

This transcript is made possible through the sponsorship of JobsOhio.

Announcer:

Ladies and gentlemen, please welcome the 19th Air Force Commander, Major General Phillip Stewart. General Stewart served previously as the Deputy Chief of Staff of Strategic Employment at Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe.

Maj. Gen. Phillip Stewart:

Good morning. I would like to warmly welcome you to the first Air, Space, Cyber Warfare Symposium Panel of AFA 2022. And what a panel it is. We open this symposium with a topic pulled directly from the headlines of every newspaper, policy document and think tank article in America and one which goes straight to the heart of America's national security. Today's panel is titled Countering Russian Aggression. And to lead this discussion, we've assembled some of the greatest warriors the US Air Force and NATO have to offer and whom I will introduce you to momentarily. To begin with, I'm Phillip Stewart and I'm the commander of 19th Air Force and extremely honored to serve as your panel moderator.

Now you might be asking, why is the 19th Air Force commander moderating a panel on countering Russian aggression? And that's a fantastic question. The short answer is, I've been the 19th Air Force commander for about a month. But before that and when this panel was assembled, I was SHAPE's Deputy Chief of Staff for Strategic Employment. SHAPE, which is the military branch of NATO, combines operations, the three, ISR, the two, nuclear operations, the 10, and cyber into a single directorate so that SACEUR has one single person to coordinate effects, the Deputy Chief of Staff for Strategic Employment. And of note, other than SACEUR, whom we just recognized and is sitting in the front row there grading our homework right now, General Walters and I were the only US generals stationed on the SHAPE staff at the time of this crisis. Now for context, when those in the front row there were all lieutenants 30 years ago we had seven American GOs on the SHAPE staff and another 17 scheduled throughout the NATO alliance. But since then we've divested all of those geo billets, probably the CENTCOM branch.

So if we're going to get serious about countering Russia, and I believe when you hear the leaders in the room on the stage present their views, you'll agree with me that that's a good idea, a great place to start will be by deliberately placing strategic Airmen in the SHAPE headquarters. Of note, General Walters and I were replaced by really fantastic army generals who will do great things for the alliance. But there are currently no Air Force generals in the military headquarters or the greatest alliance the world's ever known, NATO. NATO is also the most powerful alliance the world has ever known and it's the sole protector of the Westphalian order, which rose post World War II, and whose hallmarks are democracy, liberty, respect for human rights and women's rights, state sovereignty and the rules based international world order. Over 1 billion people, freedom loving people, reside, and one third of the world's military and industrial might, live in peace and prosperity under the NATO umbrella.

But that peace is now threatened by aggression not seen in over 75 years, Russian aggression. Joining me this morning are three of the Air Force's most renowned warriors, all of whom have faced and fought Russian aggression and are here to share their wisdom with us. Together they represent the full spectrum of US and alliance capability with in depth knowledge of the current Russia- Ukraine conflict. Please welcome my guests, the commander of US Air Forces in Europe, USAFE, and the Commander of NATO Air Command, General James Hecker. The Commander of Air Force Special Operations Command, Lieutenant General Jim Slife. The Commander 9th Air Force and the CENTCOM CFACC, Lieutenant General Alex Grynkewich.

General Hecker, please set the stage for us as we start at the strategic level and then work downwards. Now, you're the most senior US Airman in NATO, so let's talk about NATO unity. Putin had three main goals. One, divide the alliance, two, isolate Ukraine from assistance primarily through economic blackmail and intimidation of neighbors, and three, execute a rapid war. To counter that, General Walters, as SACEUR, set three strategic objectives of his own. One, maintain alliance unity, two, support Ukraine, and three, don't get NATO into a shooting war with Russia. So why was NATO able to obtain its objectives of maintaining unity while Russia was not able to divide the alliance, sir?

Gen James B. "Scorch" Hecker, USAFE:

Well, thanks, General Stewart, and thanks to AFA for providing the three of us the opportunity to be able to speak to you today on this subject. That's a great question. A lot of people didn't know how this war was going to go when it started out. A lot of people thought it was going to finish early. But we had some good successes and he was not able to divide NATO. And the big question is, why was he not able to divide NATO and get other countries to question, "Should we be involved in this war at all?" And here's what we did. We got into the information space and we went aggressive. We did things that we have not done before. We took classified information that we had and instead of keeping it to ourselves, we actually put it out there. We knew that Russia was planning to go to war and it just wasn't a buildup, it just wasn't an exercise. We knew that they were going to invade Ukraine.

We also knew that they were going to try to set it up and make it look like Ukraine attacked them and hence they attacked Ukraine so it wasn't their fault. Normally, we would've kept that to ourselves. But instead of doing that, we went public before Russia actually invaded Ukraine and said, "Hey, here's what they plan on doing. They're going to say that Ukraine attacked them. They're going to put some dead bodies around. They're going to film it and they're going to say they just did this in self-defense." So when the Russians did that a couple days later, we all knew that it was just a made up story because we came and we were offensive and we were proactive in telling that that's what they were going to do. So when they did it, NATO knew it was going to happen. And quite honestly, the rest of the world knew it was going to happen and they didn't believe it, for most of countries.

And matter of fact, it really worked to Putin's disadvantage because it really brought NATO together. It also got other nations who were on the fence that they wanted to join NATO. Now, we've got... You saw the video earlier here with our good friends from Sweden and Finland and they're going to be joining NATO and that's going to be very powerful. When you look at Finland bringing 64 F35s, you look at Sweden who's going to get 60 Griffon EFs and then you look at the geography of where they're at, that is a huge plus for NATO as far as geography as well as what they bring in the air as far as firepower goes.

Now, he also wanted to make sure that we couldn't support Ukraine as far as giving them different things. And we've seen that that has not worked for them at all. We've been able to give them a lot of weapon systems, whether that was surface to air missiles, whether that's GMLRS, whether that's, you name the different things, 155 that we've given them, that have really enabled them to not only have a five day war or 10 day war that a lot of us thought that it would be and the Russians would be able to move forward, but allowed them, here we are 200 days later, to go from giving up some of their country to a stalemate, now to a counter offensive, which are going back now.

Who knows how this thing is going to end? But with the support of our NATO nations and everything that we've given them, they've been able to halt it and now actually go on a counter offensive. So I think what we did, and my predecessors with General Harrigan and General Walters, what they did as far as making sure that we are united at NATO, united as a country and the world, I think was a huge success that we haven't been good at in the past. So that was very good.

Maj. Gen. Phillip Stewart:

And how often do we always fault either our strategic communications or our intel for not giving us accurate information? But in this case it was probably the greatest thing they did, right? We had all the intel, as you said. We shared it and we were open kimono with all of our allies. In fact, some of the intel was very exquisite in that regard. So kudos to those two communities, Intel and PA, for getting that right. General Slife, General Hecker talked about the importance of maintaining alliance unity. But there was also the importance of maintaining unity inside our own US and also across the domains as well in the inter agency level. As the Air Force's premier expert on Special Operations, can you point to the unique role SOF played, or Special Forces played, in this regard? And for that matter, comment on the role played as a global integrator, which has not always been SOF's role, especially over the last 20 years?

Lt. Gen. James C. "Jim" Slife, AFSOC Commander:

Yeah, thanks. So as the Special Operations Forces reflect on what we have learned in the last 20 years of counter VEO operations, counterinsurgencies and so forth, I think there are a number of lessons that we can learn, best practices, things that we did particularly well, that have applicability to different contexts. There are probably also some things that we need to not count on in the future. One of the things that I think SOF has done particularly well over the last 20 years is recognizing that to get anything done, you really need the support, not only within the DOD with our other services and other components, but also across our government, across the intelligence community and with our allies and partners. And so SOF has built a pretty impressive network of relationships with partners, with embassy, with country teams, with other departments in the executive branch across the intelligence community.

That network of relationships has applicability far beyond the counter VEO fight. So that's something that I think SOF has been able to leverage pretty well over the last eight years of engaging with the Ukrainian Armed Forces, training them, empowering their non-commissioned officer corps. I think SOF has done this particularly well. One of the lessons that we probably ought not learn from the last 20 years is I think historically the role of Special Operations has been to provide key enabling capabilities that allowed the broader joint force to be successful. And over the last 20 years, in many ways SOF has become the supported element in the counter VEO campaigns around the globe and I don't think that will persist in the future. I think SOF has to think of itself in terms of the broader joint force and what can we do to provide those capabilities that might not be resident elsewhere?

And so for example, in our European forces in the Special Operations Command, part of what I've told them that they need to do is they need to get closely linked up with General Hecker as the air component commander and think about creative ways that SOF can enable the air component to be successful going forward. So I think there is a lot to be learned, but foremost among those is the importance of those relationships and partnerships not only within the US military but across the government and with our partners.

Maj. Gen. Phillip Stewart:

Yes, sir. Great insight on that role. Lieutenant General Grynkewich, as an expert in CENTCOM AOR, how do you think Russia's experiences in Ukraine will impact their posture across the world, specifically in relation to China, North Korea and in your own backyard, in the Middle East, writ large with Iran? Do you think they'll be more aggressive now? Do you think they'll be more passive, talking about Russia? And in that vein, what can we glean about the global nature of regional conflicts? Are they really regional anymore or do they have impacts across?

Lt. Gen. Alex Grynkewich, Commander 9th Air Force:

Yeah, thanks, Weeble. A great question and actually you ended where I wanted to start. Many of you may be wondering why the AFCENT Commander is sitting here on a panel on Russia. And it's because strategic competition is not constrained by somewhat arbitrary boundaries that we place on a map at the combatant command lines. And so General Hecker and I talk often, a couple of times a week, about Russian activity in Syria and what's happening in Ukraine is affecting things in AFCENT and how things in AFCENT might be impacting what's going on in Ukraine. The Russian presence in Syria has become, I would argue, more aggressive since the Ukrainian invasion. And I think that's driven by a couple of things. It's driven by some of the personalities of the Russian leadership that is in Syria right now. Some of those Russian general officers, frankly, failed in Ukraine for all the reasons the General Hecker outlined up front. And now they're in Syria and my assessment is they're trying to make a name for themselves again and regain a favorable standing within the Russian Federation armed forces.

I don't think they'll succeed, but that's what they're trying to do. So we've seen increased pressure both in the air and on the ground from the Russians. And frankly, it's a bit concerning where we have forces on the ground and armed Russian aircraft that fly over them. Your Airmen and Guardians are in close contact with those Russians every single day, intercepting them, escorting them, and making sure our forces on the ground remain safe in Syria and Iraq as they continue to fight against ISIS. I also just want to quickly comment on something General Slife said that I think is really important. He was talking about the relationships that the SOF community brings to the broader enterprise.

And right now, we have a deputy combined forces air component commander, a deputy CFAC, for the first time in US Central Command's history that is a special operator. It's Major General Dave Harris. And sir, I would just say having a SOF operator with that perspective, who has those relationships and that network has been incredibly valuable to us in AFCENT. And I think it could be something that's valuable to the rest of the Air Force as we capture that unique expertise of our SOF operators who've operated in that joint and inter agency environment really since they were company grade officers. So I just wanted to highlight that, sir. Thanks.

Maj. Gen. Phillip Stewart:

Yeah, and that's a great answer on the regional conflict piece. We've argued about this a lot, especially in some of our larger war games, as to what extent a fight with Russia in EUCOM, really a fight with Russia, and when do you get the other dot coms involved as well? The geographic and the regional and all of the above because it's just so important that we get that right and who's threatened and who's not. Gentlemen, if you would let me, can we pivot out of the strategic level and back down to the operational level of warfare? And General Hecker, sir, I'd like to start with you. Russia appears never really to have seriously attempted to achieve air superiority or suppression of enemy air defenses, or SEAD as we know it. And this goes against all US doctrine. Any idea why this was the case? And would you assess it as a mistake or just perhaps a deliberate way to employ our air power different than our conception of air power? And also what do you think China would make of that decision?

Gen James B. "Scorch" Hecker, USAFE:

Yeah, air superiority is, as Weeble mentioned, is something that we really value in the United States across NATO and really the western world. And we know how important it was, it is, to get. And we've had it for a long time. Really, if you look at the last time that one of our soldiers was killed by an enemy aircraft, that was April 15th, 1953 in the Korean War. So we've had air superiority for quite a while. Over the last 20, some can argue 30, years it's mainly been uncontested and we've pretty much just had it. So we've got to make sure that we have air superiority and here's why. Think if the Ukrainians were able to

get air superiority at the beginning of the war. Everyone remembers the 25 mile long armor tanks, et cetera, north of Kyiv. If they had air superiority, all of that would have been destroyed.

You talk about what we did in the Kuwait War 30 years ago, same thing would have happened with them. If Russia would have had air superiority, we wouldn't have been able to resupply Ukraine. All the stuff that we were giving them as far as HARMs, as far as HIMARs and those kind of things, they would have been interdicted as soon as they got into country and would've never reached the Ukrainian soldiers. So you can kind of see how important air superiority is. And if you don't have it, then the aircraft back off from one another and you end up basically with what you're seeing today, mainly a land war with 155 artillery and HIMARs going back and forth, schools getting destroyed, malls getting destroyed and casualty rates that just blow away what we had in 20 years in Afghanistan, were blown away within the first month of the war.

That's what you get if you don't have air superiority. And we as western countries won't stand for that. We won't stand for those casualty rates. So we need to make sure, as we move forward, that we're able to gain and maintain air superiority. And that's why things like the operational imperative that Secretary Kendall has of the NGAD, that we need to make sure that that gets through so we don't end up in a war like this, which is almost back in the World War I days, trench warfare where we have severe casualties, as we move on. Now, why were neither one of them able to get air superiority? It's primarily because of the integrated air and defense systems that both Ukraine and Russia have. Ukraine got it from Russia a long time ago. Russia knew exactly what they were up against and yet when they tried to take their fighters and their aircraft inside those missile engagement zones, they were shot down. Roughly about 55 Russian fighters have been shot down by the integrated air and missile defense of the Ukraine.

Likewise, Ukraine, when they went across to try to go into Russian occupied territory in Ukraine, they were shot down as well. So what happened is they kind of now stay away from one another and it ends up being a ground war like I talked about. But I think it really shows the importance. Now, these IADs are very hard to get through. We would have a very difficult time, we in NATO, to take down these IADs. But it's something that we have to master, something that we have to be able to do so that we can make sure that we don't have our soldiers and our Marines die from enemy aircraft. And we've been able to do that for a long time and we need to make sure that we continue that.

So a lot of times you'll hear in the press on some of the lessons learned about this war is, "Oh, we need to bolster our army. We need more weapons. We need more artillery," and those kind of things. And to the extent a lot of that's true. But you can't forget the fact that if you had air superiority, a lot of this war that you're seeing right now wouldn't be happening.

Maj. Gen. Phillip Stewart:

Yeah, it's been fascinating to watch, right? It's been almost 50 years since two modern air forces collided with modern IADs as well. And what does that mean to our doctrine? And as General Slife wisely said, it's not just the lessons learned, but the lessons not learned or the lessons you would unlearn if you could. And I know General Tullos is in the room, so there's probably some good SAS papers to be written here over the next year as this progresses. Because we would be foolish not to learn these lessons and to blindly follow our own doctrine across the cliff. So I really do appreciate those insights. And General Slife, I'm going to pull on that thread you talked about with leveraging partners such as Ukraine. Because we always thought when we countered Russia it would be a superpower countering Russia. And of course Ukraine is not a NATO partner. Or not in NATO, they're a NATO partner nation of course. So now using building partnership capacity to counter Russia using a partner at the operational level of war poses some challenges.

For instance, Ukraine has no bombers or really even long range strike capability. So your SOF warriors had to find an innovative way to advise and assist and actually train during combat to help them with their long range fires. At the unclassified level, can you share with the audience how your team accomplished some of this in the efforts currently going under way, sir?

Lt. Gen. James C. "Jim" Slife, AFSOC Commander:

Yeah, I thought in the Chief's opening comments this morning, it was really interesting when he was talking about innovation. And it strikes me that as Airmen sometimes we run the risk of being affixed by our prefixes. We get affixed by our prefixes. So what do we do with C airplanes? Well, we carry cargo. What do we do with B airplanes? We drop bombs. We define airplanes by their prefixes. And the reality is they're all just airplanes and they all have different attributes. Some fly fast, some fly slow, some fly high, some fly low, some are visible, some are invisible, some have crews, some don't. They all have different attributes. And so the question that we have kind of been thinking our way through at AFSOC is how do we use what we have in different ways that is perhaps a little unconstrained by the way we historically think about the use of air power?

And so last December we demonstrated a capability with our partners at the Air Force Research Lab to use a C-130 as a long range precision fires platform. We launched a JASSM long range cruise missile out of the back of a C-130. It flew 600 miles or so over the Gulf of Mexico and destroyed a target out there. A C-130 can carry 12 of these, and that's the same payload that a B-52 carries. But when you can do that off a 3000 foot straight stretch of road or a dirt strip, it complicates the adversary's targeting problems which I think contributes to deterrence. If you feel this capability at scale, a C-17 could carry 36 JASSM class munitions. And so that's a real, I think, game changer when it talks about volume of fire and how do we service the targets that General Hecker might need to service in a kinetic fight.

But more importantly than that, it opens up opportunities for our partners. Many of our partners don't have the types of airplanes that we historically think about as long range precision fires platforms, but many of them have cargo airplanes. And this capability that we demonstrated requires no aircraft modification, requires no air crew training beyond that which they already do as a matter of course. And so when you can export this capability to our partners, it makes them a much more lethal force that can integrate with us. We've done an exercise in Europe in the spring. We'll be doing another one in the fall alongside our partners at USAFE and some of our NATO allies. And I think this is just an example of the type of innovation that, left to their own devices, Airmen can figure these things out and bring a lot of power to bear.

Maj. Gen. Phillip Stewart:

That's fascinating too. Of course we're not the only nation that's doing this, all 30 NATO nations, but there's also beyond, there's other nations outside the alliance. So were you able to leverage your relationships inside the Special Forces community to kind of herd these cats? Is there deconfliction going on with that, sir?

Lt. Gen. James C. "Jim" Slife, AFSOC Commander:

Absolutely. The Operational Special Operations component inside of UCOMM is Special Operations Command Europe. And as soon as we demonstrated this capability, it was Special Operations Command Europe that really wanted to employ this capability alongside our partners at the first opportunity.

Maj. Gen. Phillip Stewart:

Yeah, great. Thank you, sir. And General Grynkewich, staying at the operational level just a little longer, it's become clear that Russia simply is not capable of executing command and control and employing joint fires, at least the way we conceive of it, and the joint scale operations across domains. As a Majcom CFAC and the Air Force expert on command and control, were you surprised by this lack of C2 ability and capability and do you think there are leadership lessons there? And also what's the implication for JADC2 as a concept?

Lt. Gen. Alex Grynkewich, Commander 9th Air Force:

Yeah, really good question, Weeble. So I think I was a little surprised at the Russian inability to execute what we would really view as a joint campaign. And if you look at the Russian schema maneuver, I would argue it's probably somewhat informed by their experience in Syria where they did not fight as a joint force and they took the wrong lessons from the last war. And that's the danger all of a face every time. But there was no overall commander in Russia. There was no integration between an air campaign, if you would, in the way that Airmen think of it and ground maneuver. And there was no exercise of mission command, which as the Chief mentioned this morning, is one of the key tenets that enables our Airmen to innovate and act at speed and scale very rapidly. So I think some of it is a fact that they took away the wrong lessons. I think some of it is driven by the Russian system of autocracy and we see that manifest fairly regularly.

I also just want to go back very quickly to something General Hecker was talking about, and that's the importance of air superiority. And what I would do is contrast the situation in Ukraine that he described with the last time that we had lethal contact between US forces and Russians, which was in Syria a couple of years ago. In that engagement, we were enabled by SOF forces, both in the air and on the ground. We had air superiority and the Russian offensive, led primarily by a private military contractor, was wholly unsuccessful and several hundred Russians died in the assault and were obliterated. It was the United States' ability to integrate joint fires across artillery from Army units on the ground and from aircraft in the air, whether conventional United States Air Force or Special Operations aircraft, that were firing on those Russian positions, that ended that engagement almost before it started. That's the value of our superiority, in my mind. And it would be a very different conflict, I would predict, as General Hecker said, if the Russians had taken the lessons of that engagement in particular and brought them forward.

Maj. Gen. Phillip Stewart:

Yeah, and I think the other piece of command and control that we want to address is the command and control of our NCO corps, right? And we forget sometimes that that is the thing that separates us from the authoritarian regimes that are out there is we invest in a very strong NCO corps and junior leadership. And we push leadership down and we push decision making down. So when it came to command and control, when we were able to take out the Russian nodes, they were inactive. They were not able to function. But one of the things that the Ukrainians, who have done a lot of training with us, were able to do is they are empowered and they have that. And so I don't think we should ever lose sight of the fact that the democracies of the world, not just in NATO but across, and the empowering of people and building an NCO corps and building a corps of junior leaders who can take mission type orders and carry on, even in a command and control denied environment, is something we should not lose sight of because authoritarian governments just can't do that.

Lt. Gen. Alex Grynkewich, Commander 9th Air Force:

And Weeble, if I extend the analogy or the comparison back to that engagement that I'm referring to, that was not something that was centrally managed by a brain in the air operation center. That was Airmen on the ground and in the air making tactical decisions and meeting the CFAC's intent, which was to stop the Russian assault on our forces in southern Syria. That's the only order that had to be given and they carried it out magnificently.

Lt. Gen. James C. "Jim" Slife, AFSOC Commander:

Yeah, it was a tech sergeant on the ground that was coordinating those fires. There is no other military on the planet that empowers mid grade NCOs with that kind of authority.

Gen James B. "Scorch" Hecker, USAFE:

Yeah, we often, when we talk about the United States enlisted corps, NCO corps, they're our asymmetric advantage. And they are, they're the best that the world has to offer. But let me tell you, the Ukrainians are pretty darn good too. I had an opportunity to go watch them train and learn how to operate HIMARs. And these were enlisted folks, been in three to seven years. They've been working artillery in the Ukraine and now they come up to a totally new system, mechanized mobile computers. And in about three weeks we teach them how to use it. And they're motivated. And when you talk to them, they are innovative, big time. And when I was at a chance to talk to them, I go, "Hey, how's it going to go? Are you nervous about going back?" And they're, "No, we're not nervous at all. We know exactly what we're fighting for. We're fighting for our nation." He goes, "Russia, they have no idea what they're fighting for." And that's the difference between our NCOs, Ukraine's NCOs, western's NCOs and a country like Russia.

Lt. Gen. James C. "Jim" Slife, AFSOC Commander:

Eight years ago, after the Ukrainians lost the Crimea and lost some territory in the Donbas, one of the most consequential decisions that the Ukrainian military made was they wanted to professionalize their NCO corps. And they implemented things that for us are just a matter of course. Things like professional military education along the way for your NCOs, empowerment, authority and responsibility pushed down to lower levels. Those were the things that for the last eight years we have quietly been working with the Ukrainian military on and I think it has made all the difference. I completely agree with you, General Hecker.

Maj. Gen. Phillip Stewart:

No, yeah, you're exactly right about that, sir. That's one of the reasons why the jamming wasn't as bad as we thought it was going to be. Because of course jamming works both ways. And I won't say our forces, but the Ukrainians in particular were able to operate when both sides were blind better so we couldn't lose sight of that. And I think that's exactly what Chief Brown was getting at when he talks about, "We've done this before," right? In innovation and empowering Airmen, we're seeing the power of that in action right now. General Slife, if I could stay with you. What lessons learned from the 20 years in the counter violent extremist organizations did we apply to this war? Positive and negatives, and were we prepared frankly for what we saw and what we're seeing now in the role again of SOF and supporting as opposed to the supported role? I know you touched on that internally in your earlier answer, but if you don't mind, I'd like to pull on that thread just a little bit more, sir.

Lt. Gen. James C. "Jim" Slife, AFSOC Commander:

Yeah, I think I've hit on several of the key things that we learned was the value of integration across not just the military but the executive branch. Country teams, the inter agency, the intelligence community, those types of things, I think that that's an enduring lesson learned. I think we have learned about the value of partner engagement. I talked a little bit about what we've been doing in Ukraine for the last eight years. I think that that makes a difference. The other thing that I think we saw the beginnings of the outline emerge over the course of the last 20 years is if you rewind the clock to 20 years ago, I don't think many among us would have envisioned the emergence of space and cyber and information operations as war fighting domains. I don't think we appreciated that 20 years ago. But when you look at the reality of 2022, it is absolutely clear that those are consequential domains of operation.

And so the question becomes when we talk about integrated by design, how do we integrate those things into our day to day operations at the outset and not as bolt ons later on? And so when you look at some of the forced design work that we're going through inside of ASOC to enable us to be more effective in the theaters as we support the broader joint force, we are looking at tactical units of action that integrate all those things, space, cyber information, intelligence and SOF. Those five ingredients I think make for a powerful combination that will be transformational in the future.

Maj. Gen. Phillip Stewart:

Yeah, it really is interesting when you put it that way because it's all based on human spirit and training, right? The human weapon system. And we've talked about this a couple times, all three of you have. So you can buy all the B-21s ones you want are all the joint strike fighters, but if you don't invest in your people, provide the quality training and that growth development in which the Chief talked about, they don't fly themselves, they don't fight themselves, it's that integration level that really is fascinating. And it's been a joy to watch the Ukrainians, under the leadership of your SOF warriors and other nations, kind of unite. Our nation figured out about two centuries ago that a bunch of angry farmers fighting for their nation is a pretty powerful fighting force. They just need to be led and pointed in the direction. And your team is doing that, sir. And it's been amazing to watch.

Lt. Gen. James C. "Jim" Slife, AFSOC Commander:

I think if I could just follow up, one of the things that I think will be critical to us as an Air Force going forward is that we need to have some fundamental design principles as we think about how we organize ourselves for this operating environment. It's not even the future operating environment, it's the current operating environment. And I would suggest that some of what we have learned over the last 20 years would point us towards three design principles that we ought to be thinking about. And so the Chief talked about force generation, Wing A staff, some of those things. I think there are three things that need to be embedded into all that. The first one is decentralization. For reasons that made all the sense in the world at the time, we have heavily centralized across the Air Force over the last 30 years since the end of the Cold War. And I think now is probably a time for some decentralization.

Number two, empowerment. We see the impact that empowered mid grade NCOs and company grade officers can have if they're empowered. The Chief talked about mission command. That's a key component of mission command is empowerment and trust down the chain of command. And so I think that has to be a design principle. And number three, we have to organize ourselves around missions and not around functions. We have to organize ourselves around missions and not around functions. And our most effective organizations, the organizations that have the greatest esprit d'corps, are the ones that have a clear sense of mission and not simply a function that they perform in some larger nebulous mission that's integrated elsewhere. So the more we can push that down inside the Air Force, I think the more effective we'll be.

Maj. Gen. Phillip Stewart:

Perfect. Thank you, sir. We have a few moments left. Lieutenant General Grynkewich, your final thoughts for the audience?

Lt. Gen. Alex Grynkewich, Commander 9th Air Force:

I guess a couple of things. I'll go back to the strategic level for a minute and just the Secretary talked about the pacing threat being China. And I think while this is a panel on Russia, I'd like to take the opportunity to just note that, again, strategic competition doesn't confine itself to the combatant command boundary. I would think that General Hecker is just as concerned about Chinese influence and what the Chinese are doing in Europe and Africa as I am about what they're doing in central command and does General Slife is thinking about globally. And so this is an opportunity I think as we think about this Russian problem, which is a global problem, where we're thinking about managing escalation in multiple theaters to take some real key lessons for our Air Force about exactly how we think about a global problem like China as a rising and revisionist power.

At the operational level, I'd highlight the importance of changing our paradigm in two ways. The first is integrated by design. Their operations center in Al Udeid, which many of you have likely served in, has been a great example of that over the years where we have so many allied and partner nations who are integrated there upfront. So we've done well in that regard. You flip it over though and you talk about mission command, and I know that there's many who have flown in particular in the AOR who are likely frustrated by the CFAC being the thousand mile screwdriver or 2000 mile screwdriver that's micromanaging your tactical decisions.

Those are things that we're working on in AFCENT and experimenting with as we execute agile combat employment, as we have our air expeditionary wing commanders run cluster bases to try to provide the Air Force with the experience that we can from being in a theater that's in contact with an enemy every single day, generating combat power every single day, using an A staff using agile combat employment and thinking about how we apply mission command. So again, it's a global problem and we need to think about it globally, both at the operational and the strategic level.

Maj. Gen. Phillip Stewart:

Thank you, sir. General Slife, your closing comments?

Lt. Gen. James C. "Jim" Slife, AFSOC Commander:

I would just say that one of the things that we're talking about quite a bit in inside of AFSOC these days is that the first part of AFSOC is AF. We are the Air Force's Special Operations Command. We've spent the last 20 years serving as the Air Force component to SOCOM, necessarily so. But I think really our value proposition for the next 20 years is to be the SOF component of the United States Air Force. And so this really underpins a lot of our thinking. And I'm just pleased to have the opportunity to be up on stage with other Airmen talking about these things. Thanks.

Maj. Gen. Phillip Stewart:

Yes, sir. Thank you. General Hecker, sir, you get the final word.

Gen James B. "Scorch" Hecker, USAFE:

Well, thanks. Our last two national defense strategies through the last two administrations has really emphasized allies and partners. And it couldn't be more important now. As we take our fighter force

when I came in and it's less than half of what it was when I came in. Bomber force is less than a third, two thirds less, than when I came in. We really need our allies and partners to do things like gain and maintain air superiority. And if we take the lead like we did here with the Ukraine, if we will give up some secrets, they will follow. And what we've seen is we've had three additional countries order F35s since the invasion February 24th of '22. Right now, we have 120 F35s in NATO. By 2034, we're supposed to have around 600. And we need every one of them and we need to be interoperable and we need to work with them to make sure that we can take out the IADs and gain air superiority on day one should Russia decide to expand this war.

And it's more important now than it ever has been. So that's what we want all, when we go through and we talk to industry and we do these things, that's something that we need you guys to help us out with. Help us out with our allies and partners in giving them the things they do, integration in advance, like we talked about before, so they're buying the right things. Thank you very much.

Maj. Gen. Phillip Stewart:

Great words, sir. Thank you. And team, thank you for your leadership, your sacrifice, and this inspiring conversation and for joining us here today at AFA's first Air and Space and Cyber Warfare Symposium. And for our audience, thank you for joining us for this panel on countering Russian aggression. We hope you have an amazing rest of your day and a fantastic and incredible AFA. Thank you.

