

**DEPARTMENT OF THE AIR FORCE  
PRESENTATION TO THE SUBCOMMITTEE  
ON  
READINESS AND MANAGEMENT SUPPORT  
UNITED STATES SENATE COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES**

**SUBJECT: Current State of Readiness of U.S. Forces**

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**MARCH 15, 2016**

**NOT FOR PUBLICATION UNTIL RELEASED  
BY THE UNITED STATES SENATE  
COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES**

## **INTRODUCTION**

Today's national security challenges come from a combination of strong states that are challenging world order, weak states that cannot preserve order, and poorly governed spaces that provide sanctuary to extremists who seek to destabilize the globe. The world needs a strong American Joint Force, and since our establishment in 1947, the Air Force remains an agile responder in times of crisis, contingency, and conflict. In fact, the Joint Force depends upon Air Force capabilities and requires Airpower at the beginning, the middle, and the end of every Joint operation.

America's Air Force must be able to disrupt, degrade, or destroy any target in the world, quickly and precisely, with conventional or nuclear weapons, to deter and win our Nation's wars. Undoubtedly, decisive air, space, and cyberspace power—and the ability to command and control these forces—have become the oxygen the Joint Force breathes and are fundamental to American security and Joint operations. Whether in support of global counter-terror operations or near-peer deterrence, your Air Force remains constantly committed, as we have without respite for the past 25 years.

However, 25 years of continuous combat operations and reductions to our Total Force coupled with budget instability and lower-than-planned funding levels have resulted in one of the smallest, oldest, and least ready forces across the full-spectrum of operations in our history. The Budget Control Act (BCA) further degraded our readiness, and there is simply no way to recover without time, money, and people. While the Bipartisan Budget Act of 2015 provides some space to recover readiness and continue modernization efforts, your Air Force needs permanent relief

from BCA, consistent, flexible funding, modestly increased manpower, and time to recover readiness.

### **IMPACT OF THE BUDGET CONTROL ACT AND SEQUESTRATION**

In 2013, sequestration abruptly delayed modernization and reduced both readiness and the size of the Total Force. Specifically, sequestration forced the grounding of one-third of our combat fighter squadrons for three months. It is important to understand the cumulative effect on readiness when the Air Force stops flying. We delay aircrew proficiency and progression, suspend aircraft maintenance, create months of maintenance backlog, and defer major depot inspections and overhauls on our aging fleet. Sequestration also postponed maintenance, repair, and upgrades on our ranges, which degraded high-end training for our combat forces. Furthermore, we canceled partnership-building exercises and could not support multiple Army combat unit certification missions. Half of non-combat joint airlift and air refueling requirements were unsupported. Further, sequestration halted investment in infrastructure repairs cancelling or delaying military construction and facility restoration and modernization projects across the Air Force.

Even worse, we broke faith with our Airmen. We furloughed approximately 180,000 civilian Airmen, froze their pay, and released all temporary and term employees. Professional military education and development of our Airmen stopped, some base facilities closed, and Airmen and family services halted. Approximately 20,000 experienced Airmen separated from the Air Force under force management programs and our accession targets were decreased to meet reduced end strength caps. Our Airmen's trust, loyalty, and confidence, an essential aspect that underpins

the effectiveness of our force, eroded during this time. Bottom line—when an Air Force does not fly, readiness atrophies across the enterprise with impacts that cannot be reversed in the time it took to lose it.

The Air Force entered Fiscal Year 2014 in a government shutdown with fiscal planning focused on a second year of sequestration. We remain grateful for the modest, temporary relief from sequestration in 2014 and 2015. This relief enabled the Air Force to fly to capacity, resume critical aircraft and facility maintenance, invest in our Nuclear Force Improvement Program, fund our training ranges, purchase munitions, and invest in the KC-46, F-35, and LRS-B. Despite this relief, we still made some very tough choices. We attempted to reduce force structure, carried risk in base infrastructure support and military construction, and sacrificed near-term readiness for future modernization.

After submitting our Fiscal Year 2015 budget, our Secretary of Defense outlined five threats that factor into our National security calculus: China, Russia, Iran, North Korea, and the ongoing fight against global terrorism. As a result, the demand for Air Force capability and capacity increased. We made necessary adjustments to balance near-term readiness with future modernization in our Fiscal Year 2016 budget, but our readiness remains at a near all-time low due to continuous combat operations, reduced manpower, an aging fleet, and inconsistent funding. For the last two years, instead of rebuilding readiness for future, high-end conflicts, our Airmen have responded to events across the globe, leading and in support of the Joint Force. Although we remain the world's greatest Air Force, a return to sequestration would exacerbate the problem and delay our goal to return to full-spectrum readiness.

## **STATE OF THE AIR FORCE**

Today, the demand for Air Force capabilities continues to grow as Airmen provide America with Global Vigilance, Global Reach, and Global Power. Airmen are engaged defending U.S. interests around the globe with approximately 200,000 Airmen directly supporting Combatant Commander requirements from home station. Your Air Force has deployed 20,000 Airmen worldwide, and another 80,000 are permanently stationed at overseas bases. In this past year, more than 35,000 Airmen protected our national interests and those of our Allies by ensuring a safe, secure, and reliable nuclear deterrent. We flew nearly 1.7 million flying hours, equal to 194 continuous years of flying. We delivered a staggering 1.2 billion pounds of fuel, 345,000 tons of cargo, and evacuated over 4,000 patients. We also conducted over 8,000 cyberspace operations and prevented network intrusions. American Airmen performed nearly 20,000 Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance (ISR) missions around the world and enabled 25 space missions supporting national security objectives while simultaneously tracking over 23,000 objects orbiting the earth. All this was accomplished with a force almost 33 percent smaller than in 1991.

To put our reduced size in perspective, in 1991, during Operation DESERT STORM, we deployed 33 fighter squadrons into our first conflict since Vietnam. At that time, we had 134 combat-coded fighter squadrons, 946,000 active duty, guard, reserve, and civilian Airmen, and 80 percent of the fighter force was ready for full-spectrum operations. Today, we have just 55 combat-coded fighter squadrons, approximately 660,000 Total Force Airmen, and less than 50 percent of our Air Force is ready for full- spectrum operations—a 30 percent reduction since Operation

DESERT STORM. While the extraordinary success of Operation DESERT STORM shaped the world's perceptions of American Airpower, our near-peer adversaries responded by modernizing their forces with systems specifically designed to neutralize our strengths.

As our Secretary of the Air Force and Chief of Staff highlighted, for the first time in a generation, adversaries are challenging America's freedom of maneuver in air, space, and cyberspace in contested regions and near our Allies' borders. The Air Force continues to lead the global response against ISIL in the Middle East while still heavily engaged in Afghanistan. A resurgent Russia now supports Assad in the skies over Syria and has announced their intent to modernize their nuclear forces. In addition, we watched North Korea conduct a space launch and an illegal nuclear test, and we see worrisome military activity in the South China Sea. We also have other growing threats in both space and cyberspace. Our adversaries are closing the capability gap in space and cyberspace while also fielding advanced air defenses and fifth-generation aircraft. Our strategic capability advantage over competitors is shrinking, and our ability to project strategic deterrence is being challenged.

To meet the full requirements of our Defense Strategic Guidance and current operation plans, we require 80 percent of our combat squadrons to be full-spectrum ready. We define full-spectrum readiness as the right number of Airmen, properly led, trained and equipped, to accomplish our Air Force mission in support of the Joint Force in both contested and uncontested environments.

We measure full-spectrum readiness through our five levers of readiness: critical skills availability, weapons system sustainment, training resource availability,

flying hour program, and operational tempo. If Airmen are not ready for all possible scenarios, especially a high-end fight against a near-peer adversary, it could take longer to get to the fight; it could take longer to win; and it could cost more lives. To maintain the advantage the Air Force provides to the Joint Force, we need sufficient, predictable funding, increased manpower in critical skills areas, and improved deploy-to-dwell time. To achieve balance across our five levers of readiness, the following highlights our state of readiness and where Congressional support for this budget request is needed.

### **STATE OF THE AIR FORCE – GLOBAL NUCLEAR POWER**

As we emphasized last year, the Air Force represents two-thirds of our Nation's nuclear triad, and the nuclear enterprise remains our number one priority. With both nuclear and conventional forces, the Air Force provides a range of options for America's leaders, but the effects of age are beginning to limit Air Force nuclear capabilities. While our nuclear forces remain safe, secure, and effective, this budget provides significant investment needed to ensure nuclear readiness and unrivaled deterrence for the 21st century. Today's bombers were built in the 1960s and are approximately 55 years old. On average our facilities are now approximately 40 years old, with many facility systems operating well past their 20-year designed life span. Currently, all of our weapons storage areas are operating with waivers and deviations from our high standards. Although these storage areas are uncompromised, safe and secure, in order to address the recommendations identified in our Nuclear Enterprise Reviews for facility and weapons sustainment, we require the resource levels requested in this budget.

To ensure a reliable nuclear deterrent for the Joint Force, this budget request includes modernizing nuclear command and control, replacing some outdated and unsupportable components of Minuteman III ICBM equipment, while also making initial investments in the Ground Based-Strategic Deterrence Program. Our National Airborne Operations Centers provide critical, survivable Nuclear Command, Control, and Communications but they are 35 years old. We must recapitalize this fleet in order to maintain our Command and Control advantage in times of crisis or nuclear conflict. To support the Joint Force, we must ensure our mobile Command and Control systems are able to withstand attacks from space and cyberspace and are sufficiently resilient to function if prevention fails. Additionally, we reorganized our Nuclear Enterprise and established Air Force Global Strike Command as our Air Force lead to ensure continued, sustained, and secure Nuclear Command, Control and Communications. We managed to sustain Air Launched Cruise Missiles and Minuteman III platforms within our resources. We are developing the Long-Range Standoff weapon to provide the Joint Force with a survivable air-launched weapon capable of destroying otherwise inaccessible targets in any conflict zone. This budget request includes the resources to address those critical challenges.

### **STATE OF THE AIR FORCE – GLOBAL CONVENTIONAL POWER**

Air Superiority is the critical prerequisite for every military operation to ensure freedom of action for the Joint Force and the Nation. Our F-22s are in high demand in the Central, Pacific, and European Commands. Our F-15Cs provide primary support for Homeland Defense and to both the European and Pacific theaters. These platforms secure the high ground and have prevented American ground forces from

attack by enemy air strike since 1953. Today, our six F-22A squadrons are in high demand. Therefore, we are continuing last year's investments to modernize advanced air-to-air weaponry, requesting additional funding for sensor and tactical and seeking electronic warfare protection and modern sensor suites for our remaining F-15C fighters. To develop Airmen properly trained to meet the Combatant Commanders' demand signals, we funded flying hours to their maximum executable level and are continuing to invest in full-spectrum combat exercises like Red Flag and Green Flag. We have properly resourced these readiness components in this year's budget and request Congressional support for these critical requirements.

We also testified last year that weapons system sustainment is a key component of readiness. Weapons system sustainment costs continue to increase due to the complexity of new systems, the challenges of maintaining old systems, operations tempo, and increasing demand for maintenance personnel. We fly all of our aircraft to their full service life and beyond. The longer we extend the service life of our legacy aircraft, the more investment, preventive maintenance and manpower they require.

This year's budget continues investment in modernizing and sustaining the three combat-coded B-1 squadrons with additional precision weapons, digital data links, and other improvements aimed to negate diminished manufacturing resources. Similar to last year, we will also invest in extending the B-1 service life to maintain this strategic capability against evolving threats. We are approaching our second service life extension on F-16s. Our F-15Cs and F-15Es, which are in high demand, are experiencing structural fatigue and require the sustained, consistent funding requested

in this budget for repairs to remain effective.

Since Operation INHERENT RESOLVE in 2014, we have expended over 28,000 munitions worth \$1.2 billion, and continue to deplete our inventories in Iraq and Syria. Our Hellfire expenditures in Operations INHERENT RESOLVE, ENDURING FREEDOM, and FREEDOM'S SENTINEL increased nearly 500 percent since 2012, but procurement did not keep pace. Therefore, in this budget we will fund munitions to capacity to support current operations and start the process to replenish current inventories.

Similar to last year, we're seeking support in this budget submission to increase our capacity to provide Airmen with increased high-end training against realistic scenarios and threats. Regrettably, investments in aging critical infrastructure such as ranges, airfields, facilities, and even basic infrastructure like power and drainage systems, have been repeatedly delayed, and the problem was significantly exacerbated by sequestration. Every year that we delay these repairs affects operations and substantially increases improvement costs. Even with the world's most advanced technology, our Airmen are at a disadvantage without conducting realistic combat training exercises involving the Joint Force, our Allies, and our partners. Red Flags, and other similar training exercises, built the foundation for our success in air campaigns during the past 25 years. We need your support for this budget request to continue investment in computer-aided live, virtual, and constructive training to provide opportunities to train against the world's most capable threats, provide routine training at lower costs, and achieve the full-spectrum readiness that is vital for our national defense and to safeguard U.S. interests abroad.

## **STATE OF THE AIR FORCE – GLOBAL VIGILANCE**

Our global security environment drives an insatiable demand for integrated ISR. Today, the Air Force continues to sustain 60 Combat Air Patrols through cross-domain synchronization. With 74 percent of our ISR forces operating in direct support of combat operations, limited time remains for training and recuperation. The high demand impacts our ability to train and retain this critical skill set. Currently less than one third of our Rivet Joint linguists re-enlist, and our Intelligence career fields are critically manned.

This critical reduction of experience, coupled with the insatiable demand for Collection Management, Targeting, Expeditionary Signals Intelligence, and Airborne ISR Operators drove heavy reliance on contract personnel. While contract personnel fill a just-in-time requirement—and perform admirably—this solution does little for the long-term health of the ISR Enterprise.

To improve the quality of mission for our ISR community, the budget includes funds to create a dedicated launch and recovery MQ-1/9 squadron, increase training, and restore two MQ-9 operations squadrons. Additionally, the budget funds training for enlisted operators to fly the RQ-4 Global Hawk and funds a basing study to provide options to eventually fly RPAs on a schedule more conducive to steady-state operations.

Equally strained are the more than 7,000 Airmen working in our Distributed Common Ground System. These Airmen supported over 29,000 ISR missions, analyzed more than 380,000 hours of full motion video and disseminated 2.6 million images to our warfighters in the last year. They have now operated at these surge

levels for over a decade. Therefore, this budget continues to invest in our ISR Enterprise to provide globally integrated ISR that supports multi-domain, actionable intelligence for the Joint Force.

As we testified last year, space and cyberspace threats continue to grow. In space, our Global Positioning System provides the world's gold standard, supporting citizens across the globe every day. Fortunately, our 40 existing Global Positioning System satellites remain healthy, but they are exceeding projected service life. To maintain this capability and to build readiness for any potential conflict, we are requesting support to improve anti-jamming and secure access of military Global Positioning Systems. We also continue to partner with the Joint Force on the Space Security and Defense Program and the Joint Interagency Combined Space Operations Center to develop options for a more resilient National Security Space Enterprise.

Our cyberspace capabilities are essential to every Airman, platform, and mission in our portfolio. Therefore this budget request makes strategic investments in our cyberspace capabilities. For instance many of our weapons systems were developed prior to the emergence of the rapidly evolving cyber threats existing today. A cyber intrusion could significantly impact our ability to project vigilance, reach, and power anytime, anywhere. To improve offensive and defensive cyber readiness, we plan to grow our 26 Cyber Force Mission Teams to 39 fully operational teams by Fiscal Year 2019 and continue our investments in the Joint Information Environment.

Turning to command and control, this is the glue that enables Joint Force operations and provides the essential link between our Joint Force Air Component

Commander and all Joint Forces working for Combatant Commanders. The ability to understand changing battlefield conditions and command friendly forces is central to an effective, agile combat force especially as we face more threats that are trans-regional and span from traditional state adversaries to non-state unconventional forces. At any of our Air Operations Centers, located in every Combatant Commander's area of responsibility, you will find Airmen providing the backbone and expertise to integrate effects from every warfighting domain. The budget also includes funds to upgrade legacy equipment to open architectures to ensure critical security improvements. Our E-8 Joint Surveillance Target Attack Radar System (JSTARS) is 47 years old and will begin to reach the end of its service life next year. The E-3 Airborne Warning and Control System (AWACS) is 35 years old and requires multiple upgrades to keep this capability ahead of emerging threats. We need your support for this budget to fund mature communications, sensors, and Battle Management Command and Control system technologies to recapitalize our JSTARS and AWACS.

### **STATE OF THE AIR FORCE – GLOBAL REACH**

Airmen perform the Rapid Global Mobility mission every day in areas of peace and conflict, and provide our Nation the ability to move the Joint Force rapidly to any point on the globe. Flexibility allows Airmen to deliver bombs and bullets to the Joint Force in Iraq and Afghanistan, as well as blankets and bundles of life-saving relief supplies. Following last year's devastating earthquake in Nepal, C-130s and C-17s, refueled by KC-135s, accomplished over 150 missions delivering more than 800 tons of cargo. This core mission was also exemplified in March 2011 when we executed

more than 300 airlift and combat sorties in a single day. During that time, every Combatant Commander had a Priority 1 mission, and the Air Force accomplished each one without fail. We simultaneously delivered humanitarian relief to tsunami-ravaged Japanese cities, established and enforced a no-fly zone over Libya with Operations ODYSSEY DAWN and UNIFIED PROTECTOR, surged forces in Afghanistan for Operation ENDURING FREEDOM, and supported Presidential airlift.

Today, airframes have aged significantly and some of the same tankers refueling aircraft over Iraq and Syria were present over Vietnam. In fact, the Air Force's oldest flying KC-135, assigned to the 190th Air Refueling Wing at Forbes Field, Kansas, was refueling aircraft when some Vietnam-era pilots were still in elementary school. This year's investments begin to recapitalize refueling capabilities with the KC-46A and are essential to combat operations in anti-access/area denial environments. It also accelerates the C-130 Avionics Modernization Program and funds modernization to sustain our approximately 40-year-old MC-130 and AC-130 fleet, which support our Special Operations Command.

## **STATE OF THE AIR FORCE – PEOPLE AND INFRASTRUCTURE**

Full-spectrum readiness cannot be achieved without investing in our Total Force Airmen. Maintaining our strategic advantage necessitates reaching, recruiting, retaining, and developing the broadest and most talented All Volunteer Force our Nation has to offer. To improve mission quality in Fiscal Year 2016, we are increasing accessions and expanding our retention programs to bring our inventory from 311,000 to 317,000 active duty Airmen to address a number of key areas, including critical career fields such as intelligence, cyber, maintenance and battlefield Airmen. In the

aircraft maintenance field, we are short approximately 4,000 aircraft maintainers. Our maintainers must keep our existing aircraft flying at home and in combat, while simultaneously fielding the F-35. Due to an ongoing shortage of active duty aircraft maintainers, this budget request will fund contract maintenance personnel to fill the gap at select non-combat A-10, F-16, and C-130 units allowing our active duty maintainers to transition to the F-35. This allows us to strike the best balance between meeting today's demand while modernizing for the future.

As stated previously, we project airpower from our bases, and our infrastructure must keep up with modernization and recapitalization to sustain a ready force. To consolidate management, reduce overhead costs, and increase efficiencies, we centralized installation management under the Air Force Installation and Mission Support Center. This new command structure consolidates installation support requirements from the headquarters, major commands, and multiple field operating agencies. This budget request prioritizes readiness and modernization over installation support. With this decision we focused investments on a "mission critical, worst first" philosophy, funding projects with the most mission impact. Today the Air Force maintains infrastructure that is in excess of our operational needs. We have 500 fewer aircraft today than we had 10 years ago, yet they are spread across the same number of bases. This arrangement is inefficient with aging, unused facilities consuming funding that should be used for readiness and modernization. A reduction and realignment of Air Force infrastructure would best support Air Force operational needs, therefore we support another round of base realignment and closure.

## **FUTURE STATE OF THE AIR FORCE**

The Air Force, in consultation with Combatant Commanders, academia, and think tanks, developed a 30 Year Strategic Plan to make our forces more agile to effectively respond to future global conflicts. The plan provides for increased capability across all mission areas, specifically Adaptive Domain Control, Globally integrated ISR, Rapid Global Mobility, Global Precision Strike, and Multi-domain Command and Control. Yet, budget uncertainty has complicated our ability to execute this plan. Furthermore, the Air Force faces a modernization bow wave over the next 10 years that requires funding well beyond the BCA caps—this includes critical programs necessary to meet our capacity and capability requirements across all mission areas. Although we are grateful for the Bipartisan Budget Act relief, we still face great uncertainty for Fiscal Year 2018 and beyond. Without the funding requested in this budget, we cannot meet current demand for Air Force capability and capacity without sacrificing modernization.

As our potential adversaries employ increasingly sophisticated, capable, and lethal systems, your Air Force must modernize to deter, deny, and decisively defeat any actor that threatens the homeland and our national interests. Without the resources requested in our Fiscal Year 2017 budget, we will delay F-35 and C-130H recapitalization, defer some fourth-generation aircraft modifications, slow our planned end strength growth and take even more risk in Air Force infrastructure. A return to Budget Control Act funding levels would necessitate delays to modernization efforts. It would also further erode the already shrinking capability gap between America and our adversaries, and it would defer critical investments in space and cyber.

A return to Budget Control Act funding in Fiscal Year 2018 would force us to revisit actions taken during Fiscal Year 2013's sequestration—actions that devastated readiness and broke faith with our Airmen. We would be forced to divest force structure, disrupt readiness recovery, delay modernization efforts, defer investments in space and cyber, and triage maintenance on infrastructure and aircraft. It would continue to degrade base infrastructure, delay Airmen growth, and limit critical skill set recruitment and retention resulting in a less ready, less capable force. Air Force readiness depends on your support of this this budget and your support for repeal of the Budget Control Act to remove the threat of sequestration—permanently.

## **CONCLUSION**

In the face of a dynamic, complex, and unpredictable future, your Airmen provide a strategic advantage over America's rivals. They are educated, innovative, and motivated. Our Airmen's ability to see threats, reach threats, and strike threats is a powerful deterrent against America's enemies. These courageous Airmen, when properly trained, effectively equipped, and emboldened by the trust of their leadership, will ensure the Air Force continues to outwit and outlast opponents in Joint and Coalition operations and defend the United States from any who would do us harm.

As our Army and Marine Corps get smaller, they do not want less airlift; they want it to be more responsive. As Combatant Commanders look toward battlefields of the future, they do not want less ISR; they need more persistent, capable, and agile ISR. We have the responsibility to assure air superiority so American Soldiers and Marines keep their eyes on their enemies on the ground rather than concern

themselves with enemy Airpower overhead.

The Fiscal Year 2017 budget request—and the flexibility to execute it as we recommended—is an investment in the Air Force our Nation needs. The global developments remind us that America’s Air Force must have the capability to engage anytime, anywhere, and across the full spectrum of conflict, all while providing a reliable strategic nuclear deterrent. America expects it; Combatant Commanders require it; and with your support for this budget request, our Airmen will deliver it.