

F-16 drawdown to begin

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4/26/2010 - **SPANGDAHLEM AIR BASE, Germany** -- Six F-16 Fighting Falcons will depart Spangdahlem Air Base April 27, the first step for the 52nd Fighter Wing in the Combat Air Forces Restructuring plan that is expected to save the Air Force approximately \$355 million in fiscal year 2010 and \$3.5 billion during the next five fiscal years.

An additional six aircraft are scheduled to depart the base April 30.

"The Combat Air Force Restructuring plan is an initiative to retire approximately 250 legacy fighters across the Air Force so we can use the savings from those retirements to reinvest - to build a capabilities-based bridge to our fifth generation fighter fleet," said Lt. Col. Aaron Piepkorn, Spangdahlem Air Force Smart Operations for the 21st Century director and CAF Restructure project officer.

"Basically, it takes the money and reinvests it back into fighters, bombers, and intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance assets, so they can upgrade their capabilities creating a smaller, more capable, more flexible, more lethal fighter force," he said.

The six aircraft are the first of 21 that will depart the base. The remainder of the aircraft will depart in increments scheduled to be complete by the end of May as part of CAF Restructuring. Twenty aircraft will transition to the 148th Fighter Wing, Minnesota Air National Guard, Duluth, Minn., while one F-16 will transfer to Edwards Air Force Base in California.

The newer Block 50 F-16s departing Spangdahlem will replace older aircraft at these installations.

"The airplanes that are leaving here are not retiring; they're replacing older airplanes that will retire. So while 250 airplanes will retire in fiscal year 2010, the aircraft were losing from Spangdahlem will not retire because they're some of the newer F-16 Block 50s the Air Force has," Colonel Piepkorn said.

Additional plans include the joining of the two F-16 squadrons.

As a result of the drawdown of F-16s, the 22nd and 23rd Fighter Squadrons will transition to a single, slightly larger squadron versus keeping two separate F-16 squadrons. One proposal is to inactivate both the 22nd and 23rd Fighter Squadrons and rename the single squadron in accordance with historical precedence, Colonel Piepkorn said.

To ensure the CAF Restructuring initiative runs smoothly, a number of agencies on base have been working together to plan for the drawdown of aircraft and manning positions.

The staff at U.S. Air Forces in Europe and the Air Staff have been very involved, Colonel Piepkorn said. "And here on base, it's been a variety of units to include the operations and maintenance groups getting the planes ready, as well as the manpower folks at the (52nd Force Support Squadron)."

Along with the reduction of aircraft, "approximately 500 manpower positions will be affected with military members either moving to another available position in the 52nd FW or relocating to another base. No U.S. or local national civilian positions will be reduced," stated Capt. Erin Pinkston, manpower and personnel flight commander.

Military members will depart when they were originally scheduled to, but there will be a reduced number of inbound personnel coming into the affected units during the next few years. This will enable the wing to meet the requirement to reduce manpower by approximately 500 positions, Captain Pinkston stated.

Air-Force wide, the CAF Restructuring plan is intended to create a wave of savings in costs and manpower positions.