

**Opening Statement of U.S. Senator Jack Reed
Ranking Member, Senate Armed Services Committee**

**Room SD-G50
Dirksen Senate Office Building
Tuesday, March 3, 2016**

**To receive testimony on the posture of the Department of the Air Force
in review of the Defense Authorization Request
for Fiscal Year 2017 and the Future Years Defense Program.
(As Prepared for Delivery)**

I want to join Senator McCain in welcoming Secretary James and General Welsh to the Committee this morning to testify on the plans and programs of the Department of the Air Force in our review of the fiscal year 2017 annual authorization request.

We are grateful to each of you for your service to the Nation and for the truly professional service of the men and women under your command and pay tribute to their families, who are vital to the success of the men and women of our armed forces.

Over the past 15 years, Air Force personnel and equipment have played a key role in support of our national security goals in Iraq, Afghanistan, and elsewhere around the world. Over this time, we have relied heavily on Air Force strike aircraft to take on important ground targets, Air Force manned aircraft and unmanned aerial vehicles to provide intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (ISR) support, and Air Force tankers and cargo aircraft to support coalition air operations.

Our witnesses this morning face huge challenges as they strive to balance the need to support ongoing operations and sustain readiness with the need to modernize and keep the technological edge in the three domains of air, space, and cyberspace that are so critical to military success. The Air Force has produced a budget that, like all the services, made tough decisions in a time of constrained resources.

The Air Force is proposing significant force structure changes to ensure that it will have the right size and mix of assets and capabilities to meet strategic needs in a manner consistent with a constrained budget environment. The Air Force proposal includes major shifts in both strategic and tactical aircraft programs, with reductions shared among the active duty force, the Air National Guard, and the Air Force Reserve. Here are some examples:

- The Air Force is planning to retire the entire A-10 fighter force over the Future Years Defense Program as new F-35A Joint Strike Fighter aircraft replace them on a one-for-one basis. While there is a one-for-one replacement for aircraft and squadrons under the Air Force plan, it is not

clear that that close air support capability of the modernized force will equal or exceed the close air support capability of the current force, and would appreciate your thoughts

- The Air Force continues its plan to eventually retire the entire U-2 fleet and keep the Global Hawk Block 30 remotely piloted aircraft (RPA) fleet. In the meantime, the Air Force plans to develop and field capabilities for the Global Hawk are intended to equal or exceed the capability of the U-2, as required by law. I would appreciate an update on this.
- DOD has directed the Air Force to reduce the number of Predator and Reaper RPA Combat Air Patrols (CAPs) it will support. The previous goal was 65 CAPs, and the new goal would be 60 CAPs. This is to allow time for the Air Force personnel and logistics systems to catch up to the demand for RPA forces. I am interested in the witnesses' views on the challenges and opportunities this reduction presents.
- Finally, the Air Force wants to make significant reductions in certain high-demand/low-density forces, such as the AWACS, JSTARS and Compass Call fleets before they would be replaced by new systems and capabilities. We need to understand the risks involved in gapping these capabilities.

Four years ago, Congress created a National Commission on the Structure of the Air Force to make recommendations on policy issues that are directly relevant to these force structure decisions. We look forward to receiving testimony from the Air Force on the progress being made to implement those recommendations.

As the Air Force contemplates major force structure changes, we need to understand what if any effect these changes may have on the Air Force's ability to play a key role in implementing defense strategic guidance calling for a shift to refocus emphasis to the Asia-Pacific region. I hope our witnesses today will help us understand how this strategic shift is reflected in the Air Force budget and in the service's future plans.

In addition, the Air Force faces a continuing challenge in managing its acquisition programs, including the Joint Strike Fighter –the most expensive DOD acquisition program in history – and a new tanker and a new bomber. I hope that our witnesses will explain the steps taken or planned to control costs on these programs. We are working to schedule an acquisition reform hearing early next month, at which we should have further opportunity to explore these issues.

I look forward to the testimony of our witnesses.