



THE CASE FOR CHANGE

Optimizing for Great Power Competition

Forging a Space Service Purpose-Built
for Great Power Competition



In October 2023, Secretary Kendall released his guidance for the DAF's effort to reoptimize for Great Power Competition. The reason is simple: we must be ready for war. In the nation's first State of the Union Address, President Washington said, "To be prepared for war is one of the most effectual means of preserving peace." But that which has made us ready for the counter-VEO wars of the last two decades will not ready us for the challenges of Great Power Competition.


Great Power Competition involves rival nations with global interests, reach, and influence vying to be the preeminent actor in international politics. This means that *great power competition occurs on a global scale*. As such, competition between rival great powers unfolds in every domain—most recently in space—and across every area of responsibility. At the same time, *most competition between rival powers occurs below the threshold of open hostilities*. Day-to-day, great powers compete for influence and prestige. This is where commitment is tested, resolve is demonstrated, and credibility is established. This type of competition takes many forms, to include proxy conflicts, security cooperation, and exposing a rival's malign or irresponsible behavior.

From a technological perspective, *great powers have the resources to field advanced military technologies* that increase the tempo, range, precision, and destructive capacity of military operations. Once achieved, however, relative technological advantages are fleeting, since a great power has the resources to rapidly mimic or counter a rival's advantage. This makes rapidly transitioning advanced technology to military applications a persistent element in great power competition. Additionally, *under great power competition, the continental United States is not a sanctuary*. Preparing for great power competition means, in part, fortifying our employed-in-place infrastructure in the continental United States against surveillance, interference, and attack.

An enduring part of great power competition is conducting low-intensity operations without compromising high-intensity readiness. The military of a great power must have the capacity to engage in protracted, day-to-day competition with its rival. Failing to do so cedes advantage. At the same time, *a great power military must also prepare for high-intensity conflict, demonstrating the combat-ready credibility that underscores deterrence*. Failing to do so creates vulnerability. Therefore, to be effective in great power competition, military force structures must be sized and scoped to do both, simultaneously.

The establishment of the USSF was a response to the demands of great power competition in the space domain. Nevertheless, we still have organizational constructs, processes, and policies that are sub-optimized for the great power security environment. Therefore, we must implement enterprise-wide changes that can better prepare the USSF for this type of challenge. As these changes roll out, I ask each of you to evaluate your own span of control through this lens. Are there additional aspects of great power competition we should consider? How does great power competition impact your day-to-day mission? How can your unit rapidly adjust to better compete with our strategic rivals?

Semper Supra!



Forging a Space Service Purpose-Built for Great Power Competition

Strategic competition between great powers will characterize the global security environment for the foreseeable future. The establishment of the U.S. Space Force (USSF) was a direct response to threats arising from Great Power Competition (GPC) in the space domain. Nevertheless, our legacy roots leave us sub-optimized for the security environment confronting us today. To meet this challenge, the Department of the Air Force is reshaping the USSF's organization, operations, personnel, and equipment to complete the transformation into a service able to meet its National Defense Strategy responsibilities.

THE SHIFTING STRATEGIC LANDSCAPE

In recent years, space has transformed into a warfighting domain. Operating in a benign environment, space systems were optimized to efficiently deliver services to the Joint Force, and multiple missions were aggregated into large, complex systems to minimize exorbitant launch costs. Today, the cost of launch has significantly declined, and the use of space has exponentially proliferated. A myriad of other nations have expanded their presence into the domain—including our competitors who recognize both the benefit of space-based services to their own interests, and the Joint Force's reliance on space-based capabilities for our interests.



Optimized for an old paradigm in which satellites were essentially secure, the Space Force must grow beyond its legacy roots and embody the rapid transformation that defines this new environment.

Now, the Space Force must protect our ability to provide critical services like missile warning, position, navigation, and timing, and satellite communications, despite adversary attempts to deny them. We must also recognize that our competitors seek to use their space capabilities to degrade, disrupt or deny our actions in other domains. Efficiency is not enough—we need effective systems that are able to both increase the lethality and effectiveness of the Joint Force and protect the Joint Force from space-enabled attack.

RISK AND OPPORTUNITY

The greatest risk the Space Force faces today is that of being too late. With a fast-moving adversary, standing still is the same as falling behind. Like the Merchant Marine, which uses a fleet of vessels to provide services through a peaceful environment, today's Space Force is built to reliably provide services without interference in space. Against a near-peer adversary, a contested space domain makes these capabilities vulnerable and prone to denial. Emerging from Merchant Marine foundations, the U.S. Navy is charged with domain control, and it prioritizes effectiveness through survivability, adaptability, and combat credibility. We are forging a purpose-built Space Force to contest and control the space domain as a warfighting Service. The Space Force is laser-focused on maintaining readiness to deter and, if needed, defeat any rival.

Competition in space has evolved... We must transform.

SPACE FORCES BOLSTER STRATEGIC DETERRENCE: 1957 - 1989

In the aftermath of World War II, space was remote and nearly untouchable. As technology evolved and the Cold War ensued, great powers pursued access to space to enhance their prestige and demonstrate the superiority of their societies and institutions. Their militaries sought to leverage the unique characteristics of space to enable otherwise impossible capabilities, which gradually became foundational to modern warfare.



Demanded skilled technicians focused on ensuring space systems functioned properly to support deterrence.



Emphasized consistent and repeatable delivery of services to support strategic awareness and national decision making.



Developed and maintained readiness for persistent system availability – especially for strategic warning.



Aligned efforts to support strategic deterrence from a domain immune to the vagaries of war.

SPACE FORCES INTEGRATE INTO THE JOINT FORCE: 1990 - 2019

From positioning, navigation, and timing to communications and space-enabled attack, spacepower became the backbone for military power at the turn of the century. Resounding success in the Gulf War demonstrated that global leaders must also be leaders in space. Simultaneously, technology matured to make space generally more accessible, kicking off a renewed era of investment in space capability.



Increasing access to space demanded technical experts able to assist in integration of space effects into other domain operations.



High costs of access to space drove a risk-averse culture, favoring exquisite high-value, low-density systems.



An uncontested domain encouraged space forces to prioritize system availability, providing direct tactical integration.



Space capabilities scaled to support multi-domain operations as a key enabler of the Joint Force.

SPACE FORCES PURPOSE-BUILT FOR SPACE SUPERIORITY: 2019 -

Over the past few years, there has been a growing acknowledgement that space capabilities must be effective in the contested, congested, and competitive environment. Satellites are no longer safe from malign influence, and spacepower is increasingly available to both the private and public sector. As a result, space-based capability has grown exponentially, fundamentally shifting space from peaceful expanse to warfighting domain.



Space professionals must have broad operational and technical skills to integrate as part of a joint team.



Space forces must demonstrate resiliency against attack with full spectrum capabilities to impose costs and deny benefits.



Space forces must be ready to protect and defend space assets from attack and to protect joint forces from space-enabled attack.



Space forces must be fully integrated into joint and all-domain operations and postured to control the space domain.

KEY INITIATIVES

Great powers recognize that space is a key enabler of power projection and military success depends in large part on a nation's ability to maintain and deny access to the domain at will. Consequently, GPC demands that the Space Force double down on its key organize, train, and equip responsibilities: people, readiness, capability development, and power projection. In doing so, the Space Force will arise as a warfighting service ready to compete and win as a foundational element of Joint Force success now and into the future.

PEOPLE

Prepare Leaders for Modern Warfare



An era of GPC requires joint-minded warfighters who understand the battlefield context of the space domain as well as their ability to act within it.

The Space Force will redesign career paths to produce Guardians that meet its high-tech operational demands.

The Space Force will establish a common Officer Training Course for new accessions, and it will expand educational and developmental opportunities for all Guardians—enlisted, officer, and civilian.

READINESS

Redesign USSF Readiness Standards to Meet the Demands of GPC



The Space Force must define its readiness by its ability to deter and defeat rival powers rather than its capacity to provide services to others.

The Space Force will implement standards that reflect operations under contested conditions rather than those of a benign environment. Employed-in-place standards will also account for key infrastructure.

Increase Scope, Tempo, and Realism of Operational Assessments and Exercises

The Space Force must develop a Service-level, data-driven process to measure its readiness to overcome a thinking adversary.

The Space Force will build and conduct a series of nested exercises that increase in scope and complexity to fit within a broader Department-level framework. Assessment results will shape force design and development.

CAPABILITY DEVELOPMENT

Establish a Space Futures Command

Long-term success in GPC requires a forward-looking planning process that ensures competitiveness over time and tightly couples mission needs with capability development.

The Space Force will create a new Field Command that forecasts the threat environment, develops and validates concepts, conducts experimentation and wargames, and performs mission area design.



Strengthen Science and Technology (S&T) Processes for Space

To sustain technical advantage in GPC, the space S&T enterprise must be optimized for the transition of operationally relevant technology at a pace and scale that exceeds that of rival powers.

The Space Force will reprioritize and streamline S&T pipelines to better meet warfighter needs at the point of delivery. Integration with force design will ensure relevance of S&T investments over the long term.

POWER PROJECTION

Strengthen Force Presentation of Ready and Integrated Units

To be prepared for GPC, the Space Force must fully integrate into the Joint Force—properly trained, equipped, and ready to accept mission command for assigned objectives.

USSF will formalize Combat Squadrons as its Unit of Action. It will complete activation of the remainder of USSF Service Components and accelerate implementation of the Space Force Generation model.



CALL TO ACTION

The challenge is great, but our Guardians' potential is greater still. To thrive and win in Great Power Competition, we must enhance our capabilities, develop Guardians for modern warfare, ready for the high-intensity fight, and strengthen our power projection to contest and control the space domain. With your character, connection, commitment, and courage, we will support the rest of the Joint Force and *secure our Nation's interests in, from, and to space.*



UNITED STATES
SPACE FORCE