NOT FOR PUBLICATION UNTIL RELEASED BY
SENATE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON AIRLAND
UNITED STATES SENATE

PRESENTATION TO THE
SENATE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON AIRLAND
UNITED STATES SENATE

HEARING DATE/TIME: May 12, 2026, 4:30PM

SUBJECT: Air Force, Force Structure and Modernization Programs

STATEMENT OF:

Lt. Gen. David H. Tabor USAF
Deputy Chief of Staff
(Plans and Programs)

Lt. Gen. Luke C. G. Cropsey, USAF
Military Deputy
Assistant Secretary of the Air Force
(Acquisition, Technology & Logistics)

Maj. Gen. Niemi, USAF
Military Deputy, Deputy Chief of Staff
(Force Modernization)

NOT FOR PUBLICATION UNTIL RELEASED BY
SENATE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON AIRLAND
UNITED STATES SENATE

INTRODUCTION

Chairman Cramer, Ranking Member Kelly, and distinguished members of the subcommittee, thank you for having us here today to provide testimony on the Department of the Air Force's Fiscal Year 2027 (FY27) President's Budget (PB) request for Air Force Modernization.

As we have seen in Operations MIDNIGHT HAMMER and EPIC FURY, the United States Air Force brings unique capabilities to the fight. These distinct air power advantages ensure the Joint force retains freedom of action, extends its operational reach, and projects decisive power worldwide. It is, therefore, essential that the Air Force continues to be fiscally prioritized so we may consistently maintain our foundational readiness accounts and, looking ever-forward, modernize our force to ensure the Air Force can meet the requirements of the National Defense Strategy. Together, the Air Force and this Committee have spent years discussing the urgency of the threats our Airmen face; this year marks a pivotal moment in our commitment to modernizing and reshaping the force to meet the challenges presented by a rapidly evolving global security landscape.

To ensure our modernization efforts deliver operational advantage, the Air Force has begun a fundamental reorganization of how we translate strategy into capability. The Deputy Chief of Staff for Strategy, Design, and Requirements (A5/7) is evolving into the Air Force's Force Modernization Office – integrating force design, mission analysis, capability development, and investment prioritization into a single, enterprise-wide process. While the FY27 budget was developed during this transition, it reflects the direction of this approach. As the process matures, it will directly shape future budget submissions across the Future Years Defense Program (FYDP).

We are forging an Air Force to sustain a state of constant readiness, globally project a wide spectrum of multi-domain capabilities, and provide relevant, strategic options to senior leaders. The world's preeminent air power will be postured to effectively meet the rising call to defend the Homeland, deter or defeat our adversaries, and set conditions to achieve National objectives.

ACQUISTION TRANSFORMATION

The Air Force is fully committed and moving rapidly to implement the Secretary of War's Acquisition Transformation imperatives. We are transforming acquisition into a true warfighting function. This is a generational overhaul designed to deliver integrated, combat-effective capabilities at the speed of relevance, enhancing deterrence and our ability to win. This is a fundamental cultural shift towards speed, agility, and responsible risk-taking, driven from the highest levels of the Department. Our guiding principle is to ensure every Portfolio Acquisition Executive (PAE) has the three things they need to succeed: the authority, the resources, and the talent to execute their mission. This transformation puts the warfighter at the center of a unified system. By integrating requirements, acquisition, and resourcing, we ensure the voice of the operator is the driving force behind every decision we make. We want to thank Chairman Wicker for his vision and leadership in the FoRGED Act and the acquisition reforms Congress enacted in the FY26 NDAA. We are moving rapidly to execute and take advantage of these new flexibilities, and we look forward to continuing our work with Congress as we implement Acquisition Transformation in the Air Force.

Direct Reporting Portfolio Manager for Critical Major Weapon Systems

On December 19, 2025, the United States Senate confirmed General Dale White as the Direct Reporting Portfolio Manager (DRPM) for Critical Major Weapon Systems (CMWS), reporting directly to Deputy Secretary of War Feinberg. General White's portfolio is comprised of LGM-35A Sentinel Intercontinental Ballistic Missile systems, Minuteman III ICBM systems, F-47 Family of Systems, B-21 Family of Systems, and VC-25B Presidential Airlift.

The purpose of the DRPM CMWS is twofold: to relentlessly prioritize critical programs within the portfolio that are most consequential to the security, freedom, and prosperity of the American people; and second, to drive the transformation the Departments acquisition processes. The DAF is closely partnering with the DRPM – CMWS. The CMWS stand-up brings a Department of War (DoW), wide unity of effort and urgency to close on our critical weapon systems. Our Partnership has already removed several barriers to program execution and is setting conditions for continued program success. DRPM CWMS has the authority to cut through bureaucracy and "prove out" faster ways of doing business. The lessons we are learning are being shared and applied across the board, making all our programs faster and more efficient. The Department of the Air Force continues to support these programs and is committed to

providing CMWS with the resources and talent required to successfully execute these critical programs.

A NEW FRAMEWORK FOR MODERNIZATION

As the Secretary of the Air Force recently testified, we are in a fast-paced race for technological and operational advantage. Our adversaries are adapting to challenge the strengths of our current force, and we must change how we modernize to keep pace. Effective April 1, 2026, the Deputy Chief of Staff for Strategy, Design, and Requirements (A5/7) began transitioning into A5/7 Force Modernization, with the Deputy Chief of Staff also serving as the Air Force's Chief Modernization Officer. This organization brings an enterprise-wide, analytically grounded approach to defining what the Air Force must look like to win—and, critically, connects those decisions to the budget. While the FY27 budget was developed during this transition, it reflects the direction we are moving. As this framework matures, it will more directly shape future budget submissions across the FYDP.

Central to this approach is a shift away from evaluating platforms in isolation. Instead, we use wargaming and operational analysis to assess how the Air Force generates combat power as an integrated system. Using mission threads to identify the capability gaps that matter most, we prioritize investments to deliver operational effects—not just field new systems.

This approach enables disciplined, risk-informed tradeoffs—balancing current readiness with the need to transition from less relevant legacy systems to more lethal, integrated capabilities. The result is a force designed to deliver combat power against a peer adversary.

CURRENT CAPACITY & CAPABILITY

In line with the National Security Strategy (NSS) principles and National Defense Strategy (NDS) priorities, the Air Force continues to invest in building an increasingly integrated, connected and ready force to deter aggression from our adversaries and promote peace through strength. Our primary objective is to enable full readiness. We are doing this by incrementally adjusting our readiness accounts, ensuring training and equipment needs are properly funded. This investment also enhances our lethality by ensuring our Airmen are trained and equipped to fly, fix, and fight both today and in future high-end conflict.

Bombers

The American bomber force proudly retains its status as the embodiment of "Peace through Strength." We remain steadfast in prioritizing near and long-term readiness with funding requests for B-52 to sustain and modernize the 76 aircraft through the 2038 timeframe. This funding will support the current programs of record to include Commercial Engine Replacement Program, Radar Modernization Program, AEHF Integration, Mission Employment Trainer, nuclear and conventional communications, and weapon integration efforts. We are extending the service of our B-1 and B-2 fleets to mitigate operational gaps and facilitate the modernization of our core bomber force. Accordingly, we have programmed the B-2 to be retained through the Future Years Defense Program (FYDP), which includes a fiscal year 2027 request of $166 million for the Modular Rotary Launcher Assembly to significantly enhance its future combat capacity.

The B-21 Raider is the cornerstone of our nation's future bomber force and is demonstrating tangible progress as it executes its flight test campaign. With three low-rate initial production lots awarded and a recent agreement to increase production capacity by 25%, our plan to field at least one hundred B-21s is on track for the first aircraft to be on the ramp at Ellsworth Air Force Base in 2027, with Ellsworth, Whiteman, and Dyess, slated to be the main operating bases of the future.

Fighters

The United States fighter fleet continues to deliver dominant airpower and a decisive combat edge as recently demonstrated in Operation MIDNIGHT HAMMER and Operation EPIC FURY. F-35 production continues to improve, with 191 jets delivered in 2025 and a target range of 147 to 167 deliveries for 2026. The FY27 PB requests $2.1B in development to continue Block 4 modernization and weapons integration efforts. The Air Force is aggressively increasing the requested F-15EX quantities to meet critical mission requirements and is working closely with the War Department and Boeing to address production delays stemming from last year's union strike and accelerate production capacity.

The F-47 and Collaborative Combat Aircraft (CCA) remain the top modernization priority in the Air Force fighter fleet. As defined through Force Design and mission thread analysis, the future of air superiority depends on integrated, distributed systems that can generate combat mass in highly contested environments. The F-47 and CCA are foundational components

of this architecture, reflecting the direction of our force design and mission thread analysis, and designed to operate as a family of systems that combine survivability, autonomy, and scalable mass to achieve operational objectives that no single platform can deliver alone.

The FY27 PB requests $5.0B in RDT&E to support the F-47's continuation of agile software and open systems architectures development as well as the design, build, and test of the F-47, paving the way for first flight in 2028. The FY27 PB requests $1.4B in RDT&E and $1.1B in Procurement to support the CCA's entrance into the Increment 1 Engineering and Manufacturing Development (EMD), continued Increment 2 development, and Increment 1 Production. The Increment 1 EMD efforts include air vehicle, mission autonomy, command and control enclave, F-22 quarterback pilot vehicle interface development, and initial weapon and quarterback integration. Procurement funds will initiate new start production of Lot 1 aircraft, Mission Autonomy licensing, and command and control enclaves. Procurement will also fund the continued F-22 modifications and open system architecture kit installation, initiated in 2026, implementing F-22 CCA quarterback capability.

Munitions

A credible deterrent requires a deep magazine of munitions. The FY27 budget sends a clear demand signal to industry to increase production, with a planned procurement of 39,000 additional weapons of all types by FY33. This includes leveraging non-traditional vendors to produce affordable weapons at scale. We are enhancing production capacity and rebuilding stockpiles across the entire weapons portfolio in order to strengthen critical weapons inventories This includes the Joint Advanced Tactical Missile (JATM), Joint Air-to-Surface Stand-Off Missile (JASSM), Long-Range Anti-Ship Missile (LRASM), the Advanced Medium-Range Air to Air Missile (AMRAAM), and the Family of Affordable Mass Munitions (FAMM). The USAF is proving that speed is achievable in acquisition. By connecting Air Force operational needs directly with industry's capability, we went from an idea to a contract for our new Extended Range Attack Munition (ERAM) cruise missile and FAMM munitions in just four months. This accelerated process means we can get critical new weapons for our aircraft tested and fielded with tangible results, faster than ever.

Hypersonic Attack Cruise Missile (HACM) and Air-Launched Rapid Response Weapon (ARRW) provide the Air Force with complementary air-breathing and boost-glide capabilities that enable rapid strike against time-sensitive, high-value targets across contested environments.

The FY27 PB request of $2.1B for these Hypersonic Weapons include new and continuing development and new and continuing production. The $1.2B RDT&E request will double Hypersonic Weapons production capacity and fund affordability initiatives, new platform integration, and capability/design upgrades for each weapon. The $856M Procurement request will start HACM production and continue ARRW production at max capacity.

Aerial Refueling

Our strategic competitors continue to make significant advancements to threaten air refueling operations. Air refueling and mobility capabilities are increasingly being assessed through mission threads that examine how the Joint Force projects power and sustains operations in contested environments. These analyses highlight the need for survivable, connected, and flexible systems that can operate across extended distances while under threat.

The Air Force will comply with congressional direction to grow the tanker force to 478 Total Aircraft Inventory (TAI) in FY27, but our over-arching goal is to remain consistent with our one-for-one tanker recapitalization strategy. We also are investing in long distance over the horizon communications and protection and airlift service life extension programs as we explore next generation airlift options. We appreciate the support of this Committee and Congress in these efforts.

The KC-46A Pegasus program continues to be a critical component of modernizing the tanker fleet, steadily producing and delivering capable aircraft to the warfighter. The program of record stands at 188 tankers, with plans to purchase up to 75 additional aircraft through the KC-46 Production Extension (PEx) program. This strategy ensures the long-term sustainment and operational readiness of the fleet, cementing the KC-46A's role in global reach for years to come.

The Air Force continues to work diligently with Boeing to resolve five open Category-I (CAT-I) deficiencies. These include two related to the Remote Vision System (RVS), one for the stiff aerial refueling boom, one for aerial refueling drain line cracks, and one concerning damage to the Environmental Control System (ECS) bleed air duct. Progress is being made, with the first flight of the redesigned RVS 2.0 occurring on November 14, 2025. The current projection to begin fielding RVS 2.0 is the fourth quarter of FY27, though the Air Force and Boeing are actively exploring all opportunities to accelerate the fielding of these corrective actions.

Significant investments are being made to enhance the capability and availability of the KC-46A fleet. The Air Force is investing a $1.08 billion capital infusion across the FYDP to

improve aircraft availability. In FY27, funding for the KC-46 program is set to increase by 21%, totaling an additional $809.2 million. This will fund the final 15 aircraft of the current program of record and includes a substantial investment in depot standup and solutions for DMSMS.

The Air Force continues to prioritize the importance of securing uninterrupted tanker recapitalization in the FY27 PB. The PEx program will continue research and development of technical solutions to address DMSMS issues projected to impact the manufacturing of additional KC-46A aircraft under the KC-46A PEx program. The $267.6 million in RDT&E funding in the FY27 PB will enable planning and preparation to include acquisition documentation development, pre-award activities, risk and issue assessment, and risk and issue mitigation. The FY27 PB request of $66.9 million in procurement will fund long lead Large Aircraft Infrared Counter Measures (LAIRCM) Government Furnished Equipment (GFE) requirements for the first lot of PEx aircraft.

The FY27 PB requests $13.1 million to pursue Advanced Tanker Systems (ATS) options with a focus on tanker survivability and connectivity. ATS studies are building on previous Analysis of Alternatives (AoA) initial data funded through the Next Generation Air-refueling System (NGAS) program. Through the ATS program, the Air Force is continuing to investigate platform agnostic mission system improvements for use across the tanker fleet, including increased connectivity and survivability along with air refueling capabilities. Research will explore self-protection internally and externally and new concepts for aerial refueling. To understand future air refueling requirements, force designers must explore the relationships and tradeoffs among receivers, munitions, sortie generation, fuel distribution/storage, prepositioning, and logistics.

Executive Airlift

The Air Force's Executive Airlift C-37A/B fleet is in sustainment and consists of a mix of Gulfstream V (GV) and G550 aircraft for a total aircraft inventory of 16. Starting in FY27, the Air Force will begin recapitalizing the C-37A/B fleets with a common small commercial derivative aircraft. This new start will be an ACAT II program with a total program cost of $2.2 billion to acquire 17 aircraft (to include one trainer aircraft) across the FYDP. The FY27 PB request of $208 million will purchase and deliver one new fully mission capable aircraft

equipped with executive interiors, a robust mission communications suite, and self-defense systems.

Presidential Airlift

The Air Force is modernizing its Presidential Airlift to ensure safe, reliable air transportation for the President and senior leaders with the equivalent level of communications capability and security available in the White House.

We are continuing collaboration with Boeing on the VC-25B program, with the first aircraft now projected for delivery in mid-2028, 18 months earlier than previously anticipated. The FY27 PB requests a total of $712.0M for the VC-25B program. The request includes $555.2M in RDT&E to support aircraft modification, developmental and operational testing, certification of mission systems, and procurement of initial spares and support equipment. These funds are critical for addressing technical challenges and ensuring the aircraft meets all operational requirements. Additionally, the budget requests $156.9M in Procurement to fund the Block Upgrade program and essential spares required to meet full operational capabilities of VC-25B.

Strategic Airlift

The Next Generation Airlift (NGAL) program is the Air Force's initiative to recapitalize its strategic airlift capability, designed to recapitalize both the C-5M Super Galaxy and C-17A Globemaster III fleets. This effort is driven by the dual challenges of an aging fleet and the demands of future contested logistics, particularly across the vast distances of the Indo-Pacific. NGAL aims to develop a solution that can transport cargo over intercontinental ranges while incorporating advanced technologies for enhanced survivability, fuel efficiency, and rapid cargo handling in contested environments. Currently in its early analysis phase, with an Analysis of Alternatives (AoA) slated for FY27, the program is on an accelerated timeline that could deliver the first aircraft as early as FY38 and achieve Initial Operational Capability (IOC) as soon as FY41, ensuring the United States maintains its global power projection capabilities for decades to come.

To maintain the C-5M Super Galaxy's vital role the FY27 PB request of $100.2 million is focused on combating systemic obsolescence, maintaining aircraft viability, and sustainability. Key initiatives include replacing the primary cockpit displays, known as the Multi-Functional Display Units (MFDUs) and the 41-year-old Standard Air Data Computer. Procurement

programs address immediate reliability and safety issues by replacing faulty lavatory systems to prevent corrosion and funding low-cost modifications to mitigate parts shortages.

To ensure the C-17 Globemaster III remains a state-of-the-art asset for strategic airlift missions, the FY27 PB request of $564.3 million for key modernization initiatives that focus on upgrading the flight deck and integrating advanced connectivity systems to enhance crews' situational awareness through all phases of Mobility Air Force (MAF) operations. Procurement programs will also tackle immediate needs by addressing Federal Aviation Administration and National Security Agency mandates, On-Board Inert Gas Generation System (OBIGGS) fire risks, Heads-Up Display (HUD) obsolescence, and addressing other known deficiencies.

Tactical Airlift

The FY27 PB continues efforts to maintain and modernize a mixed fleet of 271 C-130J and C-130H aircraft, ensuring the MAF retains its ability to execute tactical airlift in support of both overseas and domestic missions. The FY27 PB requests $23.6 million in procurement funding for key modifications to our C-130H fleet. The Air Force continues to ensure the viability and sustainability of the C-130H fleet through our Center Wing Box (CWB) replacement program, enabling them to continue to safely operate well into the future.

The Air Force operates a mixed fleet of C-130Hs and C-130Js, which also support Special Operations missions by providing Special Forces with extra weight carrying capacity, longer range, and better fuel efficiency. Special mission variants of the C-130J conduct weather reconnaissance (WC-130J), search and rescue (HC-130J), and special operations (MC-130J and AC-130J). The Air Force has multiple modification efforts for the C130J, including CWB replacement, communications upgrades, Block 8.1, and mission computer updates. The C-130J Block 8.1 modernization program, currently in production, delivers new communication and data link capabilities, a modern flight management system, and other key capabilities to the field. In addition, the Air Force plans to upgrade our C130J fleet with a Mobile User Objective System (MUOS) and a Second-Generation Anti-Jam Tactical Ultra High Frequency Radio satellite communication system to ensure we maintain key global communication links. Beginning in FY27, the Air Force will start procuring Star XIII mission computers. This is a critical modernization effort to replace legacy computers before they become obsolete in FY29.

Rotary

The FY27 PB requests a total of $213.9 million for the HH-60W Jolly Green II helicopter program, including $87.9 million for RDT&E and $126 million for Procurement. These funds are designated for crucial capability upgrades to address obsolescence. The Air Force is on track for a total of 102 aircraft. As of mid-March, 76 of these HH-60Ws have been delivered. Ongoing funding and modifications ensure the fleet remains at the forefront of combat search and rescue capabilities. The program is in full-rate production and the helicopter is actively deployed.

Air Force Global Strike Command continues to replace its legacy UH-1N helicopters with the new MH-139A Grey Wolf. The FY27 PB requests a total of $266 million, including $7 million for performance enhancements and $259 million to procure four additional aircraft, bringing the total delivered to 24 out of a planned 56. With initial operational missions having commenced in early 2026, the fleet is on track to declare Initial Operational Capability by the end of FY26.

With the CV-22 Osprey's 56-aircraft Program of Record completed in August 2025, the program's focus has shifted to sustainment and modernization. The FY27 PB requests $25.7 million in RDT&E and $142.2 million in Procurement for critical upgrades to address parts obsolescence, improve capability, and enhance safety. The Joint Program Office and industry partners are committed to improving the V-22's safety, reliability, and availability through initiatives to include the Osprey Drive System Safety and Health Instrumentation, Nacelle Improvement modifications, and upgraded Proprotor Gearboxes (PRGBs). These efforts are crucial to ensure the fleet retains its unique and vital mission capabilities.

Command and Control

The Air Force is complying with Congressional direction and will continue executing the E-7A Wedgetail program consistent with current authorities and appropriations. FY26 E-7A funds are being utilized to develop an additional five E-7A Engineering, Manufacturing, and Development (EMD) aircraft and to address diminishing manufacturing sources for the Multi-Role Electronically Scanned Array (MESA) radar.

The FY27 PB requests $430.6 million in Procurement for twelve (12) 3DELRR systems based on the pre-negotiated firm fixed price procurement contract and scales up the interim

contractor support to accommodate the additional fielded systems until an organic USAF support capability is established. This investment supports replacement of the AN/TPS-75 and ARSR-4 radars and provides the warfighter with reliable and threat relevant long range radar systems. The budget also requests $22.3 million in RDT&E to continue system capability development to include electronic protection techniques, software fixes and operational testing.

Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance

ISR capabilities are central to the Air Force's ability to generate decision advantage across all mission areas. Through mission thread analysis, ISR is evaluated as part of an integrated sensing and command-and-control architecture, where platforms contribute to a broader system that connects sensors and shooters. This approach ensures ISR modernization efforts are aligned to operational outcomes and prioritized within the FYDP to deliver resilient, networked capability in contested environments.

The FY27 PB requests $16.7 million in RDT&E to support the continued fielding of new MQ-9 software capabilities through annual Operational Flight Program releases. Additionally, the budget requests $105 million in Procurement to support the fielding of Link-16 capabilities, Proliferated Low Earth Orbit (PLEO) kits, Open Mission Systems (OMS) installations, and initial spares for the MQ-9 fleet. The successful execution of this capacity enhancement is vital for maintaining a decisive strategic advantage, ensuring the MQ-9 Reaper remains a preeminent force multiplier across the full spectrum of military operations.

Electronic Warfare

Investments in Electromagnetic Spectrum Operations (EMSO) are essential for the Joint Force to achieve a competitive edge in highly contested environments. Acknowledging this, the Air Force made a generational investment in EMSO capability, increasing the portfolio by $300M, specifically in RDT&E. The focus in FY27 is maximizing non-traditional sensors in the battlespace and synchronizing EW capabilities with kinetic fires to generate overpowering C-C5ISRT effects.

Importantly, the EA-37B revitalizes the DAF's airborne electromagnetic attack platform following the divestiture of the EC-130H at the end of FY26. The FY27 PB requests $1,194M in APAF and $67M in RDT&E to procure 3 EA-37B aircraft, building the total inventory to 22 by FY31. Additionally, it provides funds to continue sustainment and modernization of the existing

fleet including Baseline 4 testing, additional spares, mission simulator upgrades, and Baseline 5 development that provides advanced electromagnetic attack capabilities.

CONCLUSION

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify. The Air Force has taken deliberate steps to strengthen how modernization decisions are made and resourced. Our modernization priorities will increasingly align force design, requirements, and resourcing across the FYDP. This positions the Air Force to more effectively deliver the capabilities the Joint Force needs – at the speed and scale required to deter, and if necessary, defeat our adversaries. We look forward to working with this subcommittee to ensure the Department of the Air Force maintains the necessary military advantage to defend the Homeland, deter our adversaries, and if necessary, fight and win.