

Deborah James

Former Secretary of the US Air Force

The United States Department of Defense



Deborah Lee James is an accomplished business executive, senior administration official, board member, and frequent keynote speaker with over 30 years of leadership experience in the federal and private sectors. Serving as the 23rd Secretary of the Air Force for the United States of America and the President of Science Application International Corporation's (SAIC) Technical and Engineering Sector, Deborah has a successful track record in strategic planning, operations, risk management, cybersecurity, talent management, and technological innovation.

In addition to her work at The ExCo Group, Lee is a member of the board of directors for several for-profit and not-for-profit organizations, including Auria, Textron, Inc., Unisys Corporation, Noblis, Inc., and the Atlantic Council. Lee is on the Advisory Boards at MIT's Lincoln Laboratory and LeanIn.Org.

As Secretary of the Air Force from 2013-2017, Lee became the second woman ever to hold the position, leading the Department of the Air Force, overseeing its \$140B budget and nearly 660,000 active-duty, Guard, Reserve, and Civilian Airmen. Navigating the intersection of people, policy, and budgetary concerns, Lee invested R&D dollars in ensuring that the Air Force remained on the cutting edge of technology and forged relationships with external partners to gain access to innovations from companies the department did not historically work with. Lee led strategic change in human capital management and overhauled headquarters operations in order to streamline processes and reduce delivery time.

Prior to her appointment as Secretary of the Air Force, Lee held an 11-year tenure at SAIC, where, most recently, she was President of the Technical and Engineering sector. She worked closely with SAIC's CEO and Board of Directors to co-lead the design effort that successfully split SAIC into two distinct public companies (SAIC and Leidos). Before holding this role, Lee was the executive vice president for communications and government affairs, working closely with the board of directors on reputation risk management.

Before joining SAIC, Lee served as Chief Operating Officer for the nonprofit Business Executives for National Security (BENS) and spent two years as vice president for international operations and marketing for United Technologies Corporation (UTC). Previously, she served in the Pentagon as the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Reserve Affairs and worked as a professional staff member on the House Armed Services Committee.

Lee received her B.A. from Duke University and an M.A. from Columbia University's School of International and Public Affairs.



Deborah focused on providing guidance to navigate change and conflict, emphasizing the importance of co-creation, clear communication, and stakeholder management and those were extremely helpful. Her emphasis on the power of storytelling, vulnerability, and explicit leadership was also appreciated.

– President of Customer Solutions, Fortune 500 Technology Company