

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

**SUBJECT: READINESS OF AIR FORCE COMBAT FORCES**

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**BY THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON READINESS AND MANAGEMENT SUPPORT**  
**UNITED STATES SENATE**

After over a decade of sustained combat operations and faced with a continually evolving economic and security environment, the United States faces a moment of transition. As a result, the President and Secretary of Defense have provided strategic guidance to preserve our global leadership and defend our National interests now and in the future. The unique Air Force capabilities that are critical to the priorities of the new strategic guidance are: domain control of air, space, and cyberspace; global intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR); rapid global mobility; and global strike.

### **Current Operations**

The United States Air Force has demonstrated its commitment to supporting combatant commanders and their operations across the globe for over two decades through continuous combat operations. Our enduring commitment to readiness and the Joint fight is a reflection of our unique air, space, and cyberspace capabilities across the full spectrum of operations, capabilities upon which our Service partners and allies have come to rely.

Since September 2001, the Air Force has flown more than 455,000 sorties in support of Operations IRAQI FREEDOM and NEW DAWN and more than 350,000 sorties in support of Operation ENDURING FREEDOM. Last year, our Airman averaged approximately 400 sorties every day, with December 17, 2011, marking the first day in 20 years that the Air Force did not fly an air tasking sortie over Iraq.

As a critical component of our Nation's strategic deterrence, we have maintained our Nation's 450 intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs) on continuous strategic alert at a greater than 99 percent readiness rate, exceeding U.S. Strategic Command's requirement. We have also achieved a record 84 consecutive successful National Security Space launches since 1999.

Our Total Force of 690,000 Active Duty, Guard, Reserve, and civilian Airmen continue to support daily combatant commander operations with over 30,000 Airmen deployed to over 230 locations around the globe. Of our deployed Airmen, 24,000 directly contribute to operations in the U.S. Central Command area of responsibility, including almost 9,000 Airmen in Afghanistan. An additional 57,000 Airmen, 8 percent of the force, are forward-stationed overseas. From home stations in the United States, approximately 134,000 Airmen provide daily support to worldwide operations: standing nuclear alert; commanding and controlling our satellites; analyzing intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance data; and much more. In total, 219,000 Airmen directly support combatant commanders every day.

While this high operations tempo (OPTEMPO) has proven our level of commitment to today's Joint fight, it has inevitably taken a toll on our weapon systems and people, putting a strain on the overall readiness of the force. We have continued to see a steady decline in unit readiness since 2003, the primary drivers being personnel and training. These factors continue to stress 17 key enlisted specialties as well as 9 officer specialties.

In terms of deployments, fifty percent of the force is scheduled to rotate at a reasonable rate where they are home at a minimum of three to four times as long as they are deployed. Ten percent of the force is scheduled to rotate at our maximum targeted rate, meaning they are home twice as long as they are deployed. Twelve percent of our force is scheduled to rotate at a rate that keeps them home at or less than fifty percent of the time, an exceptionally high rate. Twenty-five percent of our forces are enablers who simply deploy as needed (i.e., mobility aircrew and special operations forces), which tends to be higher than most metrics.

In spite of aircraft divestments and reduction in personnel, we are committed to ensuring that America's Air Force remains ready to execute its mission every day — a mission that is

indispensable to carrying out current missions and overcoming existing and emerging threats as outlined in the new Defense Strategic Guidance.

### **Weapons System Sustainment**

Over the past several years, the overall Air Force weapons system sustainment (WSS) requirement has increased due to several factors such as our sustainment strategy, the complexity of new aircraft, operations tempo, force structure changes, and growth in the depot work packages for legacy aircraft. Although the Air Force plans to retire some combat, mobility, and ISR force structure, our overall weapon system sustainment requirements continue to increase. This increase is primarily due to the cost of contract logistics support, as well as higher costs due to content increases in depot work packages for legacy aircraft. We are not procuring aircraft at a rate that is fast enough to even begin to reduce the average age of our aircraft inventory. In addition, our fleets are smaller than at the end of post-Cold War downsizing with the average age of fighters at 22 years, bombers at 35 years, and our tankers — the oldest of the fleet — at 47 years. These cost increases have resulted in a slight decrease in the percentage of weapons systems sustainment requirement funded in the next two years. WSS is funded at 79 percent of requirement in the FY13 budget.

We maintained our readiness capability in the portfolio areas most directly affecting readiness, such as aircraft, engines, and missiles. We are taking some risk in areas that are less readiness-related in the short-term such as technical orders, sustaining engineering, and software. Additionally, the Air Force continues to conduct requirements reviews and streamline organizations and processes to reduce maintenance and material costs, develop depot efficiencies, and manage weapon system requirements growth. The goal of these efforts is to sustain current weapon system sustainment performance levels for the future.

Despite our high OPTEMPO and ongoing contingency operations, the Air Force must continue to deliver and maintain combat ready forces at the highest level. For instance, maintaining aircraft availability rates, vehicles, and war reserve materiel requirements to meet operational demands is critical.

Our Air Logistics Centers (ALCs) continue to meet warfighter expectations, an example is how we monitor weapon system due date performance, a metric that tracks how soon weapon systems are back to the warfighter after receiving routine or upgrade maintenance. Significant improvements have been made in this area resulting in 21 of 24 weapon systems meeting their due date targets. The Air Force is focusing on lean processes to get these weapon systems to their target. In FY11, Oklahoma City-ALC completed maintenance on 64 KC-135s, more than any year since 1991, and reduced engine cycle time by 30 percent. Warner Robins-ALC produced 1.7 million hours of avionics upgrade maintenance, five percent above plan, performed upgrade maintenance on 30 C-17s (28 on-time and two early), and delivered software requirements at 97 percent at or below cost and 97 percent on-time. Because of process improvements, in FY12, three depots will produce as much as five depots produced in the late 1990s.

### **Facility Sustainment, Restoration and Modernization**

The sustainment portion of facilities sustainment, restoration and modernization was funded just over 80 percent of the Office of the Secretary of Defense facility sustainment model. Due to current fiscal realities and the revised strategic guidance, the Air Force is taking a deliberate pause in its military construction program, resulting in a nearly \$900 million reduction from FY12 enacted levels. To manage the risk associated with these actions we continue civil

engineering transformation to employ an enterprise-wide, centralized, asset management approach to installation resourcing which maximizes each facility dollar.

### **Flying Hour Program**

The emphasis on readiness in the new strategic guidance reinforced Air Force focus on the importance of maintaining our flying hour program (FHP). The FY13 budget request removes flying hours where associated with the retirement of some of our oldest aircraft and divestiture of single-role mission weapon systems. In the remainder of the FHP, however, levels are consistent with FY12 levels to prevent further erosion of readiness. The FY13 baseline FHP remains optimized as we continue to fly a significant portion of our hours in the Central Command AOR. As these combat sorties decrease over the next few years, these OCO hours will migrate back to our baseline program to ensure peacetime FHP requirements are met. We are also committed to a long-term effort to increase our live, virtual, and constructive operational training (LVC-OT) capability and capacity by funding improvements in our LVC-OT devices (e.g., simulators and virtual trainers) and networks.

Although the Air Force has no single rollup metric to measure flying hour program requirements, we are working toward a set of metrics that clearly articulate the training requirements needed to support desired readiness levels. The Air Force operates a wide variety of aircraft — including multi-role aircraft — that require differing training requirements in amount and type for each aircrew member. In addition, we have critical space and cyber units that involve no aircraft at all. As we develop FHP metrics, we will dovetail our efforts with the work being done at the Cost Assessment and Program Evaluation (CAPE) office at the Office of the Secretary of Defense to study the relationship between defense funding and military readiness and mature necessary metrics and assessment tools.

## **Personnel Shift**

History has shown that when we withdraw ground forces from an area of conflict, there is an increased requirement for residual Air Force presence to provide robust overwatch capabilities. In the past two months we have seen a measurable increase in tasking, and expect the same as we plan to responsibly transition the security of Afghanistan over to the Afghan security forces. This anticipated requirement, coupled with an ever smaller force, requires a close look at the composition of our forces that are capable of both high and low deploy-to-dwell ratios.

Across our two Components, the Active and the Reserve, we find both advantages and challenges. The Active Component has a higher deploy-to-dwell capacity, and is immediately available. However, it is already stressed, with a deploy-to-dwell ratio in many areas approaching redline (more than 1:2). The Reserve Component is characterized by great volunteerism and great aircrew availability. It is also committed to helping the country meet crisis and surge commitments at home and abroad. If our Active Component is too small to meet its demands, we risk putting our Guard and Reserve forces in the position of breaking other commitments to employers, communities, and families. As a result, in some of the high demand mission sets, we had to make a modest shift in force structure toward the more deployable force. This reduces our risk of overstressing all three components of the force.

Analysis indicates that in balancing this equation, you cannot continue to reduce the highly rotating force (i.e., the Active Component) without exceeding the rotational redlines of both groups. No solution was perfect, but when looking at the options, we decided that the most palatable choice was to execute a small shift from the Reserve Component to the Active Component. We also took this rebalancing opportunity to increase the Reserve Component's

exposure to emerging mission sets. This ensures that as our force gets smaller, it stays agile, lethal, and still ready to deploy at a high enough rate to combat current and emerging threat and contingencies.

### **Training Readiness**

While this generation of Airmen is one of the most combat experienced forces in our history and has proven our capabilities and relevance in today's fight, our high OPTEMPO has not been without cost to the readiness of tomorrow's force. Since DESERT SHIELD and STORM, the Air Force has not come home, evolving from a garrison force to a forward deployed force. Since 2001, our fighter forces have supported contingencies in Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya, and other locations around the world. In addition, our special operators, security forces, ISR, and other forces have provided theater security presence and helped build partnership capacity in Asia, Europe, the Middle East, and elsewhere.

As a result, the training readiness of our people has suffered. While our Airmen have quickly adapted their training to incorporate counterinsurgency tactics, which has proven invaluable to today's mission, this focus has inevitably degraded our opportunity to train across the full spectrum of operations, including specialized training to prepare for high-end, future conflicts and to meet the requirements outlined in the new strategic guidance. As our force gets smaller, we must train our Airmen to be the most lethal and effective force for the future across the full spectrum of conflict.

### **Strategic Risk**

While no plan is free of risk, the Air Force has gone to great lengths to responsibly reduce excess force structure in order to preserve readiness. Last year, the Air Force was at maximum capacity when our Airmen provided humanitarian support to our friends in Japan,



executed a large airlift movement in support of national leadership, supported the NATO no-fly zone to protect civilian lives in Libya, all while remaining fully employed with counterinsurgency operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. These operations spanned the globe and the entire operational spectrum, from humanitarian relief to combat airpower. Our Nation and our allies have come to rely on the full depth of support the Air Force team brings. As we reduce our force, we will retain the capability to execute each of these missions, but will no longer have the capacity to execute them all in parallel. As a result, the days of engaging in two large scale wars, while simultaneously responding to a myriad of humanitarian crisis and engaging in short-notice campaigns will not be possible.

The Air Force will be smaller but still very lethal, providing the Nation with the unique and enduring capabilities required to promote our national interests. We are committed and ready to support the new strategic guidance that anticipates one large scale, combined arms campaign and the ability to respond quickly to deny the objectives on an opportunistic aggressor or impose unacceptable costs.

## **Conclusion**

To both fulfill current commitments and curb emerging threats, the Air Force has made tough decisions to trade size for quality to maintain a superb and ready force. While we are a smaller uniformed force, in fact smaller than at our inception in 1947, we have mitigated risk through careful consideration of the proper rotating force mix, the appropriate level of investment in modernizations, research and development, and utilizing strategic partnerships to leverage resources and reduce redundancies to be a ready force during a time of diminishing resources.

In support of this guidance, alongside our Joint partners, the United States Air Force stands ready to defend and advance the interests of the United States by providing unique, agile and flexible capabilities across the full spectrum of operations that are required to succeed in today's fight and future conflicts. The advancements our innovative Airmen have pioneered and have continually sharpened have been essential in ensuring our Nation's security while reducing the overall casualty counts inflicted by war.

Despite fiscal challenges and an evolving security environment, America's Airmen, along with their fellow Soldiers, Sailors, Marines, and Coast Guardsmen, remain committed to the security of our Nation.