

AF officials announce Combat Air Forces restructure plan

5/20/2009 - **WASHINGTON (AFNS)** -- Following the May 7 roll-out of the fiscal year 2010 budget proposal for the Department of Defense, Air Force officials announced plans to retire legacy fighters to fund a smaller and more capable force and redistribute people for higher priority missions.

The Combat Air Forces restructuring plan would accelerate the retirement of approximately 250 aircraft, which includes 112 F-15 Eagles, 134 F-16 fighting Falcons and three A-10 Thunderbolt IIs. This does not include the five fighters previously scheduled for retirement in FY10.

"We have a strategic window of opportunity to do some important things with fighter aircraft restructuring," said Secretary of the Air Force Michael Donley. "By accepting some short-term risk, we can convert our inventory of legacy fighters and F-22 (Raptors) into a smaller, more flexible and lethal bridge to fifth-generation fighters like the F-35 (Lightning II Joint Strike Fighter). We'll also add manpower to capabilities needed now for operations across the spectrum of conflict."

Under the plan, cost savings of \$355 million in FY10 and \$3.5 billion over the next five fiscal years would be used to reduce current capability gaps. Air Force officials would invest most of the funds in advanced capability modifications to remaining fighters and bombers. Some would go toward procuring munitions for joint warfighters, including the small diameter bomb, hard-target weapons and the AIM-120D and AIM-9X missiles. The remainder would be dedicated to the procurement or sustainment of critical intelligence capabilities such as the advanced targeting pod as well as enabling technologies for tactical air controllers and special operations forces.

"We've taken this major step only after a careful assessment of the current threat environment and our current capabilities," said Air Force Chief of Staff Gen. Norton Schwartz. "Make no mistake, we can't stand still on modernizing our fighter force. The Air Force's advantage over potential adversaries is eroding, and this endangers both air and ground forces alike unless there is a very significant investment in bridge capabilities and fifth-generation aircraft. CAF restructuring gets us there."

The CAF restructuring plan, which will require appropriate environmental analyses, would enable Air Force officials to use reassignment and retraining programs to move approximately 4,000 manpower authorizations to emerging and priority missions such as manned and unmanned surveillance operations and nuclear deterrence operations.

This realignment would include the expansion of MQ-1 Predator, MQ-9 Reaper and MC-12 Liberty aircrews; the addition of a fourth active-duty B-52 Stratofortress squadron; and the expansion of Distributed Common Ground System and information processing, exploitation and dissemination capabilities for continued combatant commander support in Afghanistan and Iraq, among other adjustments.

Secretary Donley and General Schwartz have committed the Air Force to initiatives that will reinvigorate its nuclear enterprise and field 50 unmanned combat air patrols for ongoing operations by FY11.

"What we're looking for is a force mix that meets the current mission requirements of combatant commanders while providing a capable force to meet tomorrow's challenges," Secretary Donley said.

