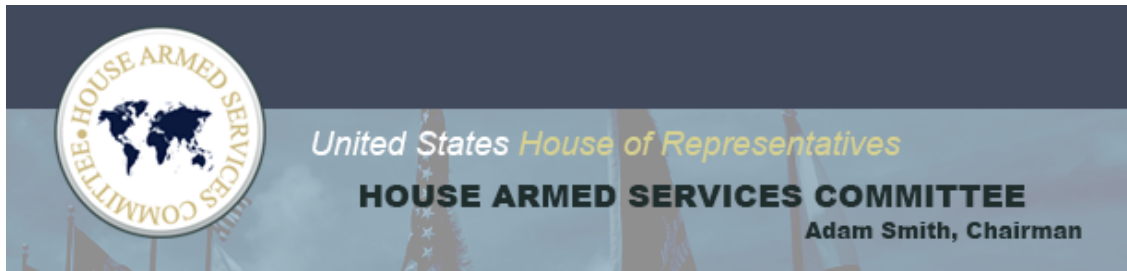


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Opening Statement (As Prepared)
Chairman Adam Smith
House Armed Services Committee Hearing:
"Department of the Air Force Fiscal Year 2023 Defense Budget Request"
April 27, 2022

Click [here](#) to stream the hearing.

Thank you for joining today's hearing on the Fiscal Year (FY) 2023 budget request from the Department of the Air Force. I want to welcome each of our witnesses. We are joined by Frank Kendall, Secretary of the Air Force, General Charles Q. Brown, Chief of Staff of the Air Force, and General John W. Raymond, Chief of Space Operations.

The President's FY2023 defense budget request reflects the Administration's emphasis on integrated deterrence across all domains, and the Department of the Air Force plays a critical role in that strategy in the conventional, nuclear, tactical and strategic areas. As such, the FY2023 request prioritizes core missions across air superiority and the space domain to respond to the increasingly complex threats that the U.S. is facing to the homeland and in each of the combatant commands.

The FY2023 budget request for the Air Force continues to require Congress to evaluate near- and mid-term risk as it reduces a significant amount of existing force structure that effectively meets current, steady-state operations around the globe. I'd like to hear more from our witnesses today about the proposed force structure changes in the budget. While it is appropriate to make shifts with the next-generation fighter beyond F-35A to support Pacific theater operations, requested divestments across tactical fighter aircraft, ISR and logistics platforms are not matched with equal procurement of new capabilities. I'd like to better understand the logic that supports this decision.

Further, the Air Force has once again changed course on tactical aircraft force structure plans. After lobbying for Congressional support over recent years on its "4+1" fighter inventory strategy, the Air Force proposes over the future years defense program (FYDP) to divest the entire fleet of A-10s by fiscal year 2028 after purchasing 218 new wings for the previously "planned fleet," nearly halve the planned buy of new F-15EX aircraft, retire one-half the entire F-15E strike-fighter fleet without a planned replacement, and retire nearly 20 percent of the F-22 fleet, while also delaying development and fielding of the F-22's replacement aircraft. As the committee evaluates the budget, I'd like to know what operational requirements have changed since last year that warrant such change in force structure. I understand the service must assess trade-offs between modernization in support of long-term readiness and combat viability of weapon systems, but this budget does not line up with a coherent plan, including the plan conveyed just one year ago. This presents many unanswered questions.

With regards to tactical aircraft affordability, the Air Force has significantly reduced F-35A purchase quantities in the budget over the next 5 years while still waiting for the program to resolve the Block 4 hardware and software development delays. Although the F-35 is the Air Force's "cornerstone" tactical fighter platform, the F-35's ongoing burden on financial resources persists. I understand we should expect the individual cost of the aircraft to rise above past levels going forward. Further, unless operations and sustainment costs of the F-35A are reduced by 47 percent over the upcoming years, the Air Force won't be able to buy its planned amount of F-35A total aircraft and would fall by short by over 825 aircraft of that inventory goal. I am particularly interested in hearing how our witnesses plan to decrease F-35 sustainment costs by inducing greater competition and increasing the performance and reliability over the existing propulsion system.

The FY2023 budget request also proposes force structure reductions in the airborne ISR inventory. However, Air Force ISR modernization plans hinge on new capabilities that are in very early stages of development, making a comprehensive evaluation of the strategy difficult. While I agree that the Air Force needs to modernize, I am very interested in the risk analysis underpinning some of these divestment decisions and the continued disconnect between Air Force equipping plans and global combatant commander requirements.

Further, the FY2023 budget request continues to make major investments in the air and land leg of the nuclear triad. With procurement of the Sentinel intercontinental ballistic missile, B-21 bomber, and Long-Range Standoff (LRSO) cruise missile all scheduled to steadily increase over the next few years, it is imperative that the Air Force effectively manage cost and schedule on these multi-billion dollar efforts. On top of its own programs, the Air Force's nuclear modernization relies on the National Nuclear Security Administration to execute several technically challenging warhead development programs with a complex that is stretched to the limit. In the late 2020s and 2030s, the Air Force will face an extremely difficult task of transitioning bomber bases and silo fields from existing systems to modern capabilities while operating both simultaneously for several years. I look forward to hearing how the Air Force plans to manage these parallel efforts, their transition, and ways that the Air Force can continue to reduce costs across the lifecycle of these programs.

As we turn to space, while it is encouraging to see a shift to a more resilient and robust architecture for one mission area, missile warning and track, there is still much work to be done to develop and get on orbit satellites that can operate through the types of threats we are seeing countries such as China and Russia developing. I look forward to hearing from the Space Force on how they are looking to transition to a more resilient architecture in each mission area, but also how the Department intends to protect our on-orbit systems today. I am also interested in hearing about the new force generation model aimed at training a Space Force that can operate in a contested space, while fully leveraging commercial and allied capabilities and opportunities. I expect the witnesses to discuss the current plan for space systems acquisition in more detail given the flux over the past several years.

Regarding readiness, I'd like to know, first, how the Air Force plans to improve aircraft readiness rates. FY2020 aircraft readiness improved as compared to FY2019, and FY2021 showed improvement as well, though the Air Force is still not meeting its readiness standards for the majority of the fleet. Additionally, what actions is the Air Force taking to improve readiness, and how does the Operations and Maintenance budget request reflect these actions?

Finally, the Air Force continues to face a critical shortage of pilots, especially in the fighter community. While increased retention rates have helped, airline industry hiring will most likely return to normal and, with it, I expect retention rates will normalize. I would like our witnesses to explain what new initiatives are being undertaken to close the pilot shortfall gap. What is being done differently to recruit, train, and retain more pilots?

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

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