

Statement of  
The Honorable Frank Kendall  
Secretary of the Air Force  
Before the  
Committee on Armed Services  
United States House of Representatives

September 28, 2023

Chairman Rogers, Ranking Member Smith, and other distinguished members of the House Armed Services Committee, I would like to thank you for the opportunity to testify this morning.

I will begin with two introductory comments about the basing decision for the permanent headquarters of United States Space Command (USSPACECOM) and then describe the process my colleagues and I followed over the past sixteen months.

First, President Biden exercised his authority and discretion as Commander in Chief and Chief Executive to make the final decision to locate the permanent headquarters of USSPACECOM in Colorado. I fully support the President's decision.

Second, any basing decision involves a balancing of different, often competing, factors. In my judgment, the two most important factors in this basing action ultimately proved to be (1) the costs to the taxpayer of constructing and operating a new permanent headquarters facility at any of the six reasonable alternative locations and (2) the operational risk associated with any transition from the provisional headquarters in Colorado to another location.

When I became the Secretary of the Air Force in July 2021, the final basing location decision for United States Space Command headquarters had not been made and the preliminary designation of Huntsville, Alabama as the preferred alternative, announced by my predecessor, was under review by the Department of Defense Inspector General (DoD IG) and the Government

Accountability Office (GAO). Accordingly, I took no action while those reviews were under way.

The DoD IG and GAO reviews were completed in the May 2022 time frame. While neither review found any fundamental flaw in the identification of the preferred alternative of Huntsville, both found deficiencies in the process by which the decision was reached.

Following a recommendation by the DoD IG, the Secretary of Defense directed me on May 4, 2022 to conduct a review of concerns expressed by senior military leaders regarding Full Operational Capability ("FOC") for USSPACECOM.

Subsequently, I directed the Department of the Air Force ("DAF") Strategic Basing Team to conduct a thorough re-evaluation of its basing analysis. In particular, I directed the basing team to implement the recommendations of the DoD IG and GAO reports, complete a National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) review of the environmental impacts associated with the basing action and re-evaluate each of the evaluation factors. As part of this process, the Commander of USSPACECOM, General Dickinson, was asked to provide specific criteria for assessing FOC.

There have been three core assumptions underpinning this basing action: the need for (1) a 464,000 square foot facility; (2) a workforce of 1,450 personnel; and (3) new construction of a permanent headquarters building. I note that these three basing assumptions are distinct from three requirements that USSPACECOM articulated as priorities: (1) mission success; (2) taking care of our people; and (3) being fiscally responsible.

The results of the re-evaluation conducted by the basing team over the ensuing six months were consistent with earlier results. All six locations were reasonable alternatives, but Huntsville was lower cost, while remaining in Colorado posed the lowest operational risk. The basing team reviewed the risks associated with the time it would take to achieve FOC and determined that, under any circumstances, USSPACECOM would achieve FOC in its

current provisional location of Colorado Springs well before a new headquarters could be built in any location.

As noted and emphasized by USSPACECOM leadership, there would be operational risk associated with the disruption of moving the provisional headquarters in Colorado to any other location. The qualitative judgment about the reduced cost of Huntsville versus the operational risk of moving from Colorado to another location became an important area of focus in the basing decision. As Commander of USSPACECOM, General Dickinson expressed the view that the operational risk was significant. The DAF Strategic Basing Team placed considerable weight on the projected cost savings and, while recognizing the risks to maintaining operational capability, believed that potential mitigation measures were available.

During January and February of 2023, the DAF basing team conducted additional analyses of several long-term trends at each alternative location, including anticipated economic impact, the availability of relevant occupational categories such as aerospace engineers and data scientists, and the cost of living.

In early April 2023, General Dickinson stated that he anticipated declaring FOC in the late summer of 2023 –earlier than previous estimates - and would do so at the provisional leased and government-owned facilities without the construction of a new, permanent headquarters’ building. General Dickinson also indicated that his requirements would soon be fulfilled.

In light of this new information, I asked General Dickinson to reconfirm USSPACECOM’s current basing needs and whether there had been any changes. I also asked the Chief of Space Operations to provide his perspective on the basing action.

In response, General Dickinson stated, in relevant part:

- USSPACECOM requirements have not changed and will soon be fulfilled as the Command estimates declaring FOC in August 2023;

- Based on the accelerating threat in space and the progress in the command, selecting a final headquarters location other than Colorado Springs would greatly reduce readiness, levy significant costs, and impose high risk to mission and force; and
- Considering the threat, USSPACECOM's pending FOC, and the situation as a whole, Colorado Springs should be the permanent location for USSPACECOM headquarters.

General Saltzman also provided his perspective on the basing action, which he subsequently shared with the Committee via correspondence dated September 13, 2023.

To validate USSPACECOM's current basing needs, I sent a basing team to Colorado Springs to assess whether the Space Command Headquarters could remain in its current configuration of leased and government-owned facilities over the long term. The basing team conducted this review in late May and early June 2023. They concluded that a new headquarters building was still necessary.

Over the course of the DAF's extensive re-evaluation of the basing process, I kept the Secretary of Defense and the National Security Council staff informed regarding the status of our basing team's analysis.

After being informed that the President would make the final decision, I briefed the Secretary of Defense and the National Security Advisor on the results of the DAF's review in June 2023. Ultimately, my view was that the decision came down to a judgment about the operational risk associated with relocating versus the reduced costs of the leading alternative of Huntsville, Alabama. My assessment was that the projected cost savings together with the availability of potential mitigation measures outweighed the operational risks that had been identified. As the Combatant Commander for USSPACECOM, General Dickinson assessed these considerations differently.

On July 31, 2023, the President announced his decision. I fully support the President's judgment in this matter.

Over the course of my tenure as Secretary of the Department of the Air Force, the threat posed by our adversaries, particularly China, in the space domain has accelerated dramatically. Against the backdrop of this intensifying threat and with a final decision now having been made by the President, we are prepared to move forward with the implementation of this basing action.