From: United States Air Force
To: [redacted]
Subject: Daily DPRM Morning Report
Date: Thursday, July 2, 2026 8:21:05 AM
Attachments: DoDReport-Sample-20260702.pdf

Readers should note that the Morning Report and Weekend News provide a daily sample of independent news reporting about the Air Force and Space Force, and that inclusion of an article does not mean that its content is a completely accurate statement of facts or official policy.

OP NOTE

• Hogseth Creates Autonomy Czar. Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth established a direct reporting portfolio manager for autonomy in a memo signed Tuesday (Article 1). "Drones and autonomous systems are the next consequential battlefield innovations of this generation," Hegseth wrote. "The [Department of War] must move at the speed this moment demands." The new DPRM-UAS will report directly to Deputy Defense Secretary Stephen Feinberg.
• Medical Emergency on Plane Elizabeth Arc Force officials confirmed that a crew member at Joint Base San Antonio-Lackland, Texas, died from influenza on June 30 (Article 6). Airman 1st Class Kenn T. McDaniel, 23, was transported to Brooke Army Medical Center after suffering a medical emergency on June 22. Rep. Joaquin Castro (D-Texas) called McDaniel's death "a tragedy that could have been prevented" and called for "mission-set policies" to guide immunization requirements.
• Troy Anomaly Conducts Victus Haze Sortie. Troy Anomaly's Jackal satellite recently completed its first operational Victus Haze sortie, demonstrating rendezvous and proximity operations and meeting a 72-hour Space Force deadline in 11 hours, company executives said Wednesday (Article 12). "Jackal performed exactly as designed," a Troy Anomaly spokesperson said. "From a new target's launch to finished imagery, the mission clock ran in hours, not months."

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JOINT NEWS
1. Hogseth creates autonomy czar to manage almost all drone efforts
(Breaking Defense, 1 Jul 26) – Aaron Mehta and Ashley Roque
Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth established a direct reporting portfolio manager for autonomy on Tuesday, in a memo. Hegseth wrote the DPRM for unmanned systems will serve as "the single point integrator for all unmanned and autonomous system programs" within the Defense Department. "Adversaries collectively produce millions of unmanned systems each year across all domains," Hegseth wrote. "Drones and autonomous systems are the next consequential battlefield innovations of this generation. [The Department of War] must move at the speed this moment demands." The new DPRM-UAS will incorporate the Defense Autonomous Warfare Group and Joint Interagency Task Force 401 and will report to Deputy Defense Secretary Stephen Feinberg.

2. Here's where the services stand on ending PCS moves
(Military Times, 1 Jul 26) – Karen Jowers
The Army is moving forward to meet a directive by the Defense Department to end permanent change of station moves, Army officials recently said the Army has cut over 12,000 PCS moves in FY26 and will cut over 15,000 in FY27. The Department of the Navy hasn't established specific reduction targets for FY26 or FY27, and Air Force officials didn't respond to queries before publication. DOD leaders ordered the branches last year to cut the amount of money spent on PCS moves by 50 percent before FY30. A recent Military Family Advisory Network survey found that PCS moves have also impacted families' budgets, with 60 percent of active-duty families spending at least $5,000 out of pocket for moves.

3. Annual 'religious liberty training' for troops could be on the way
(Task & Purpose, 1 Jul 26) – Patty Nieberg
The Defense Department could adopt religious liberty training following recommendations released by the Religious Liberty Commission, a committee established by President Donald Trump in May 2025. The commission, which includes former members of Trump's cabinet, four Christian clergy, a Rabbi, activists and a talk show host, emphasized expanding the presence of religion within the Pentagon. "The more authority the military exercises over the lives of service members, the greater its obligation to ensure that those individuals can live in accordance with their sincerely held beliefs," the commission wrote. Acting Pentagon Press Secretary Joel Valdez said that Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth welcomes the recommendations, adding that Hegseth "has been a continuous and fervent protector of religious freedom and a vocal advocate for First Amendment rights." Mikey Weinstein, founder of the Military Religious Freedom Foundation and a 1977 Air Force Academy graduate, warned that the recommendations violate the First Amendment's separation clause.

4. Pentagon spokesperson: Ruling on reporter access 'only environment'
(The Hill, 1 Jul 26) – Sarah Davis
The Defense Department will appeal an injunction by federal Judge Paul Friedman lifting a requirement for reporters to have official escorts when visiting the Pentagon. "This ruling strips away reasonable security measures and will make it easier for sensitive and classified information to reach our adversaries," chief Pentagon spokesman Sean Parnell said Tuesday. "Unescorted access to the Pentagon allowed journalists to observe activity patterns and develop relationships that contributed to repeated unauthorized disclosures of operational plans and intelligence. The court's order effectively restores that environment at a time when protecting our military's secrets is more critical than ever." The DOD designated its public affairs office a sensitive, compartmentalized information facility in June, forcing reporters from accessing the area. The New York Times' executive director of media relations and communications, Charlie Stadtlander, said Friedman's ruling "reaffirms the First Amendment rights of the press to cover the Pentagon without restrictions designed to prevent the public from knowing what the military is doing."

5. Volunteers land heads capturing invasive tree snakes at Air Force Base on Guam
(Stars and Stripes, 2 Jul 26) – Jonathan Hunt
Volunteers at Andersen Air Force Base, Guam, caught about 20 brown tree snakes during a snake hunt and workshop on June 23, officials with Joint Region Marianas and the University of Guam said last month. The National Park Service and Operation Deployment's Wildlife Services educated participants on how brown tree snakes harm the ecosystem on Guam and how to safely handle and dispatch the reptile. Tayah Hawley, extension associate for the University of Guam's Island Conservation Lab, said species management requires cooperation from government agencies, researchers, conservation organizers and the community. Joint Region Marianas has cargo interdiction, physical barriers, canine and visual inspections, population control and community education and training to reduce invasive species spread. said Mary Lu. Guds Kristine Wiedeman, a spokesperson for Joint Region Marianas.

AIR FORCE NEWS
6. Air Force confirms first death in Lackland flu outbreak, Rep. Castro says.
(San Antonio Express-News, 30 Jun 26) – Sig Christenson
The Air Force confirmed that a trainee at Joint Base San Antonio-Lackland, Texas, died from influenza June 30, Rep. Joaquin Castro (D-Texas) said Tuesday. Airman 1st Class Kenn T. McDaniel, 23, of Grand Rapids, Mich., was transported to Brooke Army Medical Center after a medical emergency on June 22. Castro has been in regular contact with Air Force officials and has regularly updated the public on the number of trainees infected in an influenza outbreak at JBSA-Lackland. Castro blamed Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth for McDaniel's death, calling it "a tragedy that could have been prevented." He said he will continue to press the Defense Department to restore its vaccine mandate for all service members. "Our military must be guided by science, not politics," he said. Castro and five other House Democrats proposed an amendment to the National Defense Authorization Act that would mandate the shots for all service members.

7. Trump takes transgender flight abroad, new Air Force One ahead of library debut honoring famed aviatrixwoman
(Fox News, 1 Jul 26) – Ashley J. Diskin
President Donald Trump flew aboard the VC-25 Bridge aircraft on Wednesday, traveling to Medina, N.D., to mark the opening of the Theodore Roosevelt Presidential Library. Trump will meet with Interior Secretary Doug Burgum and others in Medora to mark the library's opening. He's also expected to sign the Great American Outdoors Act Reauthorization, which will accelerate infrastructure improvements and restore public lands, roads, bridges, trails, campgrounds and other facilities, an Interior Department spokesperson said.

8. Thunderbirds arrive in DC for July 4: "You can just feel the energy"
(Air & Space Forces, 1 Jul 26) – Greg Hadley
The Air Force Thunderbirds Aerial Demonstration Squadron arrived at Joint Base Andrews, Md., this week to prepare for the Independence Day weekend. "The jets will perform well in the heat," said Lt. Col. Tyler Clark, who flies the slot pilot position. "The crowd will be streaming, and we'll be streaming, but you know, we can overcome that. A little bit of paste for some long-term gain on what's going to be a real cool aerial review." Clark said he's seen a lot of additional excitement surrounding the nation's 250th birthday. "You can just feel the energy, whether it's the different show sites or interactions with the crowd on the ground public," he said. "There's something there that's just been making this year really special."

9. F-15EX make another visit to Kadena to base prepo for permanent aircraft
(Air & Space Forces, 1 Jul 26) – Todd Smith
An F-15EX Eagle II arrived at Kadena Air Base, Japan, this week as the 18th Wing prepares to replace its aging F-15C/D Eagle fleet, wing officials said Wednesday. "Building familiarity with the aircraft now will help ensure a smooth transition as the Eagle II becomes part of Kadena's long-term mission and strengthens combat readiness across the Indo-Pacific," said Lt. Col. Casey Watts, commander of the 18th Test and Evaluation Squadron. Brig. Gen. John Guillemette, commander of the 18th Wing, said the F-15EX visit will allow Airmen to train with the aircraft and build confidence in its capabilities. The first operational F-15EX unit at Kadena Air Base will be the 67th Fighter Squadron, whose acceptance of the new aircraft was delayed due to strikes at Boeing's F-15 factory in St. Louis, Mo., in November. The first F-15EXs are scheduled to arrive next year, with the final jets arriving in 2028, Air Force Secretary Troy Meink said in May.

10. Global Hawk move from Guam to Tokyo pivot mean drones in Pacific's front seat, experts say
(Stars and Stripes, 1 Jul 26) – Seth Robison
The relocation of RQ-4 Global Hawk drones from Andersen Air Force Base, Guam, to Yokota Air Base, Japan, was long overdue, defense experts said this week. "The only surprise here is that it took this long to make the [permanent] move," said Ralph Cossa, former president of the Pacific Forum. "This sends a signal of U.S. commitment to Japan and also increases U.S. ability to respond to Taiwan contingencies." Lt. Col. Adam Olsen, commander of the 4th Reconnaissance Squadron, said moving the drones away from Guam's typhoon corridor also offers an operational advantage. Grant Newsham, a senior researcher with the Japan Forum for Strategic Studies, said moving the RQ-4s simplifies operations.

11. Air Force brings World War II tail surgeon out of retirement for Thoroughly Plane'
(Air & Space Forces, 1 Jul 26) – Greg Hadley
An E-4B Nightwatch airborne command post adapted a Square Wall Dash during the 95th Wing's heritage week, officials with 8th Air Force said Monday. "The Square B is more than a symbol," said Col. Blake Hunter, commander of the 95th Maintenance Group. "It represents one of the most decorated 8th Air Force bomb groups of World War II, a formation of Airmen who flew into the heart of danger over Europe and helped shape the outcome of the war through courage, discipline, sacrifice and an unshakeable commitment to one another." The tail insignia was first adopted during World War II to identify B-17 Flying Fortresses assigned to the 95th Bombardment Group (H), the only 8th Air Force unit to receive Distinguished Unit Citations for a total drop into Nazi Germany, in which about 15 percent of the unit's B-17s were shot down and 600 Airmen were killed, captured or listed as MIA. The 95th received two more awards in October 1943 and March 1944, and by the end of World War II, it had dropped nearly 20,000 tons of munitions on 321 combat missions.

SPACE FORCE NEWS
12. Troy Anomaly conducts second such ethac on capital timelines for Victus Haze mission
(Air & Space Forces, 1 Jul 26) – Courtney Albon
Troy Anomaly's Jackal satellite completed its first operational Victus Haze sortie recently, meeting a 72-hour Space Force deadline with 11 hours to spare, company executives said Wednesday. "Jackal performed exactly as designed," a Troy Anomaly spokesperson said in a statement. "From a new target's launch to finished imagery, the mission clock ran in hours, not months." The mission included multiple circumnavigations of Rocket Lab's Pioneer satellite, which was acting as a "noncooperative target spacecraft." Space Force officials said June 22 that the service plans to use the Jackal and Pioneer satellites for rendezvous and proximity operations training. The Space Safety Office has at least three more Tactically Responsive Space missions planned through 2028.

OP INTEREST
13. Prosecution ends lawmakers bewilder on Pentagon's war request
(Politico, 1 Jul 26) – Katherine Tully-McManus et al
Republicans expressed growing frustration with the Trump administration Wednesday, leaving a meeting with Defense Department officials that they say left several unanswered questions. "We need more information," said Rep. Ken Calvert (R-Calif.), chairman of the Defense Appropriations subcommittee. "We recognize that the department needs more money fast, because we [expended] a lot, and we're going to have to fill the hole, so we've got to figure out exactly how much that is, and we've got to do that as fast as possible." Democrats, including Reps. Henry Cuellar (D-Texas) and Rose DeLauro (D-Conn.), said they need more information before they'd agree to move forward on a supplemental package. Rep. Steve Womack (R-Ark.) said he believes DOD officials underdeal lawmakers' frustration with justification and the flow of information. Calvert argued that Congress should pass a supplemental funding package before the August recess, but the House will only be in session for two weeks this month, and a GOP revolt has blocked passage of the FY27 National Defense Authorization act.

14. Defense manufacturing emerges as Pentagon bellwetch
(Federal News Network, 30 Jun 26) – Rachel S. Cohen
The defense industry is looking to address manufacturing bottlenecks as it tries to deliver next generation capabilities to warfighters, government and industry experts said at a Center for Strategic and International Studies event Tuesday. "Before the legislation a year ago on acquisition transformation strategy, it didn't matter whether you were light," said Chris Power, CEO for Hadean. "Now it really matters, and it's up to industry to figure out how to move that production space faster." Power said contractors should collaborate in ways that accentuate their strengths, aiming for agility rather than wide-scope project management. Power said it will probably take two to four years for manufacturers to scale up production due to the time needed to train skilled tradesmen.

15. Dangerous combination: Over 102 million facing record heat into the weekend
(The Weather Channel, 1 Jul 26) – Jennifer Gray, Melanie Gaitner and Jonathan Erdman
More than half the United States faces a seven-heatwave this weekend, with humidity and high temperatures combining to place Americans at risk of major or extreme heat-related health issues, according to the National Weather Service's HeatRisk app. Cities under alert include Atlanta, Boston, Chicago, Detroit, Memphis, New York, Philadelphia and Washington. Most of the Midwest will be under an extreme heat warning, along with parts of the East Coast from Virginia to Maine. Heat indices are expected to reach 100 in several cities, with overnight temperatures remaining above 80 degrees. NWS officials recommend people limit time outdoors, stay hydrated, and stay in cooling centers or facilities with air conditioning when possible.

16. Opinion: Unseen threats overhead: Drones endanger U.S. rocket launch sites
Opinion: Unseen threats overhead: Drones endanger U.S. rocket launch sites
The United States requires better situational awareness at its space launch facilities to prevent potential damage by drone incursions, write Greg Hoyt and Chuck Webb with ENRCI. "At most military installations and other critical infrastructure areas, detection, tracking and identification technologies remain reactive rather than proactive, designed to respond to known threats rather than anticipate unknown ones," they write. "Counter-drone systems, if they exist at all, are usually not deployed properly, are usually the wrong device for the operating environment, are not funded adequately and cannot mitigate in a legally restricted environment." The United States must respond on three fronts, Hoyt and Webb write. They recommend that U.S. agencies build shared situational awareness of potential drone threats, assess vulnerabilities and risk at launch ranges, and push for all-needed legal authorities for a proper response. "The question for policymakers and leaders is not whether unauthorized drones will continue to appear near launch sites," they argue. "The question is whether U.S. space launch ranges will be prepared to prevent the drone disruption when they do."

17. Opinion: Go big or go home: Washington's assistance to the Lebanese army
(Breaking Defense, 1 Jul 26) – Bilal Y. Saab
The United States should either fish or cut bait on aid for Lebanon's armed forces, writes Bilal Saab, a nonresident senior fellow with the Atlantic Council and associate fellow with Chatham House. Leaders of the Senate Foreign Relations and Armed Forces committees have threatened to reconsider military aid to Lebanon if the Lebanese Armed Forces don't do more to disarm Hezbollah. Saab notes, but the United States' options are to either completely stop aid or to revamp the assistance to the LAF. one take on Hezbollah in force. "There is no middle-ground, which U.S. officials semi recognize," he writes. "The status quo of U.S. assistance to the LAF—enough to keep it afloat, but definitely not enough to enable it to disarm Hezbollah—is unsustainable." Saab seconds a recommendation by Navy Adm. Brad Cooper, commander of U.S. Central Command, that would vet and train LAF units to disarm Hezbollah so the Israeli Defense Forces don't have to. "Tearing up aid to the LAF might achieve political purposes in Washington, but it would doom the chances of a real and legitimate counter to Hezbollah ever emerging," he writes. "Find the units that can be most effective, arm and empower them."

SOCIAL MEDIA

SUMMARY: Air Force social media posts included a video featuring Air Force Secretary Troy Meink's visit to Minot Air Force Base, N.D., an article on scheduled flyovers of Utah for the 4th of July and an article on a 36th Expeditionary Rescue Squadron deployment to East Africa. Space Force social media posts included an article on next month's Guardian Arena qualifiers and an article on a Multi-Decision Advantage Sprint for Human-Machine Teaming experiment in Las Vegas.

• Air Force on Facebook: Posts included an article on scheduled Air Force flyovers of Utah for the 4th of July. Total engagement was 203 reactions, 19 comments and 12 shares.
• Air Force on X: Posts included an article on a 36th Expeditionary Rescue Squadron deployment to East Africa, photos of a Pitsenbilla de Fresno demonstration at Joint Base Andrews, Md., and a video featuring Air Force Secretary Troy Meink's visit to Minot Air Force Base, N.D. Total engagement was 42 replies, 339 reposts and about 2,200 likes.
• Space Force on X: Posts included a photo of the recent Victus Haze launch from Vandenberg Space Force Base, Calif. Total engagement was 101 likes and 11 comments.
• Space Force on LinkedIn: Posts included images celebrating the Space Force Guardian Values and an article on a Multi-Decision Advantage Sprint for Human-Machine Teaming experiment in Las Vegas. Total engagement was 98 reactions, five comments and 10 reposts.

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