



Lt. Gen. Bruce "Orville" Wright (Ret.):

Welcome to Air & Space Warfighters in Action. I'm Orville Wright, President & CEO of your Air & Space Forces Association, and it really is a pleasure to be here in person with all of you, many old friends and to have so many more online. We're counting about 500, we think. Our guest today is Lieutenant General Alexis "Grynych" Grynkeiwich, commander of US Air Force's Central. Grynych is also dual-hatted as the Combined Forces Air Component Commander for US Central Command. And he is responsible for developing contingency plans and for leading air operations across a 21 nation AOR, including a lot of time in Al Udeid Air Base in Qatar, where the newly established Task Force 99, and you'll talk more about that, is working hard to improve Air force innovation on the front lines. Grynych has also commanded a number of operational test units, including flying both F16s and F22s. And so, it's fitting today that he's with us on what would've been the hundredth birthday of perhaps the greatest test pilot of all time, Chuck Yeager.

General Yeager, of course, was the first person in history to break the sound barrier in flight. And today, on behalf of all our sponsors and friends and partners, a great opportunity to remember General Yeager's contributions to our Air Force. And I also want to give special thanks to our sponsors who are listed on the screens flanking the stage. It's their support that makes Warfighters in Action possible. So, with that Grynych, welcome. It's a treat to be here. Incredible career. And so, let's start off talking about your current job. You've done multiple tours in the central command area of responsibility over the course of your career. How has the region evolved?

Lt. Gen. Alexis Grynkeiwich:

Well, first, let me just say thanks to all of you for being here today. And sir, thanks for the invitation to be here with you and just mentioning Chuck Yeager. I'm pretty sure one of the 500 people that has signed up for this is probably my mother, who's still to this day will buy me Beemans gum every Christmas and give me a pack of that from having watched the right stuff as a kid and growing up and being part of the reason I end up joining the United States Air Force. So, thanks, mom.

So, the region has changed a lot. My first deployments to the central command area of responsibility were back during WW Southern watch, if you will, operating out of Kuwait. I tell the Kuwaitis when I see them that their country still has a special place in my heart. It's one of the first places I went to in the Middle East. And of course, back then Saddam Hussein was still in charge in Iraq and things proceeded from there.

We've seen force posture and CENTCOM from an Air Force perspective go up and down over the years. And we're at the point now where we're really focusing on General Kurilla's objectives and the way he approaches the region, looking at people, partners, and innovation. And if he were sitting up here on the stage, he would tell you, you can't do anything without your people and empowering them and having them understand the mission and being able to get after it. He would also tell you that partners are probably the most important part of his approach, trying to work with those regional partners in a way that we may not have necessarily done so in the past. And then innovation and trying to think through if the posture in CENTCOM is rightly not what it used to be, given the other challenges that we have globally, both in Europe, with the Russia and Ukraine situation, and of course, in the Indo-Pacific with the pacing threat.

Then how do we approach the difficult problems that we still have in CENTCOM? Now, there are some persistent challenges there by extremist organizations, Iran. But it's also in my view, a key battleground



in strategic competition both against Russia and China. So, we've got to look at new ways and new approaches and new technologies as we seek to accomplish our mission.

Lt. Gen. Bruce "Orville" Wright (Ret.):

So, building on your point about counterinsurgency operations and some 20 years in a very ground focused, understandable strategy, certainly in Afghanistan and Iraq. As you look at Iran now as potentially the pacing threat for you, how have your operations changed including day-to-day exercises? So, if you talk a little bit about a current update building on how much really has changed in your experience over many years, I think it'd be very formative for us.

Lt. Gen. Alexis Grynkewich:

Yeah, absolutely. So, one thing that I would tell you is the threat picture when you think about Iran has changed substantially from what it was even just five years ago. In fact, in many ways, and I don't want to overstate the analogy, but in many ways, it's very similar to what you see in the Indo-Pacific from an operational level challenge. You have large numbers of ballistic missiles that hold your bases at risk, and the launchers for those ballistic missiles are protected by advanced integrated air missile defense system that the rivals anywhere in the world.

And so, as we think about how we would prosecute operations, if we did go to major combat ops against Iran or any other threat in the region, we have to think differently than we did for the last 20 years. So, we still on a daily basis are a supporting command to combine joint Task Force inherent resolve with forces on the ground in Iraq and Syria. But in that MCO scenario, in many ways, we've become the supported command and the integrator of joint fires, bringing both air power and whether that's air force, land-based air power, carrier air power, bomber Task Forces that are being sent to us, all of those types of fires would be synchronized by the air component, but also, long range fires brought by the Army, HIMARS systems as an example, and of course, Tomahawks and other sea-based long range joint fires as well. So, there's a key role for the air component as a joint and combined air component and not just as an Air Force entity.

Lt. Gen. Bruce "Orville" Wright (Ret.):

That's great. Could you also talk a bit and his background or Guardians were key not that long ago to warning and saving lives as Iranians lost missiles against US base and US personnel? At the same time, my guess is that space has become very key to what you described, and that's holding enemy targets at risk in the AOR, including Iranian targets. So, could you talk about the integration of Guardians in your fight again to hold targets at risk?

Lt. Gen. Alexis Grynkewich:

Yeah, you bet, sir. So, one of the things that I think is most exciting is CENTCOM just recently stood up space scent, the space component from a space force to US Central command. And that space component commander is not just a servant service component commander, but now is also the combined Space Force's component commander, if you will. So, bringing together other services, not just Space Force space capabilities and synchronizing the effects that can be applied from them

The good thing from my perspective is that space is getting a lot more attention just by virtue of having its own commander in charge. That gives General Kurilla, frankly, a much cleaner C2 line than coming



through the CPAC as a space coordinating authority, which is how it was done in the past. And it makes the authorities for the joint Space Force's space capabilities that other services besides the Space Force provide much cleaner, if you will.

And then from an air component perspective, the Guardians that we have had that were previously in the director of Space Forces, so the Durst space floor in the CAOC, those Guardians are still fully integrated on our combat ops floor. They're still fully graded into the strategy and division at the combat plans. So, they're right there with us side by side. So, you kind of get the best of both worlds.

Lt. Gen. Bruce "Orville" Wright (Ret.):

Sure. Could you talk a bit about your recent exercise, Juniper Oak? Unprecedented, I think, in the history of CENTCOM and CENTAF in the context of the allied players that you had in that exercise?

Lt. Gen. Alexis Grynkewich:

Yeah, so Juniper Oak was a major joint fighters exercise that we executed bilaterally with the Israelis. It was not just air component exercise, but all of the CENTCOM components played in this. And that was one of the things that General Kurilla really insisted on from the get-go, is that we wanted to have a multi-domain approach to showing me Israelis and showing each other how we could integrate our capabilities together. So, I think from that perspective, it was a real big win. And it came together very rapidly. So, we were able to coordinate this exercise, bring it together and execute it safely and professionally in a period of just months, as opposed to going through a full joint exercise life cycle like we might normally. So, I think a couple of big wins there.

I would also say the lessons that we learned from Juniper Oak are not just applicable to our relationship with the Israelis, but they're really applicable to any time we do integrated and combined war fighting with other partners in the region. So, one thing that we have committed to, and I've already started sharing the lessons with others, is sharing those with other countries. The things that we learned from the Israelis, from working with the Israelis, I've shared with many other countries in the region just over the past couple of weeks. So very good.

The last thing I would say about it is it's no secret that the posture that we have in the region is not what it used to be. And like I said at the beginning, it should not be what it's been in the past. It needs to be a sufficient and sustainable posture. We're not the main effort anymore. There's other places that have greater needs. But what Juniper Oak did is it showed how we can rapidly bring air power and other combat capabilities into the CENTCOM region, execute an operation at scale, in this case an exercise, but it could be an actual operation at some point in the future, and then get those forces back to where they came from, so they can go back to other missions, so they can go back to recapture readiness. So, it's a new model for CENTCOM and for AFCENT and we've had in the past.

Lt. Gen. Bruce "Orville" Wright (Ret.):

It reminds me that given your force structure today, which is downside somewhat, certainly, you're all about using the resources you have for affecting joint war fighting operations. At the same time, I'm guessing that your warrior statesman responsibilities interacting with, for example, US Ambassador Gutter and other US ambassadors in the region and other air chiefs are really important. So, could you give us kind of a picture of that in your sort of one month battle rhythm as you really are a warrior statesman in the region?



Lt. Gen. Alexis Grynkeiwich:

Yeah, absolutely, sir. When when your boss tells you partnerships are important, then you really emphasize those partnerships, and you get out and about and meet with other air chiefs. So, I just came back from a three-week trip to the region, just got back on Friday night. And over the course of those three weeks, I went to nine different countries. I visited the French aircraft carrier, Charles de Gaulle. I engaged in multilateral forums with all of the Air chiefs. I supported General Kurilla at a four-star level Chief of Defense Conference.

And in each of the countries that I go to for any of those events, I always sit down with a country team. I usually meet with a chargee or the ambassador, get their perspective on things that are going on in their country and the things that we can help them with. And so, many of those are beyond the remit of asset. It might be that there's issues that the Office of Security Cooperation is having with a foreign military sales case, or it might be some other initiative that the ambassador wants to emphasize, and then we can help carry the mail and work as a combined team in our engagements with those countries. So, it's absolutely a critical part of my job, and I spend a lot of time on the road as a result.

Lt. Gen. Bruce "Orville" Wright (Ret.):

Sure. Let's talk about Joint Task Force 99 and your commitment to innovation, how that's unfolding. I think there's an integrated Air Missile Defense Conference coming up later this month. And certainly, that's an important area for innovation in your AOR. So Joint Task Force 99.

Lt. Gen. Alexis Grynkeiwich:

Sure. Yeah. Starting with Task Force 99, as I've said to others in the past, a shameless attempt to capture the success of the Navy's Task Force 59, which is in Bahrain, a fleet of unmanned surface vehicles that they have that they're using to build maritime domain awareness. And we were really looking, from an AFCENT perspective and an air component perspective, a very similar problem. So, if the Navy problem was maritime domain awareness, our problem was air domain awareness, and air domain awareness, not just of tracking objects in the air, but maybe finding things that could be on the ground about to be launched into the air and how those could be a threat to us.

And Task Force 99 was born out of the idea that if we take unmanned technologies and digital technologies and pair them together and basically teach the robots and the algorithms to solve some of these problems for us, that it could fill some of those gaps. So, I'm very excited about it. It's a very small team. But I like to say I super empower those Airmen. I give them resources and authorities, and I give them problems. And then I tell them to keep running until apprehended. And they've been doing fantastic.

Just this past week, we started flying our first Task Force 99 drones as an operational evaluation in the region, doing some ISR work, if you will, trying again, fill some of the gaps that we have as our other more traditional ISR platforms have gone to other regions or to other priorities for the Air Force. So, we're trying to solve our own problems, and we're trying to do it in a way that's less expensive, and that is frankly, in many cases, more effective than we might have been able to do just because we can get a larger volume of capacity in places where we may not need a high-end capability. So very excited about it.

The other aspect of Task Force 99 is it is... so don't think of it as a innovation lab or anything like that. It is a no kidding operational Task Force. So, it's a subordinate command that is out there conducting



operations. They're just doing it with different stuff and really getting after these problems. The last aspect of them is they are a joint and combined task force. So, we already have some countries that are planning to or have sent manpower to participate in what will become combined Task Force 99. And I just see that growing over the next month. So, I think in the next three to six months, we'll have another four or five countries sign up and provide personnel and resources to that organization, and that'll launch it on a trajectory we can't even imagine.

Lt. Gen. Bruce "Orville" Wright (Ret.):

You might build on that a bit, Grynch. Industry leaders here in the room are already thinking I can read your mind. How do they help? How do they lean it forward to bring you what you need to Task Force 99? There's some innovators in the room as well, these incredible MIT graduates that work for any one of a number of you, I mean, leading edge engineers. How do we get at accelerate change or lose almost an acquisition reform approach to pairing your innovators with very current war fighter experience to incredible engineering and program manager experience that is represented by our industry you'll share today?

Lt. Gen. Alexis Grynkewich:

Yeah, no, great question, sir. So, I think two things come to mind. The first is that the folks at Task Force 99 have very clear defined lines of effort that I want them to pursue. And it's about domain awareness. It's about accelerating the joint targeting cycle, and it's about imposing dilemmas on adversaries. So broadly speaking, if you have technologies that you think are excellent and available that could be useful in those areas, we'd love to hear about them. And we'd love to, frankly, try them out in our sandbox or no kidding, real world sandbox. That's also the metaphorical sandbox where you can play with things and try them out.

So, to me, there's a lot of opportunity for industry and AFCENT partnership in terms of you've got a technology you think's promising, you think it might have some particular uses, bring it over to the region. We can innovate and experiment with it in a real world austere environment and see what it can do for us. And if it's something that it looks like we would benefit from and applies to one of those hard operational problems, we'll definitely be looking at pursuing an interest of that. And if it's not, at least we've all learned something about that technology and it can go back and iterate it again.

Lt. Gen. Bruce "Orville" Wright (Ret.):

That sounds great. Great opportunity to certainly stay ahead of the bad guys. Would you like to share a bit on just current operational perspectives in the last few weeks? Obviously, a lot of press, and you probably had this question before, Iranians giving drones to the Russians. There's probably some other issues like Russians giving flankers to the Iranians.

Lt. Gen. Alexis Grynkewich:

That's right.

Lt. Gen. Bruce "Orville" Wright (Ret.):

Again, we need to stand classified, but I'm just shaping that question in the context of what we're all reading in the press today. So please.



Lt. Gen. Alexis Grynkewich:

Sure. Now, so let's talk about the Iranian drones that are going to Russia. I think a couple of things. First off, it's just concerning to me that the kind of capacity and capability is being supplied to Russia for the war in Ukraine. And I don't see that changing anytime soon. I think that the Russians are going to continue to want to purchase those drones. The Iranians are going to continue to want to sell them for a variety of reasons. On the Iranian side, it's a cashflow for them probably being one of the main ones. It helps now fund other activities that they have in the region. So, I think that will continue.

The other interesting dynamic is in a way, it has flipped who's the client state and who's the benefactor, if you will. And I never thought that I would see when Russia was beholden in some way to the Islamic Republic of Iran, but that is kind of the dynamic that you have. And I think that has implications across the region, and it certainly has implications in Syria where both the Russians and the Iranians are trying to maintain or gain a bigger foothold.

And now what does that dynamic look like? Do the Iranians start to ask the Russians to do things that they might not have done previously? Haven't seen that kind of cohesion between the two sides come together yet. But I think it's only natural that at some point, those kind of conversations would be going on their side. I'd be having them if I was in their shoes.

Lt. Gen. Bruce "Orville" Wright (Ret.):

And just a bit of a stretch, certainly a lot of coverage on Iran's development of their nuclear capability, including most holistic missiles with nuclear capability. If you want to risk, risk that up.

Lt. Gen. Alexis Grynkewich:

Yeah, so there's not a whole lot you can say in an unclassified environment about exactly where we think that program's going or what the outcome will be. What I would just say is we watch it very closely. And in the event that there was going to be some sort of a need for a military response, the air component is going to have a huge part of that. So, we think through a lot about what would that look like, how could that look in the future, to make sure that if asked that we have options available to the president.

Lt. Gen. Bruce "Orville" Wright (Ret.):

Shifting a bit, I know how committed you are to taking care of your Airmen and now Guardians in the AOR. There's been some recent reporting on significant upgrades to Al Udeid dorms, that kind of thing. So, you can talk about that. But just talk about as you're around the AOR, share the perspective of some credible Airmen and now Guardians that are working in including whether they attended the World Cup or not. But there's also now an opportunity for families to be PCS to the area, I think. So just an update on taking care of people, how you're taking care of people, and your leadership taking care of Airmen, Guardians in your AOR.

Lt. Gen. Alexis Grynkewich:

Sure. Yeah. We have a couple of places where families can currently go in the AOR. One is to the AFCENT Air Warfare Center, which is down in just outside of Abu Dhabi at Al Dhafra Air Base. And the families that go over there love it. They live downtown. They're on the economy, they make friends in the region. In general, I think that those families being there is a really good thing. It's a stabilizing influence.



At the same time, it's a dangerous neighborhood. So, the number of families that are there right now under policy is limited somewhat, but there are some significant investments that are going into our infrastructure in the Middle East. You mentioned the Al Udeid. We just had the ribbon cutting for the QDA, the Qatar development project that's been going on. And this is fully funded by the host nation, and all these upgrades are fantastic. So, if you'd been there before and you lived in some sort of a tent or you lived in a shipping container of some sort, that's not the case anymore. You're in a really nice dorm facility, and there's a lot more money that's going in over the next few years. Same sort of improvements are being done down at Al Dhafra. And Emiratis are funding all of that construction down there as well.

So, these countries recognize the value of the partnerships. They recognize the long-term enduring relationship even at a reduced level of posture in the region, and they're investing in that relationship with the United States. So, I think it's fantastic that they're doing so. Not every base is undergoing major upgrades like that. But probably the biggest thing that we can do for our Airmen, if I just say this, is explain to them why, what they're doing in the Middle East matters. So, we talk a lot about China.

And what I try to tell our Airmen is that what they're doing matters from two perspectives. First, it's keeping the pressure on terrorist organizations so they can't attack our homeland or the homeland of one of our key allies or partners. Because if they do, that will take us off the national defense strategy faster than anything else. Second thing is keeping Iran in check, not allowing a what is a stable and situation where we've at least got some level of deterrents against Iran, not allowing that to erupt into broader scale violence. That would be a bad thing for the National Defense Strategy to have, some sort of a regional conflict break out.

And lastly, China and Russia are in the region, and China thinks the Middle East is important. That probably means we ought to think the Middle East is important, and keeping those countries in the region, letting them know that we're the enduring partner, that we're a partner of choice for them, that we want a deep relationship based on shared interests, if you will. That's much different than the Chinese approach. And fortunately, we can always depend on the Chinese to be Chinese because they'll show up. They'll be transactional. You don't get the depth of relationship and after a few years, they're gone, and the bridge they were building or the fighters that you bought are falling apart and they're really not interested in helping you deal with them. That's not how America does it.

Lt. Gen. Bruce "Orville" Wright (Ret.):

Great points. Well, thanks so much. Well, this is tracking well. We've got some time. Very smart people in the audience to ask some questions, probably better than mine. So please, I'll just pick on General Horner first.

Speaker 3:

[inaudible 00:22:53] your information add on as it pertains to air base air defense. We got kind of used to having Patriots off that got early. Are there any more radars but with global force posture changing, that is going to change and there might be a need, as you mentioned, in Juniper Oak to scale up, go get the effects done and then maybe scale back down from a more expeditionary, agile combat ops perspective. Are you guys participating in the air base air defense and what insights are you getting with that, particularly to counter cruise missiles and UAS?

Lt. Gen. Alexis Grynkewich:



Yeah, so we're doing a lot of work in the air base defense area, and we're sharing those lessons broadly across the Air Force for the air staff and everyone else who will take them. And some of those lessons are Air Force lessons and some of them are joint and combined lessons. On the Air Force lessons, we're learning that we have a lot of different capabilities that we have purchased as a service over the years to counter UASs, but they're not fully integrated. And so, we've done a fair amount of work building base air defense centers where everyone's sitting side by side, and we're trying to digitally connect a lot of the systems that we have. So, there's a common operating picture and now a battle captain, if you will, that's sitting in the wing operation center. The Base Air Defense Center can decide what weapon to employ, kinetic or non-kinetic, against a particular threat.

On the joint level, we're doing the same thing, but now thinking as a area air defense commander about when do I send fighters in or something intercepts something at range, a UAS or a LACM, when do we have the Patriots engaged, when do we have partner patriots engaged, and when do we pass that to one of our regional friends to take care of. And then at the very end, looking at the handoff. And it's always at the seams where the issues happen. So, how do we hand off from fighter to patriot, from patriot down to that base air defense center, whether it's an Air Force base or a B dock at an Army run base, for example. So, we exercise this constantly. We're getting pretty good at it, but there's a lot of capabilities and integration that still needs to happen.

One of the things I'm most excited about is bringing partners into this. So, whether it's partners because we're in their country and they want to help defend that base because they're on it with us or more broadly, regional partners who recognize that they might be on the avenue of approach of a particular threat coming from Iran or an Iranian proxy or partner, as it goes to another country and thinking about how do we share data, information and intelligence in order to counter those threats in real time.

Lt. Gen. Bruce "Orville" Wright (Ret.):

Great, thanks. Other questions, please. Jack.

Jack:

Jack, yeah, an independent consultant. Good to see you, Grynch. For everybody here, this is kind of fun. Grynch actually retired me from the United States Air Force. He read my retirement orders. Great to see you. And you're doing so great. Could you comment your perspective on air crew readiness? A lot of us are worried about not enough flying time and things like that. What are you seeing?

Lt. Gen. Alexis Grynkewich:

Yeah, really good question. So, I think a couple of things. One thing is when we have aircraft units deploy into the CENTCOM AOR into AFCENT, we do everything that we possibly can to ensure that those units, fighter squadrons, tanker squadrons, airlift squadrons, leave the region more ready than they were when they showed up. And we do that by not just executing daily ATO taskings, which are some very long missions. And sometimes there's action and sometimes there's not, as you well know. But we also do a fair amount of contingency readiness development. So, think of that as high-end integration events where we're practicing things like going after transporter or retro launchers for ballistic missiles and how do we practice that kill chain. And then we do a fair amount of work with our partners.

So right now, today as we speak, we have elements of the 77th Expeditionary Fighter squadron that are flying in Saudi Arabia in the spheres of victory exercise, which is a high-end exercise run by the Saudi



Warfare Center alongside a number of different partners. So, they're getting large force employment opportunities. They're getting a lot of high-end training. So, I would tell you that it's a big endpoint of emphasis that we not just consume readiness and asset like we have for years, but we try to grow some of it back as we send folks back there.

Lt. Gen. Bruce "Orville" Wright (Ret.):

Sir, others please, sir.

Zach Rosenberg James:

Zach Rosenberg James. I'm wondering if you could tell us more about Task Force 99. You mentioned that they have started deploying on operational missions. And I'm wondering if you could detail a little bit about that, and tell us what other countries you hope to include in that task force in the next few months.

Lt. Gen. Alexis Grynkewich:

Yeah, you bet. So, we have sent invitations to the Task Force, to all of the framework nations that participate in combined joint task force inherent resolve, the coalition against ISIS and Iraq and Syria. And we've also sent invitations to pretty much every regional partner on the ground there. Some of those are the same countries, but there's a few that are outside the Venn diagram, if you will, on each side. So, it's really a come one come all kind of approach, coalition of the willing. The tasks that we've given Task Force 99 fall into those three broad areas I laid out to begin with, which is domain awareness, both in the air and on the ground, finding hard targets and being able to prosecute them at speed and scale and then imposing dilemmas on an adversary. So, thinking about giving them something that they haven't seen rather than F16s coming at them. Can I send something else at them that would have to make them react? So obviously, that's a capability we hold in reserve for higher end conflict, but the others kind of lay the foundation for it.

So, I think there's broad acceptance that domain awareness is absolutely something that all of us care about. We know that even if we use every regional sensor that's there, owned by every partner country that's out there, there are still gaps in our coverage. So, figuring out what digital and unmanned technologies we can apply to that, both from a airborne layer or even perhaps some sort of a ground sensor would be really useful.

And then from a targeting perspective, coming up with a volume of intelligence surveillance and reconnaissance so that we can find things much faster than we can just relying on overhead imagery and then a limited fleet of airborne ISR, higher end MQ9 and above airborne ISR. So, rather than just having dozens of airplanes that I can fly to certain locations, what if I had hundreds? Even if the sensors aren't as good, that capacity is going to matter when we're prosecuting operations at scale. So, those are the main areas that we're focusing on right now.

Lt. Gen. Bruce "Orville" Wright (Ret.):

Brings up a question I'd like to follow up on and that is intelligence innovation, the integration of you said ISR into everything that you're doing and a paradigm shift, an ISR, if you will, that we talked about, dynamic targeting, for example. Do you connect with 16th Air Force, for example, and 16th air force capabilities that are all over the world with [inaudible 00:29:47]?



Lt. Gen. Alexis Grynkewich:

Yes. Spoken like a true professional asking a question like that. So absolutely. So outside of Task Force 99, there is a lot of innovation going on in AFCENT. So, it's not just within that task force. One of the places is on the combat operations floor. So, on the combat operations floor, we have an element, I would say, of joint all domain command and control that is using algorithms to look at multi-source intelligence, fusing it together, using kill chain automation tools that have been worked by 16th Air Force and partnership with all the ISR Wings and the military intelligence brigade on the army side and bringing together all that intelligence using kill chain automation tools, layering an extra dose of AI on the top. And we're shortening the amount of time it takes to go from sensing to shooting. So, we have effectively, more than have the amount of time it takes from where we can initially detect something that might be a target, run through a joint targeting cycle, go through collateral damage estimates, and then send that target to an aircraft or some other shooter for action. We have cut that time down significantly. So, that is absolutely a partnership with 16th Air Force and all those wings, and we couldn't do it without them.

Lt. Gen. Bruce "Orville" Wright (Ret.):

Building on that question and that great response. Staying in at classified level, we've talked for many years about the intelligence ISR capabilities, non-traditional ISR capabilities the F22s and F35. So, you're starting to break through that opportunity so that there's a two-way flow of, well, incredible intelligence that can be collected by the F35 and F22 and then feed that back into the broadly defined targeting picture, I guess.

Lt. Gen. Alexis Grynkewich:

Yeah, so we don't have a lot of F22 or F35 operations in the CENTCOM region right now and that's fine. We do have them episodically. When they do come in, we fully integrate them into the picture as best we can. There's multilayer classification issues that typically will pop up with those platforms. But we do also look at other platforms that we have Strike Eagles or F16s or even just an extra pair of eyeballs on any platform to look and see is there something that we might want to use those platforms for in terms of detecting. So, I still fly missions over there. And on every single mission when we walk out the door, we'll have a package of points of interest in Syria or wherever it is that we happen to be flying on a defensive counter mission, and we'll go check those out and report back in MISREPs and get that back into the Intel cycle as well.

Lt. Gen. Bruce "Orville" Wright (Ret.):

Terrific. Other questions. I'm taking Tobias, please,

Tobias Naegele:

Tobias Naegele from Air & Space Forces Magazine. So, we have a new Space Forces component command in CENTCOM. Is that sort of making a difference at this stage, and how long will it be, and what advantages does it actually provide you?

Lt. Gen. Alexis Grynkewich:



Yeah, I think it is making a difference. So, it is making it in a couple of ways. The first is it is raising the awareness of space across all of CENTCOM, both at the CENTCOM headquarters and across all the components including at AFCENT, having a single Space Force component commander now who is talking about what space is doing, sending up a weekly report, if you will, just like components and military units all over the world do, having one that's purely focused on space capabilities, and then having him in this case, articulate what that capability is and plain English and getting everyone's level of knowledge up and just understanding what space brings to the fight has been tremendously valuable.

And I think there's the second big advantage is from a joint war fighting perspective in space, having a focal point where you know that if you talk to the space component commander in their joint and combined hat, that they can bring together knowledge of what space com brings to the fight. They can bring together what army space capabilities are there, Navy space capabilities, in addition to the Space Force capabilities. And they're doing it in such a way that it's still fully integrated with the other components. So, I think it's been tremendously valuable. I think there's a lot of learning we've still got to do, but I'm really impressed with what the Guardians have been able to do so far.

Tobias Naegele:

Do you think you're 80% there or 50% there?

Lt. Gen. Alexis Grynkewich:

It's hard to put a percentage on it. But I don't know exactly what perfection looks like. So rather than say we're 80% of the way to perfection, I'll just say it's been tremendous progress in just a few short months.

Lt. Gen. Bruce "Orville" Wright (Ret.):

Yes, sir.

Michael Miller:

Michael Miller from Virginia Tech Applied Research Corporation. First, I wanted to say that thanks for being here. And that as a former JSTARS guy back in the early days of valued air base, I'm excited to hear about the upgrades. I'm a bit jealous, but I had a question. So, for Task Force 99, is there a particular technical readiness level or maturity level that you're looking for before you will take that over there? I know you're doing operational missions with it.

Lt. Gen. Alexis Grynkewich:

Yeah, that's right. So, we want things to be pretty high TRL. In many ways, we're looking for commercial off the shelf kind of technologies or things that are just about ready to be put on the shelf. Now they don't have to be commercial off the shelf. They can be military on the shelf, ready to go almost, let's go try it out a little bit. But I'd say pretty close to the end of that chain, and that's really because they're an operational taskforce.

Now having said that, again, Task Force 99 is tremendously important and a high priority of mine. But as we think longer term and AFCENT is trying to think longer term, we are building out longer term requirements as well for things that we might want to do. So, my predecessor stood up A8 to look at those requirements to start normalizing the budget for AFCENT, and all of that work is still ongoing. And



that is a key point that I didn't bring up yet. But in addition to focusing on high-end war fighting and making sure we're ready for that, the duality of AFCENT now is we're also thinking about campaigning and how do we shaping operations over the course of time to get the region into a better place from a regional stability standpoint as opposed to what we've been doing for most of the time in the past is just being consumed by current operations.

Lt. Gen. Bruce "Orville" Wright (Ret.):

Great points.

Michael Miller:

Thanks. Appreciate it.

Lt. Gen. Bruce "Orville" Wright (Ret.):

Please, sir. Please, Chris.

Chris Gordon:

Hi. Chris Gordon here, Air & Space Forces Magazine. You talk a lot about integration with these partners, but how much is complicated by the fact that in the region, obviously, relationships between some countries is a little tense, classification issues as well? How do you try to navigate through what is a very complex web between working with the US, with other countries maybe not being so willing to work?

Lt. Gen. Alexis Grynkewich:

Yeah, Chris. Yeah, great question and good to see you again. I guess a couple of thoughts here. There is a growing willingness, even if it's private and quiet for many countries to work together in ways that they haven't before. And some of you are probably reading into it, I'm saying Abraham Accords and Israel having relationships and being willing to work with folks. But there's other dynamics in the region where countries have been, they've had more tense political or policy level disagreements in the past. Privately and in the mil to mil channels, what I'll tell you is relationships are generally very strong and very good. And the strength of those relationships and the strength of the US relationship and AFCENT's relationship with those countries really helps us to maintain an even level of cooperation even as the political relationships go up and down. So, that's kind of point number one.

Point number two is, so a lot of the integration that we're looking at is in the air and missile defense areas we talked about. And one of the really powerful things about that being an integration space is that it doesn't require you to give up sovereignty. It just requires you to be willing to share. So, if you can build some trust and you're willing to share information with another country, shared data with another country, you don't have to accept boots on the ground from somewhere else, as an example. You can do it without putting your sovereignty at that kind of risk.

We have made some tremendous progress recently so that the role AFCENT has here in many ways is as centralized node that even if there are sensitivities to where information is coming and going from, if a country's willing to share it with us and then we can basically wash the data of where it came from and re-share it to others, that allows us all to operate off a common operating picture, irrespective of some of those more higher level political sensitivities. So, that's where we're trying to get to, is a common operating picture. Information is brought together, fused by the CAOC and really by kingpin, our taxi two



node, which is now at Shaw Air Force Base, bring that all together and get a common operating picture out to those countries that are part of the regional construct.

Chris Gordon:

Just to quickly follow up on that, does classification cause any issues with that in terms of sharing?

Lt. Gen. Alexis Grynkeiwich:

Yep, absolutely. So, we have of course our foreign disclosure policies. Every nation has their version of it. There's cybersecurity concerns as you connect different systems, all of those things. But what we found is with good commander's intent from the top and good political guidance in our country from the Secretary of Defense and others to really pursue this regional approach, it's part of the charge that CENTCOM has been given. You can get through a lot of those issues. So, you would be amazed if you went into the Al Udeid CAOC today or into the Shaw CAOC, and you look up on the wall and you saw the common operating picture, and it says secret rel two and a whole bunch of trigraphs at the bottom. There's a lot of countries now that are allowed to see that picture. So, we've blown through a lot of those challenges over the last while.

Lt. Gen. Bruce "Orville" Wright (Ret.):

That's a great point. Get to Michael, just a second. But following up on that, we have a range of industry experience here. And sometimes those who build airplanes and weapon systems, you do not connect with those who build, for example, cryptology, cross domain guards, those kind of things. So, could you offer a bit of encouragement in terms of the growing opportunities to build in modern technology, to build those kind of multi-layered classification systems that you need?

Lt. Gen. Alexis Grynkeiwich:

Yeah, I would tell you, or I would ask industry to always be thinking about how you can have some ability to have a cross domain solution, whether it's within our own system from secret to TS or back and forth or being able to filter things based on which country can see what information, what national disclosure policy is across a whole range of issues. That really ends up being where we spend a fair amount of our time at the technical level, is trying to navigate through, how do we technically stitch these things together.

And then yeah, cybersecurity wise, there's all sorts of information assurance concerns as you connect systems, and there's a lot of systems in this CENTCOM region and with our partners that we work with that are not US made systems. And being able to connect those into that overall architecture is something that's tremendously valuable as well. So, thinking through how we can do that in a safe and secure manner is absolutely essential.

Lt. Gen. Bruce "Orville" Wright (Ret.):

My guess is there's evolving technology opportunities out there if we could get the tight people talking to each other. So, Michael, please.

Michael Gordon:



Michael Gordon, Wall Street Journal. Sir, at the time the US withdrew from Afghanistan, there was a lot of concern about how the United States was going to be able to monitor events internal to Afghanistan without having a physical presence there. And the concern was the amount of time it would take to fly over the country with an unmanned vehicle, your drill time would be limited. You wouldn't be able to really monitor events unless there's a guy standing on a balcony in cobble every morning, smoking a cigarette at a certain point in time.

How have you dealt with the challenges of trying to conduct ISR after Afghanistan? And does it enable you to keep tabs on the group of most concern there, which is ISIS-K? And can you discern what they're doing, or is that something that you really can't get from ISR and has to be derived from other means?

Lt. Gen. Alexis Grynkewich:

Yeah, that's a really good question. So, I'll answer it this way. Anytime you're trying to look at a hard target like this, a place where you have limited access, especially limited access on the ground, you're going to rely on multiple sources of intelligence and layer that. And that's really not an AFCENT role. That's done by some of the special operations components in CENTCOM, but we certainly are witting of those efforts and we know how we plug into it.

So, the way we plug into it is by providing airborne ISR overhead. Do I wish I had more? Absolutely. Do we have enough within that multi-layer intelligence to know if things are trending negatively and kind of as a early indication and warning that we need to be more concerned about ISIS-K as you mentioned? I think we do. And really, the role that we have is provide as much ISR as we can that layers in with those other sources to allow national decision makers to decide when they hit a level of risk that they're uncomfortable with, and then there's a policy decision about what to do with it. I wouldn't speculate on what those policy decisions would be, but I think we're okay. Would I like more? Yes. Would I like more persistence? Yes. And those are some of the things that, as I mentioned, we're trying to shorten that joint targeting cycle, not just for TELs, if you will, but this would also apply to VEOs. If I could have some other persistent detection capability, I would absolutely take it in a heartbeat. So, that's one of the areas we looked at.

Michael Gordon:

And can I ask, how are things trending in Afghanistan? And what is your assessment of ISIS-K and its capabilities and its ambitions at this point in time?

Lt. Gen. Alexis Grynkewich:

Yes, sir. Well, I'll talk broadly about ISI. I would say over the entire region, ISIS is down but not out. CENTCOM has been putting out lately press releases on the pace of counter ISIS operations that have been ongoing usually through partner forces in the region. And they're doing that mainly to, well, to just let everyone know there is still a fair amount of counter ISIS activity even on the ground that's ongoing. I would characterize overall, ISIS is able. In the areas where they operate, they've got small cells that are able to do some level of attack that it can vary in the scale of it. But say, from an IED up to some sort of an ambush with small arms or something along those lines, there are elements of ISIS and ISIS core in particular certainly still has designs on the attacks on the west. And so, we watch that connection between ISIS core and ISIS-K very carefully because ISIS-K does have some capability. And if they're able to connect, if they're able to get resourced in some way, that would be a significant concern for us. So



again, a lot of this is done in coordination with our special operations partners, but we do everything we can to fulfill their need and get them just as much visibility as we possibly can.

Lt. Gen. Bruce "Orville" Wright (Ret.):

Yes sir.

Gordon Lubold:

Hi, Gordon Lubold from Wall Street Journal. Nice to see you again, just saw you a few days ago. As a follow-up to my friend, Michael's question, two questions on counterterrorism. One, is there a way to characterize what additional capabilities or additional persistent presence you'd get from having the ability to fly ISR out of somewhere closer to Afghanistan? One. Two, are you able to give us any sense of the connection or kind of the relationship or evolving relationship between the Taliban and ISIS-K?

Lt. Gen. Alexis Grynkeiwich:

Sure. So, on the first one, what I would say is I think of it in terms of time on station and how much broad area surveillance and specific surveillance on a point on the ground that I have. So, depending on the capability you're talking about, closer is better because you don't have as much transit time and then you have more wood or time. But you could also overcome that by having something that had more loiter time that you could launch even if it was from a further distance. So, that's how I think of it. While basing closer to Afghanistan would be ideal, that's just not something that we have at this time. So longer term, could it become an option? Maybe. But really, a lot of my focus is on how do I increase the amount of persistence I have, given the physics of the problem that we have today.

On the Taliban and ISIS-K, I still see them as diametrically opposed to each other. The Taliban, it's very much in their interest to try to snuff out ISIS-K. Sometimes they're successful, sometimes they're less successful. They've got a lot of issues in Afghanistan that they're trying to solve. ISIS-K is just one of them. But this is one strange area where our interests do somewhat align with the Talibans and that everyone hates ISIS.

Lt. Gen. Bruce "Orville" Wright (Ret.):

We got a few more minutes. Please. Go ahead, Amy.

Amy Hudson:

I'm going to take advantage of the fact that I'm holding the mic to ask a question. I wanted to circle back to Task Force 99. You've talked a lot about the LOEs and your priorities with the taskforce as a whole. Can you talk about the Airmen that make up the task force and how important while the capable Airmen is part of that and how it connects to other agile combat employment operations that you're doing in the theater?

Lt. Gen. Alexis Grynkeiwich:

Yeah, Amy, that's a great question. So, the Airmen in Task Force 99, it's less than a dozen right now, but growing. I think ends stable have somewhere around 20. And there's a couple of things that I think we've learned are really important, some which I knew and just had to be reminded of and some which are new insights. The first is once Airmen found out that we were creating this thing called Task Force 99



and they were going to be empowered and given resources and authorities, they were scrambling to get into it. And there are some incredibly capable Airmen that come with coding skill or they do 3D printing or any number of things that they've done in the past that they just love and they wanted an opportunity to apply those to tactical problems. So, that's kind of a point one.

Interesting side story with that. So, they have a series of 3D printers. And the command chief and I, Chief Katie Grabham, we're visiting the task force one day, and they were showing off of they were 3D printing X, Y, or Z. And she goes, hey, do we need to get you some training for this and some formal training? They're like, good God, no, no formal training. We want to use YouTube videos to teach ourselves how to use this stuff. If you guys try to come in with Air Force formal training, it's going to be horrible. So, I think that says something about how we might need to transform some of our training philosophy in the Air Force as well. So, I'll turn that mirror right back on myself.

And then so the second thing that we learned, and those of you who are in industry won't be surprised by this, but there's a real power when you get someone with a technical acquisition engineering kind of background with an operator and bring those two perspectives together, someone who knows how to test things, how to try them out, and then someone know who knows intuitively how to use them. And getting those two individuals together to lead the task force has been a key part of what we're looking at.

So, for the last cycle, we had an operator who was the deputy commander and an acquisition officer from Big Safari who was the commander of the task force, the next cycle, they'll invert. But I think having that kind of pairing is going to be essential moving forward. But these Airmen are amazing. We've had a number of senior leaders come through and see them. They're always fired up. They've always got great ideas and we just let them run. Like I said, continue until apprehended because we'll tell you if you've gone too far. Until then, just keep running and they're totally willing to do it.

Lt. Gen. Bruce "Orville" Wright (Ret.):

Thanks. Does that motivate another question? John. Let's talk about hypersonics. So, we time for that.

Speaker 12:

This might be pretty quick, but I was just wondering about your perception of the Chinese attempts to gain influence and presence in the region and how that impacts, for instance, your operation or picture and our own interagency challenge about closing our capabilities there as opposed to the Chinese, which get it to you pretty quickly. Over.

Lt. Gen. Alexis Grynkewich:

Yeah, no, great question. So, the Chinese approach to the region has mainly been economic. Some of that has been with IT infrastructure, smart cities, et cetera. We always try to caution about the risks of that technology, and we really caution about those kinds of technologies being used in your defense sector and in your MOD. Because the moment that you start to have some of those technologies that we all suspect are doing things that they're not being sold to do, it becomes a risk for US operations and US cybersecurity.

That has actually resonated very well in the region with our partners. First off, they appreciate it when we can go with them and show them the real risks that are associated. And so, back to Chris's question about classification levels, when we're able to bust through some of those and do some intelligence



sharing on the threat, they're very receptive. And then anytime we've said, hey, you can do this, but you're putting at risk your future partnership with AFCENT or with CENTCOM or whatever component. That does make a difference, and the countries realize what the stakes are and how seriously we take it.

Lt. Gen. Bruce "Orville" Wright (Ret.):

Let me ask kind of a question that goes outside your old AOR in a warrior statesman question. As you look around the world as most Airmen in any leadership role do, you're looking at significant threats that your department of the Air Force or Airmen Guardians have to take on. So, you've got a tough one in Iran, and it's multifaceted, including violent extremism. You're very familiar with obviously, North Korea in your experience and of course, very recently, China and Russia.

So, do you have a perspective you would share as an Airman in support of Secretary Kendall's operational imperative that you see not just within your AOR? But again, most Airmen like you see the world all the time. You look at the worldwide threat as you also focus on your AOR threat.

Lt. Gen. Alexis Grynkewich:

Yeah, so I think a couple of thoughts come to mind. The first is I do think as Airmen, it's our responsibility. Really, it's military officer's many service. But Airman in particular, it's important to because of the speed and range of air power and where we operate to think broader than combat and command boundaries. And I've mentioned to some other folks. I work very closely with General Hecker and USAFE. We have shared forces across the USAFE-AFAFRICA boundary multiple times in support of multiple different operations. Sometimes it's us supporting General Hecker. More often than not, it's me asking for support from him. And he's been very gracious in providing that back to us. And I think that those sorts of opportunities, when we take advantage of them now free up resources for the other things that the Air Force needs to do in pursuit of the operational imperatives. So, I think that's really important.

I'd also say that in my view, because of how our combat and command system is structured with the number of functional combatant commands, global combatant commands and geographics, there are a lot of seams out there. And it does us well to think beyond our particular geographic region and think about the impacts that things could have outside of it. The place where we do that mostly is with respect to Russia and China and in our AOR. I am constantly talking to General Hecker about what is the right level of risk that we take in Syria. How is that potentially affecting operations that are happening in USAFE? What are the concerns about horizontal escalation, escalation that could happen outside in Ukraine that we need to be cognizant of? What's he seeing in intelligence? What are we seeing?

And the other one is China. The Chinese get almost 50% of their hydrocarbons come through the Strait of Hormuz. The Chinese are interested in the Middle East because of that. They're interested in other partnerships in the region. They're interested in being able to go across the central region and into Africa for rare earth metals that they'll use for advanced technologies and capabilities. If they're interested in that, we should probably be interested in it. And again, thinking more broadly than of this particular GCC and how we fit into those challenges, I think, is absolutely essential.

Lt. Gen. Bruce "Orville" Wright (Ret.):

Yeah, pull the string on that a bit more. Michael and I and many of us have watched, again, unclassified level coordination, connectivity between North Korea and Iran and exchange, mutual exchange of



missile technology. So, would you ever talk to seventh Air Force Commander, for example, [inaudible 00:55:36]?

Lt. Gen. Alexis Grynkewich:

Yep, absolutely. Absolutely. Anytime you see the nexus between those different countries and the connectivity happening between them, the right thing to do is pick up the phone and call and try to figure out if there is an asymmetric approach, an indirect approach that you can take to the particular problem. Might be manifesting in your AOR, but the solution might be in a different one.

Lt. Gen. Bruce "Orville" Wright (Ret.):

Yeah, that's great. Warms my heart. Before we close and Tobias, you can decide to edit this part out or not, but I can't miss the opportunity. Our Air Force Academy won the Commander in Chief Trophy this year. That means they beat West Point, and they beat Annapolis. So, I'm looking at the class of 2004 back there, Alex Ronato. You can actually ask a question if you wanted, besides just Siegel Falcons. So, class of '73, class of '93 and the class of '04 and many, many graduates of the Air Force Academy. And oh, by the way, are Falcons belong to every Airman and Guardian.

Lt. Gen. Alexis Grynkewich:

But it is cute how Army and Navy play for second place every year.

Lt. Gen. Bruce "Orville" Wright (Ret.):

Yes, sir. Alex, you have anything to add? I gave you an opportunity.

Speaker 13:

Nothing. [inaudible 00:56:47].

Lt. Gen. Alexis Grynkewich:

Great. Thanks. And actually, Merit's saying here, we actually have a pretty good partnership with the Air Force Academy here. And we've asked some of the cadets there to... we've basically sent them some money and said, hey, come up with some ideas on how you might solve this. And they're going to ship us some things that they've been working on. And then over the summer, as part of the summer research program, we expect that we're going to have some cadets show up to be part of the task force, which I'm really excited about.

Lt. Gen. Bruce "Orville" Wright (Ret.):

Terrific. Just don't let BJ sway you on your AOR or do. Well, with that, Grynch, the best part of this job is the deep level of comradeship and friendship that we share across our own Space Force Association. And by the way, that was Jimmy Doolittle's intent 76 years ago. That's the power, I think, of this group, our nation and what will keep the Chinese defensive and the Iranians and the North Koreans and the Russians. Grynch, we can't thank you enough and thank all of you again. So please, round of applause.

Lt. Gen. Alexis Grynkewich:

Thanks for the opportunity.



Lt. Gen. Bruce "Orville" Wright (Ret.):

Wrap up comments. Anything else to say?

Lt. Gen. Alexis Grynkewich:

No, I guess the last thing I would say is thank you to the Air & Space Force Association for what you do for our Airmen and Guardians every single day. It's great to know that we've got someone who's got our back. So, I truly appreciate it.

Lt. Gen. Bruce "Orville" Wright (Ret.):

Well, we'll keep at it. Thanks a lot.