

AIR COMBAT COMMAND

# STRATEGIC PLAN



SEPTEMBER 2018

## Foreword

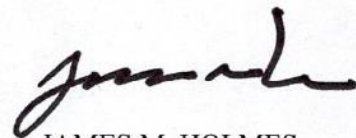
From its inception in 1946 as Tactical Air Command to its present form as Air Combat Command (ACC), our MAJCOM has delivered unmatched combat airpower in support of our Nation's objectives. To stay ahead of our adversaries, ACC has evolved from an air-only force to one that today routinely operates simultaneously in and through the air, space, and cyber domains. We've faced challenges, but our Airmen have fueled our enduring ability to prepare, adapt, and win.

As part of the most recent addition to ACC's combat power, lead command responsibilities for USAF cyber activities transitioned from AF Space Command to ACC in July of 2018. Over the next year, the actions we take to integrate 24th AF's cyber Airmen will ensure cyber capabilities are seamlessly fused into every Air Force mission area and at all levels of conflict.

To continue to provide our Air Force and our Nation with properly organized, trained; and equipped Airmen, this strategic plan reemphasizes and further details ACC's three interdependent priorities; diligently pursue squadron readiness, build leaders, and bring the future faster. Our efforts in support of these three priorities will make sure our deployed and deployed-in-place forces are ready to fight and decisively win against any adversary in any scenarios across the spectrum of conflict.

Most importantly, these priorities reaffirm ACC's steadfast commitment to its Airmen. We must never forget that our Active Duty, Guard, Reserve, officer, enlisted, and civilian Airmen are our asymmetric advantage. ACC will continue to rely upon and cultivate these precious resources to support current multi-domain operations and innovatively adapt towards a better future.

Thanks for your service to our country and Air Combat Command.



JAMES M. HOLMES  
General, United States Air Force  
Commander, Air Combat Command

**Purpose** - Nested within National, Department of Defense and Air Force strategic guidance, ACC's Strategic Plan provides priorities and goals to ensure ACC delivers combat-ready Airmen to control and exploit air, space, and cyberspace as part of the Joint Force. It sets expectations for our Airmen--Active Duty, Air Force Reserve, and Air National Guard, officer, enlisted, and civilian--by communicating what ACC stands for and highlighting the paths we will chart to realize our goals. The steps we take today to build a stronger Air Force will define the force that will fight America's next major battle.

**Communicating the Strategic Plan** - ACC commanders, supervisors, and leaders at all levels should be prepared to discuss and explain this plan to all ACC Airmen.

**Strategic Environment** - Today's global strategic environment remains incredibly volatile, uncertain, and complex. It simultaneously presents the US and its international partners with a diverse array of opportunities, challenges, and threats. Most significantly, the reemergence of great power competition, coupled with the rapid diffusion of advanced technologies, directly challenges our economic and military advantage and undermines our global position. Revisionist powers, rogue regimes, and non-state actors now undeniably possess means, ranging from cyber tools to weapons of mass destruction, to target our homeland and our interests abroad.

**Mission** - ACC organizes, trains, and equips Airmen who fight in and from multiple domains to control the air, space, and cyberspace. As the lead command for fighter, command and control, intelligence, surveillance & reconnaissance, personnel recovery, persistent attack and reconnaissance, electronic warfare, and cyber operations, ACC is responsible for providing combat air, space, and cyber power and the combat support that assures mission success to America's warfighting commands.

**Vision** - ACC's vision, '*People first, Mission always*', recognizes that Airmen provide ACC's enduring source of strength. Accordingly, ACC remains steadfastly dedicated to arming our warfighter Airmen with the combat skills and equipment necessary to succeed in all domains against any adversary. Equally important, ACC leaders at all levels must energize and resource their teams to develop new and innovative ways to accomplish their missions. We must always give our Airmen the freedom to find a better path.

**Squadrons are the key to our success** - Our squadrons are the core warfighting units of our service. They are the place where our culture resides, where innovation is born, and where Airmen succeed or fail in our missions. A vital squadron is built on three key building blocks; esprit de corps, purposeful leadership, and verifiable mission success. Esprit de corps is built on membership in a respected unit that works toward a higher purpose. Purposeful leadership requires focusing on well-defined wins, investing in people, exploiting mistakes, and nurturing resilient Airmen and families. Verifiable mission success describes the unique mission outcomes a squadron is designed and resourced to produce.<sup>1</sup>

**Measuring and Tracking Success** - To chart our course toward becoming a truly multi-domain capable air, space, and cyber power, the following pages detail ACC's three interdependent priorities. Ultimately, our readiness, our leaders, and our ability to bring the future faster will

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<sup>1</sup> "Improving Air Force Squadrons: Recommendations for Vitality." Report to CSAF, pp. 8-13.

determine our overall lethality. Subordinate goals aligned under each of these priorities further describe ACC's intent to its commanders. Given ACC's diverse units and capabilities, a single boilerplate prescription of what success looks like, such as a single list of objectives and corresponding metrics, is insufficient. As an example, fighter squadron readiness looks a lot different than cyber mission team readiness. Despite easily recognizable unit differences, each division, wing, group, and squadron contributes to ACC's lethality. Teammates must know the small handful of outcomes their squadron is resourced to produce and keep score. Understanding this, commanders at all levels will establish their own objectives based upon the outcomes they provide, and tailor their respective inspection programs to evaluate those areas.

**Priority 1: Revitalizing Squadron Readiness**

To meet the world's diverse security challenges, ACC must provide lethal, ready forces. The shifting character of modern conflict precludes long deployment spin-up times for our Active Duty, Guard, and Reserve Airmen, our families, and our weapon systems. Recognizing these realities, ACC places a special trust and confidence in its commanders to prepare combat-ready Airmen and squadrons for conflict. Failure to do so limits our senior decision makers' maneuver space and yields strategic initiative to our adversaries. In short, ACC must develop and sustain elements of both a "Fight Tonight" and a "Deploy Tonight, Fight Tomorrow" force.

Goal 1: Ready Airmen

I expect our Airmen to be physically, mentally, socially, and spiritually ready to fight tonight while deployed-in-place or deploy tonight to fight tomorrow. Where possible, ACC squadrons will train and deploy as units. However, I also expect our Airmen to be sufficiently resilient to deploy in smaller teams to supplement in-theater forces. I further expect commanders and supervisors to hold their subordinates accountable to the highest readiness standards while also aggressively pursuing both individual and squadron-level educational and training opportunities. While our Airmen provide the sword, they share the responsibility to sharpen the sword with their leaders. Where money and time become constrained, leaders must prioritize tasks, make sound risk decisions, and then smartly advocate for their Airmen's needs.

Goal 2: Ready Families

Equally important, I expect commanders and supervisors to place our Airmen's families in the best possible position to succeed. Although our spouses and children may not have sworn an oath in service to our country, they still shoulder a heavy burden. From initiating new programs or revitalizing languishing ones, to providing heartfelt phone calls or handwritten notes, I expect leaders at all levels to consider bold, creative approaches that best provide for their Airmen's families. In any event, I expect commanders to create a collaborative environment which values two-way communication founded upon mutual respect and trust. Our families should thrive, not merely survive.

Goal 3: Ready Weapon Systems

Finally, ACC, in collaboration with Department of Defense and industry acquisition and sustainment partners, will arm its Airmen with capable, relevant weapons and support platforms. Our weapon systems will continue to rely upon our Airmen's discipline, attention to detail and continued emphasis on the hard-earned basics that sustain operations and sortie generation. Additionally, we will balance the sustainment and recapitalization of existing platforms with the



development of new systems. Together they will provide the Joint Force and our Allies unmatched air and cyber capability. As we return our focus to high-end conflict, I expect every Airmen to help improve our weapon systems by identifying problem areas and providing potential fixes. Equally important, I expect every Airmen to demonstrate the utmost vigilance in protecting the information necessary to maintain our warfighting and technical edge. When a problem arises, I expect commanders and supervisors to leverage their chains of command to better engage Joint, industry, and academic partnerships in developing creative solutions.

## **Priority 2: Developing Leaders**

ACC must be able to adapt, anticipate and react to changes in the operating environment. We must meet this no-fail mission by providing the Joint Force combat ready Airmen who are superbly trained to handle the known while also educated to recognize and react to the unknown. In doing so, ACC commanders must dutifully cultivate each Airman to develop values-driven, mission-focused, people-oriented leaders ready to prevail in any warfighting environment. Most importantly, while we arm our Airmen with skills that could easily lead them to success outside uniformed service, we must treat them with the dignity and respect they deserve so they will choose to stay with us.<sup>2</sup>

### **Goal 1: Education, Training, and Experience**

Our Airmen receive incredible technical training through formalized courses which is then broadened by professional military education and on-the-job learning. ACC's continued success depends upon our Airmen's intrinsic drive towards continuous, holistic improvement. I expect every Airman to aggressively pursue these opportunities and for leaders to support their goals.

I also expect local commanders and leaders to develop and institute unit-specific training and education programs. Whether developing a squadron commander mentor program or instituting a flying training plan, I expect these programs to meet the unique demands of our Airmen and our diverse mission sets. By promoting both formal and informal training methods, we reaffirm our commitment to providing every Airman the opportunity to improve mentally, physically, socially, and spiritually. In doing so, ACC can build and sustain a resilient force capable of confronting and surmounting any challenge.

### **Goal 2: Delegate Authority**

In concert with offering our Airmen a broad range of formal and informal training and educational opportunities, we recognize the need to delegate authority to our leaders. Our expected future operating environment requires Airmen to balance compliance with independent action. They must be comfortable with uncertainty and demonstrate disciplined initiative rather than waiting for orders from a higher echelon. As supervisors and leaders, we must provide our Airmen with the proper context and trust them to know when to take independent action. We must issue our intent, describing the "what" rather than the "how," to the maximum extent practical. Doing so gives our Airmen unmatched freedom of action and the freedom to innovatively chart and learn from their own path.

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<sup>2</sup> Paraphrase of Richard Branson, "Look After Your Staff," Virgin, 27 Mar 2014, <https://www.virgin.com/richard-branson/look-after-your-staff>.

### Goal 3: Empower Leaders

Delegation of authority increases our operational and tactical flexibility and ultimately empowers our leaders. It encourages our Airmen to try new ways of doing things, fail fast, learn and improve, and then share their successes with others. It engenders a symbiotic trust. Commanders trust their Airmen will get the job done, and Airmen trust their commanders to guide rather than micromanage. While doing so carries an inherent but acceptable amount of risk in a peacetime training environment, failure to appropriately delegate authority in the event of a conflict will undoubtedly slow down our operational tempo. Given a commander's intent, subordinate leaders must confidently provide the "how." Doing so will produce Airmen who are comfortable with being uncomfortable, an essential characteristic of an adaptive warfighting force. Commanders and leaders always retain task responsibilities and must provide feedback and coaching to enable the success of their empowered Airman.

### **Priority 3: Bringing the Future Faster**

The challenge of great power competition should drive us to constantly reexamine our ACC functions and missions. Unthinking adherence to our same old ways will only bring success in the unlikely event that future conflicts are nearly identical to those of the past. While recognizing our hard-earned historical lessons, we cannot allow our previous successes to blind us to the opportunities of the future; we must look forward with an innovative spirit. Above all else, bringing the future faster is a mindset that relies on trust between Airmen and their leaders and willingness, by every Airman, to challenge the innovation status quo. It requires us to balance prudent risk acceptance with agile reaction.

#### Goal 1: Accept Risk

ACC will support design direction developed by the Air Force Warfighting Integration Capability (AFWIC), while executing our lead command responsibilities for assigned systems and capabilities. Doing so will require us to persistently reassess our own subordinate organizational and individual priorities and their alignment with this higher level guidance. However, faced with physical and fiscal constraints and broad, diverse mission sets, there may simply be things we are unable to do. This stark realization should drive us to examine our capabilities and identify areas where we can prudently assume risk. Identifying these risk areas should generate more questions: Will accepting this risk make us more ready and lethal? Who is accepting this risk? For how long? What are the steps and processes to manage it? Such introspection must span from our most complex acquisition programs to our simplest daily routines. By identifying areas where we can prudently accept risk, we can better mitigate and communicate deficiencies to the Joint Force.

#### Goal 2: Streamline and Combine the Processes We Control

To bring the future faster we must also identify where we can merge, streamline, or discard our programs and processes. Institutional risk aversion has extended our requirements and acquisition processes, enabling adversaries to counter our late-to-need weapon systems with similar capabilities in significant capacity. Recognizing our management structures and processes exist solely to empower our Airmen with the knowledge, platforms, and support

needed to fight and win, commanders and leaders must persistently advocate for improvements.<sup>3</sup> From our flight lines to our operations centers, Airmen should ask themselves, " Does this process, platform, or way of doing business make my Air Force more lethal?" Regardless of the response, their next logical question should be, "How can *I/we* make it better?"

#### Goal 3: Realize Multi-Domain Command and Control (MDC2)

We are in direct competition with adversaries who have spent decades studying how we fight. They have fielded domain-specific technologies to directly counter our proven domain-specific strengths. As a result, any single domain solution has become cost prohibitive, potentially in both blood and treasure. Anticipating future conflicts will be multi-domain in character; our advantage in future fights will depend on harnessing vast amounts of data, fusing it quickly into decision-quality information, and creating effects simultaneously, from any domain or component, from anywhere in the world. This is the Air Force vision for Multi-Domain Operations (MDO). At the heart of MDO is the ability to implement converged MDC2 solutions simultaneously, across all domains, at multiple classification levels during all phases and levels of conflict. ACC must lead the transformation of our command and control and battle management systems while collaborating with our Air Force, Intelligence Community, Joint, Allied, industry, and academic partners to provide multi-domain awareness, advanced battle management, and an agile resilient communications backbone. We must operate seamlessly in and through the air, space, and cyber domains to realize an advantage in any or all of those domains.

#### Goal 4: Integrate Joint and Coalition Capabilities

ACC cannot bring the future faster in isolation; a fight alone is a fight lost. While a humble view recognizes ACC's unique contribution to joint air, space, and cyber power, a stove-piped ACC-only perspective is self-defeating. From capability development to battlefield execution to installation support, I expect our Airmen to strengthen their relationships and interoperability with our Air Force, Joint, and Allied colleagues. Equally important, to improve our "speed to field," I expect our Airmen, supported by their respective chains of command, to closely collaborate with our industry and academia partners. By leveraging this interoperable, integrated approach, we can complement our many strengths and enhance our overall lethality.

### **Conclusion**

This strategic plan is not prescriptive nor set in stone. It communicates broad guidelines to better describe ACC's three priority areas: improving squadron readiness, building leaders, and bringing the future faster. It is intended to focus our Airmen on their missions rather than burden them with overly complicated metrics. ACC's enduring mission of providing educated, trained, lethal, and innovative Airmen who fight in multiple domains to control and exploit the air, space, and cyberspace underpins our Joint Force's power projection and our Nation's ability to pursue and protect vital interests. Active Duty, Guard, Reserve, officer and enlisted, civilian, contractor, spouses and children--all our Airmen--have been, and will continue to be, central to ACC's success. They bear the burden of competition and conflict and deserve our very best.

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<sup>3</sup> Remarks by Secretary Mattis on the National Defense Strategy, 19 Jan 2018 , Department of Defense News Transcript, <https://www.defense.gov/News/Transcripts/Transcript-View/Article/1420042/remarks-by-secretary-mattis-on-the-national-defense-strategy/>

**PEOPLE FIRST**



**MISSION ALWAYS**