

**DEPARTMENT OF THE AIR FORCE
PRESENTATION TO THE SUBCOMMITTEE
ON
READINESS AND MANAGEMENT SUPPORT**

UNITED STATES SENATE

SUBJECT: CURRENT READINESS OF THE U.S. AIR FORCE

**STATEMENT OF: GENERAL LARRY O. SPENCER
VICE CHIEF OF STAFF OF THE AIR FORCE**

MARCH 25, 2015

**NOT FOR PUBLICATION UNTIL RELEASED
BY THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON READINESS AND MANAGEMENT SUPPORT
UNITED STATES SENATE**

INTRODUCTION

The United States Air Force has never failed to meet any threat our Nation has faced and establish an environment that was beyond the capabilities of our enemies to resist. Our capabilities of range, speed, and agility give our Nation an indispensable and qualitative advantage that is unparalleled today and we must retain them going into the future. Whether it's opening an aerial port to deliver humanitarian aid, flying a single sortie from middle-America to the Korea peninsula and back to send a clear message, dropping a bomb, or dropping a Brigade Combat Team into the conflict zone— we can reach out and touch anyone, anytime, at any place, in a matter of hours, not days. Since 1947, Americans have been able to sleep soundly knowing that in every corner of the globe, the United States Air Force is ready.

Through technology, ingenuity, and unparalleled training and expertise the Air Force provides our Nation and allies more precise and effective options. But readiness requires the right number of Airmen, with the right equipment, trained to the right level, and with the right amount of support and resources, to accomplish what the Nation asks us to do. While Airmen have performed exceptionally well in major combat operations such as those in Iraq, and Afghanistan, these operations come at a price. Today, continual demand for airpower, coupled with dwindling and uncertain budgets, leave the force with insufficient time and resources to train Airmen across the full range of Air Force missions. Proficiency required for highly contested, non-permissive environments has suffered, due to our necessary engagement in the current counterinsurgency fights.

We recognize that there are no quick fixes. Even at the level of the President's Budget it will take the Air Force years to recover lost readiness. Our return to full-spectrum readiness

must include the funding of critical programs such as flying hours, weapons system sustainment, and infrastructure, while also balancing deployment tempo, training, and exercises. We must also be technologically superior and agile enough to evolve ahead of the myriad of future potential threats.

However, because of the current restrictive and uncertain fiscal environment we have been forced to make difficult choices within an incredibly complex security environment. Our current Service readiness and capacity are degraded to the point where our core capabilities are at risk. To correct this, the fiscal year 2016 President's Budget (FY16 PB) preserves the minimum capability to sustain current warfighting efforts, and places the Air Force on a path toward balancing readiness with necessary modernization in order to meet evolving threats.

READINESS TODAY; READINESS TOMORROW

The 2012 Defense Strategic Guidance (as updated by the 2014 Quadrennial Defense Review) requires healthy and sustainable Air Force combat readiness, modernization and recapitalization programs. Since passage of the Budget Control Act, the Air Force has been forced to trade capacity in an attempt to preserve capability. We are now at the point where any further reduction in size *equals* a reduction in capability – the two are inextricably linked. Combatant commanders require Air Force support on a 24/7 basis, and the Air Force does not have excess capacity to trade away. If asked to accomplish multiple parts of the defense strategy, we will have to make difficult decisions on mission priorities and dilute coverage across the board. Unless we improve readiness levels, our full combat power will take longer to apply, will pull coverage from other areas, and will increase risk to our Joint and coalition forces.

The FY16 PB is a step to alleviate some of that risk. It allows us to preserve our future readiness, including munitions inventories; protect our top three acquisitions programs; and protect investments such as the training aircraft system, cyber mission forces and the next generation of space systems. Our plan is to reduce risk in high-priority areas by accelerating the modernization of aging fleets and improving our installations around the country. We are focused on capabilities, not platforms – preserving and enhancing the agility and flexibility of the Air Force.

Weapons System Sustainment

Weapons system sustainment (WSS) is a key component of full-spectrum readiness. Years of combat demands have taken a toll across many weapons systems. We continue to see an increase in the costs of WSS requirements. These costs are driven by factors such as the complexity of new systems, operations tempo, force structure changes, and growth in required depot-level maintenance on legacy aircraft.

If sequestration-level funding returns, it will hamper our efforts to improve WSS. Depot delays will result in the grounding of some aircraft. It will mean idle production shops, a degradation of workforce proficiency and productivity, and corresponding future volatility and operational costs. Analysis shows it can take up to three years to recover full restoration of depot workforce productivity and proficiency. Historically, WSS funding requirements for combat-ready forces increase at a rate double that of inflation planning factors. WSS costs still outpace inflationary growth, and in the current fiscal environment, our efforts to restore weapons systems to required levels will be a major challenge.

The longer we fly our legacy aircraft, the more they will break and require increased preventative maintenance. We have tankers that are on average 52 years old, bombers that are over 50 years old, and fourth generation fighters that are an average of 25 years old. If we had kept WWII's B-17 bomber, and flown it in Operation Desert Storm 1991, it would have been younger than the B-52, the KC-135, and the U-2 are today. If we are not able to perform weapons system sustainment on our aircraft or modernize them so we can improve upon their speed, range, and survivability, we will lose our technological edge and superiority.

Flying Hours and Training

Our flying hour program is essential to full-spectrum readiness. If sequestration is implemented, it will affect our ability to accomplish flying and training requirements and our ability to meet full-spectrum operations. Readiness is not just influenced by funding, but also ongoing operations. Time and resources used to conduct current operations limit opportunities to train across the full-spectrum of missions. For example, the operational and combat demands over the last decade have eroded our ability to train for missions involving anti-access/area denial scenarios. To meet combatant commander requirements, we have had to increase our deployment lengths and decrease time between deployments, which affect our reconstitution and training cycles. Our high operations tempo has resulted in Airmen that are only proficient in the jobs they do when they deploy.

To fix this problem and be able to meet an increasing demand for Air Force capabilities in future operations, we need the funding and the latitude to balance these rotational and expeditionary requirements with adequate full-spectrum training. The additional funding

requested in the FY16 PB will help us recover flying hour-related readiness due to the FY13 sequester and put us on a steady path toward full recovery.

Operational Training Infrastructure (OTI)

Full-spectrum training for combat against a high-end adversary requires specific investment and emphasis on an integrated training and exercise capability. This includes the availability and sustainability of air-to-air and air-to-ground training ranges, fully augmented by, and integrated with, virtual training in simulators and with constructive models to represent a high-end adversary. This is what we call our Operational Training Infrastructure (OTI). Our ability to effectively expose our forces to a realistic, sufficiently dense, and advanced threat capability cannot be accomplished without our focus on OTI.

OTI becomes critical when you consider that we must expand our 5th generation weapon systems. These systems are so advanced that challenging our operators in live training environments while protecting the capabilities and tactics of these systems is problematic. Our approach to OTI will address these training shortfalls while maximizing the value of every training dollar.

In addition to investments in simulators as part of OTI, our ranges are used for large-scale joint and coalition exercises that are critical to training in realistic scenarios. We intend to sustain these critical national assets to elevate flying training effectiveness for the joint team and improve unit readiness. The same is true for our munitions. The FY16 PB includes funding to address the shortfalls in our critical munitions programs and to accelerate production and reduce unit cost.

Space Readiness

Space-based capabilities and effects are vital to US warfighting and the Air Force remains committed to maintaining the advantages this domain provides. Potential adversaries are developing and fielding capabilities to deny us these advantages and are also fielding their own space capabilities to support their terrestrial warfighting operations. We now recognize that space can no longer be considered a sanctuary. In order to deter and defeat interference and attacks on US space systems we must improve space domain mission assurance capabilities against aggressive and comprehensive space control programs.

Nuclear Readiness

The FY16 PB strengthens the nuclear enterprise, the number one mission priority of the Air Force. The Air Force's intercontinental ballistic missiles and heavy bombers provide two legs of the Nation's nuclear triad. The FY16 PB funds additional investments across the FYDP to sustain and modernize the ICBM force and funds 1,120 additional military and civilian billets across the nuclear enterprise as part of the Secretary of the Air Force-directed Force Improvement Program.

CONCLUSION

A ready, strong, and agile Air Force is a critical component of the best, most credible military in the world. Air Force capabilities are indispensable to deterrence, controlled escalation, and destruction of an adversary's military capability...as well as development, stability, and partnership-building. Today's Air Force provides America an indispensable hedge against the challenges of a dangerous and uncertain future, providing viable foreign policy options without requiring a large military commitment on foreign soil.

Such a force does not happen by accident; it must be deliberately planned and consistently funded in order to be successful. Continued investments in Air Force capabilities and readiness are essential to ensuring that the Air Force maintains the range, speed, and agility the Nation expects. Regardless of the future security environment, the Air Force must retain – and maintain – its unique ability to provide America with *Global Vigilance*, *Global Reach*, and *Global Power*.