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## **Ranking Member Smith Opening Statement (As Delivered) for Full Committee Hearing on “Air Force FY27 Budget Request”**

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Thank you, Chairman Rogers, and welcome to our witnesses.

As we have heard during every committee hearing this year, the global strategic landscape continues to evolve, and as such, our military must continue to adapt. And as we consider the largest Department of Defense budget request ever received, I hope to further understand from the witnesses today how this Department of Air Force budget will maintain credible combat levels, while shifting to address a much more dynamic future. Particularly, how does the FY27 request address the need for next-generation systems by increasing their research and development efforts in critical areas, such as tactical and strategic aircraft, joint all-domain command and control (JAD-C2), intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) capabilities, satellite communications, missile warning and track, and ground infrastructure to support the future space architecture?

I will continue to broadly support the retirement of aircraft that are less relevant in the modern operational environment, in lieu of platforms that are equipped to face the future threat. However, there are many examples in this budget where the Department of the Air Force, despite a sizeable increase in funding, seems to be moving counter to that, and in many cases mid-stream. The E-7A is a good example. Last year the Department attempted to cancel this program. This year the Department indicated support for the program but did not request funding to continue development. Another example is cancellation of the Next Generation-Polar program when the satellites are 80% complete. In both cases, the programs were designed to address modern threats, and were well into development and production, but were cancelled in the name of “next-generation technologies” that may or may not materialize. This directly translates to operational risk, and I’d ask our witnesses today to explain how you are managing that risk with follow-on programs that are in their early stages of design.

Further, I’d also like to hear the Air Force’s perspective on the F-35 program and its inability to deliver the Block 4 capabilities that we need, and how this reduces your ability to counter the

modern threat. It appears that you may be pivoting to the F-15EX as a stopgap while you wait for the advanced capabilities of F-35 to deliver, and I think that requires comment by our witnesses today so we can better understand your strategy for fighter recapitalization, overall.

The FY2027 budget request continues to make multibillion-dollar investments in the air and land legs of the nuclear triad, despite the lack of a comprehensive strategy review of this administration's nuclear posture. Even more troubling, we understand that there is a Nuclear Strategy Review underway and it is being done without the advice or input from the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. The omission of military advice throughout this process concerns me and questions the motives behind this decision made by the Undersecretary of Defense for Policy, particularly when that organization has not been transparent with Congress during this administration.

As we turn to space, the Space Force's budget has more than doubled. There is no doubt that a future conflict will involve the space domain, but there are two areas that raise concern with this year's request. First, the overwhelming increase in the request has been classified. This committee has for years pressed the Department to take a hard look at how it is classifying these programs, as the American public has a right to know where over \$17 billion, a nearly 300% increase over last year, is going. Second, I am incredibly concerned that the Space Force is not learning the lessons we are seeing play out in areas like munitions when it comes to vendor lock. The amount of money going to one space company in this budget request is alarming, and leadership across the Department should take a hard look at how we can ensure we have a robust, healthy, and diverse space industrial base not just today, but as we look 5- to 10-years into the future.

Thank you, and I look forward to receiving today's testimony on all of these issues.