Commercial Airfleet In Air Force Operations Essay, Research Paper

POSITION PAPER

ON

COMMERCIAL AIRFLEET IN AIR FORCE OPERATIONS

1. The last time you flew on a commercial airline for official Air Force travel, did you think about the relationship that exists between the Air Force and the commercial airline industry? There has always been interdependence between them. As Keith Hutcheson, a retired Air Force officer, Vice President for Air Force Programs, Point One VII, Inc., and Present of Global Strategists, shows in his book Air Mobility The Evolution of Global Reach, “It is a partnership that dates back to the beginning of aviation.” (Hutcheson:116) The bond between them became even stronger, with the creation of the Civil Reserve Air Fleet (CRAF). Since the birth of the CRAF in 1950, both sectors, as well as the American people have benefited from the cooperative-partnership.

2. The CRAF Program enlists the US airline industry to help create an increased airlift capability for contingencies. Airlines sign a one-year contract with the government entitling Air Mobility Command (AMC) to mobilize the aircraft and their aircrews in case of a national requirement. It is a significant and important part of the nation’s mobility resources as stated by USAF General Walter Kross, former commander in chief, United States Transportation Command (USTRANSCOM), in the US Transportation Command’s Posture Statement “USTRANSCOM could never meet its wartime requirements without its absolutely unique partnerships with civilian industry. In fact, the backbone of our nation’s [air] lift capacity lies in it’s commercial fleets.” (Kross) Without the creation of the CRAF, the burden would be overwhelming on our Air Force and the American Taxpayers to maintain a fleet capable of our airlift requirements during various types of emergencies.

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3. This arrangement not only benefits the Air Force with increased readiness, it also saves the American taxpayers billions of dollars. General Tony Robertson, commander of Air Mobility Command and also commander in chief of USTRANSCOM, emphasized this fact while addressing civilian and military representatives of the Air Force Association on the Total Force, stating “Our dependence on the total force ensures the taxpayer only pays for the additional capability when our nation needs it, during times of war or other major conflict.” (AFPN) He went on to give an example of the savings: “During Desert Storm, we activated 117 aircraft from CRAF which flew 20 percent of the total strategic airlift missions. The cost was 1.35 billion dollars vs. maintaining a military fleet [at a cost] of 4-5 billion dollars…great bargain” (AFPN) Of course the commercial airlines have a lot to gain from the partnership also.

4. To provide incentives for these carriers to commit to the program, AMC awards peacetime contracts to commercial airlines that support the program. Major Johnny Pyane, a C-141 pilot and an air carrier survey analyst at AMC headquarters, was quoted in an article by TSgt Kenneth Fidler, Air Mobility Command Public Affairs, Commercial fleet flies bulk of troops to Southwest Asia, as saying “…several commercial air carriers would be much smaller today if not for the military work they do.” He went on to say “…because we are such a big part of their clientele, they really go the extra mile to provide higher quality of care.” (Fidler) The presence of this “total force” is evident at Air Force bases throughout the world.

5. Most AMC bases today, share their runways and mission with their commercial counterparts. According to an USAF Fact Sheet on the Civil Reserve Air Fleet, “As of Oct 1 1998, 35 carriers and 657 aircraft were enrolled in the CRAF.” (USAF) Colonel

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Phillip S. Meilinger, USAF School of Advanced Airpower Studies, emphasizes this in his book 10 Propositions Regarding Air Power: “Air Power includes not only military assets, but an aerospace industry and commercial aviation.” (Merilinger:61) The commercial airlines augment AMC in all aspects of passenger and cargo airlift capabilities.

6. The Promotion Fitness Examination (PFE) Study Guide summarizes our commitment to this total force in the 21st century by stating “Better use of commercial carriers will be made to increase the efficiency of Air Force mobility” (DOAF:15) We are committed to working together, as a team, to ensure the freedom of our country. So, the next time you take off on a commercial airline from an U.S. Air Force Base, think about the relationship that exists between the two. Think about how the existence of the CRAF helps to secure the freedom we fight for each and every day. Thanks to our commercial partners, we can enjoy increased efficiency in everyday airlift operations; as well as feeling confident in knowing that during emergency operations, in which the airlift requirements exceed AMC’s capability, our civilian brethren will be there to back us up.

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Bibliography

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