



# HII DefenseTech 2026



## **BRIG GEN Houston Cantwell, USAF (RET.)**

Senior Resident Fellow, Airpower Studies

Mitchell Institute for Aerospace Studies

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BRIG GEN Houston Cantwell, USAF (RET.), is a Senior Resident Fellow for Airpower Studies at the Mitchell Institute for Aerospace Studies.

Gen Cantwell is an experienced airman and recognized national security expert. During his 30-year Air Force career, he served as a combat pilot, commander, and strategist, flying the F-16, MQ-9, and RQ-4 aircraft. He also served over 12 years within the Pacific and European theaters and is intimately familiar with major U.S. allies and partners, including North Atlantic Treaty Alliance (NATO) relationships. When Gen Cantwell was the U.S. Forces Japan,

Director of Operations, he directly engaged with Japan's Self Defense Force while shaping policies and managing the bilateral relationship. While Commanding General of NATO's Alliance Ground Surveillance Force, he helped field NATO's first collection, intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) capability, which strengthened the Alliance and built a multinational ISR capability that provided real-time surveillance of the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine. As the initial commander of the 732d Operations Group, his unit pushed the tactical cutting edge, employing remotely piloted attack aircraft with new weapons and tactics across multiple areas of operation. Brig Gen Cantwell also served as the Vice Superintendent of the U.S. Air Force Academy and the Commander of the U.S. Air Force Holm Center, providing a rare opportunity to shape the entire Air and Space Force officer accessions enterprise. Most recently, he stood up the Air Force's very first Warrant Officer Training School.

Gen Cantwell is a recognized expert in national security, uncrewed aviation, the NATO Alliance, and ISR operations.

Gen Cantwell has a BS in Systems Engineering from the University of Virginia, a Masters of Organizational Management from George Washington University, a Masters of Military Operational Art and Science from the Air Command and Staff College, a Masters of Airpower Art and Science degree from the Air Force's School of Advanced Air and Space Studies, and a Masters of National Security Strategy from the National War College. Among his career achievements, he was awarded Japan's Defense Cooperation Medal by Japan's Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, the Bronze Star Medal during Operation Enduring Freedom, and the Air Force's Distinguished Service Medal.