

AN EXPEDITIONARY AEROSPACE FORCE

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(U) United States Air Force personnel paid a high price for their nation's worldwide commitments after the Gulf War at a time when the service's resources decreased sharply under the pressure of rising costs, growing budgetary uncertainty, and changing missions. The total obligatory authority of the service for FY 1991 was \$91.2 billion, but by 1998 this budget figure dropped to \$76.3 billion. Force structure and personnel declined accordingly. In 1990 the Air Force fielded 24 active component and 12 reserve fighter wings. In 1998, it had 13 active and 7 air reserve component wings. At the same time, the number of bombers decreased by 50 percent; tankers by 40 percent; and cargo and transport aircraft by 25 percent. Active-component personnel fell from 535,000 during FY 1990 to only 369,000 eight years later. In 1998 two-thirds fewer overseas bases were available to the Air Force than in 1989.¹

(U) While the Air Force's resources declined, demands on the service remained high as it conducted a large number of operations and contributed to many other joint or combined endeavors during the decade following the Cold War. Among the most prominent of these were operations Provide Comfort, Northern Watch, and Southern Watch in Southwest Asia; Provide Relief and Restore Hope in Somalia; Uphold Democracy in Haiti; Provide Promise, Deny Flight, Deliberate Force, Joint Endeavor, Joint Guard, and Joint Forge in Bosnia; and Allied Force in Kosovo.² During 1998 alone, the USAF conducted 30,000 air mobility missions to 90 countries, engaged in 1,600 exercises in 35 nations, and made more than 95 deployments flying 27,700 sorties to enforce the no-fly zones over Iraq.³

(U) The burden of conducting these operations fell unevenly across the Air Force. The service was forced to call on E-3 Sentry Airborne Warning and Control System and RC-135 Rivet Joint aircrews, A-10 Thunderbolt II and F-15E Strike Eagle pilots, special operations personnel, security forces, and other particular groups to perform a disproportionate share of the work.⁴ Lt. Gen. Lawrence P. Farrell, Jr., who served as Headquarters USAF's deputy chief of staff for plans and programs in 1997 and 1998, described this problem to an interviewer. "There is a high level of optempo [tempo of operations] in the units deployed," he explained. "People in units with weapons systems such as U-2s, RC-135s, and A-10s have drawn repeated tours of TDY [temporary duty], and those were just the people associated with the weapons systems."⁵

(U) In addition to these specialists, support personnel also felt the stress generated by demanding deployments in the 1990s. Keeping overseas bases operating around the clock on a near-permanent basis required large numbers of airmen from security forces, engineers, cooks, personnel specialists, and other support career fields. "We found we were pulling these people from bases in the States," Lieutenant General Farrell related. "So, while we expected the optempo of the people we were deploying to be high, what we didn't realize was that we were also increasing the optempo of the bases we left behind in the States."⁶

(U) During the Cold War, airmen grew accustomed to deployments that were, as one military historian characterized them, "usually brief, and to well-stocked permanent foreign bases, often manned by USAF personnel stationed in the host nation for two or more years."⁷ In contrast, Air Force members who participated in contingencies during the 1990s "could no longer expect as a matter of course to arrive at a fully-working base with forklifts, test equipment, mess halls, adequate permanent housing, hot showers, and cable TV."⁸ During the Cold War, deploying airmen usually were welcomed and supported by "blue-suiters" who had

been in place well ahead of their arrival. However, after the Cold War, personnel faced greater austerity and stress as they typically stayed in a host nation on a TDY basis for 90 to 120 days. Moreover, national leaders expected Air Force personnel to make these austere, short-term deployments rapidly, which made them all the more stressful.⁹

(U) These factors contributed to a serious retention problem, particularly among pilots. In FY 1999 the Air Force was 1,200 pilots short and had a retention rate of 41 percent, down from 87 percent just four years earlier. Maj. Gen. Donald A. Lamontagne, who commanded the Air Force Personnel Center from 1999 to 2000, pointed directly at the deployments to the Arabian Gulf. “We’ve been trying to fix pilot retention with more money,” he asserted, “but that’s not the problem. It’s going back and forth to the desert that’s causing the problem.”¹⁰ Quality of life surveys completed by pilots and other airmen in the late 1990s supported Lamontagne’s observation. Polls showed a close relationship between the service’s increased optempo and its falling retention rates.¹¹

(U) Major General Lamontagne specifically cited deployments to the desert as the major part of the problem. Indeed, among the many operations of the decade, those in Southwest Asia were the most taxing on Air Force members and their families. By 2000, Brig. Gen. David A. Deptula, then the Air Force’s director for the Quadrennial Defense Review, noted that the service had looked for a way to man deployments that would give “predictability and stability to our personnel.”¹² However, the shifting political and military currents in Southwest Asia made it very difficult for the service to do so, and the erratic behavior of Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein raised tensions in the region at unpredictable intervals.

(U) In addition to short-notice deployments, many airmen found their tours in Southwest Asia uninspiring and they felt unappreciated. “The flying is boring,”¹³ Capt. Lou Foley, an F-16

Fighting Falcon pilot from Shaw Air Force Base (AFB), South Carolina, bluntly stated. He also contended that there was little to do between flights; the deployed units were “stuck at Prince Sultan” Air Base (AB), Saudi Arabia, an installation in the middle of the desert 70 miles south-southeast of Riyadh. Another pilot echoed Captain Foley: “We’re tired of droning holes in the sky; protecting allied airspace where we’re not welcome. They shackle us in the air, on the ground, and during our off time.”¹⁴ And an A-10 driver who was a veteran of the Gulf War and several post-Desert Storm TDYs to the region expressed a similar opinion. “Saudi isn’t fun,” he complained. “To most [Saudi nationals], we are hired guns saving our stake in the oil reserves.”¹⁵

(U) The Air Force could not change a host nation’s attitudes, its own country’s military policies, or Hussein’s actions, but it could alter the way it managed its deployments to Southwest Asia. To make the service more responsive to national strategy, more effective in joint operations, and to offer more predictable, stable assignments to the desert, the Air Force moved from being a Cold War forward-based organization to being a twenty-first century Expeditionary Aerospace Force. One thoughtful Air Force officer summarized this fundamental reform: “After a few painful years of haphazard deployments for its combat units, the service realized that it needed a change. It then adopted the Aerospace Expeditionary Force (AEF) structure.”¹⁶

Image 2



Members of the 48th Tactical Fighter Wing deployed to Saudi Arabia wait to board a KC-10A Extender.

(U) The AEF developed in two stages. During the first of these, between 1995 and 1997, the Air Force sent four aerospace expeditionary forces to the Arabian Gulf. These AEFs originated in part because of difficulties the Air Force encountered during Operation Vigilant Warrior, the U.S. response to the movement of two Iraqi armored divisions toward the Kuwaiti border in early October 1994.¹⁷ When Hussein threatened Kuwait, U.S. Operation Desert Storm units had been absent from the region for more than three years, and returning them to the area quickly proved to be a formidable challenge, though successfully met.

(U) In August 1994, Lt. Gen. John P. Jumper assumed command of the Ninth Air Force, which provided to the United States Central Command (CENTCOM) its air component, the U.S. Air Force, Central Command (CENTAF). He was in this assignment only a matter of weeks when Hussein began moving ground forces toward Kuwait, triggering the crisis that led to Operation Vigilant Warrior. Jumper quickly learned how hard it was to develop a list of forces

that could be deployed to Southwest Asia. He concluded, as he later put it, “We were no better off in 1994 than we had been in 1990,”¹⁸ at the time of Operation Desert Storm. Reflecting on Operation Vigilant Warrior three years later, Brig. Gen. William R. Looney III, who at the time had been a colonel and commander of the 33d Fighter Wing, characterized the deployment as “not as crisp as it should have been. . . . It didn’t go as well as we wanted.”¹⁹

(U) Colonel Looney, Lieutenant General Jumper, and other leaders concluded from this experience that the Air Force needed a new way of organizing the forces it would deploy in times of war or contingencies. Jumper remained in Southwest Asia for roughly three months following Operation Vigilant Warrior and, after thoroughly studying the available deployment plans, he advised Air Force Chief of Staff (CSAF) General Ronald R. Fogleman: “We need to organize ourselves for rapid reaction, to have people standing by. We can’t have contingency warfare as an afterthought to a Cold War status.”²⁰ General Fogleman endorsed this principle and encouraged Jumper to develop it further.²¹

(U) Another element in the origin of the AEFs was Lieutenant General Jumper’s goal that CENTAF would be able to generate as many sorties per month as an aircraft carrier could from the waters of Southwest Asia. “It was not to compete with the Navy,” he stated, “but to have the functional equivalent of what the combatant commanders seemed to value. . . . We came up with a squadron-size force that was able to deploy rapidly.”²²

(U) In Jumper’s role as a numbered Air Force commander, he garnered support for the AEF concept from the head of Air Combat Command and the CSAF. As CENTAF commander, he proposed the model to the CENTCOM commander, who also accepted it. The chairman of the joint chiefs of staff, Army General John M. Shalikashvili, endorsed the concept and directed the

Air Force to deploy an Air Expeditionary Force, which became known later as AEF I, to Bahrain not later than October 19, 1995.²³

(U) Consisting of 18 F-16s and 675 personnel, AEF I operated from Bahrain's Sheikh Isa AB, from October 28 until December 18, 1995. The unit generated 705 sorties during that time.²⁴ Lieutenant General Jumper later said AEF I got the initiative "off to a decent start. . . . The Bahrainians loved us; they took good care of us over there."²⁵

(U) This first stage of AEF development sustained its momentum. Jumper championed the organizational concept after he left Ninth Air Force, moving first to the air staff and then, in succession, to command USAFE and ACC. Other senior leaders, including Ronald E. Keys and Michael E. Ryan, both of whom would wear four stars – Ryan served as CSAF, 1997-2001 – also promoted the AEF concept.²⁶

(U) The success of the first Air Expeditionary Force led to a second iteration which also deployed to Bahrain. The AEF II supported Operation Southern Watch, initially from Shaheed Mwaffaq AB and then from Azraq AB, both in Jordan, during May-June 1996.²⁷ "Access is one of the things that's required to make a concept like this work," Lieutenant General Jumper pointed out. "You have to be welcomed by the host country."²⁸ In this regard, the record of AEF II matched the record of its predecessor. Brig. Gen. William R. Looney III, who commanded the second AEF, praised the local support it received. "Our Jordanian hosts," he recalled a year later, "were just excellent—very professional—and they told us they were sorry to see us go."²⁹

(U) Other Air Expeditionary Forces followed the first two. AEF III, like its predecessor, supported Operation Southern Watch, deploying to Doha, Qatar, in June 1996, and remaining there until August. The fighter contingent of AEF IV was canceled, but its B-52 bombers which operated from Anderson AFB, Guam, contributed to Desert Strike, the September 1996 U.S.

response to the Iraqi seizure of the Kurdish-held town of Irbil in northern Iraq. CENTCOM initially planned, but later scrubbed, a fifth AEF.³⁰

(U) The second stage in the development of the expeditionary aerospace force concept began emerging separately in early 1998 at the initiative of CSAF General Ryan. On February 1, Ryan briefed the plan to his senior commanders, which directed the entire Air Force to adopt the AEF model.³¹ “The period of self examination and strategic reassessment,” Ryan told his commanders, “must give way to the need to focus on the execution of the vision.”³²

(U) During the spring and summer of 1998, Lieutenant General Farrell pursued the CSAF’s guidance and coordinated the development of the EAF’s second stage. Applying the AEF model to the entire service was an enormous undertaking requiring the efforts of senior leaders and action officers in many air staff offices. They completed the task by June; the next month Air Force briefers presented the mature expeditionary aerospace force concept to Secretary of Defense William S. Cohen, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Henry H. Shelton, theater commanders, and appropriate national legislators. Having gained their approval, General Ryan and Acting Secretary of the Air Force F. Whitten Peters announced that the Air Force would begin future AEF deployments on October 1, 1999, the first day of FY 2000.³³

(U) In its mature form, the EAF concept divided the entire Air Force into ten Aerospace Expeditionary Forces. Each AEF had about 12,000 personnel and 175 to 200 aircraft, drawing them from various bases and providing a cross-section of capabilities. Every AEF passed through a 15-month cycle, during which it conducted training and participated in exercises, prepared to deploy overseas if needed, moved to on-call status or in fact deployed, and recovered from its deployment. During the first 3 of these 15 months, an AEF was brought up-to-date in its mission-qualification and other basic training. For the next six and a half months it concentrated on joint

interoperability and other advanced training, and participated in service exercises. Then, the AEF entered the “spin-up” stage of its cycle: the two months when it trained for its specific responsibilities if called on to deploy. Next came three months during which the personnel and aircraft “bucket” conducted sustainment training while on call, or deployed. The AEF’s cycle ended with two weeks spent recovering from the intense training or an actual deployment.³⁴

(U) The AEF system provided several practical benefits that developed over time. First, Air Force personnel and their families benefited, and deployment notification times steadily improved. At the beginning of the first four AEF deployments, airmen received only a couple of days’ notice. During the next two, the situation improved only slightly because Air Force planners disseminated the manning requirement documentation only about 15 days prior to deployment. However, as they gained experience with the new process, significant progress took place: notification time for AEFs VII and VIII rose to 40 days; and for AEFs IX and X, 75 days.³⁵

(U) The service as a whole also benefited from adopting the new AEF structure. Instead of stressing personnel in particular career fields, assets, and units, the AEFs spread the requirements across the entire service.³⁶ In addition, the scheduling of training and of deployments became more predictable. Wings and other units—and individuals and their families—knew about deployments 15 months in advance. Airmen knew when their AEF would be in training and when it would be on call, and they could plan their professional and personal lives accordingly. “The new structure allowed a degree of professional and personal predictability for Airmen,” one officer pointed out. “Commanders knew how much time they had to rest and reconstitute their units before they were to deploy again, and individuals could make personal plans knowing that their schedules were relatively firm.”³⁷

(U) Commanders and personnel found that the AEF structure improved the deployment process. The new structure also benefited the service—and the nation. The AEF provided “rapid, responsive, and reliable airpower,” Brigadier General Looney contended, “tailored to the specific needs of a situation . . . [and which] moves out quickly.”³⁸ Looking back on the advent of the AEF structure from his perspective as chief of staff in 2008, retired General Jumper reflected: “I think it’s something the Air Force should be proud of. We were well ahead of our time.”³⁹

(U) When the Air Force undertook this dramatic innovation during the 1990s, no leader could foresee the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks and no mechanism for scheduling deployments could account for every eventuality. The AEF system did not resolve all of the problems that the Air Force faced in managing its personnel during the early twentieth-first century. Nonetheless, the service’s move from a Cold War, forward-based organization to an expeditionary force proved timely. By September 2001 the Air Force had gained valuable experience with the AEF structure and stood much better prepared than it had been several years earlier for the unexpected contingencies and deployments that the nation’s leaders soon called upon the service to make, in Afghanistan, Iraq, and elsewhere.

¹ (U) Richard G. Davis, *Anatomy of a Reform: The Expeditionary Aerospace Force* (Washington: Air Force History and Museums Program, 2003), pp 12-13; *United States Air Force Statistical Digest, Fiscal Year 1991* (Washington: Office of the Deputy Assistant Secretary of the Air Force for Cost and Economics, 1991), p 37; Otto Kreisher, "In the Sandbox," *Air Force Magazine* 81:8 (Aug 1998), p 68.

² (U) Davis, *Anatomy of a Reform*, pp 17–18 [note: These operations are discussed elsewhere in this work. Some, like operations Provide Comfort and Restore Hope, passed through more than one iteration. It also should be noted that Operation Allied Force was a North Atlantic Treaty Organization designation for the 1999 Kosovo operation; the United States designation was Operation Noble Anvil. See Chapter 12].

³ (U) Davis, *Anatomy of a Reform*, p 19.

⁴ (U) Bruce D. Callander, "The New Expeditionary Force," *Air Force Magazine* 81:9 (Sep 1998), p 54.

⁵ (U) Web site (U), Official Air Force biography of Lt Gen Lawrence P. Farrell, Jr., <http://www.af.mil/information/bios/bio.asp?bioID=5392> (accessed 17 May 10); Callander, "The New Expeditionary Force," *Air Force Magazine* 81:9, p 55.

⁶ (U) Web site (U), Official Air Force biography, Farrell; Callander, "The New Expeditionary Force," *Air Force Magazine* 81:9, p 55.

⁷ (U) Davis, *Anatomy of a Reform*, p 21.

⁸ (U) Davis, *Anatomy of a Reform*, pp 15, 21.

⁹ (U) Davis, *Anatomy of a Reform*, pp 15, 21; John P. Jumper, "Operating Abroad," *Air Force Magazine* 81:12 (Dec 1998), p 29.

¹⁰ (U) Web site (U), Official Air Force biography of Lt Gen Donald A. Lamontagne, <http://www.af.mil/information/bios/bio.asp?bioID=6131> (accessed 17 May 10); Callander, "The New Expeditionary Force," *Air Force Magazine* 81:9, p 55.

¹¹ (U) Davis, *Anatomy of a Reform*, p 15; Web site (U), Official Air Force biography, Lamontagne; Callander, "The New Expeditionary Force," *Air Force Magazine* 81:9, p 55.

¹² (U) Otto Kreisher, "In the Sandbox," *Air Force Magazine* 81:8 (Aug 1998), p 68; Briefing (U), Headquarters Air Force Quadrennial Defense Review by Brig Gen David A. Deptula, "Building A Fully Capable Expeditionary Air Force (FEAF)," 30 Jan 01; Web site (U), Official Air Force biography of Lt Gen David A. Deptula, <http://www.af.mil/information/bios/bio.asp?bioID=5213> (accessed 17 May 10) [see also: Davis, *Anatomy of a Reform*, p 86].

¹³ (U) Kreisher, "In the Sandbox," *Air Force Magazine* 81:8, p 69.

¹⁴ (U) Kreisher, "In the Sandbox," *Air Force Magazine* 81:8, p 69; Perry D. Jamieson, *Khobar Towers: Tragedy and Response* (Washington: Air Force History and Museums Program, 2008), p 181; Paul K. White, *Crises After the Storm: An Appraisal of U.S. Air Operations in Iraq since the Persian Gulf War* (Washington: Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 1999), p 53.

¹⁵ (U) Kreisher, "In the Sandbox," *Air Force Magazine* 81:8, p 69.

¹⁶ (U) Davis, *Anatomy of a Reform*, p 1; Clint "Q" Hinote, "The Drawdown Asymmetry: Why Ground Forces Will Depart Iraq but Air Forces Will Stay," *Strategic Studies Quarterly* 2:2 (Summer 2008), p 47.

¹⁷ (U) Timothy A. Peppe and Rachel Lea Heide, "Bending but not Broken: The USAF's Expeditionary Air Force Experience in the 21st Century," n.d., p 2.

¹⁸ (U) Discussion (U), Perry D. Jamieson, Air Force History and Museums Program, with Gen John P. Jumper, Air Force Chief of Staff from Sep 01 to Sep 05, 7 Nov 08.

¹⁹ (U) Web site (U), Official Air Force biography of Gen John P. Jumper, <http://www.af.mil/information/bios/bio.asp?bioID=5986> (accessed 17 May 10); Discussion (U), Jamieson with Jumper, 7 Nov 08; Web site (U), Official Air Force biography of Gen William R. Looney III, <http://www.af.mil/information/bios/bio.asp?bioID=6229> (accessed 17 May 10); John A. Tirpak, "The Expeditionary Air Force Takes Shape," *Air Force Magazine* 80:6 (Jun 1997), p 30.

²⁰ (U) Discussion (U), Jamieson with Jumper, 7 Nov 08.

²¹ (U) Discussion (U), Jamieson with Jumper, 7 Nov 08.

²² (U) Discussion (U), Jamieson with Jumper, 7 Nov 08 [note: A slightly different interpretation of this factor in the origin of the AEF can be found in Davis, *Anatomy of a Reform*, pp 30–32].

²³ (U) Discussion (U), Jamieson with Jumper, 7 Nov 08; Davis, *Anatomy of a Reform*, pp 32–33; Official biography of Gen John M. Shalikashvili, n.d.

²⁴ (U) Davis, *Anatomy of a Reform*, p 33.

²⁵ (U) Discussion (U), Jamieson with Jumper, 7 Nov 08.

²⁶ (U) Davis, *Anatomy of a Reform*, p 33.

²⁷ (U) Davis, *Anatomy of a Reform*, p 33; Web site (U), Official Air Force biography, Looney; Tirpak, "The Expeditionary Air Force Takes Shape," *Air Force Magazine* 80:6, p 31.

²⁸ (U) Tirpak, "The Expeditionary Air Force Takes Shape," *Air Force Magazine* 80:6, p 31.

²⁹ (U) Tirpak, "The Expeditionary Air Force Takes Shape," *Air Force Magazine* 80:6, p 31.

³⁰ (U) Davis, *Anatomy of a Reform*, pp 33–34.

³¹ (U) Davis, *Anatomy of a Reform*, pp 43, 45, 48; Discussion (U), Jamieson with Jumper, 7 Nov 08.

³² (U) Davis, *Anatomy of a Reform*, p 43.

³³ (U) Davis, *Anatomy of a Reform*, pp 45-56; Article, Peppe and Heide, "Bending but not Broken," n.d., p 2.

³⁴ (U) John A. Tirpak, "The EAF Turns One," *Air Force Magazine* 83:10 (Oct 2000), p 20; Peppe and Heide, "Bending but not Broken," n.d., pp 2–3 [note: This paragraph describes the original AEF cycle. After 11 Sep 01, the increased number of deployments and the more rapid tempo of operations stressed the system. Hinote refers to AEFs in 2008 deploying for 4 months out of a 20-month cycle, versus 3 months of a 15-month cycle; Clint "Q" Hinote, "The Drawdown Asymmetry: Why Ground Forces Will Depart Iraq but Air Forces Will Stay," *Strategic Studies Quarterly* 2:2 (Summer 2008), p 47].

³⁵ (U) Tirpak, "The EAF Turns One," *Air Force Magazine* 83:10, p 22.

³⁶ (U) Pepe and Heide, "Bending but not Broken," n.d., p 2; Remarks (U), Lt Gen Daniel Darnell, Headquarters Air Force A3/A5, Air Force Strategy Conference, Chantilly, Va., 11 Jun 08.

³⁷ (U) Pepe and Heide, "Bending but not Broken," n.d., pp 2-3; Hinote, "The Drawdown Asymmetry," *Strategic Studies Quarterly* 2:2, p 47 [note: Lt Col Hinote's capitalizing of "Airmen" followed guidance which came from the Air Force Chief of Staff in Feb 2004. See: Lisa Horn, "General Jumper decrees airman be spelled with capital "A,"" *Stars and Stripes*, 25 Jul 08].

³⁸ (U) Tirpak, "The EAF Turns One," *Air Force Magazine* 83:10, p 30.

³⁹ (U) Discussion (U), Jamieson with Jumper, 7 Nov 08.