

Secretary of the Air Force  
1670 Air Force Pentagon  
Washington, DC 20330-1670

Secretary of the Army  
101 Army Pentagon  
Washington, DC 20310-0101

The Honorable Carl Levin  
Chairman  
Committee on Armed Services  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

SEP 20 2011

Dear Mr. Chairman:

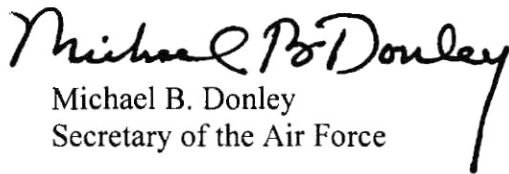
We are writing to address language in the recent committee report recommending a provision in the National Defense Authorization Act for FY 2012 that requires the Secretary of Defense to develop and implement a plan for the orderly transfer of the Air Force MC-12W Liberty Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance (ISR) aircraft to the Army. We strongly recommend the Congress not incorporate this provision in the final legislation.

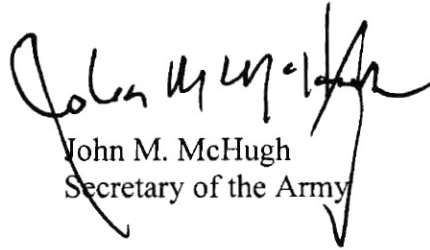
The proposed FY 2012 NDAA language indicates the USAF MC-12W aircraft transfer would replace the Army's Guardrail aircraft. While the aircraft share similar airframes, mission sets differ. The USAF MC-12W is a Full Motion Video (FMV) system that uses Signals Intelligence (SIGINT) as a cueing mechanism, whereas the RC-12 Guardrail is a tethered communication/electronic intelligence platform - without FMV. Replacement would significantly decrease warfighter support due to the extensive internal aircraft modifications required to accommodate these different mission sets, thus impacting current intelligence collection missions supporting the warfighter during ongoing combat operations. The Army's Enhanced Medium Altitude Reconnaissance Surveillance System (EMARSS) aircraft and the USAF MC-12W are very similar platforms developed to address FY08 FMV surge efforts by augmenting remotely piloted aircraft (MQ-1/9) capability. While the MC-12W/EMARSS aircraft are FMV systems, Guardrail is not.

The language also suggests manpower freed from the MC-12W program could be used to augment expanding Air Force unmanned aircraft system (UAS) requirements. Any MC-12W aircrew personnel would not immediately be able to support UAS requirements because UAS crews must attend specific training which is already at full capacity. Also, the Air Force is in the midst of modifying MC-12W operations to permit exploitation within the Air Force Distributed Common Ground System (AF DCGS) architecture. Doing so permits the Air Force to more effectively utilize analyst manpower without impact to ISR products – products produced from a DCGS capable of flexing to address global warfighter ISR needs. Absent a similar architecture, mission transfer to the Army would likely incur a significant intelligence analyst manpower bill to meet specific COCOM requirements.

Finally, the MC-12W is a proven multi-intelligence system that is being relied upon daily by US and Coalition Forces in Iraq and Afghanistan to identify, track, and locate terrorists and Taliban forces. We are convinced that any transfer of ISR assets such as the MC-12W during this critical time would be disruptive to ongoing military operations. Both Services are heavily engaged in combat in the field and dealing with budgetary constraints at home. While the EMARSS program is facing alternate budget scenarios that may lead the Army to explore other options, the Air Force remains committed to the MC-12W program as an enduring capability as evidenced by its transition to the current baseline budget, establishment of a dedicated crew force and training pipeline, and a recently announced basing decision, all of which are being executed at this time. We acknowledge that scenarios exist which may create an environment favorable for aircraft transfer, but given the current military situation, we strongly recommend continued operation of the MC-12W within the Air Force.

A similar letter has been sent to the ranking minority member of your committee as well as the chairman and ranking member of House Armed Services Committee and House and Senate Intelligence Committees.

  
Michael B. Donley  
Secretary of the Air Force

  
John M. McHugh  
Secretary of the Army