



The Secretary's Vector

Dr. James G. Roche
Secretary of the Air Force

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America's Airmen Fighting the War on Terrorism

"The world needs America's leadership. ... Democracy and freedom are threatened around the world. ... It would be easy for America to withdraw behind the oceans. ... What you do saves our countries from the threat of worldwide terror. ... We support you and respect you.

Mayor Jean-Pierre Dardenne, April 13, 2004

The mayor of LaRoche-on-Ardennes, Belgium delivered those stirring words on the first day of my trip to visit our deployed Airmen as we remembered the sacrifices of a previous generation. With the World War II crash site of an Air Corps B-17 bomber as the backdrop, his compelling address set the tone for my eight-day, seven-country journey. He praised our strength of purpose in Iraq and elsewhere in the world, and noted that without it, democracy and liberty were threatened. He encouraged us to stay the course, and relayed the support of the citizens of Belgium for our leadership in the war on terrorism. As I stood alongside the mayor on that Belgian hilltop, it made me incredibly proud to be an American, and to serve our nation and freedom-loving people everywhere.

Like the United States in the 21st Century, Belgium in the 20th Century suffered foreign aggression and brutal attacks that forever changed their perspective on the value of freedom. As we continue our fight in the war on terrorism, we should consider this history. It reminds us that there is no greater motivator, no force for change more compelling, no condition more worthy than freedom. Freedom is not a privilege reserved for some, it is a right for every nation and people, and only by ensuring freedom will we enjoy peace and security around the globe.

From Western Europe, to Central Asia, to the Persian Gulf, I visited our Airmen currently serving this worthy cause. As I traveled throughout these regions, I asked our folks to keep the following points in mind; I ask each of you to do so as well:

1) *We are at war.* The cancer of al Qaeda is not gone, and radicalism and technology combine in a deadly mix. As recent bombings in Turkey and Spain demonstrate, there are no safe havens. Although we have made progress, we must remember that the threat continues to metastasize, and that we face a factional insurgency that threatens the Iraqi people's wonderful opportunity for freedom. We must stay focused, and on the offensive to root out and destroy these grave threats -- in Afghanistan, in Iraq, in the ungoverned regions in the Horn of Africa, and around the globe. This campaign will last a long time; your vigilance and focus will make the difference between success and failure in this important cause.

2) *We are evolving the Air Force to this new era.* Our focus on Core Competencies has had a dramatic payoff in operations around the globe, as has our renewed emphasis on close air support, and integration with ground forces. Throughout my visit, I witnessed the professionalism of our Airmen in a variety of settings and missions:

- Flying with NATO Squadron 1 of the NATO Airborne Early Warning and Control Force over the Balkans, I observed our efforts to preserve stability for the people of that troubled region;
- Our team at Incirlik Air Base, Turkey has made dramatic improvements to support forces transiting the theater, and are prepared to dramatically expand their footprint if required;
- In Manas, Kyrgyzstan, our Airmen operate and sustain Ganci Air Base, the strategic hub for ground forces entering Afghanistan. Their aerial port, intra-theater lift, medivac, and aerial refueling missions make this former Soviet base vital to our pursuit of terrorists in the region;
- At Karshi-Khanabad in Uzbekistan, Soldiers and Airmen work side-by-side, delivering special operations, combat search and rescue, and theater lift to our combatants;
- At Bagram Air Base, Afghanistan, the focal point of our joint force, our Airmen there exemplify the expeditionary mindset, and are providing the air-to-ground cooperation that General Jumper and I have envisioned. Major General Eric Olsen, the U.S. Army officer commanding CJTF-180, called air and space power his “hammer” in the fight against a distributed, resilient enemy;
- In Qatar, our mobility, reconnaissance, C2, and strike forces integrated their capabilities to produce a range of effects. I had the opportunity to fly with the “Alley Cats” of the 128th Expeditionary Air Command and Control Squadron over Afghanistan. This superb JSTARS team expertly combined with the Predator, Rivet Joint, Special Operations Forces, and strike assets to produce a lethal package of combat capability;
- The Total Force team in Morón, Spain provides critical support to the largest swap out of military forces in history. I’m proud of what they are doing for our Air Force and for the Soldiers and Marines transiting this irreplaceable gateway to Southwest and Central Asia.

At every stop, our base defenders, maintainers, communicators, engineers, and logisticians were making the mission happen, despite a variety of challenges from land mines to host nation limitations. Our Airmen were mission-focused, and highly motivated, a tribute to leaders and supervisors -- at home station and those forward deployed.

3) *Respect and care for every Airman.* During every stop, I also spoke about the obligation we have to respect the competence and excellence of our fellow Airmen, regardless of gender, ethnic origin, or race. Every Airman should view another Airman as their wingman, someone in whom they can trust their life. We cannot and will not tolerate sexual assault or harassment of any kind. We cannot have any Airman afraid of any other Airman. These offenses are contrary to good order and discipline and undermine the character and integrity of every member of our team.

Respecting and caring for each other also means helping your fellow Airmen during times of stress. Each of us also has a responsibility to identify and help prevent suicides. Worry about each other, care for each other, and when you spot depression, let someone know or intervene yourself. Our success as a service depends on this special brand of trust, loyalty, and personal fortitude.

During my travels, I was again convinced of a fact you know to be true: we are the world’s finest air and space force, and this generation is indeed worthy of America’s admiration and praise. You are serving proudly in this just cause, and I am honored to help lead this great team.



A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "James G. Roche".

James G. Roche
Secretary of the Air Force