

# FROM THE EDITOR

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Dear Reader,

In March 1943 Winston Churchill addressed the British people in a BBC broadcast from his country home, giving them hope for the future amid wartime. His speech, delivered just prior to the start of the North Africa offensive that would eventually prove crucial to Allied victory, anticipated the challenges of postwar recovery on the home front. “The difficulties which will confront us will take all our highest qualities to overcome,” he warned. He then offered this encouragement: “Difficulties mastered are opportunities won.”

His proverbial words, spoken during some of the darkest days of global conflict, are as salient today as they were then.

Although we are not in the midst of a world war, multiple events threaten global stability and regional security. China’s role in the rules-based international order continues to evolve in alarming ways; Russia’s ongoing aggression in Ukraine has led to a war of attrition where neither side has achieved any degree of air superiority; and Israeli military responses in the Middle East are reshaping the region’s strategic landscape. Meanwhile, the threat of nuclear aggression by peer and near-peer adversaries such as North Korea and Iran looms in the background, and such challenges to the world order now extend beyond the terrestrial realm into the space domain, where adversarial maneuvering is creating an ambiguous operational environment with outsized strategic implications. In response to such challenges, the Department of the Air Force has been given the imperative to rapidly integrate technological advancements within our air and space power capabilities.

Many of these issues serve as the impetus for the discussions found in this issue of *Æther: A Journal of Strategic Airpower and Spacepower*. As complex and daunting as such challenges may appear, the United States has adapted and mastered similar difficulties before. The contributors to this issue of *Æther* offer ways in which we might tap into our “highest qualities”—embodied within our Airmen and Guardians—to overcome them.

Wannes Verstraete jumpstarts this issue with an article in our Nuclear Policy forum, “Adapting the Hardware of NATO’s Forward-Deployed Nuclear Forces.” He explores the need for NATO to rethink and diversify its theater nuclear posture in response to

evolving geopolitical threats, particularly from Russia, to maintain American nuclear deterrence credibility and secure Allied assurance.

Next, in our Innovation Forum, Todd Moulton and Joshua Pusillo demonstrate that the current security environment demands a more rigorous interservice effort to foster new thinking among future leaders. Crucial change begins with the creation of a true culture of innovation within the Defense Department in “Joint Innovation: What Is and What Could Be.”

In the Space Policy Forum, two contributions offer proposals for handling challenges confronting our newest service, particularly in face of the rapidly expanding commercial space industry. In “Optimizing Officer Retention in the US Space Force: A Strategy for Success,” Brandon Eans points to the critical need for effective talent management to maintain Guardian readiness in future conflict. Stiff competition from commercial space companies calls for new ways to incentivize long-term Guardian commitment. In “Playing by the Rules: Norms During Armed Conflict in Space,” Sophia Chang—who brings a new voice to the field—highlights the practicality of establishing and adhering to norms of behavior in space for the US military.

In the Modern Airpower forum, Tucker Browne, Isaiah Harp, Michael Byrnes, and Brent Maggard provide a critical examination of the Air Force’s pivot toward a future force reliant on tactical autonomy. In “Ready, Fire, Aim: Tactical Autonomy in the Age of AI,” they demonstrate how realistic technological assessment, disciplined procurement, and strategic hedging are necessary for the future force design.

Finally, the forum and issue close with Stephen Redmond and Ryan Enlow’s “A Revived Commitment to Control of the Air.” The authors provide a nuanced view for integrating emerging capabilities and adaptive airpower to ensure the United States continues to provide airpower anytime, anywhere in support of our national defense.

This edition of *Æther* represents a well-considered contribution to the ongoing effort to master the difficulties of our day and turn them into opportunities for victory tomorrow. Æ

~ The Editor

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