

Department of the Air Force

Projection Forces FY23 Budget Request

Opening Remarks

Good Morning. Ladies and gentlemen, I call to order this hearing of the Seapower and Projection Forces Subcommittee.

First, some administrative and technical notes for virtual participants. Members are reminded that they must be visible onscreen within the software platform for the purposes of identity verification. Members must continue to use the software platform's video function while attending the hearing unless they experience connectivity issues or other technical problems that render the member unable to fully participate on camera. If you experience technical difficulties, please contact the committee staff for assistance.

When you are recognized, video will be broadcast via the television and internet feeds. You will be recognized as normal for questions, but if you want to speak at another time you must seek recognition verbally. Please mute your microphone when you are not speaking and remember to unmute prior to speaking. Please be aware that there is a slight lag between when you start speaking and when the camera switches to you. Please remember to keep the software platform's video function on for the entirety of the time you are attending this hearing. If you leave for a short period for reasons other than joining a different proceeding, please leave your video function on. If you are leaving to join a different proceeding or will be absent for a significant period of time, you should exit the software platform entirely and then rejoin if you return.

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We meet today to discuss the Department of the Air Force's fiscal year 2023 budget request for projection forces aviation programs and capabilities .

Appearing before the subcommittee today are:

- Mr. Andrew Hunter, Assistant Secretary of the Air Force for Acquisition, Technology and Logistics; and
- Lieutenant General David Nahom, Air Force Deputy Chief of Staff for Plans and Programs.

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Gentlemen, I'd like to thank you in advance for your testimony, and welcome Mr. Hunter back to the committee and congratulate General Nahom for his next assignment to Alaska and safe travels.

The programs under our subcommittee's jurisdiction provide the Department of Defense with capabilities to project power and support operations around the world. The bombers, tankers, strategic and tactical airlift programs present an advantage and retain our superiority over our adversaries and pacing threats. I am concerned with the increasing age of our tactical airlift fleet, combined with numerous readiness challenges, that pose serious risks in our ability to meet key warfighting requirements.

As our subcommittee continues to move forward on the next NDAA, we must assess these tradeoffs and ask ourselves if we are responding to the combatant commanders' immediate requirements today, while directing resources to deliver

future capabilities that will transform the trajectory of our capabilities in the future.

It is worth noting that the Air Force requests a significant investment for procurement of the B-21 Raider, as well as investing in continued research and development for a modernized airframe capable of providing global strike capabilities.

Additionally, the budget request retires no bombers in FY23, and requests a 35% increase from FY22 enacted levels across RDT&E and procurement for bomber programs to recapitalize and modernize our bomber fleet.

On the KC-46, the budget proposes to procure 15 aircraft to advance mobility aircraft fleets. Similar to the position we were in last year, while the Air Force proposes procurement of additional tankers, questions are raised while the service plans to retire what it deems “legacy” tankers from the Guard and Reserve. Additionally, it was just reported that the Air Force is in fact paying for some of the KC-46s Remote Vision System 2.0 after stating that industry would cover the costs of the upgrade, which causes serious budgetary concerns for this subcommittee.

To that end, the Air Force’s continuously changing tanker roadmap poses serious concerns for Congress, as any decision will impact basing strategy, personnel

levels and locations for those personnel, installation upgrades, maintenance strategies, and implications for Air Force spending. As the Air Force continues deliberations for the best strategy, it is of interest to many Members on this subcommittee to be informed on any updates that result from those discussions. I hope that our witnesses will address this in our hearing today.

Finally, the issue of the Air Force's plans to sustain the tactical airlift fleet for the National Guard has been long-standing concern for this subcommittee. In the past, it has been the job of Congress to direct spending for the procurement of additional C-130Js and investments in upgrades to in-service aircraft. Just last year, it was Congress that added 16 J-models for the Air National Guard and 4 J-models for the Air Force Reserve, while also leading – again - the effort to procure propeller and engine enhancement packages.

It is evident that, once again, the Air Force lacks a clear plan to sustain and recapitalize our tactical airlift fleet. This issue is even more urgent as we look to the results of the [MCRS] and the validated and clear need to sustain our tactical airlift capabilities. I remain frustrated by the lack of path forward on this issue that doesn't rely on annual congressional plus-ups.

With that I turn to Ranking Member Wittman for his comments.