



SECRETARY OF THE AIR FORCE
WASHINGTON

SEP 05 2023

Airmen and Guardians,

Over the last two years, I've had the opportunity to learn more about the Air Force and Space Force, and to appreciate both the capabilities we provide to the nation and the professionalism of our total force. I am in awe of and deeply proud of all our Airmen and Guardians from every component of the force, the Department of the Air Force civilians who support them, and the families that love and nourish them. We are second to none, but we cannot afford complacency.

Your senior leaders--myself, Honorable Kristyn Jones, General Brown, General Saltzman, Chief Bass, and Chief Towberman--each have our own way of expressing our priorities: one team, one fight; accelerate change or lose; competitive endurance; and what got us here won't get us there. We are all saying the same thing, but in different ways. We must be ready for a fight unlike anything all of us serving today have ever seen, and that requires both unity of effort and change.

As I've said many times, it has been clear to me for over a decade that China is intent on fielding a force that can conduct aggression in the Western Pacific and prevail even if the United States intervenes. While China has focused on creating the regional conventional forces it believes it needs, China is also dramatically expanding its nuclear force and military space capabilities. We cannot sustain deterrence by standing still.

Integrated deterrence is a key aspect of our National Defense Strategy intended to prevent an act of aggression, and our Air Force and Space Force are essential to executing this strategy. For the last two years, we have focused on establishing the modernization programs we need to maintain our conventional superiority. The work we did under the "Operational Imperative" label produced the new investments and programs included in the FY24 Defense Budget. This work isn't finished, but it is well begun.

However, we need to do more. We must also address the need for broader and more comprehensive change throughout the Department of the Air Force. It has become clear to the entire senior leadership team that we are not optimized for great power competition. Over more than two decades, we have optimized to support post-9/11 conflicts and demands; this is not what the nation needs for the coming decades of strategic competition. Accordingly, we will conduct a major initiative over the next several months to identify and implement the changes needed to meet our pacing challenge. This initiative will involve a comprehensive look at all aspects of how we organize, train, and equip the Air Force and Space Force.

This will not be easy; existing habits and structures are well established, but it must be done. A centralized planning effort will be led from the combined Department of the Air Force Headquarters with support and extensive input from our Major Commands and Field Commands.

It will conclude by January 2024 and be followed by an implementation phase. Fortunately, the movement to reoptimize for great power competition has already started; I see evidence of that everywhere I go. But we must move faster and more comprehensively. We must identify all the changes we need to make and accelerate them.

We start now. I have one piece of immediate direction for each of you. Every person and organization in the Department, starting today, needs to consider these questions; If asked to go to war today against a peer competitor, are we as ready as we could be? What can we change in each of our units and organizations to be more ready? These should not be looked upon as theoretical or academic questions. The fact is that this is why the Air Force and Space Force exist. This is why we all serve – to be ready at any time to undertake the most stressing mission we may be given. Deterrence is the goal, but deterrence rests firmly on our readiness and ability to win. No one wants a great power conflict, and no one can predict when one might occur, but come it may, and we must be as ready as we can be – now, tomorrow, and every day.

Change is hard, losing is unacceptable.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Frank Kendall', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Frank Kendall
Secretary of the Air Force
One Team, One Fight