

Good morning, everyone. What a great conference it's been. I have thoroughly enjoyed the panels, fellowship, and being among friends.

I'm grateful to Air Chief Marshal Smyth and the Royal Air Force team for hosting this year's symposium and for the opportunity to address the audience today. Bringing together air and space leaders from across the globe is no small feat, and I appreciate the tremendous effort that went into making this event possible. Gatherings like this are important because we learn from one another, challenge each other, and strengthen the relationships that bolster our collective security.

This is my first address here as Chief of Staff of the United States Air Force, and I am honored to join such a distinguished group of leaders.

Throughout my career, I've had the privilege of serving alongside many of the nations represented in this room, whether in combat operations, coalition exercises, humanitarian missions, or routine engagements. These experiences reinforced my assessment that our greatest advantage is not any single platform, weapon, or technology, it is our network of allies and partners willing to stand together in defense of shared interests, values, and responsibility.

The strategic environment continues to evolve at a remarkable pace. Emerging technologies are transforming warfare and artificial intelligence is accelerating decision-making. Autonomous systems are creating new opportunities and challenges while long-range precision weapons continue to proliferate. Space has become increasingly contested and our adversaries are investing heavily in capabilities designed to deny access, disrupt communications, and challenge our ability to project power.

Despite all that is evolving, some truths remain constant. Air and space superiority are fundamental to military success. Integrating our air and space forces with partners is vital to preserve freedom of action around the world. No nation can effectively deter aggression, respond to crisis, or prevail in conflict alone.

Recent operations have reinforced these realities. Across multiple theaters and at different scales of conflict, airpower has consistently provided our political leaders with options that are rapid, flexible, precise, and strategically decisive. Operations such as Midnight Hammer and Epic Fury have demonstrated the ability of modern air and space power to generate effects across vast distances at a speed unmatched by any other form of military power.

Those operations also highlight another important truth. The most effective airpower is combined airpower. When allied and partner air forces operate together, we create options, dilemmas, and effects that no nation can generate independently. We expand capacity, increase resilience, and complicate adversarial planning. Most importantly, we strengthen deterrence.

Our competitors understand this. They recognize that the strength of our alliances is one of the greatest strategic advantages enjoyed by the free world. They understand that a coalition capable of operating as a unified force presents a challenge far greater than the sum of its individual parts.

That advantage did not emerge overnight. It has been built through decades of shared sacrifice, mutual trust, and a willingness to stand together when the stakes were highest. Across generations, our Airmen and Guardians have flown together, fought together, and learned from one another. We have responded to natural disasters, evacuated civilians from danger, and, when necessary, conducted combat operations side by side.

Those experiences matter because they create something that cannot be purchased, or rapidly fielded. They create confidence that a wingman will be there when needed, that a partner nation will uphold its commitments and ensure we will not stand alone in a moment of crisis.

Deterrence is often measured in numbers of aircraft, missiles, satellites, or military personnel. Those capabilities are important. Yet one of the most powerful deterrent signals we can send is demonstrating that free nations are united, capable, and prepared to act together. A coalition that can rapidly generate combat power across multiple domains and theaters presents a challenge that any potential adversary must carefully consider.

That is why interoperability matters. Success in future conflict will depend upon our ability to operate together from day one. The opening hours of a crisis is no time to establish new procedures, negotiate support agreements, or solve integration challenges. There will be no pause button while we work through logistics shortfalls or command-and-control friction. Those issues must be solved before a crisis begins — readiness cannot be surged overnight.

For many years, we focused primarily on common procedures, shared tactics, and compatible communications. Those elements remain essential, but future conflict demands that we expand our thinking, to include how we share information, make decisions, and how quickly we can translate awareness into action. In an increasingly contested environment, speed is critical. The force that can understand a situation, make better decisions, and act first will possess the advantage.

That reality places greater importance on command and control, data sharing, and the integration of our battle networks. We must continue finding ways to securely exchange information across national boundaries while protecting the data and capabilities entrusted to us. We should build architectures that allow coalition commanders to see the same operational picture and make informed decisions.

This is not solely a technical challenge. It is also a matter of policy, trust, and commitment. Technology can connect networks. Relationships connect people. Both are necessary if we are going to operate as a truly integrated force.

This means that our air forces must be able to launch, recover, refuel, rearm, repair, and regenerate one another's aircraft. They should be able to leverage logistics networks, maintenance expertise, spare parts, and support equipment. They must be capable of generating combat power from dispersed locations across multiple nations under contested conditions.

In short, we must be able to fight as one team. The encouraging news is that we are already making significant progress. For instance, in Japan, after years of close coordination, the Koku Jieitai refuelers recently achieved certification to conduct direct hot-pit refueling of U.S. aircraft. That capability reduces turnaround times, streamlines logistics, and

increases operational tempo. More importantly, it demonstrates what is possible when allies invest in practical interoperability.

Exercise Steadfast Dart is NATO's premier Allied Reaction Force deployment exercise that validated the ability of European Allies to rapidly mobilize, command, and sustain combat forces. By successfully deploying forces across multiple borders and merging land, maritime, and air capabilities, the exercise proved that common procedures and C2 structures enable a cohesive, combat-ready force.

During Exercise Eagle Resolve, US Central Command worked beside Qatari Armed Forces bringing together six Gulf Cooperation Council nations to strengthen integrated air and missile defense, cybersecurity, and command and control capabilities. By combining partner-nation forces and expertise across multiple domains, Eagle Resolve reinforced coalition readiness and cooperation against shared threats. It demonstrated the value of integrating tactics and strengthening partnerships for regional security.

Collectively, exercises like these create a force that is stronger, faster, and more difficult to defeat. Interoperability, however, extends beyond sustainment and logistics - it requires a mindset. Our Airmen must grow comfortable operating alongside partners whose organizations, procedures, and cultures may differ from

their own. They should develop the adaptability necessary to solve problems together in dynamic environments. Fighting alongside allies facilitates rapid mutual learning, promoting the sharing of tactics, techniques, and procedures to counter evolving threats.

We often say we must train like we fight. That principle applies equally to coalition operations. Large-scale multinational exercises provide opportunities to test concepts, identify shortcomings, and build trust before those capabilities are needed in combat. They allow our Airmen to operate in realistic environments, solve problems together, and develop the habits necessary to succeed under pressure.

Over the past several years, exercises such as Bright Star, Baltic Zenith, Cold Response, African Lion, and Red Flag have expanded in both scope and complexity. These events incorporate multiple nations, distributed operations, contested logistics, and realistic command-and-control challenges. That trend must continue. The more opportunities our Airmen have to operate together, the more effective our combined force becomes.

The process of continuous learning must remain a shared priority as the strategic environment continues to evolve. New technologies will emerge and adversaries will adapt. Our

willingness to learn, adjust, and improve together will determine whether we maintain our advantage in the years ahead.

Another area where cooperation remains essential is access, basing, and overflight. ABO does not always receive the same attention as advanced aircraft, the newest technology, or emerging operational concepts. Yet access, basing, and overflight remains among the most important enablers of collective airpower. This was critical for an operation like EPIC FURY, in which our allies and partners enabled ABO operations. This regional access, in close coordination with our allies and partners, allows us to sustain complex, large-scale operations.

ABO enables mobility and agility throughout the theater. It allows us to project power, respond rapidly to crises, reassure allies, and maintain operational flexibility across vast geographic distances. In many ways, access is the foundation upon which modern coalition airpower rests.

The ability to disperse forces across multiple operating locations creates significant challenges for any adversary. A resilient network of bases, logistics hubs, maintenance facilities, and supporting infrastructure increases survivability and complicates targeting. It also ensures that combat power can continue to be generated even in highly contested environments.

As we look toward the future, we should strengthen the foundations that allow our air and space forces to operate as a truly integrated coalition by pursuing agreements that expand operational flexibility, eliminate barriers, and exercising together in realistic and demanding environments and investing in emerging technologies that ensure coalition effectiveness rather than create new seams.

Artificial intelligence, autonomous systems, human-machine teaming, advanced battle networks, and resilient space architecture all hold tremendous promise. Many of these capabilities are developing at a pace unlike anything we have experienced in previous generations. The challenge before us is not simply adopting new technology, it's ensuring that innovation strengthens coalition effectiveness from the beginning. We should be designing systems, architectures, and concepts of operation with interoperability in mind rather than attempting to retrofit compatibility later.

When we develop capabilities together, exercise them together, and refine them together, we create advantages that extend far beyond the performance of any individual platform. We create operational approaches that are more resilient, more adaptable, and more difficult for adversaries to counter.

Yet technology alone does not determine success. The next conflict will not be won by the nation with the most advanced platform alone. Victory will depend on people, trust, and relationships.

The combined force that can connect, adapt, and generate combat power faster, while fighting together seamlessly will prevail. But becoming that force happens long before a crisis emerges. It begins with the relationships represented in this room, with the agreements we negotiate, the exercises we conduct, and the trust we build.

Our nations may differ in geography, size, resources, and force structure, but we share a common responsibility to defend our people, preserve stability, and deter aggression.

Every relationship strengthened, agreement signed, and exercise conducted builds a more secure and stable international environment. Those efforts reduce the likelihood of conflict by making clear that aggression will face a unified response.

Through our joint training, operations, and interoperability, we strengthen our collective deterrence. If we continue investing in these core foundations, we will remain secure. Should deterrence fail, we stand ready to fight and win together. Thank you for your partnership and continued leadership.