

DEPARTMENT OF THE AIR FORCE
PRESENTATION TO THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON READINESS
COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES
UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

SUBJECT: MILITARY AVIATION READINESS AND SAFETY HEARING

STATEMENT OF: LIEUTENANT GENERAL MARK C. NOWLAND
DEPUTY CHIEF OF STAFF FOR OPERATIONS
HEADQUARTERS, U.S. AIR FORCE

NOVEMBER 9, 2017

NOT FOR PUBLICATION UNTIL RELEASED
BY THE COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES
UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Introduction

For seventy years, the United States Air Force has provided a decisive advantage to the warfighter in air, space, and cyber. However we are quickly approaching an inflection point. The last twenty six years of continuous operations have taken a toll. Readiness levels are not what they once were and adversaries are beginning to close the gap.

Today's Airmen total 660,000. They go to work each day 24-7-365 to provide homeland defense, deter aggression from abroad and provide a robust, reliable, and survivable nuclear enterprise--the bedrock of our national security. Unfortunately, less than 50% of our force is ready for high-end conflict against a near peer adversary.

We are in need of critical investments to reverse declines made from a quarter century of conflict. These operations have come with a cost, forcing us to spend on the near term instead of investing in the future. Funding from the Fiscal Year 2017 Request for Additional Appropriations is moving us on the right track. With continued, sustained funding the Air Force will transform from where we are today into a more lethal, ready force for the future.

Where We Are Today

The \$5.6 billion dollars the Air Force received with the Fiscal Year 2017 Request for Additional Appropriation was spent wisely.

We were able to fund our top readiness priority—people. The funding allowed us 4,000 additional active-duty Airmen, helping accelerate readiness recovery by getting our aircraft back in the air. However it will take five to seven years for these Airmen to become experienced, and we need sustained funding to ensure they receive the necessary training.

Additionally we made investments in pilot production to address our most critical shortfall. New Formal Training Units are getting F-16 pilots their qualification faster. We are accelerating repairs to our aging fleet and increasing stock levels of spare parts through supplemented funding for Weapon Systems Sustainment. For example, \$95 million procured initial spares in support of five additional F-35As. These investments provide the logistical foundation necessary to improve aircraft availability and utilization rates. Well maintained aircraft substantially increase training opportunities to regain readiness.

The additional appropriation also provided the funding needed to equip our Battlefield Airman. This equipment decreases the risk of fratricide and lowers the weight of a Battlefield Airmen's kit by 30%. It provides our warfighters on the ground with essential weapons and accessories, communications gear, situational awareness equipment, personal protective equipment, night vision devices, training devices, and explosive detection equipment.

The Air Force upgraded our fleet's targeting capabilities as well as munitions production. \$60 million was spent to maximize the production of BLU-117 munitions to replenish stockpiles expended in the fight against ISIS. \$144 million was spent to upgrade F-16 Active Electronically Scanned Array radars. Enabling tracking of small asymmetric targets and simultaneous detection and tracking in multiple directions.

Finally, the Air Force funded increased levels of accessions, enhancements to network security, and infrastructure repairs to provide the backbone to stabilize readiness recovery efforts. The investments ensure the Air Force can train, house, and equip increased personnel to perform the work necessary to restore readiness.

What Do We Expect

The Air Force investment in readiness means the service will close gaps in weapon system proficiency, capability, and growth in multi-domain operators, yet shortfalls will remain in the near future.

Fiscal Year 2017 appropriations are arresting our readiness decline. The Fiscal Year 2018 President's Budget lays a foundation for restored readiness and increased Joint lethality. Looking beyond, our future budget requests will build a bridge to the future. It will provide a solid readiness foundation with a strong path toward a pragmatic vision of tomorrow.

Success today and into the future is about our Airmen and their readiness to do what the nation asks. To meet the Joint Force's insatiable demand for airpower the Air Force must grow the end strength of our total force. In addition to growing end strength, investments need to be made in the training infrastructure, to provide the tools to train Airmen to meet sophisticated and technologically advanced threats in air, space and cyberspace, while also increasing funding to weapon system sustainment, to ensure aircraft, weapons and vehicles are available for Airmen to train with and leverage. Investments made in in this year's budgets have to be sustained through the future to ensure Airmen who join today can gain experience and grow their skills. The President's FY 18 budget request, as well as the Air Force's plan for future investments in readiness, will make tangible gains but substantive readiness recovery remains an 8-10 year process after conditions are set.

Steps We're Taking to Solve the Operator Crisis

Twenty six years of combat operations and budget uncertainty, combined with a healthier US economy and airline industry hiring, has created an operator retention problem for the Air Force. This goes beyond just pilots, the Air Force's most stressed career-field are AC-130 gunners. To successfully combat the crisis in operator retention, the Air Force must surge production of operators in air, space and cyberspace, while making fundamental changes that improve quality of life and quality of service for our Airmen. The Air Force is attacking this crisis with the value proposition that Airmen want to do amazing things with amazing people and the latest technology so their lives make a difference.

The Secretary of the Air Force and Chief of Staff are implementing numerous retention initiatives helping with talent management and retaining critical skills across all operator specialties. Examples include: changes to deployment and assignment policies, compensation options, improvements to Air Force computer solutions and increasing manning levels to support high operations tempo while reducing stress on our operators and their families.

Flying Hour Program – Weapon System Sustainment

Consistent, sufficient funding for flying training underpins readiness. However, although our FY 2018 request would provide the maximum executable number of flying hours, the actual number of hours that our pilots are able to train continues to fall short of that needed to sustain full-spectrum readiness. The Air Force's ability to execute at a higher rate is limited by ongoing contingency operations and maintenance manpower shortfalls that constrain sortie generation rates. Therefore, before we increase flying hours, we must fix maintenance manning, and invest in weapons systems sustainment as well as training resources. Without a balanced increase in all three, Airmen will not be able to fly additional hours. Further, without improvements to our infrastructure, our training intensity and relevancy will be insufficient, which will prevent our Airmen from preparing for full-spectrum, major combat operations.

Training Infrastructure

The final linchpin for regaining full-spectrum readiness includes leveraging current and future funding to change how we train, fundamentally shifting the concept back to an inspection program that ensures commanders are training against realistic threats, and can operate under wartime conditions. The Air Force needs the infrastructure to train at home station and in large-scale, joint, and combined exercises like Red Flag or Green Flag. Realistic training also includes high fidelity air, space and cyber simulators with the ability to conduct virtual and live training simultaneously, with our joint and coalition partners. Most importantly, this integrated synthetic training must be integrated with multi-domain command and control capabilities. This includes virtual replications of environmental conditions on the ground with which we can train Airmen with soldiers, sailors, and Marines.

Conclusion

Since 1947, the Air Force has relentlessly provided America with credible deterrence and decisive combat power in times of peace, crisis, contingencies, and conflict. However, our relative advantage over potential adversaries is shrinking, so we must adapt and change in order to win decisively against any adversary. We owe this to our nation, our joint teammates, our allies, and most importantly our Airmen and their families. Our nation requires lethal and ready air, space, and cyber power now more than ever. America expects it; combatant commanders require it; and with your support, the United States Air Force will regain full-spectrum readiness.