

***AIR FORCE AND
SPACE FORCE
VECTORS FOR THE
INCOMING TRUMP
DEFENSE TEAM***

Lt Gen David A. Deptula, (USAF Ret)

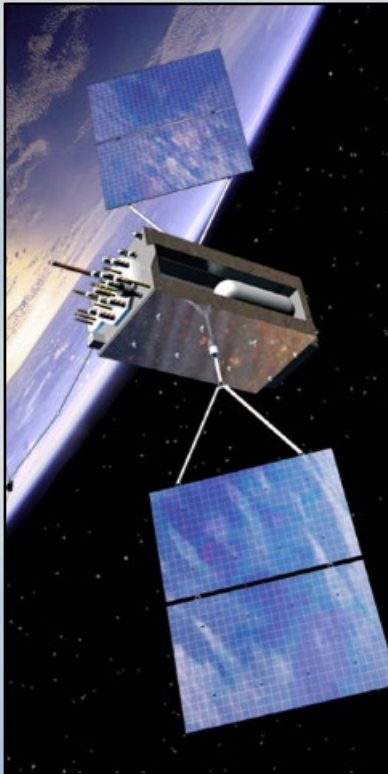
Col Mark Gunzinger, (USAF Ret)

February 27, 2025

Threats & Fundamental Principles

“The threats the United States faces are the most serious and most challenging the nation has encountered since 1945 and include the potential for near-term major war.”

2024 National Defense Strategy Commission



- **Threats, fiscal, and political realities demand DOD focus on what matters most:**

- Building a strong military to accomplish:
 - Competing with peer adversaries
 - Strengthening alliances and partnerships
 - Protecting global access
 - Providing nuclear deterrence
 - Realistically adapting new technologies

However: The Air Force is in a Force Structure Nosedive

Today, the USAF is the Oldest, the Smallest, and the Least Ready in its 77 Year History...

At the same time the Chinese AF is the newest, largest, and most ready in its history



PLAAF H-20



- **Not a criticism, but a fact...**
- **Multiple administrations cut the AF to net a “peace dividend” and later to fund the Army's COIN strategy**
- **There was a recapitalization plan, but...**
 - OEF, OIF and OIR dramatically altered this plan
 - Army received \$65 Billion a year more than the AF for 20 years post 9/11—a total of \$1.3 Trillion more than the AF...
 - The Air Force was downsized to provide offsets for the Army
 - F-22s canceled; KC-46, B-21, F-35 delayed; F-35 rate reduced
- **Legacy aircraft are at the end of their structural lives...**

The USAF is programmed to lose about 1000 planes over the next five years without complete replacement—continuing its decline...

The Numbers Tell the Story

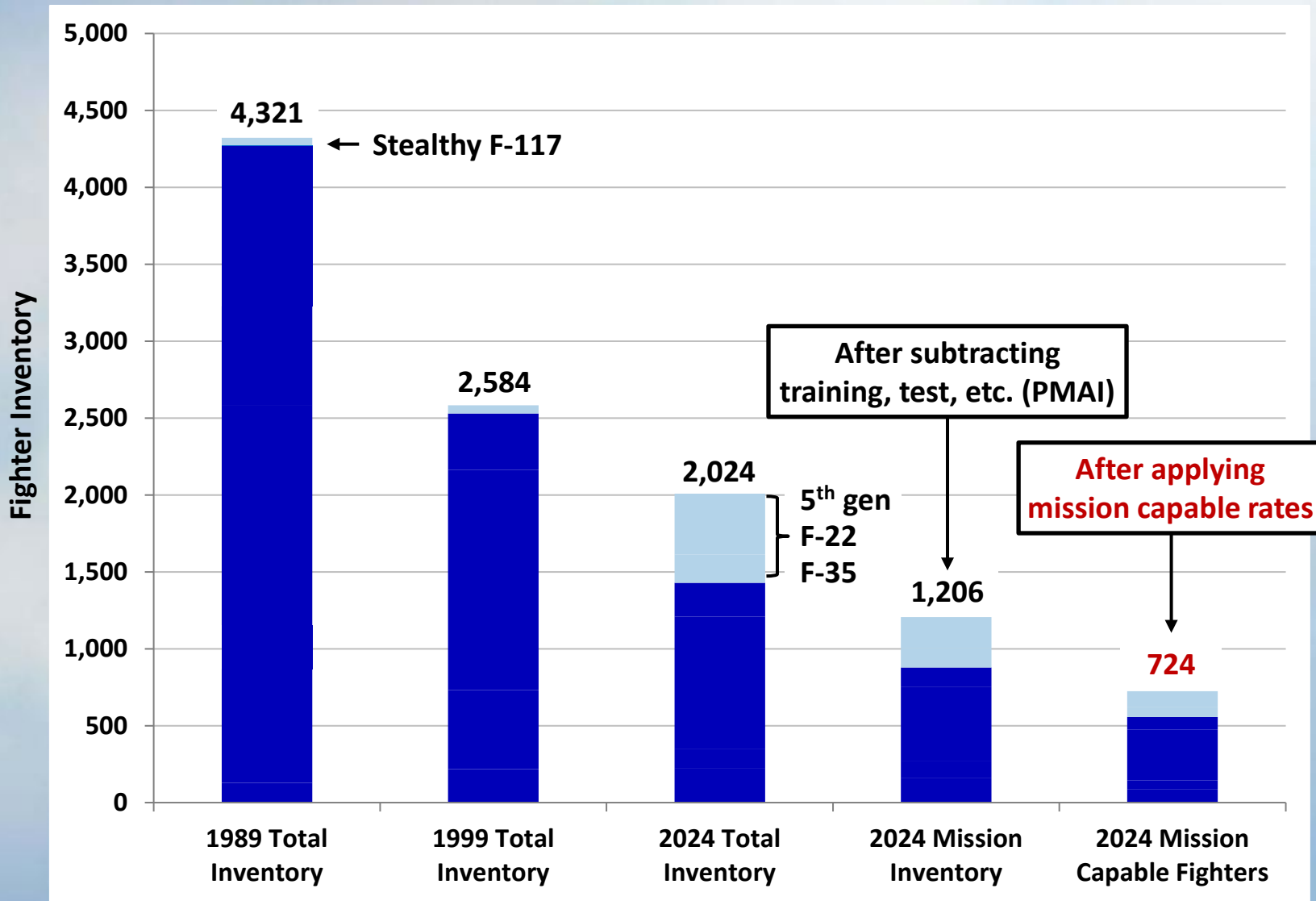
- **Airmen are undertaking missions with aircraft that average well over a quarter of a century in age**
 - KC-135 tankers and B-52 bombers pre-date the Cuban Missile Crisis (“youngest” is over 63 years old!)
 - F-15, F-16, and A-10 date from the Nixon & Ford days
- **The 2020’s are a make-or-break window**
 - Legacy airframes are increasingly non-survivable
 - F-22 and B-2 face longevity challenges as high-demand, low-density assets
 - F-35 procurement is well below requirements
- **10 aircraft types first flew over 50 years ago**
 - Those 10 aircraft types account for over 2,600 Air Force aircraft or two-thirds of its entire force
- **In comparison, the Navy has only one operational warship on duty over 50 years old**

Aircraft	Average Age*
A-10	43 years (72) 53 261
F-15C	39 years (72) 53 127
F-15E	32 years (86) 39
F-16C	34 years (74) 51 862
F-22	17 years (97) 28
F-35	6 Years (06) 19
B-1B	38 years (74) 51 45
B-2A	30 years (89) 36
B-52H	63 years (52) 73 76
KC-10A	Retired
KC-135	63 years (56) 69 325
KC-46	4 years
U-2	41 years (55) 68 27
C-17A	21 years (91) 34
C-130 (cargo)	22 years (54) 71 406
T-38C	57 years (59) 66 495
AWACS	44 years (75) 50 15

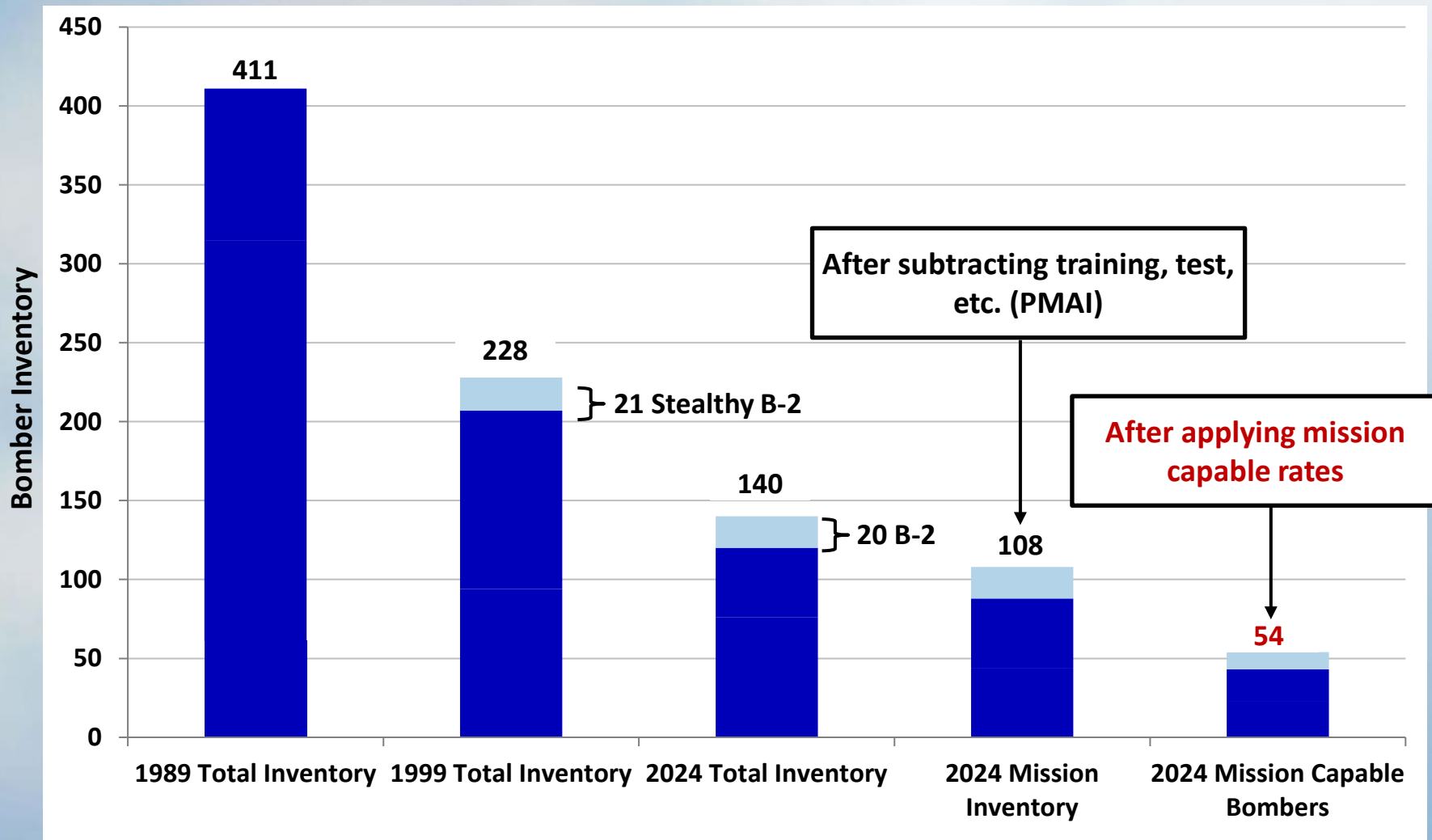
*(Year of 1st flight); yrs since first flight; inventory)

While AF recapitalization has been on pause for 30+ years, the rest of the world continues to evolve.

Current State of the Force: Fighters

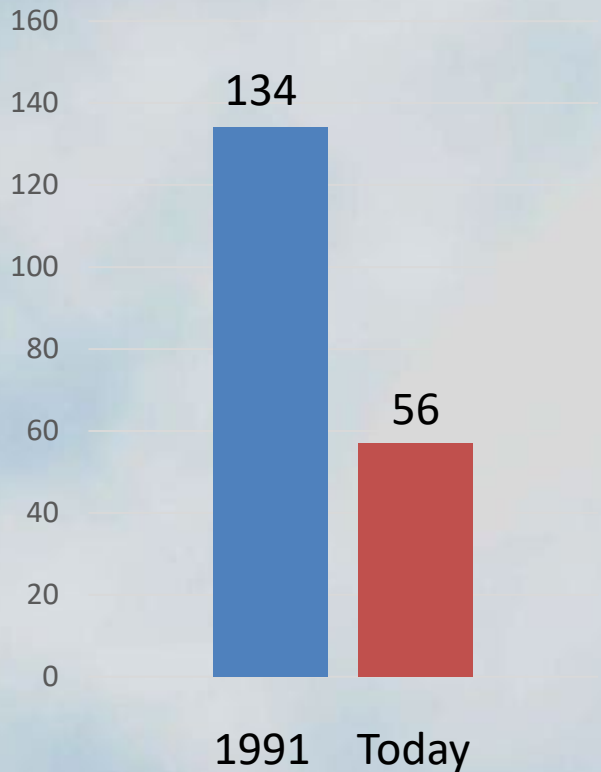


Current State of the Force: Bombers



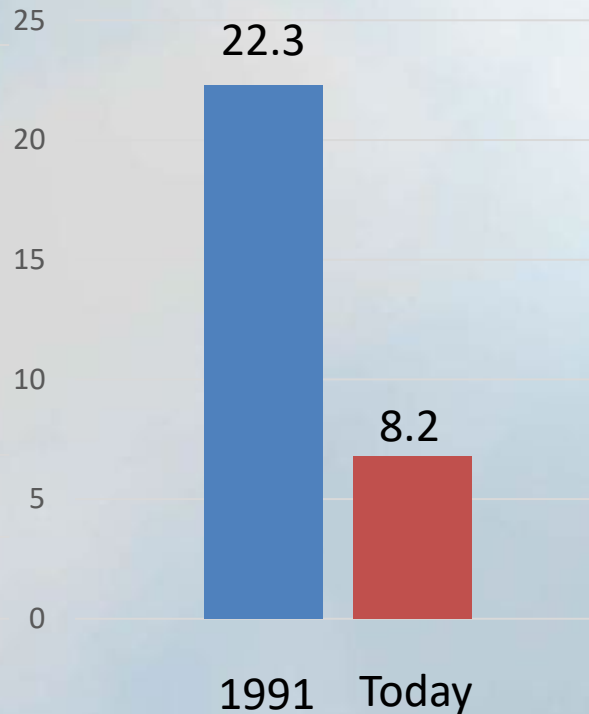
Key Trends All In the Wrong Direction

Fighter Squadrons



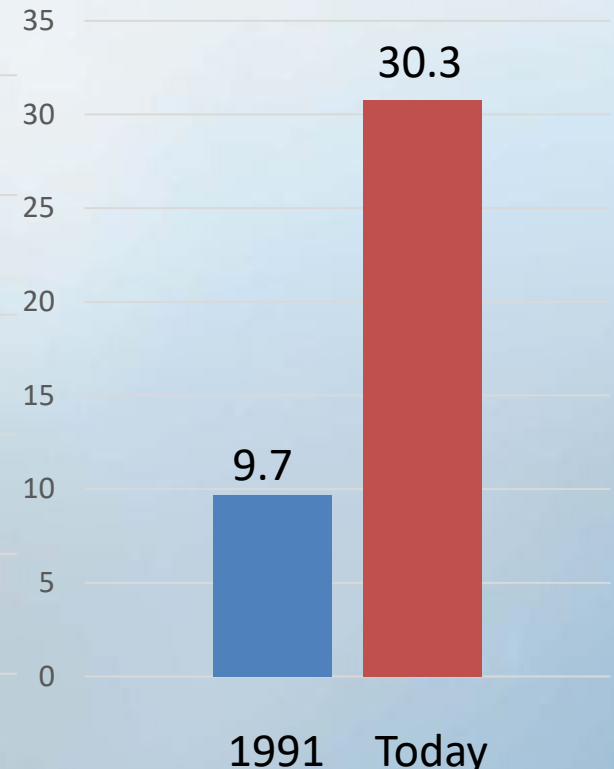
58 Percent Less

Flight Hours per Month



63 Percent Less

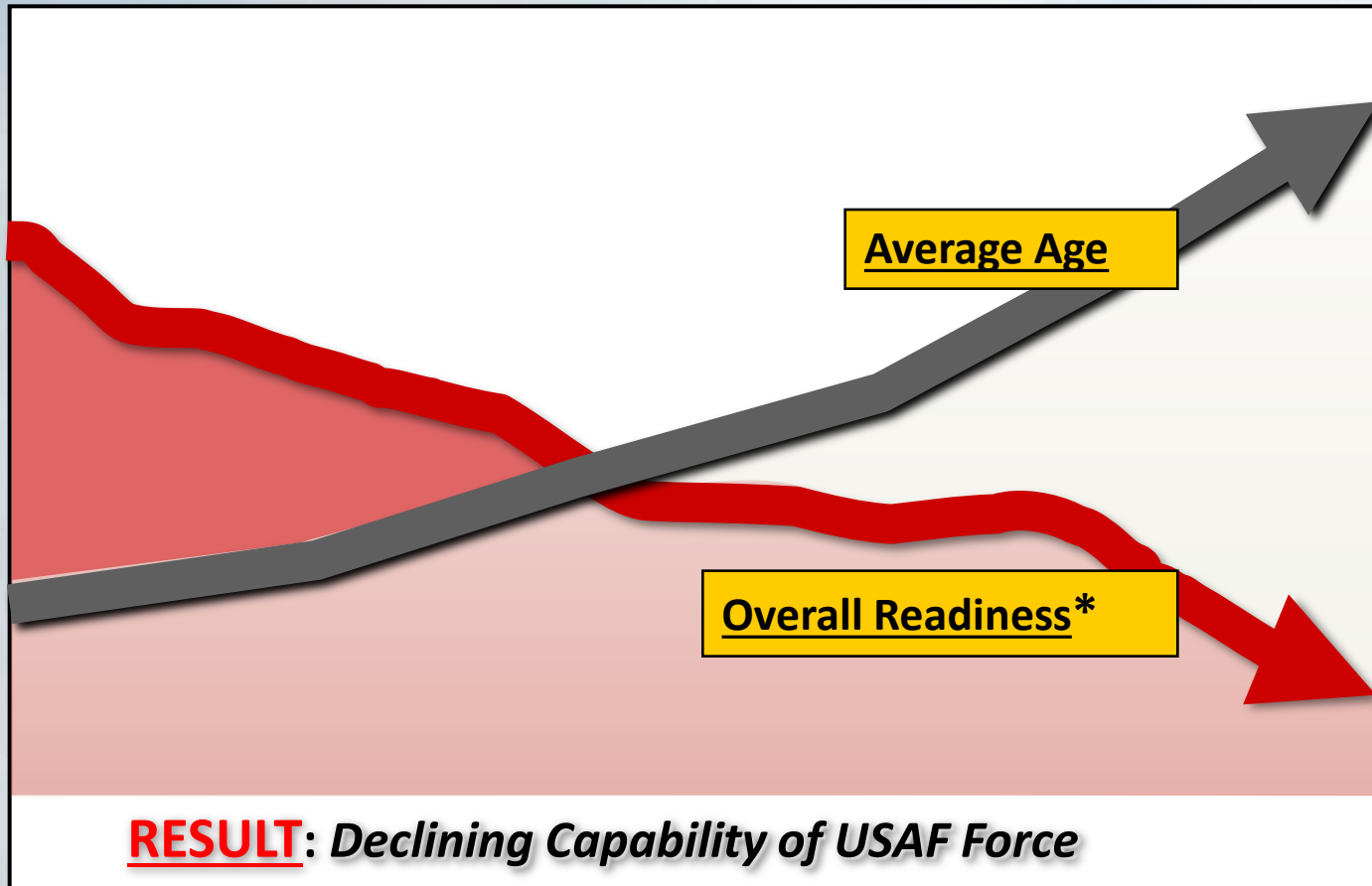
Average Fighter Age



Three Times Older

Data from ACC

Inverse Relationship Between Aircraft Average Age and Readiness



* Overall Readiness represents composite result of inventory size, MC rates, effects of sustained surge/deployed ops on acft service lives, training, and personnel/retention

Space Force Challenges

The U.S. Space Force is underfunded; undersized; and without the authorities to consolidate DOD space agencies.

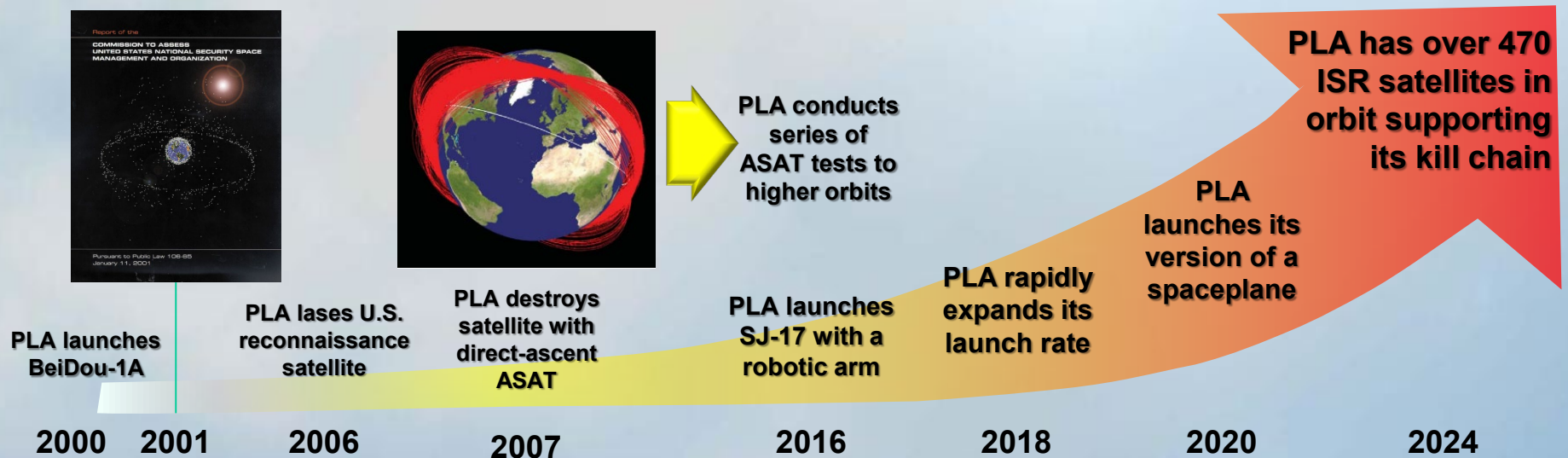
- **Funding: USSF is only 3.5 percent of the DOD budget—it can't do its missions to deter or defeat threats in space without more funding.**
- **Personnel: The USSF is half the size of the Coast Guard, yet space expertise is required to support the space force, space command and the individual services unique space requirements.**
- **Organizational authorities: “Our national-security space program is spread across more than 60 departments and agencies, resulting in a glaring lack of leadership and accountability that undermines our combatant commanders and puts our war-fighters at risk.” (2019 VP) Only one agency has been integrated into the Space Force (SDA).**

“We need a Space Force to deliver critical space effects for the conduct of joint military operations, and that can protect U.S. and her allies from space-enabled attack and this new mission requires new resources”

Gen Chance B. Saltzman, CSO

Threats Driving Space Force Demand

- **To counter U.S. Space Systems**
 - Since Desert Storm, China undertook a campaign to erase the asymmetric advantage space capabilities afforded U.S. and Allied forces
- **To use space to target U.S. and Allied forces**
 - In the past decade, China has fielded space capabilities at a “breakout pace” to extend its power projection capability



For more on the growing threat, check out: [Building USSF Counterspace Capabilities—An Imperative for America’s Defense](#) and the [Schriever Spacepower Series](#) with Maj Gen Gregory J. Gagnon

Priorities For Next SECAF

Macro Objectives

- 1. Reverse the decline in Air Force readiness and force structure.**
- 2. Resource the Space Force to meet the demands of the National Defense Strategy**
- 3. Urge transparency in DOD budget reporting: Move the \$45B+ passthrough now shown in the Dept of the Air Force budget to where it actually belongs—“Defense-wide spending.”**



“The Air Force requires significantly more resources to expand both its capacity and its capabilities”—2024 Commission on the National Defense Strategy

Priorities For Next SECAF (1/2)

The Most Critical Priorities to Achieve Those Objectives:

- Proceed with NGAD penetrating combat aircraft immediately...
- Rise the annual buy to 74 F-35s and 24 F-15EXs
- Ramp B-21 acquisition to 20 per year by 2030.
- Increase fighter pilot flying hours to a minimum of 200 hours/yr to restore readiness.
- Fully fund Weapon System Sustainment (WSS) requirements.
- Aggressively pursue AI/autonomy realizing it has promise but we will still require both piloted and uninhabited aircraft—stay the course with CCAs.
- Build a stockpile of conventional precision munitions in advance of conflict. The defense industrial base is unable to adequately respond to crisis.



Priorities For Next SECAF

- Fully fund Space Force programs designed to achieve space superiority
- Increase personnel in the Space Force
- Consolidate all DOD space agencies into the Space Force to assure unity of military and space intelligence operations, reducing duplication and waste.
- Establish a national nuclear deterrence fund separate from the Air Force and the Navy service accounts to ensure necessary funding is not offset from conventional forces.
- Fully fund the Sentinel program to begin replacing the Air Force's obsolescing Minuteman-III ICBMs and their launch facilities by 2030
- Initiate development of the Next Generation Air Refueling System (NGAS) with initial production target in the 2030s.



“The Air Force requires significantly more resources to expand both its capacity and its capabilities”—2024 Commission on the National Defense Strategy

Bottom Lines

- **The Department of the Air Force is too small, too old, and not ready to execute the national defense strategy**
- **On its current vector, and without a significant increase in funding the situation will only get worse.**
- **The cost of the effort to begin recovering the Air Force's decline and adequately fund the Space Force will require an increase of at least \$45 billion annually.**

There is no more time left to delay. The fixes must start now, or the United States risks losing the next major war.



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