

**OPENING STATEMENT OF U.S. SENATOR JIM INHOFE
RANKING MEMBER, SENATE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE
ROOM SD-G50
DIRKSEN SENATE OFFICE BUILDING**

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To conduct a hearing on the Air Force budget posture in review of the Defense Authorization Request for Fiscal Year 2023 and the Future Years Defense Program

(As prepared for delivery)

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I join you in welcoming our witnesses.

I'll get right to it. I've reviewed the new 2022 National Defense Strategy, and I've examined the budget. I've attended multiple threat briefings—Secretary Kendall, I was sorry to miss yours, but I understand it was not filled with good news.

So, I don't understand how this Air Force budget even begins to resource the strategy. First, inflation is the new sequestration. It's destroying your buying power—and the salaries of your service members. That's definitely true in 2022, and it's almost certainly true in 2023.

Second, there's simply not enough in this budget to reverse the trends we hear about in classified sessions. That's particularly true over the next five to seven years. This budget divests 1,500 aircraft and buys 500 over five years.

Let's take one example. This budget retires almost half the AWACS fleet this year, when the replacement won't be online until 2027. I have always been in favor of divesting aircraft when it makes sense and we can mitigate the risk. But we're not mitigating the risk unless we move much, much faster on replacement.

I appreciate your decision to pursue a sole-source of the E-7 Wedgetail. I look forward to working with you to use existing authorities to get this critical capability as soon as possible.

Another—this budget buys only 33 F-35As, the lowest since sequestration. These Block 4 aircraft will be the cornerstone of our fleet, new allies and partners are joining the program, and our commanders and pilots tell us they love the aircraft and want more.

We are still buying multiple air munitions at very low rates. We are buying tankers at very low rates, despite concerns about contested logistics. I could go on, but you get the idea.

Just to be clear, I'm not blaming you. This is what happens when you get an arbitrary topline, when the budget just doesn't match the strategy. It's not strategy-based budgeting.

There are bright spots in the Air Force budget. Nuclear modernization is proceeding well. The B-21 and Next-Generation Air Dominance are significant success stories. But most of the bright spots share one thing in common—they're ten years away.

And I'm proud of what the Space Force has been able to achieve with real budget growth since its stand-up. We are finally moving to meet the threat in space, but we can still move faster. I look forward to your testimony. Mr. Chairman.

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