

# Space Force Is Key in Future Threat Mitigation Targeting China, Russia: Air Force Secretary

Secretary Frank Kendall outlines his vision for the Department of the Air Force in 2050, emphasizing space dominance and technological advancement.

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The U.S. Air Force Thunderbirds perform at the 2024 New York International Air Show at the Orange County



By Chase Smith

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In his final think tank engagement before President-elect Donald Trump's inauguration next week, Secretary of the Air Force Frank Kendall discussed his vision for the Department of the Air Force in 2050, emphasizing the critical role of the Space Force in addressing future threats from China and Russia.

Speaking at the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) on Jan. 13, Kendall [outlined](#) the anticipated needs and capabilities of the Air Force and Space Force over the next 25 years.

“Space is going to be the decisive domain,” he [said](#). “The ability of the entire joint force to project power depends upon our success in space. If we do not deny China, in particular, its targeting capabilities—with AI assistance and automated battle command and control and long-range precision munitions that depend on that ... if we don't deny that precise and real-time targeting capability—the whole joint force is at grave risk.”

Kendall said the report, which has yet to be fully released, envisions a significantly expanded and more capable Space Force by 2050. The Air Force did not respond to The Epoch Times' request for comment on when the report would be made public.

Kendall emphasized at the event the need for a “much bigger, much more capable, much more powerful Space Force” that would evolve from its current support-oriented role to a more combat-ready force.

While the Space Force is a separate and distinct branch of the armed services, it is organized under the Department of the Air Force, according to its [website](#).

Kendall envisions the Space Force—which was designated as the sixth branch of the military under the first Trump administration in 2019—developing stronger military capabilities and taking a more assertive stance in space operations, much like how a navy is more equipped for warfare than a merchant marine fleet.

Key capabilities highlighted for the future Space Force include enhanced counter-space operations, automated space domain awareness, improved surveillance and targeting capabilities, and more resilient missile warning and tracking systems. Kendall also stressed the importance of leveraging commercial partnerships in areas such as communications and positioning, navigation, and timing (PNT) services.

Regarding the Air Force, Kendall outlined several priorities for 2050, including maintaining two legs of the nuclear triad under the Air Force's purview, enhancing global conventional strike capabilities, and improving tactical air power survivability. He emphasized the need for next-generation aerial refueling and the integration of collaborative combat aircraft (CCA) into the force structure.

Throughout his presentation, Kendall emphasized the urgency of addressing the threat posed by China.

“China, China, China remains the problem,” he said, adding that Russia also “doesn’t go away as a serious threat” even though China “increasingly dominates the story... [as] a strategic competitor to the United States.”

The secretary also touched on the challenges of incorporating artificial intelligence and autonomous systems into military operations.

“We’re gonna be in a world by 2025 where decisions will not be made at human speed—they’re gonna be made at machine speed,” Kendall said. “Humans will have to oversee, and we will remain consistent with our values, but time is the most fundamental parameter in the battlefield ... fractions of a second matter, and human beings can only handle so much data at a time.”

Kendall expressed concerns about the future of nuclear stability in a world in which China, Russia, and the United States all possess significant nuclear arsenals. He called for increased dialogue between nations to mitigate the risks associated with nuclear brinksmanship.

As Kendall prepares to hand over leadership to the Trump administration, he emphasized several key decisions that will need to be addressed promptly.

These include finalizing the fiscal year 2025 budget negotiations with Congress and preparing the 2026 budget for submission.

Kendall also highlighted the critical decision regarding the future of the Next Generation Air Dominance (NGAD) program, stating that the new administration will need to determine whether to proceed with the current concept or explore alternatives.

Additionally, he stressed the importance of reassessing the Air Force's global posture and deployments in light of the focus on China as the pacing challenge. Kendall urged the incoming team to be prepared for the complexity and urgency of these decisions, emphasizing the need for a thorough understanding of the issues and swift action to maintain the Air Force's competitive edge.

Trump has so far not named his nominee to replace Kendall as secretary of the Air Force.

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