirements of the National Defense Strategy? What's coming out of the White House and out of OMB?

And some of the challenges that we're currently facing right now, and Gonzo highlighted them, the most important thing that our Department of Defense and the Congress is focused on is protecting the homeland, is being ready to fight tonight against a near peer adversary, to deter other adversaries, and to be able to provide the type of strategic deterrence that is critically important for the security of our nation. So maybe over the course of the questions, we can identify areas that we can be supportive.

And we are here, we are here to support all of you, to be a voice for the Air Force Reserves, for Big Air Force, for the Air National Guard in Washington, DC and on the Hill. So thanks for having us.

Lt. Gen. David A. Deptula (Ret.):

Well, thank you both for those remarks, and Gonzo again for the overview of the presentation. Let's dig into some of these issues as you suggest, in a little bit more detail. One of the items that you mentioned was the National Defense Strategy. And we all know in here that relatively recent change if you look over the last 30 years, but the latest National Defense Strategy plans only for a force capable of fighting one conflict at a time.

But we face multiple threats. You all know what they are. I'm not going to waste time by itemizing each one, but the question to you all is does the Department of Defense force planning approach need to change? And if so, how should it change to ensure that our military has both the capacity and capabilities needed to compete and win against multiple threats, not just one?

Rep. Kaiali'i Kahele (D-Hawaii):

I think just with the new administration, and new national security strategy came a new national defense strategy and that's the overarching requirements for the Department of Defense to provide the

defense for the nation. And what are the requirements that the services need to provide to meet those requirements coming from the administration? There's no doubt that when that request and that budget is presented to Congress, we look at it, at how does the Department of Defense's budget impact national security?

How does it increase or decrease risk? What are the types of investments we're making or not making in terms of equipment, in terms of resources? And that's what we often weigh when we're looking at the budget. There's no doubt that air power and air superiority is going to be number one for any major military conflict and it's going to require critical investments and important decisions to be made by the Congress when it passes the NDAA, like Photo just talked about.

We're facing a continuing resolution in 10 days, a partial government shutdown if we don't get a budget done by the end of this month. And it's highly likely that nothing's going to happen before the November 8th general election to see what the political dynamics are going to be in Washington, DC, before the Appropriations Committee passes out their defense bill, both from HAC, from HAC-D, and see what the Senate does.

The Senate hasn't done anything yet. The House Armed Services Committee, we've passed the authorizing bill and we've passed it over, but the Senate hasn't taken action yet. So we're going to have to see what they do. And it's probably going to be pushed into sometime in December when we're able to pass the final NDAA piece.

Rep. August Pfluger (R-Texas):

Yeah, totally agree. Just let me go back to my days at Tyndall Air Force Base or training in the F-22 in a mission just six years ago, five years ago in the Middle East. Start with the target, start with the threat. What is the threat, and how do we identify that? The NSS, the National Security Strategy, national defense strategy, these things should identify the threat and it shouldn't be a reactionary, "Let's give you the budget and then come up with what your threat is." No, it's actually opposite of that. There's a threat and the force planning structure that we have right now does need some help.

I think it can be sharpened and refined to identify not just the capabilities. I mean, the capabilities are very important right now. First off, the Chinese, they do not have the same bureaucratic nightmare that we have here. And I know that's a shocker to everybody, but when they say there's a threat and they go out and try to solve these problems, what they're doing is allocating the amount of money that's needed to go face down these threats. Now we don't have unlimited amounts of money and we're facing \$30 trillion in debt in our country that has to be dealt with, so knowing that, we still have to start with that threat environment. We still have to start with what is required to deter, to defeat.

And then that's where the capacity issue comes in. And what needs to be communicated loud and clear is we know what the threat is. We understand that there are finite resources, and this is coming from the Pentagon, we're going to be able to have a capability to meet X, Y, and Z threat. And when you can't meet that capability, it needs to be clearly communicated so that the risk can be assumed on the other side of the river.

And likewise on the capacity side, just a couple of years ago, the Air Force did a nice job of coming up with a number of squadrons. And since the Gulf War, we have been declining in that capacity to meet and defeat the threats that are around the world. So absolutely, we need to reorganize, to refine, and to do a better job when it comes to force planning and to have that threat then committed... basically communicated to the American public.

And when those things are done, and I think the pass through issues, and I've introduced legislation, I know Kai has worked on this, the pass through issue is not communicating the real story, the narrative,

and you'll probably get to this, but it's not communicating the real story of what the Air Force budget is from year in and year out, because it's being masked to the tune of \$40 plus billion.

Rep. Kaiiali'i Kahele (D-Hawaii):

And why the pass through is so important is it's two things. One, it creates transparency, it creates transparency for the decision makers on the Hill and for the American public. The second thing it does is it provides parity, it provides the United States Air Force to be able to compete against the other branches. Historically, it's been one-third, one-third, one-third. But if you look at the Air Force's budget as presented by the administration, it's about \$230 billion. That is not reflective of what the Air Force has money to spend on, because you take out 40 billion in pass through, you take out about, I don't know, 20 something billion to fund the Space Force.

And you just look at the two legs of the three-leg nuclear triad that we have to... and the cruise missile defense that we're responsible for. And there's a lot of requirements placed on our United States Air Force and we're just not able to invest in more F-35s, more F-15 EXs, more platforms. We can't get the B-21 fast enough to replace our B-1s or our B-2 strategic bomber force.

So these are the things that are important and it's why fixing the pass through issue is important. And we have other champions on the Hill, Representative Bacon from Nebraska, we've partnered with him on this pass through issue, but it's going to require engagement from all of you to engage your members of Congress on the House Appropriations Committee, HAC-D, on HASC to be able to provide that clarity and to be able to provide them that political leverage to be able to address this issue.

Col. Mark Gunzinger (Ret.):

So very quickly, I don't believe DOD backed off two-war force planning construct, sizing and shaping its forces because of a lack of threat. It did it because of a lack of resources. The point I want to make though is not every service needs a two-war force. DOD as a whole does. The Army should size primarily in Russia and Europe because it's going to be air, land, cyberspace, and space-centric. In the Indo-Pacific, it's going to be air, maritime, space, and cyberspace-centric. So the Navy Marine Corps should size for the Indo-Pacific, but remember I said air for both theaters. The Air Force must size its forces, its capabilities, and capacity for both Indo-Pacific and for Europe. And it's the only force that's going to be able to deploy and employ its forces again within hours, to begin to blunt an invasion by a peer adversary and then bring it to a halt.

Lt. Gen. David A. Deptula (Ret.):

Thanks for that. Back to our Congressmen, how does Congress currently view the way forward when it comes to building a force that can combat this array of threats that we've talked about that the country now faces? And is there any consensus within Congress on their awareness of these threats and what our future force size and structure should look like?

I'd just add one more on there, is have the consequences of Russia invading Ukraine garnered any attention? It doesn't on the Hill, to the degree on what we ought to be attuned to, by just giving more money to Ukraine.

Rep. August Pfluger (R-Texas):

Great questions. Nothing like a crisis to be able to help shape and refine our own plans. Yes, there is consensus, I believe, on what that threat is and on what we should be focusing on. And that is China, and it's not just their military threat. It's an all of the above threat, whether it's Belt and Road, through their economic policies, whether it's their cyber activities or obviously, their conventional and non-

conventional military force and the structure that they have. So I think that if there's one bipartisan consensus issue in Congress right now, it is the threat of China.

Now, I think this is where we take a step back and one of the issues, and I serve on Homeland Security and I serve on Foreign Affairs, which is a good compliment to Kai and his Armed Services Committee. Let me speak from a perspective of a member of Foreign Affairs, that it appears to me that the narrative that we get from year in and year out DOD-wide will change.

And I think the point that Gonzo just made, that we may not need every service to have a two-front war capacity/capability. That is the narrative that I think we need to coalesce around on the Hill. That is what we can do something about with a limited resource environment. And I don't think that that has actually happened, and I think that we would do ourselves a lot of good from a national security strategy on down to the resources that are appropriated by coalescing around that. When it comes to Ukraine, I'll briefly say a lot of lessons have been learned, and I think one of the key lessons that everybody in this room that is here at AFA should take away from it is the job that you do is so incredibly important.

It is the game changer when it comes to the ways in which we will fight wars and without the air superiority, without the ability to fight in a true joint environment, and we have seen the Russian military all but crumble against the Ukrainian force. I mean, I was in Kyiv 18 days prior to the invasion talking to Zelenskyy, and he had his minister of defense there. He had multiple people in his cabinet and they were confident at that point in time that they were going to put up a good fight.

But I don't think anybody could've predicted just how important air power is, and you see the lack of ability of Russia to project air power, but it's because they didn't take the lessons seriously. They had the time to learn it in Syria, they had the time to learn it wherever their other deployments in the Mediterranean and other areas and they didn't do it. So I hope that Capitol Hill will take those lessons and run with it.

Rep. Kaiiali'i Kahele (D-Hawaii):

I think in the conversations I've had on HASC and seeing different members debate, I know that they get upset when we are not able to get the platforms on time, on schedule, what we ordered. I mean, we can talk about F-35, we can talk about the KC-46, but it's going to take a whole of government effort with the defense industry to be able to produce the platforms that we've ordered and produce it on time and on schedule, what the American taxpayer paid for.

At the same time, Congress sets the conditions for that defense industry and when we say we're going to order 700 F-22s and we buy 184 of them, and they create a production line to mass produce F-35s and F-22s in these platforms, and we don't buy what we say we're going to buy and we close down hot production lines prematurely, that affects the defense industry.

So there's going to have to be a relationship that's a working relationship with the defense industry in Congress so that we can prioritize what we need. There's no doubt we need as many fifth generation fighters as possible. We should be at 80% right now. Our combat air force should be at 80% fifth gen, and it is not. We're still flying F-15Cs and Ds. We're still flying Vipers that were designed and built in the 60s and 70s. And if you go to the operational level and just look at the sortie generation rates and our Eagles down at Kadina, which is probably the closest to the fight for Taiwan, these airframes are being flown way beyond what their life expectancy would've expected to be.

So they're being restricted. Guys can't go out there and pull as much Gs and fight how they want to fight because they just can't do it with the aircraft. So what are we going to replace that with? Well, we're going to put F-15 EXs at Kadina. Well, we just ordered 24 F-15 EXs in the latest NDAA. Is that enough F-15 EXs that we just ordered?

We want to divest to invest, we want to divest, Block 20 F-22s. Is that a good decision to make? Right now, you see in the House Armed Services Committee, it is not. We would rather take those dozen or two dozen or so Block 20 F-22s because we're not building any more of them and make them into Block 33s, or whatever they are. So we have another squadron available if we need fifth gen F-22s. So those are the decisions that I hear often and we try and weigh in as best as we can on the committees that we serve on.

Lt. Gen. David A. Deptula (Ret.):

Well, that's a great segue into this next question, which has to do with funding capacity growth and future capabilities. And you just talked about how in the past, we've cut acquisition of new programs that were intended to modernize some of our oldest forces, and a lot of that was driven by the exigencies at the time. It happened both to the F-22 as you mentioned, as well as the B-2. We were originally supposed to buy 132, we ended up buying 21.

So how would you characterize risk right now to programs that are critical to our future, like the B-21, like the KC-46, T-7, F-15 EX, F-35 and NGAD? Are the resources going to be available to buy enough of these platforms to meet our Air Force global operational requirements?

Rep. Kaiiali'i Kahele (D-Hawaii):

Because the Air Force has a budget it has, they approach Congress with, "We want to divest to invest, we want to retire aircraft so that we can take those resources into new platforms or additional platforms," and sometimes what you're seeing is Congress push back, because if we're not replacing an aircraft real time with another platform, then that's going to of course increase the amount of risk that we have. So I think that's one of the challenges that we deal with every single day.

Rep. August Pfluger (R-Texas):

I'm going to go back to the threat-based approach here. When do we need these aircraft to come online? When were they planned to come online and why were the weapons systems... And let me just step away from saying aircraft, when were the weapon systems designed and needed to be available? And when you look at the risk that we're assuming, it really comes down to there's a lot of political risk that I don't know is being planned for on the acquisition schedule.

And I'll specifically talk to China here. When are we going to reach our peak risk with regards to China? Is that next year? Is it 2025? Is it 2027, '28, '29? And at that point in time, and it probably is somewhere between '27 and '30, 2027 and 2030, at that point in time, what weapon systems do we have to execute the NDS?

And so yes, I think we do have a real problem with risk right now, specifically when it comes to our fifth generation fighters, when it comes to the transition between the B-2 and the B-21, are we going to be able to actually execute what the NDS states that we need to be ready to execute? And this is a real decision that we're going to have to make on both sides of the river, and we need to come together in both branches of government and have that clear eyed discussion, because I think that the risk right now from my perspective is actually outweighing the need to... Let me put it this way, we've got to speed up our acquisition cycle at the speed of relevancy, and get to those public-private partnerships using maybe private companies in some cases that can leverage quickly technology to meet those threats.

Lt. Gen. David A. Deptula (Ret.):

Very good. We're coming up to the end of our period. Real quick question to both of you on innovation. With each service pursuing their own solutions for a future fight, obviously we've got to be selective in what we choose to invest in. How do you view the current process of picking so-called winners and losers when it comes to innovative technologies?

Rep. August Pfluger (R-Texas):

Neither of us want this question. Well, I think it's slow and archaic and I think it's not... We're basically dealing with a flip phone system when we've got an iPhone world, and that flip phone system, it's not good enough to meet the iOS updates. And if you use some other type of phone, I'm sorry. I see a friend of mine here that runs AFWERX, and Nate Diller is somebody who is constantly fighting this battle of bringing technology rapidly to bear, so that the ideas that we have can be in an iPhone world, not 20 years ago.

So quite honestly, I'm not going to grade it here on the stage, but it's not meeting the standards. And we need to increase that and leverage technology and do it at the speed of relevancy.

Rep. Kaiiali'i Kahele (D-Hawaii):

I'll jump to another point. We've been talking about platforms and all the fancy shiny objects, but we often forget about our Airmen. We forget about our military bases that have suffered from years and years of lack of investment. I just went to Columbus Air Force Base back in March. I hadn't been there in 20 years, the same base that was there when I was there, same T-38s that were flying when I was there.

So we got to be investing in our bases. Joint basing has not been a good thing. It hasn't been a good thing for Hickam Air Force Base, I can tell you that. We haven't put in investments at Hickam for years, and that's the same way across the entire force. So if we're not investing in our bases, our infrastructure, our people, how are we going to be investing in additional platforms? And that's I think something that often goes overlooked, especially on the Hill.

Rep. August Pfluger (R-Texas):

We've got a lot of commanders, and I know Colonel Reilman, I'm not sure if he's in the room, but the base that I represent, Goodfellow Air Force Base through Colonel Reilman's leadership is doing exactly what Kai is saying. And that is bringing to attention the things that are going to... the most foundational Maslow Hierarchy needs, shelter and food and these things that are going to actually have an impact on recruitment and retention.

And we don't want them to have a negative impact on it. And the Airmen that come from Goodfellow, I'm proud to represent you. I'm proud of what you do.

Col. Mark Gunzinger (Ret.):

Yeah, just a quick word. I'm all for innovation, no question about it. I've been a champion of next gen technologies for decades, in and out of the department, but we can't let 1,000 flowers bloom, which is an approach the DOD seems to be taking. Take the Army for instance, it's investing in hypersonic weapons. It's going to buy a \$50 million missile to kill a single target. That doesn't make any sense whatsoever.

You have to apply cost per effect analysis and invest into things that will have the most impact in the battle space of the future, rather than just allowing each service to invest in whatever it thinks it needs. We need cross-domain, we need cross service trade-offs, and no one is driving those trade-offs.

Rep. Kaiali'i Kahele (D-Hawaii):

And maybe Gonzo then, and I know the Mitchell Institute has proposed this, is the cost per effect analysis or looking at mission roles and responsibilities for how we execute the national defense strategy is something that should be seriously considered at the Pentagon.

Lt. Gen. David A. Deptula (Ret.):

I'll just finish up with a plug for if we're not going to increase the defense budget, we're not going to decrease the requirements in our national defense strategy, then we have to make smarter decisions about the resources that we have. And that's where cost per effect decision making comes into play.

So with that, ladies and gentlemen, we've come to the end of our panel. We really appreciate you all being here. And Congressmen, thank you for taking time out of your busy schedule for being here and for all of you, please pick up a copy. I think that there's copies of the report in the back, read it, commit it to memory, and use it to make the case that our Air Force needs more funding. With that, have a great aerospace power kind of day.

