

UNCLASSIFIED



UNITED STATES AIR FORCE

UNCLASSIFIED FORCE DESIGN OVERVIEW

A CHANGED CHARACTER OF WAR

The United States Air Force (USAF) is transitioning from over 30 years of conflict in the Middle East to address the complex and rapidly changing threats of the Great Power Competition (GPC) environment. The National Defense Strategy (NDS) establishes the People's Republic of China (PRC) as the pacing challenge. The PRC's ever-growing capacity of increasingly capable long-range fires—such as ballistic missiles, cruise missiles, and attack unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs)—continues to expand the range and density with which they can threaten friendly forces. While paced by the PRC as a long-term strategic competitor, the future Air Force must also be able to respond to an acute Russian threat and other potential aggressors. Ongoing conflicts in Ukraine and the Middle East highlight the growing effectiveness of smaller, less-costly systems that in sufficient quantities create quality of their own.

The character of war has changed – the combination of network-enabled long-range fires, and mass quantities of agile short-range systems, challenges our preferred way of war. The Air Force must transform from what it is today to what it needs to be to compete.

WHAT IS ONE FORCE DESIGN

On October 4, 2024, General David Allvin, Chief of Staff of the United States Air Force, signed the classified 'One Force Design' document, establishing the USAF's Force Design as the 'North Star' for the USAF's modernization. This document identifies the key attributes of the capabilities that will accomplish the USAF's enduring missions (defend the homeland, maintain strategic deterrence, and project power). It draws from national strategy and the Joint Warfighting Concept (JWC) to define USAF warfighting requirements through a continuous cycle of wargaming, modeling and simulation, and strategic assessments. Annually, the USAF will issue updated Force Design Guidance that charts the path to achieve our Force Design and is adapted to budget realities, technology advancements, and changes in the threat.

FORCE DESIGN FRAMEWORK

The Force Design introduces a transformational framework, which will direct the Service on how to address key imbalances and create a more lethal and resilient force. The framework identifies three unique mission areas to address the changed character of war. The attributes of the capabilities in Mission Area 1 capitalize on advancements in short-ranged mass fires and sensing, while Mission Area 2 capabilities harness long-range systems and fires to project power, and flexible Mission Area 3 systems allow the USAF to respond to a range of contingencies anywhere on the globe.

- **Mission Area 1 (MA1) Capabilities** have attributes that allow them to live within and generate combat power from the dense threat area which will be under constant attack from adversary ballistic and cruise missiles or attack UAVs.
- **Mission Area 2 (MA2) Capabilities** have attributes that afford them the range to operate from the defensible area of relative sanctuary beyond the umbrella of most adversary ballistic and cruise missiles or attack UAVs and project fires into highly contested environments.
- **Mission Area 3 (MA3) Capabilities** have attributes that create the flexibility and mass to span a range of potential future crises and operate from the broader area that covers most of the world with positions resilient to limited adversary attack.

Mission Area Capabilities integrate with each other to conduct required missions and create a single lethal Air Force. MA1 Capabilities allow them to posture and operate close to an adversary, employ fires in mass directly against enemy fielded forces, and provide sensors, communications, and battle management to MA2 Capabilities. MA2 Capabilities employ from long ranges to penetrate or project fires into highly contested threat areas and may be supported by MA3 Capabilities in transit or MA1 Capabilities close to the threat. MA3 Capabilities are essential to competitive efforts to build relationships and integration with allies and partners, provide flexibility to meet global taskings, and bring mass to the most challenging conflicts when conditions allow.

IMPLEMENTING FORCE DESIGN

We will make hard decisions to align our capabilities, people, posture, and force structure with a force design that resonates with the changed character of war to meet the challenges of the future. We will transform through deliberate tradeoffs between modernization and sustainment to maintain competitive advantage. Our success depends on purposeful integration of the Air Force with Joint Force, Allies, and partners. We owe it to our future Airmen to get this right.