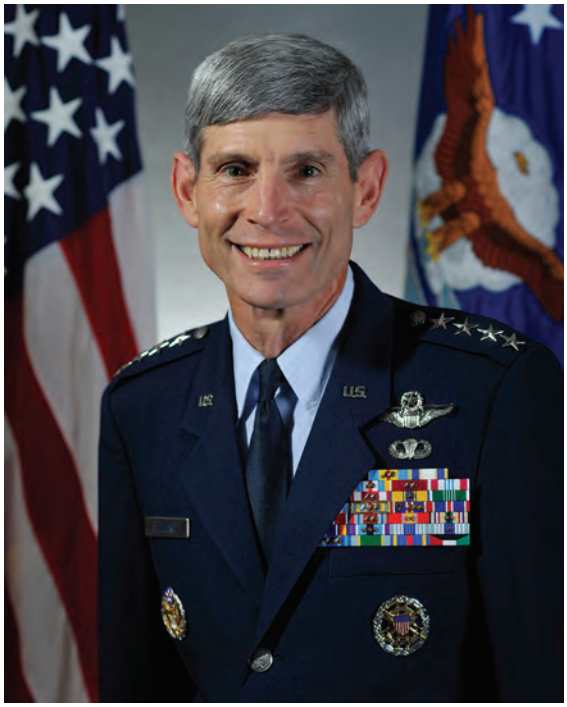


U.S. Air Force

General Norton A. Schwartz, Chief of Staff of the U.S. Air Force

# An Interview with Norton A. Schwartz

**JFQ:** *When you talk to the public and Congress, how do you describe the Air Force role in implementing U.S. national security policy? What unique capabilities does the Air Force bring to the table?*

**General Schwartz:** I think there are essentially four things that I would describe as enduring qualities of our Air Force—things that are relevant now and will be relevant in the future.

One is what I would call domain control, and that applies both in the air and in space, and to some degree, in cyberspace as well. That is securing some part of these domains so that the other members of the joint team can accomplish their missions without the threat of attack from above by an adversary. It is fundamental to the way we operate as a joint team, and it is clear that this will be an enduring capability for the Air Force going forward.

Second is intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance [ISR], and clearly that's been an ascendant capability in the last 10 years as we have transitioned from general purpose force/major force engagement scenarios to what I would characterize as the more man-hunting kind of role that we currently have. We also now apply our ISR capabilities more often in direct support to small units on the battlefield, so that when these small units go around the corner, through a window, or over a wall, they're not surprised by what's on the other side. So ISR in all of its dimensions—overhead, air-breathing, multiple sensors, et cetera—and, more importantly, the capacity to digest that data stream and turn that [intelligence] product into useful information are enduring capabilities.

The third area clearly is lift—the capacity to get shooters to the fight, and to extend the range of those platforms that do the airlift mission and the platforms that conduct strike missions as well. So the lift part of this, as well as the air refueling piece, is a key part of what we do for the joint team.

Finally, global strike is something that is almost unique to the Air Force, and it manifests itself in a number of different ways. Fundamentally, this is about being able to reach out to put targets at risk, wherever they may be on the planet. That has both deterrent effects and clearly warfighting implications as well.

Col William T. Eliason, USAF (Ret.), Ph.D., Editor of *Joint Force Quarterly,* interviewed General Schwartz at his Pentagon office.

There's also another capability important to this, and that is how we command and control those four enduring features of our Air Force. We have the capacity to command and control the tools that we have at our disposal on a scale that is something others don't approach. So that too is an important feature.

Again, I would say command and control, ISR, lift, domain control, and global strike are the features of an Air Force like ours, and which are required now in the kinds of irregular warfare fights that we've been in during the last 10 years or so, and will be required in other fights that we might see in the future.

**JFQ:** *For several years, the Air Force has been operating closely with its joint teammates in Iraq and Afghanistan. However, the Air Force's role has not always been front and center. What can you tell our readers about the Service's involvement in these conflicts, and how have they influenced your thinking about future operations?*

**General Schwartz:** This isn't about who gets the credit, and it's clear that the campaigns that we've been in, at least in Iraq and Afghanistan, have been largely ground-focused. It shouldn't be a surprise that the Army and Marine Corps are predominantly the ones that have gained the most attention as these conflicts have unfolded—although both the Navy and Air Force have made not-inconsequential contributions to battlefield activity, to be sure.

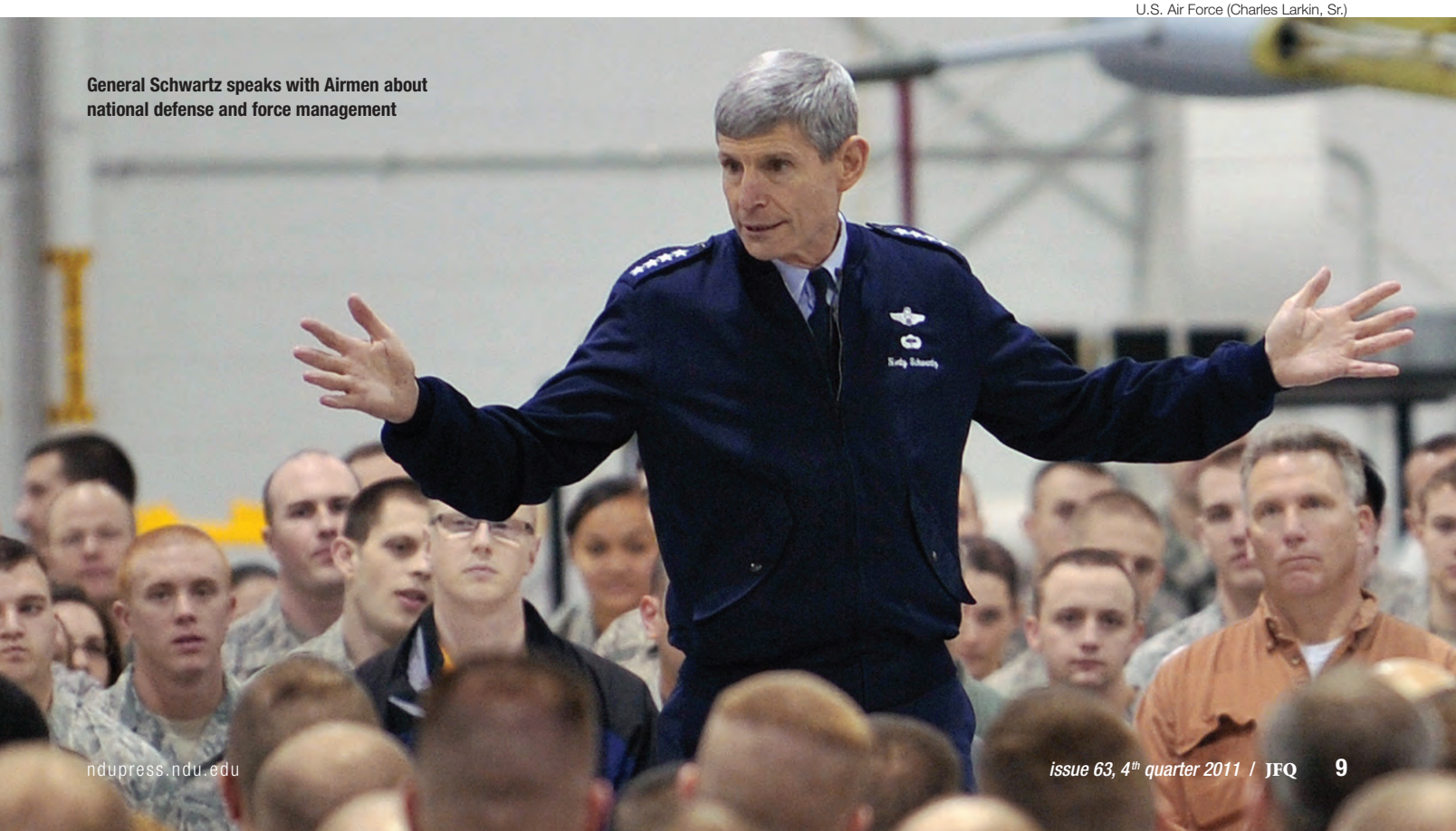
However, the Libya scenario is a different one. Here's a case where it's a much more air-centric campaign, and we naturally gain more attention there than does the Army or Marine Corps—although we're certainly grateful that in the early days, the Marine Corps helped rescue one of our aviators. But it's a team sport. It's all about trust and confidence and keeping promises. As a team, we have come to rely upon one another to a greater degree than ever before. Regardless of Service, there is a level of confidence that, if someone promises he will be there to deliver an effect that's essential for another member of the team to accomplish his mission, it will happen or we'll die trying. That continues to be our ethic, and it certainly will continue to be so in the future.

**JFQ:** *You've joined forces with the Navy and Marine Corps to develop the AirSea Battle Concept. Why is this new concept so important?*

**General Schwartz:** The Air Force and Navy have had, over the course of time, periods of more intense collaboration than at other times. It's been what I would characterize as ad hoc—certainly positive—but not at a consistent level. So one of the things that [Admiral] Gary Roughead [Chief of Naval Operations], [General James] Conway [Commandant of the Marine Corps] at the time, [General James] Amos [Commandant of the Marine Corps] now, and I decided to do, recognizing that the Navy and Air Force are the two Services with global perspective, was to cooperate routinely in the global commons. Access to the global commons is vital to the country for both strategic and national security reasons, but also economic reasons, so we concluded we needed to collaborate at a different level.

AirSea Battle really came about in three dimensions. One is the institutional dimension to normalize this collaboration—make it not an episodic thing but something that is much more routine between Marines, Sailors, and Airmen at the headquarters level on down. The second dimension was at the operational level. Clearly, the antiaccess/area-denial environment is intensifying, and this is an issue again for the Services on which the country depends a great deal for power projection. So how do we at the operational level maximize our collective power projection capability in a more systematic way? We

U.S. Air Force (Charles Larkin, Sr.)



**General Schwartz speaks with Airmen about national defense and force management**

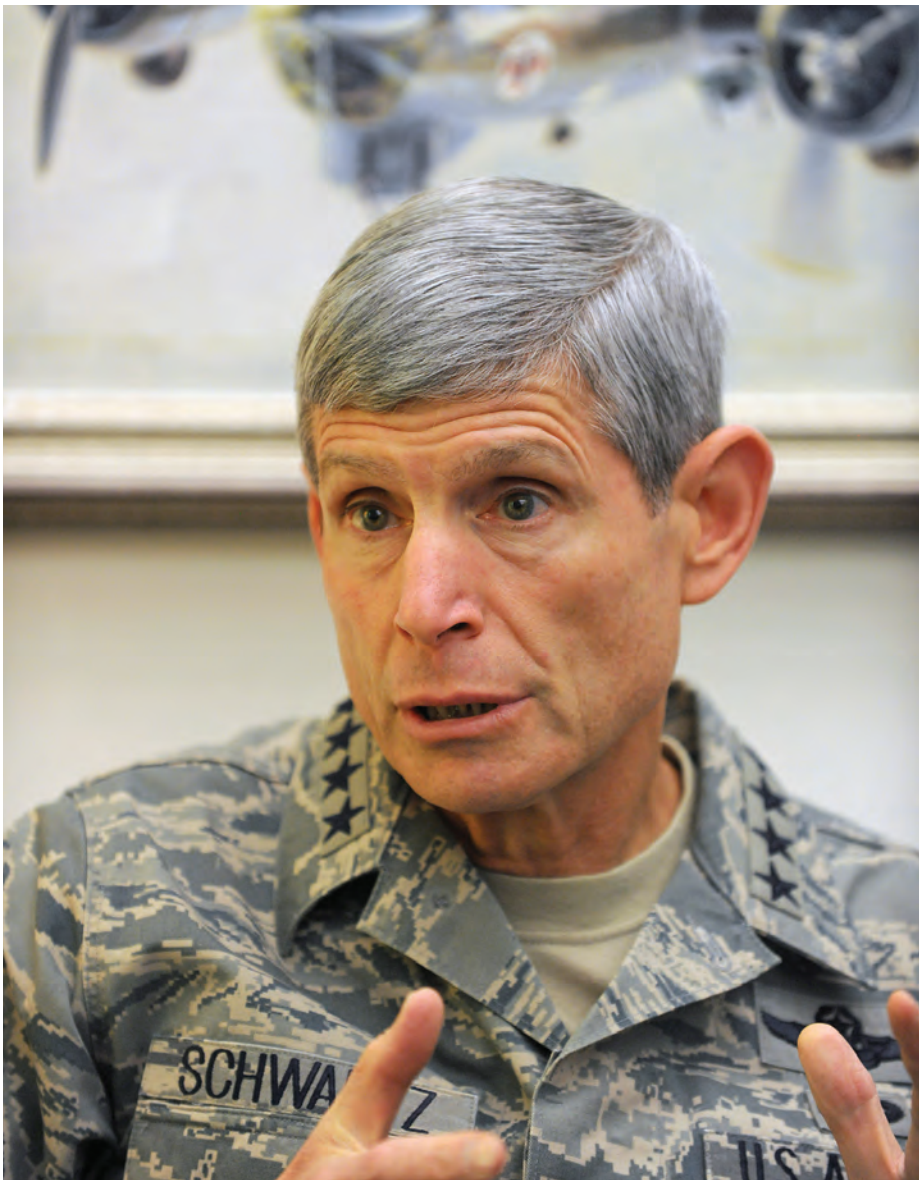
have gone about this in a manner that I think is much more thoughtful. This is not so much about new systems as it is really about how we better employ what we have at our collective disposal for maximum effect.

While this may be a bit far-fetched, here is an example that gives you an idea of what we're thinking about. There are fundamentally two stealth platforms in the DOD [Department of Defense] portfolio. Clearly, the Air Force has one of them with the B–2. Clearly, the Navy has one of them with their fleet of submarines. It's something that I quite frankly had never thought much about and that we haven't collectively given much thought to in the past: Is there a way for those two stealth capabilities in the defense portfolio to better reinforce one another? Maybe there's not, but this kind of thinking has potential to make better use of the resources we do have at our disposal and to moderate those capabilities out there that have the potential of making power projection a higher risk proposition for our country.

Finally, the third piece of how we are approaching AirSea Battle is on the acquisition side. I would argue that a good example is Global Hawk for the Air Force and the BAMS [Broad Area Maritime Surveillance] program for the Navy. We're using essentially the same platform; the only difference really is the sensor: one for an environment largely maritime-focused, and one for us largely overland-focused. But why should the Navy and Air Force have two different depots? Why should the Navy and Air Force even have different training pipelines or base such similar systems at different locations? So part of AirSea Battle is to make sure that, in those areas where we are clearly in the same space, we are making the best use of our resources—common ground stations, common training, common basing, common logistics supply chain, et cetera, to the extent possible.

None of this is rocket science, but this is a level of institutional commitment that I don't think has existed before. It will make a difference in preserving one of America's strong suits: power projection.

**JFQ:** JFQ *recently featured an article that suggested the need for better integration of cyber operations into the joint force commander's command and control. What is your assessment of the way ahead for cyber operations for the joint force?*




U.S. Air Force (Scott Ash)

**General Schwartz is interviewed at his Pentagon office**

**General Schwartz:** This is an immature area, and one in which there's still a great deal of uncertainty in terms of what our capacities are, what our legal authorities are, and how we operate in peacetime versus wartime. Cyberspace is another one of those areas where traditional geographic boundaries don't apply. There are probably still more questions than answers here, but it is absolutely clear that we depend on our cyber capabilities to orchestrate the tools of warfare and that cyber capabilities themselves have the potential of performing military missions. So this is why we now have a U.S. Cyber Command—to bring this nascent capability, for which we don't yet have an end-to-end understanding, to its full potential. That is the vision for Cyber Command.

Within the Air Force, we see this in two contexts. One, naturally, is defending our network, and that's not a trivial job. We're certainly focused on that. Second, there are places for us to apply cyber in a more offensive context, but only in support of traditional Air Force missions. For example, you could take down an air defense capability kinetically. We do that with F–16 CJs. We've done that recently in Libya. However, you might instead choose, for good reasons, to disrupt an air defense capability with electrons. It will depend on the circumstances and the commander's intent, but there is a place for that. The Air Force is focusing on things that

support traditional Air Force missions, and not anything beyond that particular role.

**JFQ:** *Having experienced lengthy and at times difficult times with Air Force acquisition of major platforms such as the F–22 and the new tanker aircraft, what lessons have you learned that can be applied to achieve more timely fielding of capabilities in the future?*

**General Schwartz:** This is not something that applies just to the Air Force, although we have had significant challenges in the area. I think there are three major pieces to this. One is that we must have requirement stability. Our discipline in this area has abated over the last 10 years. When money is plentiful, discipline on requirements tends not to be as good as we'd like. One of the things we have done is to get our arms around what the drivers of capability are, and to make sure that if there are any changes, they are approved at the appropriate level. I'm the requirements officer for the Air Force. While I'm not as expert on the breadth of the requirements as some folks who focus on this every day, in the end, it is my responsibility along with the other Service chiefs. We have worked hard to discipline the requirements side of this, and the KC–46/KC–X competition is a case in point. We didn't wiggle, and we will not going forward. We have a [specification], we signed a contract, we have a contractor, and we're going to buy the airplane that we spec'd. We're not going to change requirements, at least on the initial increment, because we can't afford to.

That brings on the second piece of this. The attribute of affordability has to have higher relevance in our acquisitions. I acknowledge that there are times when it doesn't matter what it costs. The Osama bin Laden mission is a case in point. But in acquisition, we're going to increasingly be in a situation where cost-consciousness will matter a lot. The new Long-Range Strike platform is an example, where the Secretary of Defense has said that cost will be an independent variable for this acquisition program, or it won't go. I think that probably won't be a unique circumstance going forward.

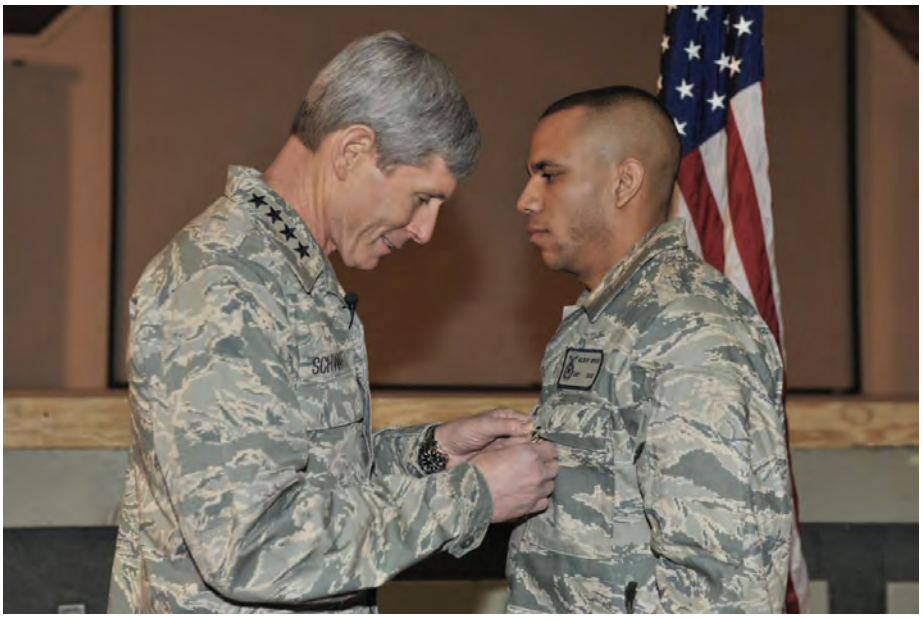
Finally, I think there will be a need for stability in program funding. This is easier said than done. However, we ask a lot of program managers, and then we sometimes change their funding streams, making it difficult to hold people accountable on both sides of this, in both government and industry. So the key things are requirements stability, resource stability, and, in between, more cost-consciousness on the part of both industry and government.

**JFQ:** *After a long period of decline marked by a number of incidents, the Air Force took steps to restore the nuclear enterprise. Can you give us a sense of where the Service's contribution to nuclear forces stands today?*

**General Schwartz:** The Air Force has two of the three legs of the triad, and it is true that we went through a period when people questioned our competence in this important mission area. So we went about repairing that by standing up Air Force Global Strike Command on the operations side and establishing the Air Force Nuclear Weapons Center for the sustainment of the nuclear enterprise. But I think apart from the organizational pieces, which were not unimportant, this is also a human capital question. Over time, for reasons that are understandable—I'm not saying justified, but understandable—the focus on the people who did this work diminished. It is very demanding work. This is an area where zero defects—perfection—is the standard. These people are under the microscope all the time. That's what the American people expect. So we're making sure that we have the right people—the critical mass of human capital—in order to do this job well.

We're ensuring we manage this pool as a key resource of our Air Force, and that those who work in this area know that this is a profoundly important mission involving the Nation's most lethal weapons and which requires a level of professionalism that leads the force in many respects. We're making sure these folks know that we as an institution value that commitment and that we will reward that commitment. That's why sustaining the nuclear enterprise is our number-one priority—we cannot back off of that. Again, I think this is a whole lot less about force structure. What it is really about is reassuring people who do this demanding work that it's worthy work, that it's valued, and that it's essential to the Nation's security.

**JFQ:** *Given the continuing pressures of the global economy and impacts of reductions in the Federal budget, can you discuss what measures you are considering in terms of reductions or restructuring of Air Force personnel, force structure, and operations, and their impact on your efforts at recapitalizing the force?*



U.S. Air Force (Shelia deVera)

**General Schwartz presents Purple Heart to security forces officer at Bagram Airfield, Afghanistan**

**General Schwartz:** There's going to be pressure, there's going to be friction, and we're going to have to make choices. We recently worked through the DOD efficiency

process to squeeze overhead and look for excess, overlaps, duplication, and so on in order to move about $33 billion from support to mission-critical activities. Now we have additional targets. The trend lines are clear. The collective view of the Service chiefs is that we are not going to allow a return to the period when the Armed Forces actually went hollow. We're not going back there. You've heard the Secretary of Defense say that we may be a smaller force, but we're going to continue to be a superb force. That is the bottom line on this, but we will probably have to get smaller.

We will not reduce manpower first, however. We tried to do that some years ago and discovered that it really didn't save that much money. We went from about 355,000 to 320,000, and it didn't save a nickel because the cost of personnel continued to escalate. We have a ceiling right now of about 332,000, and we will squeeze force structure before we squeeze manpower. There are negotiations under way both for debt ceiling considerations and future OMB [Office of Management and Budget] numbers for the DOD, and we'll see what they turn out to be. It is clear, as the Secretary of Defense stated, that Defense is not off the table, and while we can become more efficient, there are certainly ways to save on the costs of operations. I do think that reductions will be significant and will probably require us to get a bit smaller. We're prepared to make those choices. I think the key thing is that we're going to need the help of our partners in Congress. As we make adjustments, some places will lose force structure and others may gain. One hopes that it's possible for us to reach consensus with the various delegations on how to go about this.

**JFQ:** *You are a graduate of two of our joint professional military education colleges and have served more joint time than any of your peers on the Joint Staff, including the Chairman. How well did your joint education and experience prepare you for these positions, including being a member of the Joint Chiefs? With such a wealth of experience to draw on, what is your assessment of where jointness is today and to go in the future?*

**General Schwartz:** You know, it's better to be lucky than good. I have had a range of experiences, and I think that having been a prior combatant commander has made me a better Service chief. You understand the demand side of the equation. You are part of a network that the Service chiefs are not, given the division of labor in the Goldwater-Nichols Act. Being selected as Air Force chief of staff was unexpected, but it has proven to be very valuable to have migrated through the COCOM [combatant commander] ranks to become a Service chief.

Additionally, I was lucky enough to establish relationships and credibility with a range of teammates over the years, and that certainly has proven valuable and helpful to the Air Force in making the case that we're all in and that the Air Force will do whatever's necessary while people are dying in the current conflicts. There is a level of trust that I think started out in the captain years, with Doug Brown, Pete Schoomaker, Eric Olson, and lots of other people who are now doing important things for the country as well. We should all be proud of who we are and where we come from, but a reality is that as you become more senior, you have to be able to be bigger than where you came from. The joint experiences I've been fortunate enough to be exposed to have enabled me to be bigger than where I came from, and have hopefully allowed me to be an asset to the Air Force and to my fellow Service chiefs. Everything has its time, but I do think that having a broad base matters in a job like this. I was fortunate to have opportunities along the way, and to have people take chances with me.

We came to this job unexpectedly, of course, but having that larger network of folks has benefits, and it sure made it easier when we joined the Joint Chiefs in 2008. My wife Suzie and I have been longtime friends with George and Sheila Casey, as well as with Jim and Annette Conway. Gary Roughead and I had the opportunity in the past to work with one another. These relationships go back decades, and that is not trivial. I think it's something that strengthens our Armed Forces and is a reason for staying the course in this area. If we think back to the late 1990s, we are light years better than in those days. You can see the difference; this is roughly 30 years of joint business, and it has made a huge difference. It does not mean that the Services aren't vital—they clearly are—but it also has created a generation of military leaders who are bigger than where they came from. **JFQ**