

## **Opening Statement**

**Chairman Joe Courtney**

### **“Air Force Projection Forces Aviation Programs and Capabilities Related to the 2020 President’s Budget Request”**

This morning, the Seapower and Projection Forces Subcommittee meets to review the Air Force projection forces aspects of our subcommittee’s jurisdiction and the department’s Fiscal Year 2020 budget submission.

Winston Churchill once noted before the House of Commons that “Not to have an adequate air force in the present state of the world is to compromise the foundations of national freedom and independence.” As then, our Air Force bomber, tanker, and airlift platforms are critical to our national defense strategy and our ability to project power around the world.

But in comparison to the relatively active turnover elsewhere in the Air Force and even the Navy fleet, our Air Force projection forces are very much a stable entity. To a greater extent than in most areas of our national defense, the projection forces we have today will be the projection forces we may call upon in a conflict a decade from now. And yet, there are a number of challenges in assuring our continued capability in this realm. We do not have an active effort to recapitalize our strategic lift aircraft. The B-21 Raider program, while on track, is still many years from being fielded in significant numbers to recapitalize the bomber fleet. And the while the Air Force was finally able to accept its first KC-46 in 2019, significant deficiencies will remain in every aircraft the Air Force accepts this year and just last week, new issues arose requiring pause in acceptance of new aircraft.

All of this underscores the importance that this committee ascribes to keeping procurement programs on track and to the maintenance of our existing platforms. We will continue to closely scrutinize and provide input on the budgets presented to us. As I have done in previous hearings, I would like to highlight for members a few key areas where this subcommittee has had significant input on the Administration's budgeted plans for projection forces.

Last year, the Air Force planned to begin retirement of KC-10 tanker aircraft in anticipation of KC-46 aircraft being accepted. As we have seen in the last year, however, there is little reason to begin retiring aircraft when the replacements continue to suffer from technical deficiencies. Therefore, this subcommittee included language in the NDAA which was eventually signed into law which prohibits KC-10 retirements until the Air Force first meets it’s requirement 479 tanker aircraft.

Last year, the Air Force announced plans to make significant investments in the existing Air Force One aircraft despite the procurement of new aircraft planned to begin flying the next president in 2024. Members may recall this included a plan to spend a full \$24 million on just two refrigerators. In response, in addition to the good work of the subcommittee to

convince Air Force leadership to take a different approach on the refrigerators, we also set a firm retirement date in the FY19 NDAA for the existing Air Force One aircraft, the effect of which will limit similar wasteful procurements as the planes reach retirement.

And finally, this year's Air Force budget will continue to rely on congressional adds for propulsion modifications to the C-130H fleet, including the eight aircraft flown by Connecticut's 103<sup>rd</sup> Airlift Wing, the "Flying Yankees". Returning members of the subcommittee may recall the hearing we held last fall on deadly mishaps in our intra-theater airlift fleet. Since that hearing, we have received the final report showing that a legacy propeller was responsible for a 2017 tragedy which killed 17 servicemembers. And just last month, the Air Force grounded sixty C-130H aircraft, including six of the eight aircraft in the 103<sup>rd</sup> Airlift Wing, due to safety concerns with the same propeller system. I believe it is far past time for Air Force acquisition leadership to recognize that our C-130H fleet has a safety issue that requires real and urgent investment in a readily available alternative propeller. I look forward to delving into this issue later in the hearing.