

**DEPARTMENT OF THE AIR FORCE**  
**PRESENTATION TO THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON READINESS AND MANAGEMENT**  
**SUPPORT**  
**UNITED STATES SENATE**

**SUBJECT: CURRENT READINESS OF THE U.S. AIR FORCE**

**STATEMENT OF: GENERAL LARRY O. SPENCER**  
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## **INTRODUCTION**

America's Air Force has conducted 22 years of sustained combat operations and is continuing to meet high operational tempo demands to support today's fight. This has inevitably taken a toll on our weapons systems and people, and since 2003 has strained and degraded the overall readiness of the force. The Air Force fiscal year 2014 (FY14) budget request attempts to align resources to slow our readiness decline and set the stage for restoring full-spectrum readiness. However, the current fiscal environment threatens to derail these efforts and put into jeopardy the Air Force's ability to meet combatant commander requirements. The rebalance to the Asia-Pacific and our continued presence in the Middle East and Africa indicate that the demand for Air Force capabilities will remain constant, or perhaps even rise, over the next decade. To ensure that our Airmen can continue to contribute our five enduring core missions to the joint team, our readiness must improve.

## **READINESS**

The Air Force provides *Global Vigilance*, *Global Reach*, and *Global Power* for America through its five core missions of air and space superiority, intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR), rapid global mobility, global strike, and command and control. By integrating capabilities across these core missions, we bring a unique set of options to deter war, deliver rapid, life-saving responses to threatened areas anywhere on the planet, and strike hard and precisely wherever and whenever the national interest demands.

The cornerstone of our Airmen's ability to provide airpower to the Nation and contribute our core missions to the joint team is their readiness. "Readiness" is the ability of a unit to provide its designed operational capabilities within the required timeframe. It is comprised of personnel requirements, training (to include flying hours), weapon system sustainment, facilities,

and installations. A responsive readiness posture depends on good health in all of these key areas. While protecting future readiness includes modernizing weapons systems and equipment, creating combat readiness in the near-term is a complex task involving the intersection of personnel, materiel, and training. It includes balancing time between operational and training commitments, funding from multiple sources, informed levels of risk, and effectively managing resources to achieve the desired state of readiness.

Mitigating the risk associated with a smaller military requires a ready force. If we attempt to sustain current force levels while personnel and operational costs rise, there will be progressively fewer resources available to support our current number of installations, maintain existing aircraft inventories, vital equipment and weapons, and invest in future capabilities—the definition of a hollow force.

The Air Force supports combatant command missions that require 24/7 availability. Space operations, command and control, cyber defense, ISR, special operations, personnel recovery, and nuclear deterrence are all high priority missions that cannot be done adequately, and in some cases cannot be done safely, at low readiness levels. In support of U.S. defense strategy, our air forces must be capable of quickly responding and shifting between theaters of operation. Allowing the Air Force to slip to a lower state of readiness that requires a long buildup to full combat effectiveness negates the essential strategic advantages of airpower and puts joint forces at increased risk.

The Consolidated and Further Continuing Appropriations Act, 2013, combined with sequestration reductions, results in approximately \$4.4 billion less than our request from our operations and maintenance accounts from which we fund some of our foundational readiness programs, including weapons system sustainment (WSS) and our flying hour program (FHP).

We project that sequestration will reduce WSS and FHP by about \$2.1 billion from our original FY13 budget request. These cuts will affect FY14 and beyond by driving down aircraft availability rates, and potentially preventing our ability to fly additional hours even if funded.

The President's Budget includes balanced deficit reduction proposals that would allow Congress to replace and repeal sequestration in FY13 and the associated cap reductions in FY14 – 21. If sequestration is not replaced, the Air Force will have to rebuild degraded unit readiness, accept further delays to modernization, absorb the backlog in depot maintenance inductions, and invest additional funding to restore infrastructure. However, because sequestration impacts are already occurring, even if our readiness programs are funded to the levels requested in the FY14 President's Budget (PB), our readiness levels may still not recover to pre-sequester levels in FY14. If the post-sequester Budget Control Act funding caps remain in effect, the Air Force will be unable to reinvigorate readiness and align with the Defense Strategic Guidance. In both the short- and long-term, sequestration will have devastating impacts to readiness, will significantly affect our modernization programs, and may cause further force structure reductions.

#### Weapons System Sustainment

WSS is a key component of full-spectrum readiness. Years of combat demands have taken a toll across many weapon systems, and we continue to see an increase in the costs of WSS requirements, which are driven by sustainment strategy, complexity of new weapon systems, operations tempo, force structure changes, and growth in depot work packages for aging, legacy aircraft. With recent force structure reductions, we must carefully manage how we allocate WSS in order to avoid availability shortfalls. We are planning to fund WSS to 81 percent of the FY14 requirement using funds from the base budget as well as overseas contingency operations (OCO) funds.

Sequestration has further set back our efforts to improve WSS. Depot delays will result in the grounding of some affected aircraft. The deferments mean idled production shops, a degradation of workforce proficiency and productivity, and corresponding future volatility and operational costs. It can take two-to-three years to recover full restoration of depot workforce productivity and proficiency.

Moreover, WSS funding requirements for combat-ready air, space, and cyber forces have consistently increased at a rate double that of inflation planning factors. Although service life extension programs and periodic modifications have allowed our inventory to support 22 years of unabated operations, the cost of maintenance and sustainment continues to rise. WSS costs still outpace inflationary growth, and in the current fiscal environment, our efforts to restore weapons system availability to required levels will be a serious challenge. Although the FY14 PB adds baseline funds for WSS, we continue to rely on OCO funding for global contingency operations.

#### Flying Hour Program

The emphasis on readiness in the Defense Strategic Guidance reinforced the Air Force focus on the importance of maintaining our FHP as part of our full-spectrum readiness. For the FY14 budget request, the Air Force balanced the allocation of flying hours across the Total Force to maintain—and in some cases—incrementally improve readiness levels.

However, as with WSS, sequestration affects our ability to improve readiness, and in fact, readiness levels are already declining. Lost flight hours will cause unit stand-downs which will result in severe, rapid, and long-term unit combat readiness degradation. We have already ceased operations for one-third of our fighter and bomber force. Within 60 days of a stand down, the affected units will be unable to meet emergent or operations plans requirements. Lost

currency training requires six months to a year to return to current sub-optimal levels, with desired flying proficiency for crewmembers requiring even longer.

The flying hour program will continue to rely on OCO funding to support Operation ENDURING FREEDOM and the redeployment of combat forces from Afghanistan. With the expectation of decreasing OCO flying hours, we have programmed increasing operations and maintenance (O&M)-funded flying hours in FY15 and throughout the FYDP. Beginning in FY15, the program meets approximately 90 percent of the peacetime training requirement to attain full-spectrum readiness across the Total Force.

The Air Force is committed to a long-term effort to increase our live, virtual, and constructive operational training (LVC-OT) capability and capacity by funding improvements in LVC-OT devices (e.g., simulators and virtual trainers) and networks. Adjustments to the flying hour program will continue to evolve as the fidelity of simulators and LVC-OT capabilities improve. Increasing our virtual capabilities will minimize fuel consumption and aircraft maintenance costs while ensuring high quality training for our aircrews.

Full-spectrum training also includes the availability and sustainability of air-to-air and air-to-ground training ranges. Many of our ranges are venues for large-scale joint and coalition training events and are critical enablers for concepts like Air-Sea Battle. In FY14, we are increasing funding to improve and sustain these crucial national assets to elevate flying training effectiveness for the joint team, which in turn improves individual and unit readiness levels.

#### Readiness and Modernization

The decline in future budgets does not allow us to maintain force structure and continue all planned investment programs while also improving readiness. To prioritize readiness, we have made a conscious choice to assume additional risk in some modernization programs.

Although we have been more effective in our use of operating resources and garnered savings from better business practices, the Air Force has been forced to terminate or restructure several programs. Program restructures and terminations include terminating the Space Based Surveillance Block 10 follow-on, freezing Gorgon Stare at Increment II, terminating Air Force participation in the Joint Precision Approach and Landing System land-based segment, and divesting the UAV (unmanned aerial vehicle) Battlelab. In addition, several key modernization priorities were deferred, including a replacement for the aging T-38 trainer and the JSTARS surveillance aircraft.

To achieve the readiness levels we desire, the Air Force needs sustained modernization. For example, our legacy, or fourth generation, fighter fleet has secured more than 20 years of an air superiority advantage, but may lose its ability operate as effectively in contested environments. Weapon systems like the F-22, with contributions from the F-35, are what will carry America's Air Force forward to continue to provide air superiority. During F-35 development, it is imperative that we maintain our fourth-generation fighter fleet. Therefore, the at least 300 F-16s will undergo a service life extension program and a capability enhancement called Combat Avionics Programmed Extension Suite, which permits them to remain relevant in the near-term threat environment until the F-35 is available in sufficient numbers. We are also upgrading the F-15 fleet's radar and electronic warfare capabilities that will permit it to operate in conjunction with fifth-generation aircraft in the future threat environment.

Other top modernization programs include the KC-46A and the Long Range Strike-Bomber (LRS-B). Because the future will likely call for us to provide rapid global mobility to remote, austere locations in contested environments, we will require a very capable tanker fleet. The KC-46A program will ensure that our Nation retains a tanker fleet able to provide crucial air

refueling capacity worldwide for decades to come. The LRS-B is a key piece of the development of our long range strike family of systems, the capabilities of which are critical to our ability to carry out our global strike mission.

America's Air Force remains the most capable in the world, but we cannot allow readiness levels to decline further and modernization cannot wait for the next cycle of increased defense spending. We have important production lines under way and development programs that are, or will soon be, mature enough for production. Cancelling programs in anticipation of a future generation of technology would be wasteful and, in some cases, risk the loss of critical engineering talent and technological advantage. New threats and corresponding investment needs are not theoretical future possibilities. They are here, now. Air superiority and long-range strike capabilities cannot be assumed. Significant investment in fifth-generation platforms and munitions is essential to address these threats. The future success of the Nation's military and the joint team depends on modernizing our Air Force and keeping it ready to fight.

## **CONCLUSION**

The Air Force's core missions will continue to serve America's long-term security interests by giving our Nation and its leadership unmatched options against the challenges of an unpredictable future. In the last several decades, Air Force airpower has been an indispensable element of deterrence, controlled escalation, and, when so tasked by the Nation's leadership, destruction of an adversary's military capability—all accomplished with minimal casualties to U.S. servicemen and women and civilians. However, investments in Air Force capabilities and readiness remain essential to ensuring that the Nation will maintain an agile, flexible, and ready force. This force must be deliberately planned and consistently funded, as reconstitution of a highly sophisticated and capable Air Force cannot occur quickly if allowed to atrophy.



Today's Air Force provides America an indispensable hedge against the challenges of a dangerous and uncertain future, providing viable foreign policy options exclusive of a large military commitment on foreign soil. Regardless of the future security environment, the Air Force must retain and maintain its unique ability to provide America with *Global Vigilance*, *Global Reach*, and *Global Power*.