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HOUSE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON SEAPOWER AND PROJECTION FORCES
UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

PRESENTATION TO THE
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STATEMENT OF:

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INTRODUCTION

Chairman Kelly, Ranking Member Courtney, and distinguished members of the subcommittee, thank you for having us here today to provide testimony on the Department of the Air Force's bomber, tanker, and airlift programs.

The United States Air Force is critical to our national defense. The Nation can no longer assume that future military operations will be conducted in uncontested airspace. Our competitors have long studied the way we fight and are fielding systems intended to deny U.S. control of the skies above the warzone, which in turn threatens our Airmen, as well as our Joint Force partners and allies on the ground. Air superiority is not a given; it must be achieved and sustained by the capabilities produced for and operated by our Airmen. This is why the Air Force continues to invest in technologically superior capabilities in order to outmatch our adversaries. We are leveraging new acquisition methods to ensure systems integration across weapon designs, assuring commonality and increased lethality, with the goal of fielding weapons systems in sufficient enough numbers to deter competitors.

CURRENT CAPACITY & CAPABILITY

In line with the Interim National Defense Strategic Guidance (INDSG), the Air Force continues to invest in capabilities to defend the Homeland, deter China, and ensure robust cooperation with our allies and partners. Investment in meaningful military capability remains our focus. We are carefully spreading risk across our portfolios to resource readiness while also investing in lethal and effective capabilities, especially in the modernization of our strategic bomber fleet. The Air Force is also committed to recapitalizing and modernizing our aerial refueling fleet, ensuring rapid global reach and operational flexibility. If deterrence fails, our Airmen must have the training, tools, platforms, and operating systems required to win.

Bomber Force Structure & Readiness

The Air Force supports the INDSG call for continued sustainment and modernization of the nuclear triad to ensure a safe, secure, and effective nuclear deterrent to backstop our integrated deterrence approach. Air Force bombers uphold the air leg of the Nation's Nuclear Triad, delivering conventional global strike effects and providing a visible deterrent to our adversaries. Since the days of Strategic Air Command, Air Force bombers have been a symbol of "Peace Through Strength." As a unique national security capability, the B-21 represents the future of this bomber force. The Air Force will gradually transition the current three-bomber

fleet to a two-bomber fleet of next-generation B-21s and modernized B-52s to provide the Nation with strategic deterrence and conventional strategic attack options for decades to come.

B-21

The B-21 Raider will form the backbone of the Nation's future bomber force and provide both conventional and nuclear capabilities. This unique platform is designed with an open systems architecture and incorporates lessons learned from existing and maturing technologies, giving it unmatched range, payload, and access to deter and win our Nation's wars. The B-21 program is executing its flight test campaign and has begun Low-Rate Initial Production (LRIP). The program has a disciplined approach for actively managing risk as it continues to mature the production line, complete the system flight testing and progress towards fielding the platform.

B-52

B-52 is undergoing the most comprehensive modernization in the platform's history, executing numerous programs in various acquisition phases from early development through production and fielding. B-52 Commercial Engine Replacement Program anticipates a Milestone B decision in third quarter of fiscal year 2025 (3QFY25), which will authorize program entry into the Engineering and Manufacturing Development phase. The first engine to test is currently at Arnold Engineering Development Complex, Tennessee, and is undergoing wind tunnel and altitude testing. B-52 Radar Modernization Program is currently modifying the first two test jets and progressing toward contract award for the first two LRIP lots. Due to schedule delays and budget underestimation, Milestone C is now estimated in 4QFY26.

B-2

The B-2 continues development and flight testing of modern avionics, communication systems, cockpit displays, armament systems, low-observable components, aircraft supportability improvements, and support equipment development. In FY26, the Air Force will continue to purchase and install equipment supporting the aforementioned efforts and training systems while continuing to deliver relevant maintenance and repair capabilities for B-2 systems.

B-1

The B-1 has completed the development and flight testing of secure communications upgrades and will continue production efforts of the kits into FY26; the program remains on schedule to complete installations by FY27. In FY26, the B-1 will continue procurement and

integration of the External Heavy-Stores Pylons. The pylons maximize carriage capacity of standoff munitions on the B-1 and allows the Air Force to increase volume of fires from standoff ranges.

LRSO

Bombers armed with the Long-Range Standoff Weapon (LRSO) provide a recallable, re-targetable capability to hold any target at risk with visible and tailorable deterrence. LRSO replaces the aging Air-Launched Cruise Missile, countering adversaries' ever-improving integrated air defenses with lethal, tailorable nuclear strike capability. LRSO and its associated nuclear warhead, the W80-4, are both on track, with the LRSO currently in developmental testing and planned to achieve Milestone C in 3QFY26.

Aerial Refueling & Mobility Programs

Our strategic competitors continue to make significant advancements to threaten the current tanker fleet, which potentially forces operations farther away from their area of responsibility and induces a cascading effect that significantly impacts the effectiveness of our fighter aircraft. Operational and statutory requirements set a minimum number of aerial refueling tankers. The Air Force also recognizes connectivity and survivability of all our fleets, including tankers, are crucial in current and future operating environments. We appreciate the support of this Committee and Congress in these modernization efforts. The Air Force intends to continue operating the current tanker fleet and will replace aircraft one-for-one to ensure sufficient tanker capacity going forward for the Joint Force.

The high tempo and demand of global operations require a set number of strategic and tactical airlift aircraft with specific capabilities anchored in the ability to generate necessary mission-capable rates to achieve wartime demands. The Air Force will continue modernization efforts to our airlift fleet to ensure safe, reliable, and rapid operational support globally to the Joint Force, as well as full integration into operations under Agile Combat Employment. The Air Force is also in the early requirements development stage of the Next Generation Airlift (NGAL) program, assessing capabilities that will deliver future airlift to meet the rapid delivery necessary for the Combatant Commands. Finally, the Executive Airlift fleet supports the President of the United States through the VC-25 aircraft, as well as the Vice President of the United States, First Lady of the United States, Secretary of State, Secretary of Defense, and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff through five different aircraft types. Air Force modernization and recapitalization

efforts of these aircraft will continue to provide safe, reliable operational support while keeping airborne passengers globally connected and ensuring operational continuity where applicable.

Tankers

Continuing to deliver refueling capability to the Joint force is a priority for the Air Force. The Air Force has prioritized KC-46A tanker production, which is replacing a significant portion of the aging fleet. This program represents the first phase in a broader strategy to ensure rapid global mobility for the future. As of 7 April 2025, 89 KC-46As have been delivered. While the Air Force currently plans to acquire 183 KC-46A aircraft, additional tanker recapitalization will be required to fully support the Congressionally mandated floor of 466 tankers. Boeing met its FY24 delivery target, but the overall schedule remains a focus area due to ongoing challenges, including recently discovered wing cracks. The Air Force continues to work with Boeing to resolve Category 1 deficiencies, such as the remote vision system and stiff air refueling boom, as well as two non-operational Category 1 product quality deficiencies. The Air Force also continues to prioritize KC-135 tanker sustainment. Recent efforts focus on sustaining and upgrading the current fleet of 377 aircraft to ensure it meets the Air Force's refueling needs. The KC-135 will remain a vital part of the fleet well beyond 2050 based on the current modernization plan.

Presidential Airlift

The Presidential Airlift fleet supports the President of the United States through the VC-25A. We are committed to replacing the 35-year-old VC-25A with reliable air transport equipped with communications capability and security equal to that of the White House. We are working through VC-25B modification delays attributed to interiors supplier transition, manpower limitations, and wiring design completion. The Air Force is actively pursuing options to accelerate VC-25B delivery in coordination with commercial and government stakeholders.

Executive Airlift

The Executive Airlift fleet supports the Top Five customers (Vice President of the United States, First Lady of the United States, Secretary of State, Secretary of Defense, and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff) and Combatant Commanders through the C-32A, C-40B/C, and C-37A/B aircraft. We will continue to maintain the aging Executive Airlift aircraft and execute modernization modifications to provide reliable operational support while keeping passengers globally connected in the air.

NGAL

The NGAL Capabilities-Based Assessment (CBA) will complete by the end of April 2025. This is the first step in the recapitalization of the heavily used Strategic Airlift Fleet, which consists of the C-17A and the C-5M. An AoA is the next step after completion of the CBA and Initial Capabilities Document.

C-5M

The C-5M aircraft is capable of outsized cargo delivery in support of national objectives. The Air Force continues to ensure the C-5M fleet remains sustainable and viable with modifications to address obsolescence and flight safety issues. These modifications include the replacement of the multi-functional controls and display; Communications, Navigation, Surveillance/Air Traffic Management and C-5M Core Mission Computer/Weather Radar system equipment; and Mission Systems Equipment Lavatories replacements. Efforts to improve aircraft availability and mission capability also continue to be a top priority, with additional investment in spares to reduce repair timelines.

C-17A

The C-17A is the only aircraft that delivers tactical capability at strategic range to austere airfields. Aircraft availability and mission capability remain top priorities with critical modifications to the C-17A fleet focused on addressing obsolescence and flight safety issues. These modifications include replacement of the Heads-Up Display, Filter Fire Mitigation for Onboard Inert Gas Generating System, Flight Deck Replacement, Beyond Line of Sight, and Aircraft Connectivity. C-17A Aircraft Connectivity was a new FY25 start program providing increased capability for aircrew situational awareness, real-time secure command and control of forces, and close joint logistics chains at speed and range.

C-130H

The Air Force is modernizing its 117 C-130H aircraft, all flown by the Air Reserve Component (ARC) (86 Air National Guard (ANG) and 31 Air Force Reserve Command (AFRC)), to ensure continued viability and sustainability. Key upgrades include Center Wing Box replacements for structural longevity and the Avionics Modernization Program Increment 2 for improved maintainability, reliability, and mandated cryptographic capabilities (including MUOS/SATURN) through the installation of a new digital avionics suite. This fleet will be

reduced to 62 aircraft (38 ANG, 24 AFRC) by 2029 as new C-130Js are delivered for recapitalization.

C-130J

The Air Force continues to receive Congressionally directed increases for its C-130 fleet with 159 C-130Js (103 active duty, 56 ARC, plus 50 more ARC aircraft in production for delivery through 2029) to replace C-130Hs. The Service also operates specialized C-130J variants: 30 AC-130Js and 64 MC-130Js for special operations, 39 HC-130Js for combat rescue, and 10 WC-130Js for weather reconnaissance. Modernization programs include Center Wing Box replacements, Large Aircraft Infrared Countermeasures, communications upgrades, and the Block 8.1 upgrade, delivering enhanced capabilities in communication, navigation, and data transfer. Cryptographic modernization is also underway across the C-130J fleet to meet Mandate I requirements.

CV-22

The CV-22 is the Air Force variant of the joint V-22 tilt-rotor aircraft. It allows for long-distance, terrain following, vertical lift operations with increased survivability and is the only high-speed vertical lift platform in the Air Force inventory. The Bell-Boeing team will deliver the last two CV-22s in FY25. The Joint Program Office, along with industry partners are committed to continuously improving the V-22 Osprey's safety, reliability, capability, and availability. Ongoing efforts include the Osprey Drive System Safety and Health Instrumentation, Duplex Hardened Planetary Pinion Bearings and upgraded Proprotor Gearboxes (PRGBs) to include material improvements and PRGB Input Quill Assembly redesign.

CONCLUSION

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify. We look forward to working with this subcommittee to ensure the Department of the Air Force maintains the necessary military advantage to defend the Homeland and deter China, with robust support from our allies and partners, well into the future..