

# Fight the Base, Recover the Base, Win the War!

Maj Gen (sel) Bradley D. Spacy, USAF

Mr. Edwin H. Oshiba, USAF

Capt Nicholas J. Thomas, USAF, PE

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*Our installations are combat platforms from which we generate air, space and cyberspace power. These platforms and the Airmen that operate, protect, and maintain them are integral to our ability to project combat power. Tomorrow's battlefield requires agile and resilient multiskilled Airmen and scalable and adaptable bases; both must blend together seamlessly. Deliberately assigning all Airmen a role in fighting and recovering a base strengthens the bond between Airmen and mission generation and ultimately creates the combat support synergy critical to success in future conflicts.*

—Maj Gen Theresa C. Carter, Commander  
Air Force Installation and Mission Support Center



*The alarm sounded at 1310L, just as many Airmen were returning from lunch. Terrorist activity was reported near the base, and the threat was determined to be imminent. As the base rapidly worked through elevating force protection conditions, Airmen streamed from buildings to predetermined rally points where they formed into squads, took roll, and waited to arm-up. At the same time, mobile armories deployed from the logistics readiness squadron. Within 90 minutes, about 600 Airmen were armed and ready to assume their “battle stations” in base defense sectors of responsibility throughout the installation. As command and control was established and posting requirements were met, security forces pulled back into a mobile posture, ready to fill gaps in the defense and provide expertise wherever it was required. Predesignated supplies were distributed to base-defense-sector command posts. Airmen not immediately needed for base defense were sent back to work areas or home to rest for later shifts. In just under two hours, the base was transformed from a quiet, peacetime operation into a combat-ready airpower platform ready to repel a level II ground threat.<sup>1</sup>The base could maintain this posture almost indefinitely.*

**T**his scenario may sound like fiction, but it is not; it recounts a “Fight the Base” (FTB) exercise at Scott AFB, Illinois. By providing basic “shoot, move, and communicate” skills training to Airmen of the mission support group, wing leaders harnessed existing manpower for base defense—manpower that otherwise would have been directed to shelter-in-place during emergencies. This construct can also be used to harness the same manpower under a “Recover the Base” (RTB) plan for response after an enemy attack or natural disaster. In an increasingly complex threat environment where safety is no longer determined by distance from the “combat zone” and in light of emerging operational concepts that count on fewer Airmen trained in more skills, the FTB/RTB concepts offer a way for the Air Force to use all Airmen to maximize the full capability of the air base as a combat platform.

## Fight the Ship

The idea of deliberately organizing all available manpower to work outside their primary duties in times of emergency is not new to the US military. The Navy’s battle-tested “Fighting the Ship” capability, which involves treating the ship and its entire population as a single weapons system, is the foundation of this concept. On a ship, when the commanding officer orders, “General quarters! All hands man your battle stations,” all available seamen immediately report to their prescribed battle stations to enable the ship to fight at “maximum capability.”<sup>2</sup> The Navy further capitalizes on the training and readiness of its seamen by employing all available hands during an emergency or disaster experienced by the ship.<sup>3</sup> In such a scenario, again, “general quarters” is called, and all Navy personnel report to their assigned battle stations prepared to respond to the emergency at hand.<sup>4</sup> Prior training, including firefighting; basic damage-control procedures; chemical, biological, and radiological defense; and first-aid procedures, readies the ship to immediately mitigate and/or control the effects of the emergency.<sup>5</sup>

## Strategic Imperative

*Today's global security environment is the most unpredictable I have seen in 40 years of service.*

—Gen Martin Dempsey, 2015

Neither is the idea of organizing and including all Airmen in base defense and recovery operations totally new in the Air Force. In response to emerging lessons learned in Operation Iraqi Freedom, the Air Force Requirements for Operational Capabilities Council requested a doctrinal change recommendation (DCR) in 2006 to address gaps in the service's ability “to adequately detect, assess, deny, and respond to ground threats in the Air Force's battlespace.”<sup>6</sup> One of the DCR's two primary components was “transforming the Service culture from a Cold War, garrison-centric force to a ‘fight the base’ expeditionary culture . . . where all Airmen will have an active role in defending the installation.”<sup>7</sup> The intent of the DCR was to deliberately mold the collective power of combat-trained Airmen into an operational capability by assigning them “battle stations” in base defense.<sup>8</sup> The FTB concept was later captured in draft Air Force Instruction 10-250, “Installation Arming and Response,” and was executed selectively but never employed throughout the service.<sup>9</sup>

The rationale behind the FTB construct is more relevant today than ever before. According to former secretary of defense Leon Panetta, the US military is at a “strategic turning point.”<sup>10</sup> Less than two years removed from a war that lasted more than a decade, the military services confront a global security environment that is as fluid as it is complex and dangerous.<sup>11</sup> Adversaries continue to narrow the advantage gap enjoyed by the US military by making gains in antiaccess weapons technology, and security challenges necessitate military readiness levels poised to confront the full-spectrum of military operations from both traditional state actors and substate groups.<sup>12</sup> Couple this operating environment with a future characterized by a smaller force and continued spending limits, and the need to create a multiskilled, agile, and resilient force becomes no less than an operational imperative.<sup>13</sup>

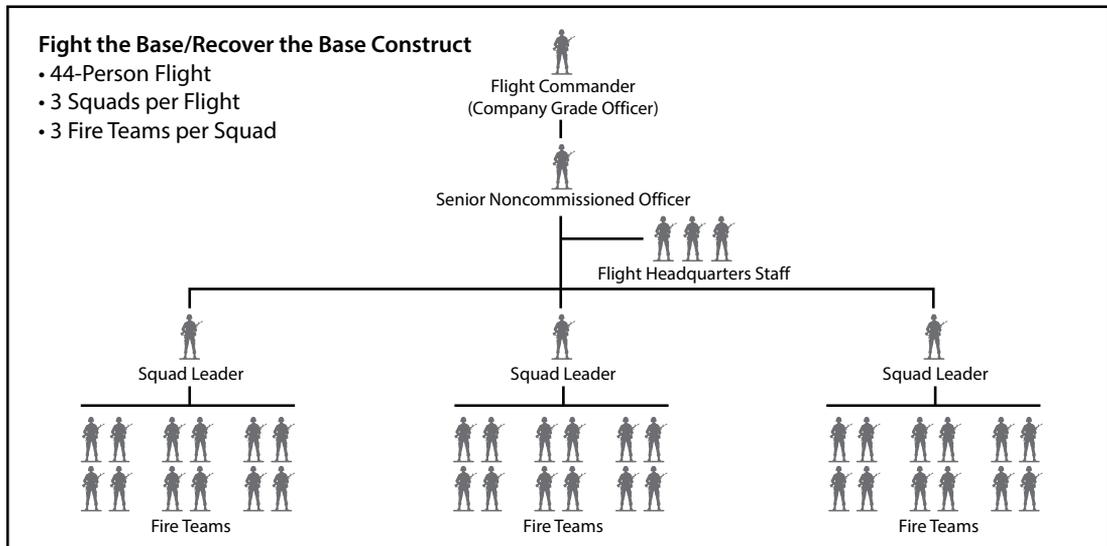
The 2015 Department of the Air Force publication *America's Air Force: A Call to the Future*, which captures the expected environment over the next 30 years, emphasizes this operational imperative. This strategy document explains that tomorrow's battlefield will find itself in increasingly contested areas as the advancement and “proliferation of long-range precision strike weapons will allow any location on earth to be held at risk.”<sup>14</sup> Airmen will have to fly, fight, and win both inside and outside the “traditional” battlespace. This future environment increases the risk of catastrophic damage, both to main and forward operating platforms, and could inflict high casualties on deployed members.

Central to equipping the force to operate in such a dynamic and dangerous environment is institutional agility—the creation of a flexible, adaptable, and responsive force.<sup>15</sup> In operational terms, agility enables the Air Force to adapt and respond quickly to adversarial actions, exploit available resources, and actively employ resiliency measures across the spectrum.<sup>16</sup> The FTB and RTB concepts build a force ide-

ally suited for this environment—multiskilled, lean, and agile. This new concept will offer a capability that allows the Air Force to radically augment the “collective power” of base-defense forces either inside or outside the continental United States, send forward smaller teams to support dispersed operations, and reduce the human and physical footprint of contingency bases; indeed, they are force multipliers.<sup>17</sup>

## Fight the Base, Recover the Base

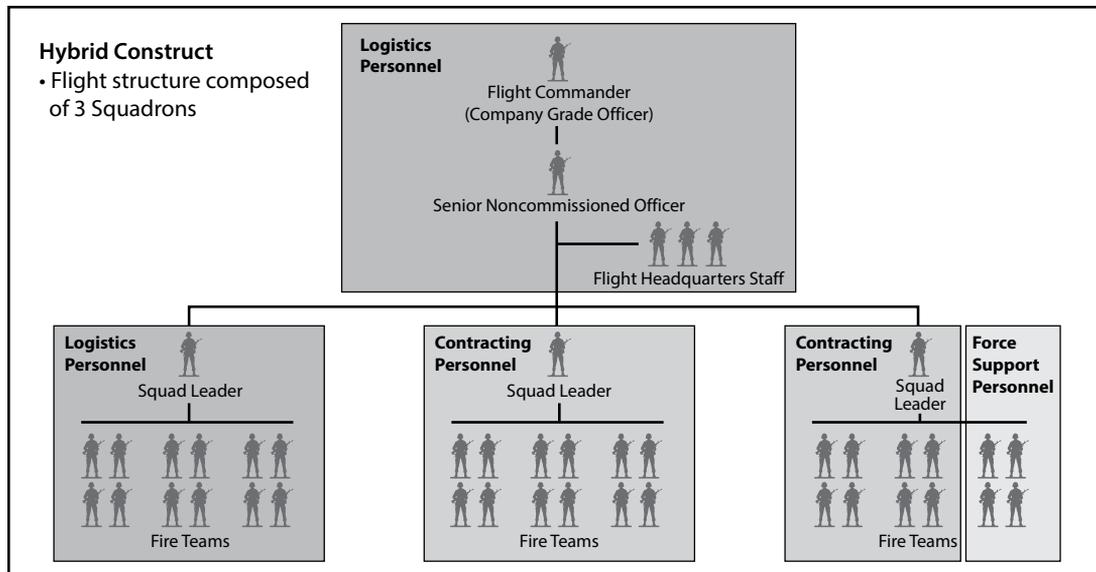
The FTB/RTB concepts apply the Navy model to an air base by treating the base as a shiplike combat platform. The foundation of the FTB/RTB plan is a capability created by deliberately organizing Airmen on an installation into emergency response teams and including them in base defense or disaster-response plans. Under this construct, Airmen are organized into 44-person flights, each led by a company grade officer and a senior noncommissioned officer with a 3-person headquarters staff. A flight contains 3 13-person squads composed of a squad leader and 3 4-person fire teams, each of which has a leader and 3 fire team members (fig. 1). This basic organizational structure provides appropriate leadership and is tailorable to mission requirements. It also supplies building blocks that easily plug into a security forces base defense force and civil engineer base-recovery teams.



**Figure 1. Standard flight structure**

The FTB/RTB flight structure can be overlaid on all of the base’s squadron organizations. For example, an Airman in the force support squadron may work enlisted assignments day-to-day and report to the noncommissioned officer in charge of the assignments section but also be assigned to “Bravo Flight” in the FTB/RTB plan. His

or her noncommissioned officer in charge in the assignments section may also serve as the squad leader in the FTB/RTB structure. If a squadron doesn't fit neatly into the 44-person flight construct, then squads and fire teams can be tailored or combined with other units as required to meet local needs (fig. 2).



**Figure 2. Hybrid flight structure**

Under the FTB/RTB plan, all personnel are assigned “battle stations” within base defense or emergency response sectors around the installation. Battle stations associated with the FTB concept can be defensive fighting positions on the perimeter, working entry control points, or performing as part of mobile walking patrols. Battle stations should be permanently assigned for the duration of a tour so that Airmen become familiar with their assigned duties and area. For example, a small squadron such as contracting might be assigned solely to manning base-entry control points where, over time, they would become experts in that skill. Similarly, larger squadrons such as civil engineering or logistics readiness might be assigned dismounted patrolling duties throughout unpopulated or wooded areas of the base. Some specialties like aircraft maintenance or firefighters may be mission-essential in all conditions and man “battle stations in-place” (i.e., they perform their normal duties in emergency situations).

RTB builds off the FTB concept by supplying contingency-ready Airmen to augment base-recovery forces in the event of a natural disaster or other contingency. RTB organization and manning mirror the FTB structure, organized in the same squad format and thus taking advantage of the familiarity that squads have with



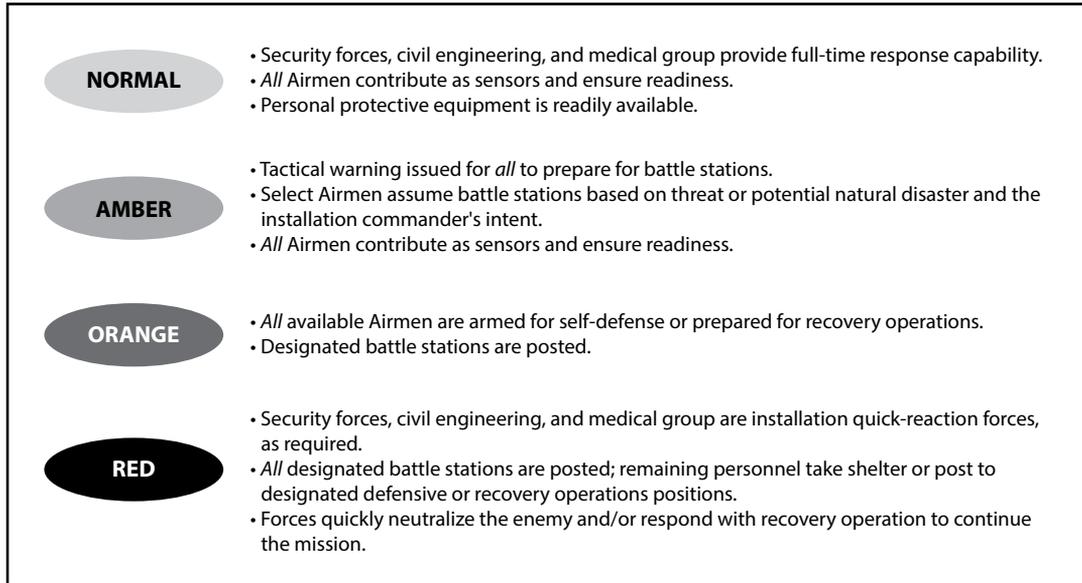
their battle stations and with each other's individual strengths. The base's civil engineer squadron acts as the focal point in all efforts to restore damaged facilities and infrastructure, including roadways, airfield surfaces, and utilities; it also supports civil authorities, providing them with any necessary equipment/personnel but only after the wing commander has approved this support. According to the amount and type of damage, that squadron determines the number of RTB forces required as well as where, when, and how they will be employed.

The difference between RTB and traditional base-recovery plans lies in the pre-identification of teams and their response sectors, as well as the training they receive prior to employment. Historically, bases form an unskilled manpower pool in reaction to a contingency. Organization occurs "on the fly," and base-recovery skills are learned as the contingency unfolds. The RTB concept organizes, trains, and equips Airmen to restore critical mission capabilities more expeditiously than do current methods. Trained RTB squads—manned and led by nonengineer Airmen—could be employed to accelerate the base-recovery process by clearing debris from streets, reporting damage to increase situational awareness and improve prioritization of recovery efforts, and even making minor repairs, such as shoring, boarding broken windows, and so forth. This same force could easily be employed in similar off-base situations should such a need arise, enabling the seamless interface with off-base emergency management organizations during scenarios involving military support to civilian authorities.

In both FTB and RTB, all Airmen are assigned rally points where they report automatically when the base alarm sounds or a recall message is sent out. These points should be close enough to work areas to facilitate a quick on-foot response if possible and be sized appropriately for the responding population. Central rally points can be used for multiple smaller squadrons if geography permits, while larger squadrons such as logistics readiness might need a rally point dedicated to that squadron. Once assembled at their respective rally points, Airmen will receive the appropriate equipment and any required instructions.

## Concept of Operations

Under the FTB/RTB plan, all Airmen report to their normal work areas for day-to-day operations. In the event of an FTB recall, they would fall under the command of the defense force commander. Under an RTB scenario, Airmen would answer to the local base civil engineer. To facilitate the proper installation readiness levels, the construct includes four base defense postures that allow the base to prepare Airmen and resources to react to the identified threat. In response to elevated intelligence indicators or threat levels, these postures increase from normal to amber to orange and to red (fig. 3), each one directly increasing the number of Airmen and resources available for immediate base defense or response.<sup>18</sup> When the FTB/RTB alarm sounds, Airmen respond automatically to their assigned rally points.



**Figure 3. Force defense postures.** (From briefing, Col Brad Spacy, commander, 375th Mission Support Group, subject: Installation Arming and Response: Fight the Base, Recover the Base, 17 April 2007, slide 10.)

At the rally point, Airmen form into their respective squads and flights, and unit leadership issues orders. Once assembled at their rally points, Airmen will receive the appropriate equipment and instructions. Those not immediately required are placed into a work/rest cycle (i.e., either they return to their normal duties or go home to rest and wait for their shift). As Airmen respond to their rally points under an FTB scenario, “mobile armories” simultaneously deploy from the logistic readiness squadron armory. Once armed, Airmen deploy to their predesignated battle stations.

The nature of RTB scenarios means that they may not merit an immediate response. Under RTB, the alarm may not sound until after the disaster has struck. For example, if a tornado hits a base, Airmen would not be recalled until after it has passed and the area is safe for a structured response. When directed, they would report to rally points just as they would under FTB but receive orders and equipment appropriate to help recover from the disaster. Once recovery operations are complete, Airmen would return to their normal work areas. Armed with these basic skill sets, the RTB squads present a ready, capable recovery force to assist the installation commander with both on- and off-base contingencies. Consider the impact of the tornado touching down on an Air Force base—roads blocked with debris and downed trees, facilities destroyed, flash flooding from torrential rain accompanying the storm, basewide power outages, fires and natural gas leaks, leaking fuel systems, and so forth. Such an event would quickly overwhelm engineers and would likely result in days and weeks of work just to restore basic services and reopen major roadways. Additionally, without basic services and clear access routes



throughout the base, most Airmen—with the exception of first responders and engineers—would likely remain idle.

The FTB/RTB construct applies equally to both garrison and deployed locations. The measured response provided by the force defense postures ensures that Airmen have adequate time to prepare for manning battle stations. However, in the event of a “no-notice” emergency such as an enemy attack, the defense posture could elevate immediately from normal to red. In an immediate response, Airmen would respond directly to their rally points upon notification.

## Training

Training is a key component of both FTB and RTB plans but should not necessitate significant new funding. FTB training builds on ground-combat skills taught as part of predeployment requirements. Basic ground-combat skills should be enhanced with routine home-station training in practical “shoot, move, and communicate” skills such as basic rifle fighting, individual and team movement, hand and arm signals, and radio communications. Basic weapons-qualification training can also be reinforced through the use of a firearms training simulator present in most security forces squadrons. Routine use of the simulator not only enhances basic weapons skills but also increases Airmen’s confidence in weapons handling—experience not currently afforded under today’s “just-in-time” training format.

Similarly, RTB builds on the confidence gained in basic ground-combat skills training with a focus on specific equipment not normally included in predeployment training (i.e., heavy-equipment operations, debris clearance, flood control, damage assessment and reporting, and expedient repair methods). These skills can also be taught on any base with a civil engineering capability or through the use of virtual tools. Subject-matter experts will offer the remaining skill sets through hands-on training, including sandbagging techniques, chain saw and gas-powered blower operations, contingency vehicle training, expedient shelter erection, damage assessment and reporting, and command and control. These different training avenues allow RTB squad leaders a variety of alternatives and flexibility in ensuring that their Airmen receive the prerequisite skill sets. Taken as a whole, FTB/RTB training gives all Airmen added skills and confidence that are readily transferable to any environment.

Under this concept, the skills taught and used in garrison are the same as those required in a deployed environment, and the transition from peacetime to combat operations can become almost seamless. Initially these skills should be taught by subject-matter experts using standardized lesson plans coordinated with the appropriate functional community; however, over time as the FTB/RTB culture matures, all officers and noncommissioned officers should be able to teach these skills to their Airmen using available time in the work week. Routine base-level exercises should be combined with required emergency-response exercises and test the full spectrum of FTB/RTB plans.

## Equipment

Equipment is another important component of executing the FTB/RTB plan. In addition to appropriate weapons and specialty equipment issued for a specific emergency response, all Airmen will be permanently issued a traditional “A-bag” of equipment normally associated with deployment. This bag should be kept readily available in their work areas, and Airmen would be accountable for routinely inventorying and maintaining equipment as necessary. Having equipment close at hand not only facilitates rapid transition to “battle stations” but also inculcates a “take care of your equipment and it will take care of you” philosophy critical in combat environments. In addition to the A-bag equipment common to all personnel, certain specialized equipment will be needed for RTB. Some of it, such as safety equipment, can be issued directly to the Airman, but other pieces, such as heavy-equipment vehicles, chainsaws, and tools, will have to be centrally controlled at the owning squadrons. Once this plan is implemented, when Airmen deploy to contingency locations, they will take with them equipment they have used and maintained routinely rather than a foreign bag of gear they seldom if ever touch before deployment processing.

## Benefits and Opportunities

The benefits of FTB/RTB concepts extend far beyond the immediate improvement in installation emergency response. Fully developed and executed, FTB/RTB plans help build the “every Airman is a war fighter” culture by giving all Airmen a shared role and stake in fighting or recovering the air base as a coherent capability. This unifying role also helps break down functional stovepipes and increases teamwork and cooperation in all facets of base operations. Furthermore, combat skills taught routinely over time make Airmen more capable and enhance their confidence. Having more confident, multiskilled Airmen able to respond across the spectrum of emergency situations increases the Air Force’s ability to adjust more quickly to enemy attack plans and dramatically improve overall force agility and resiliency in both garrison and combat operational environments.

## The Way Ahead

The draft version of Air Force Instruction 10-250, which provides the basis for fielding an Air Force-wide FTB/RTB capability, should be revived and implemented. The Air Force Installation and Mission Support Center, as the only Air Force organization with cross-functional representation and an enterprise-wide view of all installation and mission-support forces, should coordinate with functional representatives to develop appropriate tactics, techniques, and procedures for FTB/RTB plans. Additionally, a comprehensive review of the Air Force’s readiness training centers should be conducted to ensure that predeployment training experiences support and build on FTB/RTB skills taught at the home station. Furthermore, joint training and sister-service training opportunities should be evaluated. Professional military



education should be adjusted to support the FTB/RTB culture and “every Airman is a war fighter” philosophy. Finally, all Airmen should embrace the fact that they are the key in the Air Force’s ability to “Fight the Base, Recover the Base, and Win the War!” ☛

## Notes

1. For the level II ground threat, see Air Force Handbook 31-109, *Integrated Defense in Expeditionary Environments*, 1 May 2013, 6–7, [http://static.e-publishing.af.mil/production/1/af\\_a4\\_7/publication/afh31-109/afh31-109.pdf](http://static.e-publishing.af.mil/production/1/af_a4_7/publication/afh31-109/afh31-109.pdf).

2. Department of the Navy, *Standard Organization and Regulations Manual* (Washington, DC: Office of the Chief of Naval Operations, July 2012), 6-118, 4-13.

3. *Ibid.*, 6-118.

4. *Ibid.*, 6-118–19.

5. *Ibid.*, 6-117.

6. Department of the Air Force, *Joint Doctrine, Organization, Training, Materiel, Leadership and Education, Personnel and Facilities (DOTMLPF) Change Recommendation (DCR) for Integrated Defense* (Washington, DC: AF/A7S, April 2006), i.

7. *Ibid.*

8. *Ibid.*

9. Air Force Instruction (AFI) 10-250, “Installation Arming and Response” (draft), April 2006. Note that AFI 10-250 is now *Individual Medical Readiness*, 16 April 2014, [http://static.e-publishing.af.mil/production/1/af\\_sg/publication/afi10-250/afi10-250.pdf](http://static.e-publishing.af.mil/production/1/af_sg/publication/afi10-250/afi10-250.pdf).

10. US Department of Defense, *Sustaining U.S. Global Leadership: Priorities for 21st Century Defense* (Washington, DC: Office of the Secretary of Defense, January 2012), [http://archive.defense.gov/news/Defense\\_Strategic\\_Guidance.pdf](http://archive.defense.gov/news/Defense_Strategic_Guidance.pdf). The quotation appears in the letter from the secretary of defense.

11. Joint Chiefs of Staff, *The National Military Strategy of the United States of America, 2015* (Washington, DC: Joint Chiefs of Staff, June 2015), i, [http://www.jcs.mil/Portals/36/Documents/Publications/2015\\_National\\_Military\\_Strategy.pdf](http://www.jcs.mil/Portals/36/Documents/Publications/2015_National_Military_Strategy.pdf).

12. *Ibid.*, i; and Brig Gen Charles Flynn and Maj Joshua Richardson, “Joint Operational Access and the Global Response Force: Redefining Readiness,” *Military Review* 93, no. 4 (July–August 2013): 38–44, [http://usacac.army.mil/CAC2/MilitaryReview/Archives/English/MilitaryReview\\_20130831\\_art001.pdf](http://usacac.army.mil/CAC2/MilitaryReview/Archives/English/MilitaryReview_20130831_art001.pdf).

13. President of the United States, *National Security Strategy* (Washington, DC: White House, February 2015), 8, [https://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/docs/2015\\_national\\_security\\_strategy.pdf](https://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/docs/2015_national_security_strategy.pdf).

14. Department of the Air Force, *America’s Air Force: A Call to the Future* (Washington, DC: Office of the Secretary of the Air Force, July 2014), 7, [https://www.my.af.mil/gcss-af/USAF/AFP40/d/s6925EC1351870FB5E044080020E329A9/Files/editorial/AF\\_30\\_Year\\_Strategy\\_2.pdf](https://www.my.af.mil/gcss-af/USAF/AFP40/d/s6925EC1351870FB5E044080020E329A9/Files/editorial/AF_30_Year_Strategy_2.pdf).

15. *Ibid.*, 8.

16. Department of the Air Force, *USAF Strategic Master Plan* (Washington, DC: Office of the Secretary of the Air Force, May 2015), 3, 47, [http://www.af.mil/Portals/1/documents/Force%20Management/Strategic\\_Master\\_Plan.pdf?timestamp=1434024300378](http://www.af.mil/Portals/1/documents/Force%20Management/Strategic_Master_Plan.pdf?timestamp=1434024300378); and Department of the Air Force, *America’s Air Force*, 4.

17. Brig Gen Robert H. “Bob” Holmes et al., “The Air Force’s New Ground War: Ensuring Projection of Air and Space Power through Expeditionary Security Operations,” *Air and Space Power Journal* 20, no. 3 (Fall 2006): 41–52, <http://www.airpower.maxwell.af.mil/airchronicles/apj/apj06/fal06/fal06.pdf>.

18. AFI 10-250, “Installation Arming and Response,” 2–3.



### **Maj Gen (sel) Bradley D. Spacy, USAF**

Major General (sel) Spacy (BA, Fresno State University; MEd, University of Southern Mississippi) is the director of expeditionary support, Air Force Installation and Mission Support Center, Joint Base San Antonio–Lackland, Texas. He and his team are responsible for delivering worldwide expeditionary installation and mission support capabilities to customers at the headquarters, major command, and installation levels. General Spacy was commissioned in 1987 at California State University–Fresno as an AFROTC distinguished graduate. He has commanded two squadrons, including the US Air Force Honor Guard, and a mission support group; he is also a two-time wing commander. As the director of force protection for US Central Command Air Forces Forward, General Spacy created, planned, and participated in Operation Desert Safeside / Task Force 1041, an offensive ground-combat operation to kill or capture insurgent forces in Iraq. He has served as chief of the Senate Liaison Office, Office of the Secretary of the Air Force, Washington, DC, where he worked with the US Senate on Air Force priorities and programs. General Spacy is a graduate of the Marine Corps Command and Staff College and Joint Forces Staff College. He was a National Defense Fellow at the Institute for National Security Studies and a Senior Executive Fellow at Harvard University.



### **Mr. Edwin H. Oshiba, USAF**

Mr. Oshiba (BS, Santa Clara University; MS, Air Force Institute of Technology) is the deputy director of civil engineers, Headquarters US Air Force. He is responsible for providing executive leadership, direction, and technical knowledge to organize, train, and equip a 51,000-person engineering force and for the development, construction, operation, maintenance, emergency response, readiness, housing, and environmental quality of Air Force bases worldwide. Mr. Oshiba was commissioned in the Air Force in 1989 upon graduation from Santa Clara University. He commanded three civil engineer squadrons and an expeditionary engineer group. He retired in 2015 in the rank of colonel, last serving as the chief, Installations Strategy and Plans Division, Headquarters US Air Force. In that position, he led the development of installation support strategy, planning, and future war-fighting concepts to enable the Air Force's core missions. Additionally, he provided oversight and guidance for installation development planning, encroachment, compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act, installations governance, and business process reengineering. Mr. Oshiba has earned three master of science degrees from the Air Force Institute of Technology, Air War College, and National War College.



### **Capt Nicholas J. Thomas, USAF, PE**

Captain Thomas (BS, University of Miami; MS, University of Central Florida) is the executive officer, Expeditionary Support Directorate, Air Force Installation and Mission Support Center, Joint Base San Antonio–Lackland, Texas. Commissioned in 2008 at the University of Miami, he previously served on the Pacific Air Forces staff as the officer in charge, Civil Engineer Theater Security Engagements, responsible for building partner capacity and executing exercise-related construction projects in support of Pacific Command's phase-zero operations. His previous assignments include installation management flight commander and F-22 beddown program director for the 325th Civil Engineer Squadron. Captain Thomas has deployed to Afghanistan and Kuwait in support of Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation New Dawn.

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