

SECRETARY OF THE AIR FORCE

Washington, DC

July 13, 2009

Hon. CARL LEVIN
Chairman, Committee on Armed Services
U.S. Senate
Washington, D.C.

DEAR MR. CHAIRMAN:

As the Senate considers the FY10 Defense Authorization Bill, we write to reiterate our personal and professional views concerning the future of the F-22 program, and why we recommended to the Secretary of Defense that the Air Force not pursue F-22 production beyond 187 aircraft.

The F-22 is the most capable fighter in our military inventory and, arguably, the world. Among its principal advantages are stealth and speed; and while optimized for air-to-air combat, it also has a ground attack capability. Requirements for the F-22 have changed significantly over the past 20 years, as DoD has continued to reassess potential threats, scenarios, and force structure--to include the number of major combat operations we might be challenged to conduct and their timing/phasing.

Broadly speaking, previous assessments have concluded that a progressively more sophisticated mix of aircraft, weapons, and networking capabilities will, over time and within practical limits, enable us to produce needed combat power with fewer platforms. As the overall requirements for fighter inventories have declined, including F-22s, the rising F-22 program costs also led to smaller buys. Together these trends, coupled with constrained resources, ultimately led to a DoD-imposed funding cap and a December 2004 approved program of 183 aircraft (later adjusted to 187).

As we prepared the Fiscal Year 10 funding submission, and mindful that the final lot of aircraft is scheduled for completion over the next year, we methodically reviewed this issue from multiple perspectives. These included: emerging joint warfighting requirements; complementary F-22 and F-35 roles in the future security environment; potential advantages of continuing a warm F-22 production line as insurance against possible delays/failures in the F-35 program; potential impacts to the Services and international partners if resources were realigned from the F-35 to the F-22; overall tactical aircraft force structure; and funding implications, given that extending F-22 production to 243 aircraft would create an unfunded requirement estimated at over \$13 billion.

This review concluded with a holistic and balanced set of recommendations for our fighter force: 1) focus procurement on modern 5th generation aircraft rather than less capable F-15s and F-16s; 2) given that the F-35 will constitute the majority of the future fighter force, transition as quickly as is prudent to F-35 production; 3) complete F-22 procurement at 187 aircraft, while continuing plans for future F-22 upgrades; and 4) accelerate the retirements of the oldest 4th generation aircraft and modify the remaining aircraft with necessary upgrades in capability.

And finally, while it is tempting to focus only on whether the Air Force would benefit from additional F-22s, which we acknowledge some in the airpower community have advocated, this decision has increasingly become a zero-sum game. Within a fixed Air Force and DoD budget, however large or small, our challenge is to decide among many competing joint warfighting needs; to include intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance; command and control; and related needs in the space and cyber domains. At the same time, we are working to repair years of institutional neglect of our nuclear forces, rebuild our acquisition workforce, and taking steps to improve Air Force capabilities for irregular warfare. Ultimately, buying more F-22s means doing less of something else and we did not recommend displacement of these other priorities to fund additional F-22s.

In summary, we assessed the F-22 decision from all angles, taking into account competing strategic priorities and complementary programs and alternatives, all balanced within the context of available resources. We did not and do not recommend F-22s be included in the FY10 defense budget. This is a difficult decision but one with which we are comfortable. Most importantly, in this and other budget decisions, we believe it is important for Air Force leaders to make clear choices, balancing requirements across range of Air Force contributions to joint capabilities.

Make no mistake: air superiority is and remains an essential capability for joint warfighting today and in the future. The F-22 is a vital tool in the military toolbox and will remain in our inventory for decades to come.

NORTON A. SCHWARTZ Chief of Staff **MICHAEL B. DONLEY** Secretary of the Air Force