

## Donley: Tough decisions ahead for Air Force

*Michael Hoffman - Staff writer, Air Force Times, Posted : Tuesday Sep 15, 2009 12:45:52 EDT*

Air Force Secretary Michael Donley on Monday asked airmen and the defense industry for their support as he and Chief of Staff Gen. Norton Schwartz lead the service through a massive transition.

“As our Air Force is in transition, we must be bold and embrace change. It is one of our great strengths. Our Air Force is born of innovation, our airmen are innately adaptable. We have been challenged many times in our history; this is yet another opportunity that we will take on together,” he said in his State of the Force speech at the Air Force Association’s Air & Space Conference 2009.

The Air Force is becoming a force flush with unmanned aerial vehicles and fewer F-22 fighters. It’s a future much different than the one former Air Force Secretary Whit Peters envisioned in 2000 when he led a team that wrote Air Force Vision 2020, a report that predicted what the force would look like in 2020.

Donley used the report to illustrate how expectations have changed and how his service leadership must accept the changing international security climate and technological advances.

“No, my friends, we are not building the Air Force we thought we would build 10 years ago,” he said.

“Vision 2020” predicted the service would field 1,600 fifth-generation fighters, retire all of its fourth-generation fighters and operate more than 80 space platforms. Donley said the service now expects to build 1,000 fifth-generation fighters, still fly 1,400 fourth-generation fighters and operate just 40 space platforms by 2020. The service also didn’t foresee the growth in special operations and personal recovery, or the major demand for unmanned aerial systems, he said.

The 9/11 attacks fueled the changes.

Donley told airmen and defense industry officials to expect more upgrades in areas such as UAV sensor technology and airlift, rather than investments in fifth-generation fighters or long-range bombers.

“Over the last 10 years, our spending on combat forces — like ICBMs, bombers, fighters, and munitions, for example — has decreased from roughly 29 percent to 22 percent of our budget,” Donley said. “That 7 percent has been absorbed into joint force enablers: airlift, air refueling, C2ISR, space, and intelligence, to name a few.”

Donley and Schwartz must transform the Air Force as budgets get smaller and operational costs grow. The service’s aircraft inventory dropped by 10 percent while operational costs grew by 19 percent compared to 2000, Donley said. Similarly, the Air Force has 7 percent fewer airmen but personnel costs grew 16 percent, he said.

“These rising costs show no signs of abating, and other costs show dramatic increases, to include projections of defense health costs potentially doubling in the next 10 years, if we don’t do anything about it,” Donley said.

Donley said these conditions forced him and Schwartz to stop production of the F-22 at 187 aircraft and prematurely retire 250 fighters. Donley answered critics that include top Air Force officers who said cutting the F-22 put the nation’s security at risk.

“We’re not in a situation where we can adapt to changing requirements by adding people and money,” he said “Instead, we have to make trades — painful trades — within our existing functions and resources. Our perception of risk will change. In some functional areas, doing less may reflect a smaller requirement rather than increasing risk.”

The secretary said more tough decisions will come over the next couple years but asked the airmen and industry officials to work with Air Force leadership, not against it.

“The strategic environment, new technologies, and a full cycle of resource changes, up, down and flat, have brought us to a different place; they compel us in new directions. ... Shaping these new directions will not always be easy, but — consistent with our heritage — these new directions will always seek to move us forward,” Donley said.