

PAIRS CASE 2024-C-0714
NOT FOR PUBLICATION UNTIL RELEASED BY
HOUSE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON SEAPOWER AND PROJECTION FORCES
UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

PRESENTATION TO THE
HOUSE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON SEAPOWER AND PROJECTION FORCES
UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

HEARING DATE/TIME: Jul 23, 2024, 10:00 A.M.

SUBJECT: Aircraft Mobility

STATEMENT OF:

Lt. Gen. David H. Tabor, USAF
Deputy Chief of Staff
(Plans and Programs)

NOT FOR PUBLICATION UNTIL RELEASED BY
HOUSE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON SEAPOWER AND PROJECTION FORCES
UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

INTRODUCTION

Chairman Kelly, Chairman Waltz, Ranking Member Courtney, Ranking Member Garamendi, and distinguished members of both subcommittees, thank you for having us here today to provide testimony on the importance of connectivity across the Department of the Air Force's mobility aircraft.

The United States Air Force is critical to our national defense. Our capabilities underwrite the capabilities of the entire joint force, and we are uniquely suited to provide this cornerstone of the Nation's defense. This is particularly true of our mobility aircraft and the power projection capabilities they bring to joint operations.

Our Air and Space Forces are in unprecedented times. We are in a race for technological superiority to outpace the investments China is making to deny our ability to project power. For the last 30 years, while we answered the call in relatively permissive environments, our adversaries watched us closely to observe how we operated. They identified perceived vulnerabilities, and invested in capabilities and technologies that seek to overcome our long-held warfighting advantages. During those 30 years, relative US advantage has eroded. While we remain dominant in the near-term, urgent action is needed now to maintain and expand our dominance into the future.

While adversaries have taken advantage of our 20-year commitment to counterinsurgency to modernize their own forces, our investments have not kept pace with the need to create the Air Force of the future. Failure to address the critical capability gaps that exist today severely increases the risk to future warfighters. Now is the time to prioritize investment in our Operational Imperatives. Now is the time to transform for the future. And to do so, we must be willing to accept some near-term risk in return for enduring long-term benefits.

We must have the situational awareness and decision support tools to close hundreds of kill chains on relevant timelines in all domains - air, land, maritime, space, and cyber – while operating in a highly contested environment. Investment in digital infrastructure and applications, along with modern air and space communication platforms, provides the foundation of Command, Control, and Communication with the speed, adaptability, and resilience needed to achieve this. The connectivity and decision support we provide will be scalable to interoperate with Joint and coalition partners in a federated manner.

The Department of the Air Force's FY25PB request reflects our commitment to developing a threat-informed, concept-driven future Air Force. We have made significant progress in identifying the capabilities the Air Force will need to develop and field to prevail against our adversaries. However, the Air Force is facing a significant, dangerous shift in the strategic security environment. The Air Force has historically adapted to key inflection points to best compete in emerging security landscapes. We must reoptimize to pivot from supporting post-9/11 conflicts and demands to deterring, and if necessary, winning, conflicts in an era of Great Power Competition (GPC).

The Secretary of the Air Force has made clear we are out of time and must reoptimize now. To achieve a more competitive posture, the DAF is implementing major changes centered on how we develop people, generate operational readiness, project power, and develop integrated capabilities. Since time is of the essence in capability development, we are thankful for Congress providing the Section 229 "Quick Start" authority in the FY24 NDAA and are already using this authority to expedite modernization. While grateful for this support, we continue to be hampered by restrictions on the retirement of our outdated aircraft. These compromises divert focus from our operational imperatives and reduce our ability to deliver decisive combat power at the time and place of our choosing. We are being asked to reduce our strategic readiness by retaining yesterday's legacy force structure, which comes at the cost of today's operational readiness and tomorrow's modernization. While tough choices were made to meet the Fiscal Responsibility Act spending caps, we believe this budget represents the best option for spreading risk over time. We are eager for continued collaboration with Congress, industry, and the communities that support our Air Bases to ensure our Nation's security.

CURRENT CAPACITY AND CAPABILITY

Following National Defense Strategy (NDS) guidance, the Air Force seeks to invest in technologies and field systems that are both lethal and survivable against tomorrow's threats. This ultimately means transitioning away from many legacy platforms to free up manpower and resources to modernize and field more credible systems. If we are to modernize to address the emerging threat, we must use resources tied to our legacy platforms and weapons systems that are decreasing in relevance today and will be irrelevant in a future peer conflict. Retaining systems that have either limited contributions, or are simply not relevant in the future fight,

delays modernization and exacerbates future capability gaps. If deterrence fails, our Airmen must have the training, tools, platforms, and operating systems required to win. We must strike a balance between risk in the near-term and risk in the future.

Aerial Refueling

Near-peer competitors have made significant advancements that threaten today's tanker fleet and potentially forces them to operate farther away from their area of responsibility. The stacked demand of global operations requires a set number of air refueling tankers with specific capabilities, generating at mission capable rates to meet timelines and win the fight.

KC-46A

The KC-46A continues to provide increased operational readiness, flexibility, connectivity, and survivability to the Global Reach mission. "The Department plans to procure at least 183 KC-46As by 2027. To date, 139 production aircraft (143 total including the 4 EMD tails) are on contract and 84 KC-46As have already been delivered to the warfighter."

The FY25 PB requests \$24.95 million in RDT&E funds to support increased effort on the KC-46A Pegasus Advanced Communications Suite (PACS) Block 1 program. In addition to PACS Block 1, Air Mobility Command will accelerate the means to connect the Mobility Air Forces (MAF) via the FY25 new start MAF Connectivity to optimize operations and close logistics and kill chains. These connectivity initiatives provide the KC-46A with increased communications reliability using high-bandwidth, multi-waveform, multi-orbit, constellation systems of systems, including accelerating commercial satellite-based internet services.

KC-135

The FY25 PB requests \$32.0M in RDT&E to continue KC-135 fleet communications suite modernization to enable digital and secure communications across the fleet. These modernization efforts include Aero-I SATCOM, Comm 2 Crypto and Data, High-Frequency Modernization, and Mobile User Objective System. The FY25 PB also requests \$161.6M in procurement to continue installation of Real-Time Information in the Cockpit (RTIC), Comm 2 Crypto and Data, High-Frequency Modernization, and the safety of flight Rudder Position

Indicator (RPI) modifications. These modifications will allow the KC-135 to meet NSA-crypto mandates. The RPI modification will allow crews enhanced situational awareness into the actual rudder position, versus what it is commanded, and provide advanced visuals so crews can avoid safety of flight situations. The KC-135 will also begin the installation of Mobility Air Force (MAF) Connectivity enhancement; allowing the tanker to close logistics and kill chains. The KC-135 fleet completed all Block 45 installs in FY24.

Strategic and Tactical Airlift

The stacked demand of global operations requires a set number of strategic and tactical airlift aircraft with specific connectivity, survivability, and agility capabilities now, generating at mission capable rates to meet timelines and win the fight.

C-5M

The FY25 PB requests \$45.5 million in procurement, predominately for Communications, Navigation, Surveillance/Air Traffic Management (CNS/ATM), C-5 Core Mission Computer/Weather Radar (CMC/WxR) system equipment, CNS/ATM complies with civil airspace mandates for US National Airspace System and international civil airspace. CMC/WxR upgrades computer processor modules and addresses obsolescence issues.

Additionally, the FY25 PB requests \$33.0 million in RDT&E to support Replacement of the Multi-functional Controls and Display (RMCD), which mitigates the obsolescence of the current control and display units and increases capacity for future technology integration into the cockpit.

C-17A

The FY25 PB requests \$120.7 million in procurement funding to continue critical modifications to the C-17 fleet to address obsolescence and flight safety issues. These include Beyond Line of Sight (BLOS), Replacement Heads-Up Display (RHUD), and Aircraft Connectivity. The BLOS communication system effort modernizes multi-channel voice and data communication subsystems to address obsolescence issues and enables compliance with FAA

and NSA mandates. The RHUD modification addresses obsolescence issues with the current HUD that will become unsupported in FY26 and could cause grounding of aircraft if the current scheduled is delayed. MAF Connectivity is a new start program that will provide capability for increased aircrew situational awareness, real-time secure command and control of forces, and close logistics and kill chains.

C-130H

The FY25 President's budget requests \$102.5 million in procurement funding to support the C-130H fleet. The Avionics Modernization Program (AMP) Increment 2 program improves the C-130H fleet maintainability and reliability by providing a new digital avionics suite, mitigating obsolescence and diminishing manufacturing source challenges, and provides Crypto Modification I capabilities to include MUOS/SATURN upgrades.

C-130J

The C-130J Block 8.1 modernization program, currently in production, delivers new communication and data link capabilities, a modern flight management system, and other key capabilities to the field. In addition, the Air Force plans to upgrade both our C-130H and C-130J fleets with a Mobile User Objective System and a Second-Generation Anti-Jam Tactical Ultra High Frequency Radio satellite communication system to ensure we maintain key communication links anywhere in the world.

CV-22

The CV-22 is the Air Force variant of the joint V-22 tilt-rotor aircraft. It allows for long-distance, terrain following, vertical lift operations with increased survivability and is the only high-speed vertical lift platform in the Air Force inventory. The FY25 PB requests \$53.1 million to continue development and modifications to increase CV-22 fleet reliability, capability, and survivability. Investments in these areas will ensure the CV-22 fleet remains ready, reliable, and relevant in the future. Notable investments include the Block 20 Mission Computer Obsolescence Initiative to replace older mission computers and upgrades several avionics

systems. Additionally, investments in Nacelle Improvement include redesigned wiring and structural improvements of the nacelles designed to increase aircraft availability by over 5 percent.

INVESTMENT IN IMPROVED MOBILITY AIRCRAFT CONTINUITY

In charting the way forward to complete the connectivity needed to support the Joint All Domain Command and Control system, the Department of the Air Force has selected the Hybrid SATCOM Terminals to provide the needed bandwidth to support the hyper-connectedness amongst those in the battlespace. The Hybrid SATCOM Terminal system, or HST for short, is a flexible, multi-orbit, multi-waveform, multi-frequency, and a multi-vendor solution.

HST communicates through both military and commercial satellites, accommodates software-defined networking to connect to DoD services regardless of which constellation is in use, connects to two or more constellations simultaneously, and incorporates or provides interfaces for secure comms. In other words, the HST system provides the resilient network required for contested and semi-contested environments.

The work already completed by AMC to accelerate basic connectivity and cockpit awareness complements the developing HST technology. We are looking for ways to accelerate this effort and the components of our strategy span air and space. We are excited for what the future holds with this solution pathway.

CONCLUSION

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify. We look forward to working with these subcommittees to ensure the Department of the Air Force maintains the necessary military advantage to secure our vital national interests and support our allies and partners in Fiscal Year 2025 and beyond.