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This month, the LeMay Center highlights Red Flag 25-1, as a vivid demonstration of airspace control in a dense, contested battlespace.



In early 2025, the U.S. Air Force hosted Red Flag 25-1 at Nellis AFB, Nevada, marking the 50th anniversary of the service's longest large-force employment exercise. Over three weeks, up to 150 aircraft and 2,000 Airmen from 30 units executed hundreds of complex missions across the Nevada Test and Training Range (NTTR). The exercise required meticulous airspace design, deconfliction, and real-time command and control (C2) to synchronize kinetic and non-kinetic fires while preserving safety and adhering to National Airspace System (NAS) regulations. The scenarios replicated peer-level threats, GPS denial, and dynamic targeting challenges designed to test the integration of air, space, and cyber capabilities in a contested environment.

Born in the aftermath of Vietnam, Red Flag was designed by then Tactical Air Command to give every Airman the “first 10 combat sorties” in a realistic, learning-focused environment before facing real combat. Fifty years later, that vision endures as the Air Force's longest-running large-scale exercise – one that has grown into a global training venue for U.S., allied, and partner nations.

Why it matters today: Air Force Doctrine Publication (AFDP) 3-52, *Airspace Control*, establishes airspace control as an imperative for the effective application of airpower. All joint force components have airspace mission requirements that should be integrated,



coordinated, prioritized, and deconflicted within the airspace control system. Planners must establish airspace control mechanisms, allocate control authorities, and establish procedural and positive control measures that enable high-density, joint, and multinational operations. Red Flag serves as an operational laboratory where this doctrine is tested, refined, and validated. The lessons learned from Red Flag inform and evolve airspace control doctrine to reduce the risk of fratricide, synchronize fires, and preserve freedom of action under complex, degraded, or contested conditions.

For more on the Air Force's approach to Airspace Control, see [AFDP 3-52](#). You can also explore our doctrine podcast library on iTunes, Spotify, Amazon Music, or at www.doctrine.af.mil.