

**DEPARTMENT OF THE AIR FORCE  
PRESENTATION TO THE SUBCOMMITTEE  
ON  
READINESS**

**UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

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

**STATEMENT OF: GENERAL LARRY O. SPENCER  
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BY THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON READINESS  
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## INTRODUCTION

America's Airmen and Air Force capabilities play a foundational role in how our military fights and wins wars. The Air Force's agile response to national missions gives our Nation an indispensable advantage that we must retain as we plan for an uncertain future. Whether responding to a national security threat or humanitarian crisis, your Air Force provides the responsive global capabilities necessary for the joint force to operate successfully. As our world becomes more interconnected and networked, Air Force capabilities that allow Americans to see, reach, and affect a situation anywhere on the globe within a matter of hours will become even more critical. However, the current fiscal environment requires the Air Force to make choices that place readiness into direct competition with modernization. To best support the national defense requirements, we chose to preserve the minimum capabilities necessary to sustain current warfighting efforts while investing in capabilities needed to ensure we stay viable in a contested battlespace. Moving forward, we aim to maintain a force ready for the full range of military operations while building an Air Force capable of executing our five core missions of (1) air and space superiority, (2) intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR), (3) rapid global mobility, (4) global strike, and (5) command and control against a high-end threat in 2023 and beyond.

To prepare for the high-end fight, we need to maintain a ready force by focusing on the training required to win against a well-trained, technologically-advanced adversary. In the past, we have revolutionized warfighting by focusing on technology that produces game-changing capabilities for the joint force, such as stealth, Global Positioning System (GPS), and remotely piloted aircraft (RPA). These technologies, along with research, development, and test, ensured the Nation's strategic and asymmetric advantage. The Air Force has always had to balance

between what we can do (capability), how much we have to do it with (capacity), and how well trained and responsive we need to be (readiness). To do this, we must be ready across the Total Force. We will continue to be committed to a Total Force that fully leverages the strengths of each component. Ultimately, this means we need to have 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 President tasks us to do and survive.

Over the past ten years, our Airmen have performed exceptionally well during major combat operations in Iraq, Afghanistan, and in other conflicts across the globe. However, these operations tend to focus on missions conducted in a permissive air environment, which left insufficient time and resources to train our Airmen across the full range of Air Force missions, especially missions conducted in highly contested, non-permissive environments. While the decline in full-spectrum readiness started before sequestration, it has been exacerbated since the law took effect because of the loss of large force exercises (e.g., RED FLAG, GREEN FLAG, etc.) and the cancellation of advanced mission training opportunities, especially on our military ranges. To ensure success in the future, we must get back to full-spectrum readiness by funding critical readiness programs such as flying hours and weapons system sustainment, while also balancing deployment tempo and home-station training. This is not going to be a quick fix and it will take us years to recover. If we are not able to train for scenarios across the full range of military operations, we may not get there in time and it may take the joint team longer to win.

## **READINESS**

The Air Force delivers *Global Vigilance*, *Global Reach*, and *Global Power* for America through our five core missions. By integrating capabilities across these core missions, we bring

a unique set of options to deter war, deliver rapid, life-saving responses to threatened areas anywhere on the planet, and strike precisely wherever and whenever the national interest demands. The cornerstone of our ability to provide airpower to the Nation and contribute our core missions to the joint team lies in our readiness. Readiness ensures our military can provide the President with a range of options to deter or defeat aggression against our Nation, allies, and our collective interests. To support the 2012 Defense Strategic Guidance, as updated during deliberations on the 2014 Quadrennial Defense Review, the Air Force must always be prepared to respond anywhere in the world. The Air Force defines readiness as the ability at the unit level to provide distinct operational capabilities within a specified timeframe. It encompasses personnel requirements, training, flying hours, weapons system sustainment, facilities, and installation support. A responsive readiness posture depends on high levels of health in all these areas. Because protecting future readiness includes modernizing weapons system and their associated equipment, creating combat readiness in the near-term is a complex task involving the intersection of personnel, materiel, and training. This also includes balancing time between operational and training commitments, executing funding from multiple sources, informed level of risk, and effectively managing resources to achieve the desired state of readiness.

Due to end strength and force structure changes, we had to mitigate the risk associated with a smaller military which requires a more ready combat force. If we want to sustain current force levels while personnel and operational costs continue to rise, there will be fewer resources available to support our installations, maintain current aircraft fleets, and invest in future capabilities. Combatant commanders require Air Force support on a 24/7 basis. Many of our mission sets are high priority missions that cannot be accomplished adequately or safely at low readiness levels as suggested by a tiered readiness construct. In support of our national defense

strategy, Airmen must be able to quickly respond across the full-spectrum of operations and shift between theaters of operation. Slipping to a lower state of readiness that requires a long build up to full combat effectiveness negates the essential strategic advantages of airpower and puts joint forces at increased risk.

The President's Budget (PB) reflects our effort to develop and retain the capabilities our Nation expects of its Air Force within the constraints placed upon us. Maintaining the fiscal year 2015 (FY15) PB top line level of funding will provide us with the flexibility to make strategic resourcing choices to maximize combat capability from each taxpayer dollar. If we maintain funding at this level, we can continue a gradual path of readiness recovery while preserving our future readiness, including munitions inventories, protecting our top three acquisitions programs, and protecting investments, such as the new training aircraft system and the next generation of space systems. The FY15 PB includes an Opportunity, Growth, and Security initiative that will help us reduce risk in high-priority areas, including our readiness posture by accelerating the modernization of our aging fleets and improving our installations around the country. Guiding our strategy and budget process were the requirements that we must remain ready for the full range of operations and to focus on the unique capabilities the Air Force provides the joint force against a full-spectrum, high-end threat now and in the future.

#### 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, and we continue to see an increase in the costs of WSS requirements, which are driven by sustainment strategy, complexity of new systems, operations tempo, force structure changes, and growth in depot work

packages for legacy aircraft. With recent force structure reductions, we must carefully manage how we allocate WSS in order to avoid availability shortfalls. Per the Office of the Secretary of Defense's directive, we plan to fund WSS to 80 percent of the requirement in FY15. This facilitates recovery of \$260 million of unaccomplished depot maintenance in FY13. If sequestration continues, it will further hamper our efforts to improve WSS. Depot delays will result in the grounding of some affected aircraft. The deferrals 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. Although service-life extension programs and periodic modification have allowed our inventory to support 22 years of enabled operations, the cost of maintenance and sustainment continues to rise. 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. To illustrate the challenges we have with our legacy aircraft, we can compare our older aircraft to an older car. When you first buy a new car, maintenance costs are relatively low, especially if the car is covered with a warranty. However, as the car ages, maintenance costs rise as more and more components begin to break or you need to do more preventive maintenance. The same holds true for our aircraft. The longer we fly our legacy aircraft, the more they will break and require increased preventative maintenance just like an old car. We are now nearing a point where it costs more to sustain our aircraft than it does to replace them. We have tankers that are on average 52 years old, bombers that are upwards of 30 years old, and fourth generation fighters that are an average of 25 years old. 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 risk our technological edge and superiority.

### Flying Hour Program and Training Resources

The emphasis on readiness in the Defense Strategic Guidance reinforced the Air Force focus on the importance of maintaining our flying hour program as part of our full-spectrum readiness. Just as with WSS, if sequestration funding levels continue, it will affect our ability to improve flying and training readiness. The flying hour program will continue to rely on overseas contingency operations funding to support Operation ENDURING FREEDOM, aircraft in the CENTCOM area of responsibility, and the redeployment of forces from Afghanistan. In addition to funding, readiness is influenced by ongoing operations as time and resources used in supporting current operations limit our opportunities to train across the full-spectrum of potential mission sets. 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, which in turn challenges our reconstitution and training cycles when our Airmen return from a deployment. Because there will continue to be a high demand for Air Force capabilities in future operations, balancing these rotational and expeditionary requirements with the full-spectrum training required to meet the Defense Strategic Guidance will be a critical element of our strategy in the future.

The FY15 PB increases flying hours in the operation and maintenance accounts which will allow the Air Force to fly at levels needed to begin improving readiness. The additional funding will help us recover flying hour-related readiness due to the FY13 sequester and reduced

flying in the first three months of FY14 in order to produce a small readiness increase in FY14 and FY15. The FY15 PB request supports adding additional hours to the flying hour program in FY16 – FY19 to return the program back to the full requirement as much as possible to meet the minimum training requirements.

To complement full-spectrum training, the Air Force remains committed to the long-term effort to increase our live, virtual, and constructive operational training capability and capacity by funding improvements in these types of training devices and networks. Adjustments to the flying hour program will continue to evolve as the fidelity of our devices and simulators improve. Increasing our virtual capabilities will minimize fuel consumption and aircraft maintenance costs while ensuring high quality training for our aircrews.

Full-spectrum training also includes the availability and sustainability of air-to-air and air-to-ground training ranges. Many of our ranges are venues for large-scale joint and coalition training events and are critical enablers for concepts like Air-Sea Battle. We intend to sustain these critical national assets to elevate flying training effectiveness for the joint team which will in turn improve individual and unit readiness. The same holds true for our munitions. The FY15 PB includes funding that addresses the shortfalls in our critical munitions programs and realigns funds in order to accelerate production and reduce unit cost. These investments also support and maintain our industrial base so we are able to train the way we intend to fight.

## **CONCLUSION**

The Air Force will continue to serve America's long-term security interests by giving our Nation unmatched options against the challenges of an unpredictable future. Your American Airmen are proud of the critical role they play in our Nation's defense. We hire the best people



we can find and we train them better than any other airmen in the world. My job is to ensure that whenever America calls, our Airmen are ready and capable of fighting and winning our Nation's wars. Through detailed planning, we aim to improve our near-term readiness while continuing to build the force so it is ready for the full range of combat operations against a high-end threat in 2023 and beyond.

The Air Force is a vital element of the best military in the world. When we are called, we answer, and we win. That is what we do. In the last several decades, Air Force airpower has been an indispensable element of deterrence, controlled escalation, and when tasked by the Nation's senior leadership, destruction of an adversary's military capability—all accomplished with minimal casualties to U.S. service members. However, investments in Air Force capabilities and readiness remain essential to ensuring that the Nation will maintain an agile, flexible, and ready force. This force must be deliberately planned and consistently funded in order to be successful. 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. 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*.