



CHIEF's Sight Picture

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Adapting the AEF -- Longer Deployments, More Forces

For the past 12 years, our Air Force has adapted to the demands of a changing world. Beginning in the early 1990s, we developed composite wings, expeditionary organizations, and crisis-response packages that allowed us to rapidly deliver combat capability to Combatant Commanders. In 1998, we formalized the structure into ten Air Expeditionary Force packages. These responsive air and space capabilities allow us to present forces in a consistent manner and conduct military operations across the spectrum of conflict. Throughout the late 1990s, our AEF concept of operations has proven itself time and again. Even with the high demands of Operations ENDURING FREEDOM and IRAQI FREEDOM, our AEFs surged to support the Combatant Commanders' warfighting and deterrence missions, employing nearly eight AEFs of combat forces. When major air and space operations diminished last year, we began the process of reestablishing the AEF battle rhythm. Our reconstitution target was March of this year, but the continued demands of global operations, additional contingencies in other theaters, and a tasking to support Army operations with 2,000 of our expeditionary combat support forces required us to reassess our planning assumptions, and to adjust our AEFs to a new mission set.

Simply put, the demands on our deployable forces have not diminished and are not expected to decline for some time. We have a new rotational requirement for nearly 20,000 Airmen -- about three times the demand prior to September 11, 2001. Further, the Air Force Component Commander in the Central Command area of operations has asked us to deploy people for longer tour lengths to allow greater continuity for expeditionary commanders in the field. To adapt to this new set of circumstances, I've directed a change to the AEF rotational cycle and have asked our Major Commands to expand the pool of deployable Airmen in each AEF.

Beginning with AEF Cycle 5 in September 2004, the baseline deployment will be 120 days vice 90, and the AEF cycle will change from a fifteen-month rotational cycle to a twenty-month cycle. We will continue to expect that each Airman will deploy only once during each cycle, although some stressed specialties will deploy longer, and in greater frequency, until manpower levels are adjusted or the theater requirements diminish. For those already deployed in AEFs 7/8 (Mar – May) and those deploying in AEF 9/10 (Jun – Aug), it is our intent to stick to our 90-day deployment cycle. For those identified to deploy in AEF 1/2 (Sep – Nov), you should prepare to be gone a minimum of four months. This evolution of the AEF is not a temporary adjustment. More appropriately, it is recognition of new demands around the world for air and space power.

It is important to remember several fundamental principles regarding our AEF concept of operations. First, we are not changing the basic composition of each AEF; each will continue to provide about 5 AEWs and 6 AEGs of capability during each vulnerability period. Our low density/high demand units will continue to follow DoD-approved deployment guidelines. Finally, Air Force global mobility forces will continue to follow our AEF Presence Policy, with mobility aviation units postured in multiple AEFs to support the USTRANSCOM mission and other Combatant Commander needs.

The 20-month cycle will continue to provide commanders and Airmen the ability to plan ahead, allowing a sense of predictability while providing greater continuity to the in-theater commander. Still, I recognize longer deployments will present challenges to our Reserve Component, possibly affecting the number of ARC volunteers, and requiring selected use of Presidential mobilization authority. We will manage these matters very carefully, ensuring equity and fairness across the Total Force.

In addition to extending tour lengths, it is my intent to expand our pool of deployable Airmen from our current level of about 272,000. I have asked all of our Major Commands to aggressively review the assumptions upon which they exclude Airmen from our AEFs and take immediate steps to maximize those postured in the Air Force Worldwide UTC System and our AEF libraries. The MAJCOMs will posture the maximum number of manpower authorizations into standard UTCs, and if required, we will develop new ones to provide additional expeditionary capabilities. Residual authorizations will be postured into associated UTCs and will be coded to support AEF requirements across the range of military operations.

Let me be perfectly clear -- in our Air Force, every Airman is expeditionary, every Airman will know his/her place in the AEF system, and every Airman will be prepared to support the Combatant Commander, whether deployed, in CONUS via reachback, or employed at home station. If you are wearing the uniform of the United States Air Force, you are a part of the AEF.

We are at war today, and will remain engaged around the globe against a brutal and resilient enemy. Every Airman -- Active, Guard, Reserve, and Civilian -- must be focused on our national commitment to the Global War on Terrorism. Our job is to deploy and deal with terrorists wherever they are in the world so we never again have to deal with them on our own soil. You will be the difference between our success and failure in this vital cause. Once again, I want to thank each and every one of you for your dedication, professionalism, and service to our nation.




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