



Australian Government
Department of Defence

AF STRAT

AIR FORCE STRATEGY

KEY HIGHLIGHTS



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1. <https://www.legislation.gov.au/Series/C1968A00063>

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FOREWORD

The release of *Air Force Strategy* (AFSTRAT) is a key milestone for Air Force in articulating the role air and space power play in generating strategic effects as part of a joint and integrated force.

AFSTRAT brings a contemporary perspective to our understanding of strategy and planning, and establishes the connections with Defence and national strategy. AFSTRAT builds on the significant modernisation, integration and organisational transformation programs Air Force has already delivered. These programs have provided the foundation for Air Force's potency in its air and space power capability, as an integrated part of Australia's national security apparatus.

However, we are not yet fully exploiting our potential. Actions by competitors in the 'grey zone' – a region that sits below the threshold of declared conflict – are testing our traditional understanding of warning time. Air Force must adapt to this environment of *strategic competition* in the Indo-Pacific.

By broadening the options air and space power provide to the joint force to include operations below the threshold of direct military conflict, Air Force will present enhanced effects to the Joint Force and to government. This document outlines how Air Force will posture for responsive, agile and potent air and space effects across the operational spectrum – from cooperation to high-end conflict – to shape Australia's strategic environment; to deter actions against Australia's interests; and to respond with credible military force, when required.



This strategy guides how Air Force will creatively and dynamically contribute to the Joint Force through the strategic effects identified in the Defence Strategic Update. .

AFSTRAT extends the bounds of possibility for how air and space power can be understood and applied in an era of *strategic competition*. This document acts as the catalyst to enable air and space power practitioners to seize opportunity, not just treat risk.

I commend the *Air Force Strategy* to you, and trust it serves as a catalyst to usher in a new era of air and space power to pursue our national objectives.

Mel Hupfeld, AO, DSC

Air Marshal

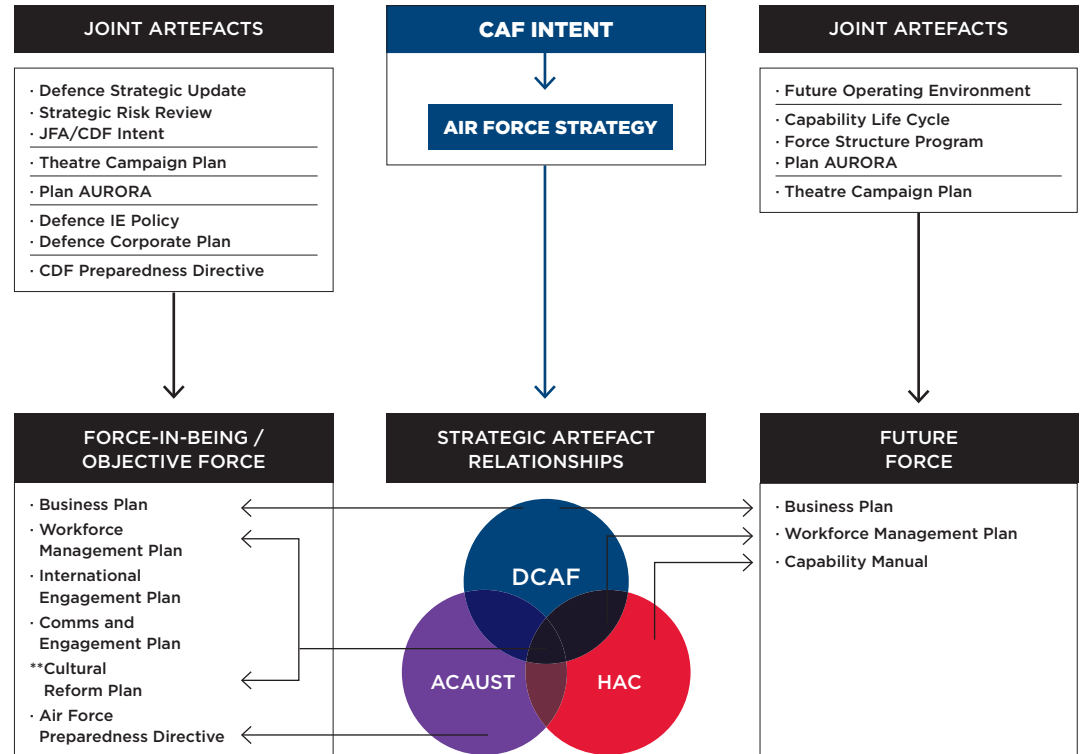
Chief of Air Force

September 2020



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AF STRATEGIC ARCHITECTURE





STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENT

JOINT FORCE CONTEXT

The Indo-Pacific geostrategic environment is now characterised by a dynamic of strategic competition where actors deploy power and influence to achieve strategic goals without resorting to openly declared conflict. Since strategic goals are being won and lost in ways that avoid force-on-force conflict, Air Force can no longer afford to view itself as just about aircraft: it must broaden the effects it provides to government across a spectrum from cooperation to conflict.

Peace and war serve as the bookends to a diverse and unfolding range of geostrategic activities. Figure 1.1 articulates this sophisticated and dynamic understanding of geo-strategic contest. Historically, Air Force's strategic personality has been anchored to the right side of this continuum. Noting that conflict – in the sense of high-end, state-on-state warfare – is a rare state within our geopolitical system, a disproportionate focus on such types of conflict may cause the organisation to miss critical opportunities to contribute to strategic effect through air and space power. It is therefore necessary to broaden Air Force's strategic aperture to encompass much greater utility than merely contributing to high-end warfighting.

POLITICAL WARFARE AND INFLUENCE

Political warfare describes how competitors employ coordinated campaigns to use every aspect of their national power through covert and coercive methods to win influence and control. These actions are particularly effective in grey zone scenarios aimed at 'winning without fighting', since their purpose is to influence without provoking a military reaction. Air Force cannot afford to ignore these tactics. Choosing not to engage simply accelerates an adversary's strategic success.

Many emerging international security challenges will not be suited to force-on-force engagement. Rather, they will require that Air Force provide an enduring contribution to statecraft. To do this, Air Force must provide a suite of capabilities and effects that present strategic off-ramps and opportunities for the joint force at the lower ends of the spectrum of conflict, cognisant of the subtleties of the current strategic environment. In short, Air Force must be part of Australia's ability to synchronise and mobilise all aspects of national power.

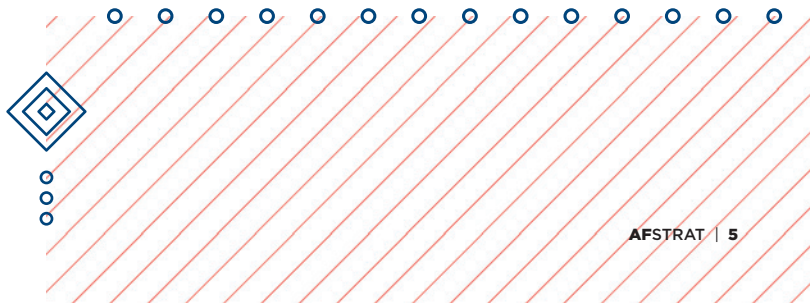
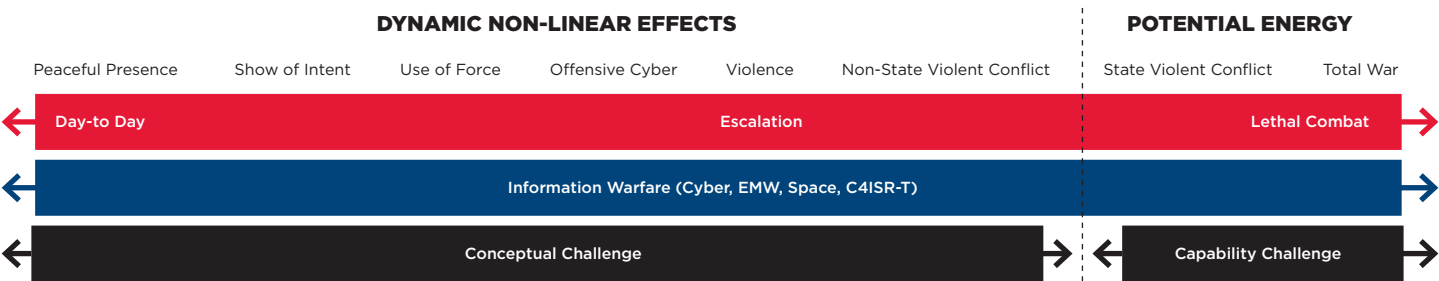


FIGURE 1.1 COMPETITION CONTINUUM



FOR MUCH OF AIR FORCE'S HISTORY, THE ABILITY TO GENERATE AIR COMBAT POWER HAS FUNDAMENTALLY SHAPED ITS CONCEPT OF STRATEGY AND FORMED THE BASIS FOR HOW AIR FORCE HAS UNDERSTOOD AND POSITIONED ITSELF WITHIN AUSTRALIAN DOCTRINE. IN THE CURRENT GLOBAL SECURITY ENVIRONMENT, AIR COMBAT POWER REMAINS VITAL, BUT IS NO LONGER SOLELY SUFFICIENT IN DESCRIBING HOW AIR FORCE CONTRIBUTES TO NATIONAL STRATEGIC EFFECTS.



STRATEGIC EFFECT AND ENGAGEMENT

Defence's response to the context of strategic competition is oriented towards achieving military strategic effect, and so the governing idea central to AFSTRAT is an integrated approach to working within whole-of-Australian-government (WoAG) efforts.

This will require innovative and creative employment of Air Force capabilities in ways that may fundamentally challenge traditional air and space power roles and missions. It is therefore critical for air and space power practitioners to understand how they can support the Strategic Defence Objectives³:

- a. **Shape** strategic areas of interest in support of Australia's interests by maintaining and building national cooperation and military partnerships to access and engage with key regional decision-makers and partners from a position of trust
- b. **Deter**⁴ behaviours and policies that are counter to Australia's interests by contributing to WoAG efforts through the joint force to expose and discourage grey zone tactics and political warfare
- c. **Respond**, when required, to challenges to Australian national interests, which includes defeating acts of aggression from malign actors, and contributing to DACC⁵ or HADR⁶ activities. Air Force will always maintain high-end warfighting capabilities, and while these also contribute to deterrence, the credibility to provide combat air power to the joint force represents a key contribution in the upper end of the competition continuum.

New relationships and connections are necessary to ensure Air Force's platforms, capabilities, missions and people are organised and composed for joint force effect. This way of thinking resists predetermined pathways for the employment of air and space power, and allows Air Force the freedom to re-imagine what force employment and future force considerations could become.



3. Drawn from Defence Strategic Update 2020
4. There are two accepted methods for achieving deterrence, denial and punishment. Denial seeks to make it physically difficult to achieve an objective, while punishment is threatening damage to the adversary for a particular course of action. Their effectiveness is dependent on how credible they appear and how much appetite for risk an adversary has.
5. Defence Assistance to the Civil Community
6. Humanitarian Assistance / Disaster Response



NEW APPROACHES TO CREATIVITY AND DILEMMAS

Creativity is required to maximise Air Force's value to the joint force in an environment of strategic competition. This is complicated by an underlying tension between the dual pursuits of:

- a. clear and rational guidance that offers hard, measurable boundaries to air and space practitioners; and
- b. creative and non-prescriptive compositions of platforms, capabilities and priorities to address complex grey-zone threats.

Air and space power practitioners will resolve this tension by ensuring that novelty and creativity are central characteristics when engaging in an environment of strategic competition, and be able to apply air and space power in ways that cannot easily be anticipated by competitors or adversaries.



JOINT FORCE CONTRIBUTIONS

Generating strategic contributions and embracing horizontal integration means Air Force needs to reconsider how it manages the composition of platforms, capabilities and missions to achieve air and space power effects. These packages frame the orchestration of effects in the air and space domain, and represent the 'operational art' that Air Force must embrace in an environment of strategic competition. These packages require air and space power practitioners to consider effects rather than aircraft, thereby resisting platform-centric thought.

Horizontal integration also means Air Force needs to shift the focus of Force Generation (FORGEN) and preparedness away from simplistic approaches to quantify readiness within a stove-piped force element construct. The concept of Joint Force Contributions is outlined in the Air Force Preparedness Directive (AFPD), while a Jericho 21 task will explore the relevance of Air Forces organisational structure to better enable horizontal integration.

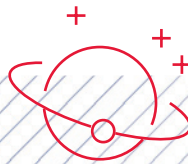


AFSTRAT AND FORCE GENERATION

Command teams must be able to articulate a clear linkage back to this document (and by extension, to higher Defence strategic guidance), for all exercises and FORGEN activities. This thread must be explicit to ensure all parts of the organisation understand their contribution to strategic outcomes. In particular, Air Command is critical to Air Force's success when prioritising the allocation of support to force elements and deriving associated sustainable readiness requirements. In an environment of strategic competition, Air Force can no longer afford to conduct FORGEN activities without consideration to how they may serve a greater purpose to Defence's strategic objectives. This will require a far more nuanced approach to the planning and execution of all activities.

FORGEN must become a more dynamic process. In an era of strategic competition, Air Force cannot afford the luxury of conducting activities that do not offer a clear linkage to strategic effect and guidance. A 'one size fits all' approach to air and space power, underpinned by rigid FORGEN structures will not prepare Air Force to meaningfully contribute air and space effects as part of the joint force.





LOE1:

DELIVERING AIR AND SPACE POWER AS PART OF THE JOINT FORCE



STRATEGIC VISION:

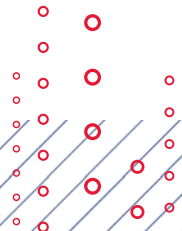
Air Force will lead the integration of air and space power into the joint force and support the relationships needed to generate, deliver and govern air and space power on behalf of the Australian government.

STRATEGIC EFFECT:

AIR FORCE IS THE EXEMPLAR FOR THE PROVISION OF CAPABILITY AND EFFECT TO THE JOINT FORCE AND GOVERNMENT ACROSS THE SPECTRUM OF CONFLICT.

We identify and seize opportunities to build relationships and capacity both as an Air Force and when projecting air and space power effects as part of the joint force.

Where there is divergence between priorities for the integration of air and space power effects into our own Joint Force and with coalition forces, the joint force will take precedence.





LOE2:

DEVELOPING AN INTELLIGENT AND SKILLED WORKFORCE

STRATEGIC VISION:

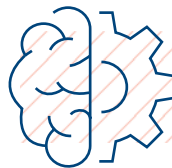
Our people will be ready to seize opportunities to engage and assure access in our region, while denying the opportunity for malign competitors to do the same.

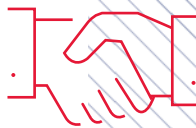
STRATEGIC EFFECT:

OUR PEOPLE RESPONSIBLY CHALLENGE THE STATUS QUO, THINK INNOVATIVELY, AND NURTURE RELATIONSHIPS OF INFLUENCE.

Air Force provides the necessary education, resources and opportunities to hone our people's intellectual edge to understand and appreciate the nuances of the spectrum of conflict and what it means for the joint force.

Air Force places people in positions for engagement, development, and effect, rather than to fill liabilities. We value our contribution to the strategic centre; our joint and overseas positions are filled through careful consideration to how posting plots allow us to grow strategic, resilient leaders for the future.





LOE3:

DEEPENING RELATIONSHIPS, STRENGTHENING ENGAGEMENT

STRATEGIC VISION:

Air Force will understand the importance of relationships; internally, externally, and internationally with partners and potential competitors alike. Air Force's people are well connected with the joint force, government departments, our allies, partners and industry.

Photo courtesy of DEWC Systems Engineer
Sean Jorgensen-Day

STRATEGIC EFFECT:

AIR FORCE DEVELOPS COMPELLING AND DEEP RELATIONSHIPS ACROSS AIR FORCE, THE JOINT FORCE, GOVERNMENT DEPARTMENTS, ALLIES, PARTNERS, ACADEMIA AND INDUSTRY AND IS A TRUSTED MEMBER OF THE AUSTRALIAN COMMUNITY.

Air Force generates and fosters relationships that have and continue to allow us to support the delivery of air and space power in support of national strategic effect.

Air Force's relationships are underpinned by plans that focus our achievement of linkages with international partners, industry, academia and other key stakeholders. An overarching Strategic Communications guidance articulates clear measures of success and linking Air Force's public face with strategic narratives.



LOE4: EVOLVING AIR FORCE CULTURE



STRATEGIC VISION:
Air Force will be culturally and organisationally prepared to deliver its full air and space power potential as part of the joint force.



STRATEGIC EFFECT:

AIR FORCE'S CULTURE AND REWARD SYSTEM IS ONE THAT VALUES LEADERSHIP AND STRATEGIC THINKING WHILE ASSURING TACTICAL AND TECHNICAL EXCELLENCE.

The Air Force SLT contains a broad mix of the best leaders and thinkers in the organisation, irrespective of their tactical and technical background.

Air Force is seen as legitimate through the eyes of the Australian Government and society by reflecting values that create cultures of inclusion and belonging.

Air Force has deep cultural understandings that inform and shape the way it plans and conducts its activities.

The development and reward of future leaders is targeted and systematic so Air Force develops the best thinkers and strategic leaders who are capable of projecting air and space power on behalf of the Defence organisation.

Air Force values experience gained in joint organisations, and grows joint leaders and air power Strategists rather than Air Force leaders.

Air Force epitomises the Defence values of: Service, Courage, Respect, Integrity and Excellence in everything it does.



LOE5:

AGILE AND COHERENT GOVERNANCE

STRATEGIC VISION:

Air Force will create space for the organisation to grow and operate while ensuring safety and regulatory compliance. Importantly, there will be clear lineage from the Defence Corporate Plan to Air Force's own governance processes. Air Force will empower leaders at all levels to make decisions and to succeed by removing unnecessary administration and bureaucracy and providing the framework to curate and grow ideas that contribute to achieving an intellectual edge over potential competitors.

STRATEGIC EFFECT:

AIR FORCE DELIVERS AIR AND SPACE POWER TO THE JOINT FORCE THROUGH A FOCUSED, RESPONSIVE AND ACCOUNTABLE SYSTEM.

Air Force provides sufficient human capital to meet current and future organisational and operational requirements.

Our system incorporates a sophisticated career management framework that is capable of identifying and nurturing talent.

Air Force is organised in a manner that optimises effect while reducing administrative burden and unnecessary bureaucracy.

Air Force provides the opportunity and space for members to curate leading edge research, honing ideas through to realisation in a safe environment that is failure tolerant.



AIR FORCE

