The National Defense Strategy identified that the United States is challenged by a more competitive and dangerous global environment. A great power competition has emerged with both Russia and China, and their destabilizing activities have placed the U.S. national and economic security at risk. Russia is modernizing both its conventional nuclear arsenals, while China is aggressively investing to overtake our military and technological advantages globally by approximately 2025. Over the past few years, we have seen our military and technological advantages seep away while increased threats emerged from mid-tier powers and the rogue regimes of North Korea, Iran, and violent extremist organizations. American air, space, and cyber superiority are imperative for any military operation and necessary to maintain peace. All domains are in jeopardy.

During the time the legacy force was aging and shrinking, the Air Force showed superb stewardship over the nation’s space mission—funding and managing nearly 90 percent of military space.

While the number of Air Force missions increased, the number of its personnel declined by 30 percent and the number of its aircraft declined by 37 percent since the 1991 Gulf War. Matched with insufficient and unpredictable budgets, the Air Force has faced the combined effects of decreased readiness and aging weapons systems and equipment. The Air Force is just too small and too old for what our nation requires of it. Forged against the backdrop of deterrence, readiness, and engagement, the Air Force has been in continuous combat operations for 28 years with a steadily smaller force, which has taken a severe toll on both weapon systems and, more importantly, Airmen and their families.

The stability and regular order in the fiscal year 2018 and 2019 budgets have halted the immediate decline in military capability. The Defense Department, which focused on readiness in 2018 and is investing in lethality in 2019, still lacks the resources to grow its end strength capacity as required and budget sequestration is scheduled to return in fiscal year (FY) 2020.

Congress must fund the Air Force on time and in a sufficient manner to thwart readiness issues and to recapitalize and modernize the oldest, smallest, and least ready Air Force in its history. The U.S. needs to increase investments in Research and Development (R&D) and in its Science and Technology (S&T) accounts to promote innovation and experimentation necessary for achieving and maintaining the air, space, and cyber superiority that this nation requires, and our warfighters deserve.

**THE AIR FORCE ASSOCIATION’S MISSION IS TO PROMOTE A DOMINANT UNITED STATES AIR FORCE AND A STRONG NATIONAL DEFENSE, AND TO HONOR AIRMEN AND OUR AIR FORCE HERITAGE.**
THE PREAMBLE TO THE FIRST AFA STATEMENT OF POLICY DECLARED, “WE HAVE BANDED TOGETHER AS THE AIR FORCE ASSOCIATION WITH THIS IN COMMON—A STEADFAST BELIEF IN A STRONG UNITED STATES AS THE BEST INSURANCE FOR WORLD PEACE, AND IN AIRPOWER AS THE KEY TO OUR STRENGTH.”

THEREFORE, THE AIR FORCE ASSOCIATION SUPPORTS THE FOLLOWING ACTIONS:

1. REBUILD COMBAT READINESS IN AIR, SPACE, AND CYBERSPACE
   a. Advocate to Congress that Departments of Defense and Veterans Affairs budgets be completed by the beginning of each fiscal year. The Air Force needs stable and predictable funding at adequate funding levels. Continuing Resolutions (CRs) impede readiness, while consistent yearly budgets allow the Air Force to make long-term plans and effectively manage its programs.
   b. End the Budget Control Act of 2011—its debilitating restrictions continue to erode readiness.
   c. Work collaboratively with the Department of Defense and the aerospace industry to reduce the cost and time to acquire new weapons systems.

2. FORCE STRUCTURE
   a. Size force structure to meet global requirements by increasing Active Duty strength to 350,000 personnel, the Air National Guard to 120,000 personnel, and the Reserve to 72,500 personnel. The Air Force must be sized and funded commensurate with the missions it is given.
   b. Increase targeted pilot retention bonuses up to $60,000 to stem the loss of pilots. The Air Force has training limitations and retention challenges because of the continuous operations tempo, deployments, and additional duties. Their shortage has grown more acute because of hiring demand from the commercial airline industry.
   c. Grow the Total Force to 386 total squadrons to meet the Air Force’s many missions. Operational squadrons are the core fighting unit of the Air Force. Increase from 55 fighter squadrons to 62 fighter squadrons; from 9 bomber squadrons to 14; from 53 airlift squadrons to 54; and from 16 space squadrons to 23. Tomorrow’s threats require that the Air Force grow in order to carry out all of its assigned missions, and our air superiority is endangered.
   d. Advocate for smart space. The Air Force has led the Armed Forces in establishing America’s space capability such that it is unrivaled in the world. Today, to split up the well-integrated set of air and space capabilities that have been organized to seamlessly contribute to America’s military capabilities would result in more harm than good. The question of standing up a new armed service for space is not “if,” but “when,” and the “when” is the time all the conditions for creating a separate armed force for space are met. The standup of a combatant command (US Space Command) to focus on warfare in space is appropriate. Rapidly reducing U.S. space capability gaps, while re-establishing US Space Command, is the best way to address advancing threats to space. The Space Force proposal is a resource question writ large: too much mission, too few dollars. Standing up a separate space bureaucracy amplifies the problem by driving more money to a headquarters function, not space operations. Congress has constrained space capabilities, not the Air Force, by underfunding the service.
   e. Recruit and retain highly skilled support personnel, and implement selective bonuses for depleted career fields—such as cybersecurity, security forces, maintainers, and medical personnel. It is “cheaper to retain than retrain.”

3. RECAPITALIZATION / MODERNIZATION
   a. Recapitalize the Air Force’s air and space systems to ensure continued core mission capabilities.
   b. Accelerate the Air Force’s top three acquisition programs. The warfighters deserve equipment in a timely and sufficient manner, while mitigating costs to the taxpayers.
      1. F-35A Lightning II—The US must speed up acquisition of the strike fighter, which is the only fifth-generation fighter in production and is survivable against today’s defenses. Currently, the Air Force is gaining approximately 48-56 aircraft annually, but it needs to recapitalize much sooner by procuring 80-100 aircraft per year to keep up with future demands and decrease unit costs.
      2. KC-46A Pegasus Tanker—Replace costly 50-year-old aircraft that are at the end of their service lives. The Air Force is expected to receive only about 15 aircraft annually, which is only a very small down payment on the 500 total new tankers that are required.
      3. B-21 Raider Bomber—Procure 180 B-21 bombers. The current long-range strike force averages 40 years in age and 87 percent of today’s bomber fleet predates stealth technology.
   c. Fund the T-X trainer aircraft program to replace the T-38 Talon; a new trainer is key to meeting the needed increase in pilot production the Air Force requires and provides a platform more aligned with fifth generation aircraft.
   d. Sustain and modernize the airlift fleet that provides our nation its global mobility.
   e. Accelerate the Air Force’s new Advanced Battle Management System (ABMS)—a more survivable architecture using a network of integrated sensors.
   f. Advance the Long Range Standoff Weapon (LRSO) with nuclear capability.
   g. Support full funding for the Ground Based Strategic Deterrent (GBSD) to replace the Minuteman III intercontinental ballistic missile system (ICBM), which is increasingly expensive to maintain as it is nearly 50 years old and faces future capability gaps.
h. Grow robust space launch capabilities, taking advantage of cost-reducing measures in the commercial space industry.

i. Endorse the Air Force’s “Next Generation ISR (Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance) Dominance Flight Plan,” utilizing a sensing grid that fuses together data from legacy platforms and incorporates emerging technologies. We support continuing upgrades to reconnaissance and surveillance platforms and battle management systems. Artificial Intelligence (AI) will be key in deciphering data.

j. Accelerate innovation, experimentation, and development of remotely piloted aircraft (RPA) technologies including sensors, semi-autonomous (unmanned wingman) and autonomous operations, airbase defense, micro/nanoscale, and swarming technologies.

k. Expand recruiting of RPA pilots to non-traditional communities to alleviate critical pilot shortages and enhance diversity.

l. Encourage and reward rapid development and acquisition programs such as the Air Force’s Light Attack demonstration.

m. Collaborate with Congress and industry to institute defense industrial base policies that ensure a robust defense industrial base capable of meeting Air Force acquisition/procurement requirements.

n. Boost support to the Air Force laboratories, National Laboratories, and Nuclear laboratories.

o. Quicken the acquisition of replacement helicopters for the UH-1N fleet at the earliest opportunity for missile force security and VIP movements.

p. Grow capabilities in Nuclear Command, Control & Communications (NC3) and Multi-Domain Command and Control (MDC2).

q. Shape Air Force cybersecurity legislation, budgets, and programs that benefit our nation and warfighters.

4. INVEST IN TECHNOLOGY

a. Invest at least 10 percent of Science & Technology (S&T) funding in sustainment technologies, since a huge portion of the Air Force budget is consumed by sustainment costs. Increase the budget commensurate with the Air Force’s increased emphasis on basic and applied research to drive long-term innovation and dominance in air and space power.

b. Advance hypersonic technologies more aggressively and leverage those technologies to more fully integrate operations in the air and space environments. We are trailing behind the Chinese and the Russians in hypersonics development.

c. Develop Artificial Intelligence (AI) investments and strategies, which will enhance warfighting capabilities. Initial AI efforts are rightly focused on assessing and categorizing the abundance of data from aircraft, satellites and weapons, however, we must be flexible enough to explore additional uses for AI to ensure we don’t fall behind our strategic competitors.

d. Leverage industry’s progress and increase expenditures on autonomy and quantum computing.

5. SUPPORT AIRMEN AND THEIR FAMILIES; TREAT RETIREES AND VETERANS WITH DIGNITY AND RESPECT; CHAMPION CIVILIAN MATTERS

a. AIRMEN AND FAMILIES
   1. Pay and Benefits
      • Tie military pay raises to the Employment Cost Index (ECI).
   2. Healthcare: Healthcare is a readiness issue
      • Fund TRICARE to provide proper care for military members and families.

b. VETERANS
   1. Pay and Benefits
      • Contest cuts that would eliminate the Individual Unemployability (IU) benefit once a veteran becomes eligible for Social Security. IU helps those veterans who have service-connected disabilities and are not able to work.
   2. Healthcare: Honor our nation’s promise to veterans.
      • Challenge TRICARE fee increases proposed by Congress.
      • Preserve TRICARE for Life (TFL). It is a national obligation to retirees, earned long ago. TFL is costing less, not more. Negative changes are perceived as a breach of faith.
      • Improve VA Health Care to ensure veterans have the health care they deserve. Safeguard full funding for the VA Mission Act and keep the development of the new Electronic Health Record on schedule.
   3. Arlington National Cemetery
      • Pursue all avenues to expand and preserve Arlington National Cemetery before changing burial and inurnment requirements for our members and veterans.

c. CIVILIANS
   1. Support the recruitment, talent management, and retention of quality Air Force civilians. We are losing civilian talent and expertise to other opportunities due to long delays and a burdensome hiring system. DOD has experienced a 30 percent cut in numbers over the past two decades. Civilians serve as the institutional memory for the force, and their corporate knowledge and skills cannot be easily replaced.
   2. Promote civilian pay raises. They are key members of the Air Force’s Total Force.
AIR FORCE ASSOCIATION CORE VALUES

Integrity First
Service Before Self
Excellence in All We Do
Independence and Nonpartisanship
Diversity and Inclusiveness

AIR FORCE ASSOCIATION MISSION

To promote a dominant United States Air Force and a strong national defense and to honor Airmen and our Air Force heritage. To accomplish this, we:

EDUCATE the public on the critical need for unmatched aerospace power and a technically superior workforce to ensure US national security;

ADVOCATE for aerospace power and STEM education; and

SUPPORT the Total Air Force family and promote aerospace education.

The Air Force Association (AFA) is a 501(c)(3), independent, nonpartisan, nonprofit educational organization promoting public understanding of aerospace power and the pivotal role it plays in the security of the nation. AFA disseminates information through Air Force Magazine, airforcemag.com, the Mitchell Institute, national symposia, and other forms of public outreach. Learn more about AFA by visiting www.afa.org.