Department of the Air Force Operational Imperative (DAF OI)

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DAF OI-5. Defining Optimized Resilient Forward Basing, Sustainment, and Communications in a Contested Environment

Short-hand reference: Resilient Forward Basing

Situation: ***Fixed forward Airbases are targetable and vulnerable to attack. China, the pacing challenge for the United States, has invested heavily in long range precision munitions designed to attack USAF forward air bases and other high value targets.*** To achieve resilient basing the DAF has developed a concept, Agile Combat Employment or ACE, that uses a hub and spoke system of alternative basing. This concept is sound, but a cost effective mix of investments is necessary to make ACE effective. The DAF must acquire a mix of enablers that include pre-positioned essential supplies, improved expeditionary communications, and both active and passive defenses of distributed operating bases. Additionally, the DAF must expand the number of bases from which it can operate and provide a mix of defenses, concealment, and hardening, as well as the ability to maintain logistics support from multiple locations.

Challenge: The DAF currently relies on a limited number of isolated, forward air bases in the Western Pacific and a handful of fixed bases in Eastern Europe. These bases are increasingly threatened by advances in adversary long-range precision strike capability. Additionally, adversaries continue to challenge U.S. efforts to gain allied and partner access, basing, and overflight (ABO). The DAF must define and acquire a cost effective mix of responses to these threats that will enable resilient forward basing.

Approach: The DAF will complicate the adversary's plans to target its bases by distributing operations to dispersed locations and improving its ability sustain and conduct continuing operations—all while selectively hardening base infrastructure against attack and invoking a combination of concealment, deception, and defenses. This imperative will be accomplished through a mix of investments in resilient forward basing, sustainment, and communications to support strategic sensing and tactical operations. Active defenses should be provided by Joint Force partners. This OI furthers the Air Force's Agile Combat Employment (ACE), a scheme of maneuver that calls for using a network of dispersed operating locations that are resilient to attack.

- Expand prepositioned fuel, war reserve material (WRM), aircraft support, and other logistics at key locations. Improve the Joint Force's ability to generate sorties from distributed locations in combat conditions.
- Enhance infrastructure hardening, Joint Force-provided active defense, and proliferation, as well as the range of needed logistics, agile communications, and other improvements such as expeditionary training to develop multi-capable Airmen.
- Implement the most cost-effective combination of investments to mitigate the threat to forward tactical airbases.
- Engage with willing allies and partners to provide ABO and build partner nation capabilities to defend air and space bases.