# Department of the Air Force

Presentation

Before the Senate Appropriations
Committee, Subcommittee on Defense

## *Weapons Systems Divestments Hearing*

Witness Statement of

Lieutenant General David S. Nahom
Deputy Chief of Staff,
Plans and Programs

July 21, 2021

# BIOGRAPHY

**UNITED STATES AIR FORCE**

## LIEUTENANT GENERAL DAVID S. NAHOM

Lt. Gen. David S. Nahom is the Deputy Chief of Staff for Plans and Programs, Headquarters U.S. Air Force, the Pentagon, Arlington, Virginia. In support of the Chief of Staff and Secretary of the Air Force, he leads the development and integration of the Air Force resource allocation plan. Asthe Air Force's senior programmer, he leads the development, integration, evaluation and analysis of the Air Force Program across the Future Years Defense Plan. He directs and coordinates activities ensuring the Air Force builds and employs effective air, space and cyber forces to achieve national defense objectives.

Lt. Gen. Nahom was commissioned through the Reserve Officer Training Corps at the University of Colorado and is a distinguished graduate of both undergraduate navigator training and Euro-NATO Joint Jet Pilot Training. During his 31-year active duty Air Force career, the general commanded at the squadron, group and wing level and is acommand pilot with more than 3,400 hours in the F-22A Raptor, F-15A/B/C/D Eagle and F-111F Aardvark.

In addition to his flying and command experience, Lt. Gen. Nahom is a graduate of the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College and the NATO Defense College. He has held headquarters-level assignments at NATO Combined Air Operations Center Six, U.S. Forces Korea, PacificAir Forces, Headquarters Air Force and Air Forces Central Command. Prior to his current assignment, the general was the Director of Programs, Office of the Deputy Chief of Staff for Plans and Programs, Headquarters Air Force, the Pentagon, Arlington, Virginia.

**EDUCATION**

1988 Bachelor of Arts, Economics, University of Colorado, Boulder
1993 Squadron Officer School, Maxwell Air Force Base, Ala.
2001 Army Command and General Staff College, Fort Leavenworth, Kan.
2001 Master of Military Operational Arts and Science, Fort Leavenworth, Kan.2006 Air War College, Maxwell AFB, Ala., by correspondence
2009 NATO Defense College, Rome, Italy

**ASSIGNMENTS**

1. November 1988–August 1989, Student, Specialized Undergraduate Navigator Training, Mather Air Force Base, Calif.
2. September 1989–October 1989, Student, AT-38 Fighter Lead-In Training, 436th Tactical Fighter Training Squadron,Holloman AFB, N.M.
3. November 1989–May 1990, Student, F-111 Replacement Training Unit, Mountain Home AFB, Idaho
4. June 1990–February 1993, F-111F Weapons Systems Officer, 492nd TFTS, RAF Lakenheath, United Kingdom
5. March 1993–July 1994, Student, Euro-NATO Joint Jet Pilot Training, Sheppard AFB, Texas
6. August 1994–October 1994, Student, Introduction to Fighter Fundamentals, Columbus AFB, Miss.
7. November 1994–June 1995, Student, F-15C Fighter Training Unit, Tyndall AFB, Fla.
8. July 1995–September 1997, Aircraft Commander, Mission Commander, 71st Fighter Squadron, Joint Base

Langley-Eustis, Va.
9. September 1997–December 1999, Flight Lead, Chief Squadron Scheduler, Operations Support Squadron, JBLangley-Eustis, Va.
10. December 1999–June 2000, F-15C Instructor Pilot, Assistant Director of Operations, 95th FS, Tyndall AFB, Fla.
11. June 2000–July 2001, Student, Army Command and General Staff College, Fort Leavenworth, Kan.
12. September 2002–June 2003, Chief Wing Training, F-15C Instructor Pilot, 33rd Operations Support Squadron,Eglin AFB, Fla.
13. June 2003–August 2005, Assistant Director of Operations, Director of Operations, 60th FS, Eglin AFB, Fla.
14. August 2005–June 2006, Chief of Wing Safety, 33rd Fighter Wing, Eglin AFB, Fla.
15. June 2006–August 2008 Commander, Deputy Commander for Maintenance Group, 60th FS, Eglin AFB, Fla.
16. July 2008–January 2009, Student/Senior Course Member, NATO Defense College, Rome, Italy
17. June 2010–July 2012, Commander, 18th Operations Group, Kadena Air Base, Japan
18. July 2012–March 2013, Executive Officer to Commander Pacific Air Forces, JB Pearl Harbor-Hickam, Hawaii
19. March 2013–August 2014, Commander, 3rd Wing, JB Elmendorf-Richardson, Alaska
20. September 2014–October 2015, Director of Regional Affairs, Deputy Under Secretary of the Air Force,International Affairs, Headquarters Air Force, Arlington, Va.
21. November 2016–April 2017, Deputy Director of Plans, Programs and Requirements, JB Langley-Eustis, Va.
22. April 2017–May 2018, Deputy Commander, US Air Forces Central Command; Deputy, Combined Force AirComponent Commander, US Central Command, Southwest Asia
23. May 2018–September 2019, Director of Programs, Office of the Deputy Chief of Staff for Plans and Programs,Headquarters Air Force, the Pentagon, Arlington, Va.
24. September 2019–present, Deputy Chief of Staff, Plans and Programs, Headquarters Air Force, the Pentagon,Arlington, Va.

**SUMMARY OF JOINT ASSIGNMENTS**
1. July 2001–July 2002, Chief of Fighter Operations, NATO Combined Air Operations Six, Eskisehir, Turkey, as a major
2. February 2009–June 2010, Chief J37 Training, Readiness, and Exercises Division, U.S. Pacific Command, YongSan, Seoul, South Korea, as a colonel

**FLIGHT INFORMATION**
Rating: command pilot
Flight hours: more than 3,400
Aircraft flown: F-22A, F-15 A-D, AT-38, T-38, T-37 and F-111A/F

**MAJOR AWARDS AND DECORATIONS**
Defense Superior Service Medal with oak leaf cluster
Legion of Merit with oak leaf cluster
Distinguished Flying Cross with oak leaf cluster
Defense Meritorious Service Medal
Meritorious Service Medal with three oak leaf clusters
Air Medal with four oak leaf clusters
Aerial Achievement Medal with three oak leaf cluster
Air Force Commendation Medal with oak leaf cluster
Air Force Achievement Medal with two oak leaf clusters

**EFFECTIVE DATES OF PROMOTION**
Second Lieutenant Aug. 13, 1988
First Lieutenant Aug. 13, 1990
Captain Aug. 13, 1992
Major Dec. 1, 1999
Lieutenant Colonel April 1, 2004
Colonel July 1, 2009
Brigadier General Oct. 17, 2014
Major General June 2, 2018
Lieutenant General Sept. 4, 2019

(Current as of October 2019)

## INTRODUCTION

Chairman Tester, Ranking Member Shelby, and distinguished members of this committee, on behalf of Acting Secretary of the Air Force, the Honorable John P. Roth, and the Chief of Staff of the Air Force, General Charles Q. Brown, Jr., thank you for the opportunity to testify for the Air Force.

Your Air Force remains committed to making the hard choices required to balance the need to preserve near-term readiness for today's missions with the imperative to also build the long-term readiness essential to prevail in strategic competition with China or any other nation.

National security is evolving. The clear and ever-present danger of previous generations has become far more opaque and complex. Our success in the strategic battlespace is dependent on the relevancy of our capabilities and the Airmen who wield those resources.

Strategic competition utilizes both long-term strategy and short-term improvisation. Our nation's military potency relies on developing our airpower inventory toward platforms, equipment, and capabilities that will be relevant in peer competition in 2030 and beyond. To achieve this, we must shed capabilities that are too old, irrelevant in the future dynamic environment, or are unsustainable.

We look forward to collaborating closely with this committee to explore and evaluate all divestiture options regarding the A-10, F-15C/D, F-16C/D, E-8, MQ-9 Combat Lines, RQ-4, C-130H and our tanker transition plan that best help us to deliver on our promise to "Fly, fight, and win…airpower anytime, anywhere."

## CURRENT CAPACITY AND CAPABILITY

Current Air Force aircraft are becoming significantly more expensive to sustain as they age, and our fleet is the oldest in the Department of Defense. The average age of the Air Force fleet is 29 years, while the U.S. Navy is 14 years and the U.S. Army is 15 years. In comparison to our allies, the average age of the Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) is 9 years and the Royal Air Force (United Kingdom) is 16 years. Weapons System Sustainment (WSS) costs have increased 130 percent over the last 20 years, even with a 15 percent decrease in total aircraft inventory (TAI). We need new platforms and weapons to replace a legacy force, but also must invest in cutting-edge technology needed to confront and pace peer competitors.

## THE FIGHTER FLEET

Our planned fighter portfolio, relevant in 2030 and beyond, requires deliberate development, acquisition, training, modernization, and sustainment of aircraft that meet the demands of future

conflicts. As part of our proposed fighter force structure change, the Air Force must transition its fighter fleet from seven platforms (F-35, F-22, F-16, F-15EX, F-15E, F-15C, and A-10) to four platforms (NGAD, F-35, F-15EX, and F-16) plus the A-10 in the near/mid-term. To attain the desired fighter fleet, the Air Force must right-size current aircraft inventories to expedite the transition away from less capable, aging aircraft and emphasize investment in future capabilities such as Next Generation Air Dominance (NGAD) and F-35 modernization. The desired Air Force fighter fleet should match the capability and capacity of both platforms and weapons to maximize lethality.

**A-10 THUNDERBOLT**

The A-10 Thunderbolt has proven to be one of the most durable and capable close air support aircraft in the Air Force inventory since its introduction in 1977. The Air Force believes its analysis supports reducing 42 A-10 aircraft from the current 281 to 239 in Fiscal Year 2022 (FY22) and plans to reach an end-state of 218 by FY23. This reduction will appropriately size the fleet for cost-effectiveness while simultaneously providing the capability to counter violent extremist organizations and addressing lower-end fights into the 2030s.

A reduction of A-10 aircraft in FY22 will reset the fleet from nine to seven combat squadrons. A 218 aircraft fleet allows Attack Squadrons to maintain a minimum of 18 Primary Mission Aircraft Inventory, guaranteeing one squadron is always available to support combatant commander requirements for close air support and combat search and rescue.

As we reduce the fleet to 218, by 42 in FY22 and an additional 21 in FY23, we will continue to re-wing and modernize the remaining A-10s. Re-winging is the A-10's most significant modernization program and we have purchased wings to outfit a fleet of 218 aircraft. In FY22, we will continue executing FY21 funding to begin installs and support engineering change orders, and other government costs that are typically required to execute major modification efforts of this nature.

Failure to right-size the A-10 fleet has considerable consequences. Maintaining current fleet numbers will result in a significant buyback cost to the Air Force to upgrade and sustain A-10s that are not needed to meet future requirements, ultimately impacting the Air Force's ability to purchase aircraft that will win a high-end fight.

The human capital toll is also significant. Between FY21-22 a total of 91 F-35s will deliver. Failure to right-size the A-10 fleet means hundreds of maintenance personnel will not be available to resource platforms such as the F-35. While adding funds could solve the personnel deficit, new recruits require training with a lead time of at least a year (post recruitment), and the most critical billets of experienced maintainers requires years to create and cannot be purchased. Ultimately, relief is required from legislation that currently prevents retirement of any A-10s. A

right-sized A-10 fleet provides the capability, capacity, and affordability to achieve National Defense Strategy objectives and meet air superiority and global strike needs for the Joint Force.

**F-15C/D EAGLE**

The F-15C/D supports both Homeland Defense and the air superiority mission. Our F-15C fleet is aging, with two-thirds of the fleet past its designed service life. The 234 F-15C/Ds in the Air Force inventory will reach the end of their design service life in the next six to eight years, and our analysis shows additional service life extension programs are not cost effective.

The FY22 President's budget request divests 48 F-15C/Ds from the active fleet (234 aircraft to 186 aircraft), which includes the reduction of the F-15C/D squadron at Royal Air Force Lakenheath.

We have already started to replace this fleet with a modernized successor by purchasing the F-15EX. The F-15EX "Eagle II" will provide superior sensor, range, and payload for Critical Infrastructure Defense. The transition from a seven-fighter force structure to a four-fighter construct enables the Air Force to focus efforts on capabilities relevant in the future spectrum of conflict. As the F-15C/D fleet is reduced, increases in F-15EXs and F-35s will ensure no degradation in capabilities.

**F-16 C/D FIGHTING FALCON**

The F-16 is the Air Force's primary multi-role fighter and Suppression of Enemy Air Defense aircraft. Our more than 600 late block F-16s will provide affordable capacity for the next 15 or more years, in both competition and more permissive combat environments.

The Air Force's current fleet consists of 936 F-16s with 325 Pre-Block and 611 Post-Block aircraft. Starting in FY22, due to rising costs in sustainment, the Air Force begins a phased approach to a F-16 fleet Pre-Block reduction, decreasing the fleet by 47 F-16s (936 aircraft to 889 aircraft). In FY22, we will continue to modernize the Post-Block F-16s we keep as our "affordable capacity" fighter into the 2040s. The F-16 investment strategy funds modifications for the most capable, late block aircraft to ensure they can operate and survive in today's threat environment.

The F-16 Pre-Block fleet is not lethal nor survivable enough to survive against near-peer air defense systems and threats. In order to facilitate these capability improvements, we must divest legacy F-16 Pre-Block force structure and continue investment in needed National Defense Strategy capabilities that will win a high-end fight.

**E-8 JSTARS**

The highly contested environment of the future will require sophisticated command and control to facilitate battlespace management and highly agile sensing grid capabilities. To stay ahead of emerging threats, we must accelerate intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) modernization. The Air Force will improve ISR capabilities by developing, producing, and fielding a family of interconnected and multi-role crewed and uncrewed systems. This investment pivot requires the Air Force to divest the E-8 Joint Surveillance and Target Attack Radar System (JSTARS), which cannot survive in a highly contested environment. We must fund emerging ISR capabilities that can collect in the most complex and dynamic areas.

In FY22, the Air Force seeks to retire 4 JSTARS aircraft to (16 aircraft to 12 aircraft). JSTARS does not support any ISR 2030 future force requirement, nor does it support any near-peer engagement. It is operationally imperative that, as JSTARS aircraft are retired, personnel shift to assist in other, critically understaffed, areas in support of newly emerging missions.

Currently, the Air Force is seeking relief from congressional language that prevents immediate retirement of any E-8 JSTARS aircraft, or language that hinders retirement. As required, the Air Force is currently in the process of coordinating the required certification through the Secretary of Defense (SECDEF) for approval.

**MQ-9 REAPER**

The MQ-9 Reaper has proven extremely valuable as an uncrewed aircraft operating in permissive environments where link access is unencumbered, and air defense threats are relatively nonexistent. The Air Force must focus on real-time domain awareness, enabled by data fusion at the edge of the battlespace, secure data transport, artificial intelligence, and penetrating collection capabilities. Global Integrated Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance (GIISR) capabilities must enable and connect to the Advanced Battle Management System (ABMS) as part of the Joint All-Domain Command and Control (JADC2) construct to remain competitive in the high-end fight.

Unlike traditional aircraft employment concepts, the MQ-9 presents capability through combat-air-patrols (CAPs) rather than aircraft number. In the FY22 PB, the Air Force seeks to reduce MQ-9 Government-Owned Government Operated (GOGO) combat lines by 4 (60 combat lines to 56 combat lines). This reduction of combat lines does not equate to reduction in aircraft inventory; no tails will be divested.

The FY22 PB funds existing technology maturation and modernization activities that keep the platform operational and relevant until full-scale divestments begin (planned around FY30).

This funding demonstrates the Air Force's commitment to the MQ-9 and the platforms support to the Counter-Violent Extremist Organization mission. However, we must also focus on right-sizing the fleet to enable investments to modernize ISR for the highly contested conflicts of the future. Reduction of combat lines also allows the Air Force to redirect funding towards the completion of studies, analysis, and concept exploration to determine an armed ISR follow-on effort to support the 2030 Force Design.

Significant risks exist without proper divestment of MQ-9 assets. Funding and personnel must support capabilities to win the future high-end conflicts that require accelerated investment. If the Air Force does not modify the MQ-9 force presentation and is required to keep 60 combat lines, it will become more vulnerable and increasingly irrelevant even in low-end conflicts.

The Air Force requests no restrictive language preventing further reduction of MQ-9 combat lines and no additional funding for MQ-9 procurement in FY22.

**RQ-4 GLOBAL HAWK**

The RQ-4 Global Hawk is a high-altitude, uncrewed, ISR collection platform. While the system has exceptional loiter time and operational reach, the Air Force is moving toward more survivable capabilities that fulfill National Defense Strategy requirements. The Air Force's ability to win future high-end conflicts requires accelerating investment and accepting short-term risks by divesting legacy ISR assets that offer limited capability against peer and near-peer threats. Retiring RQ-4 Block 30s allows the Air Force to field advanced technology while bringing the ISR enterprise into the digital age using modernized sensing grid technologies. The Air Force intends to retire the RQ-4 Block 30 fleet to invest in advanced penetrating ISR platforms, which will enable the Joint Force to compete and win against a peer competitor in the high-end fight.

The Air Force currently possesses 20 RQ-4 Block 30 aircraft and 10 Block 40 in the inventory. The FY22 PB proposes retirement of the entire Block 30 fleet due to its inability to operate in highly contested environments.

In FY21, the Air Force proposed divestment of the RQ-4 Block 30s; however, Congress non-concurred. Current law requires the Air Force to maintain an RQ-4 fleet until the service can prove the replacement costs are less than RQ-4 sustainment and Joint Reconnaissance Operations Center certifies the capability is greater than RQ-4 for combatant commanders. However, the SECDEF waiver option states that SECDEF can request a waiver if replacement capability is believed to be worth the higher cost.

In the FY22 PB, the Air Force is once again proposing divestment of the RQ-4 Block 30 fleet (20 aircraft) along with the SECDEF approved waiver allowing the divestment. We must look to

the future and continue the transition towards a family of interconnected and multi-role systems and sensors for the highly-contested environment that are digitally engineered to increase data processing speed, mission effectiveness, interoperability, survivability, and penetration at a reduced cost.

**TANKERS (KC-10, KC-135, AND KC-46)**

To maintain our edge in Rapid Global Mobility for the future fight, Air Force must right-size the KC-10 and KC-135 fleets, while continuing to invest in the KC-46. This transition plan requires shedding legacy aircraft and repurposing airmen as KC-46s are delivered. As we move to field the KC-46, Congressional language is restricting retirement of legacy tankers.

The current National Defense Strategy mandates that the Air Force maintain 479 tanker aircraft in its fleet. To achieve the future fleet, the Air Force needs to retire the KC-10 and KC-135 on a one-for-one basis with the KC-46A. Current models and simulations indicate that the Air Force plan to recapitalize aging KC-135 and KC-10s with KC-46As and non-developmental follow-on will meet the 2030+ anticipated aerial refueling demand.

In FY22, the Air Force plans to divest 14 KC-10s (50 aircraft to 36 aircraft), and divest 18 KC-135 (394 aircraft to 376 aircraft). Additionally, adding to capacity and capability, the KC-46 fleet will increase from the 55 aircraft to 71 (+16 aircraft) in FY22. The advanced communication capabilities of the KC-46 will also contribute to advanced command and control (ABMS/JADC2) to enable advanced targeting and battle management.

The Air Force requests approval to continue execution of the tanker transition plan through right-sizing efforts. This will allow us to manage the finite number of aircrews/maintainers and align them with KC-46 Formal Training Unit allocations. In order to do this the Air Force needs to retire KC-135s and KC-10s. With hundreds of personnel tied up in legacy tanker missions, the Air Force will not be able to support and maintain an entire squadron of modern KC-46 aircraft. With these restrictions in place, units will be forced to maintain two sets of aircraft with one set of crews and maintainers. This places a heavy burden on our Airmen, and results in two insufficiently crewed fleets.

**C-130H/J**

C-130Hs and C-130Js are medium-size transport aircraft capable of completing a variety of tactical airlift operations across a broad range of missions. The fleet delivers air logistics support for all theater forces, including those involved in combat operations. As with other weapon systems, the Air Force is taking acceptable risk in the C-130 portfolio as it focuses resources toward the future force.

In an effort to "Accelerate Change or Lose" the Air Force is focused on modernizing the force at the cost of legacy capabilities to ensure our nation is ready to fight and win in the future. We have taken a measured amount of acceptable operational risk in force structure to appropriately align available resources, inherently increasing aircraft readiness rates and allowing for utilization of fiscal resources on the remaining aircraft to maintain or further improve readiness. Planned right-sizing of the C-130 fleet aims to meet current operational needs while simultaneously investing in technologies that support and advance our concept of victory.

In the FY22 PB, the Air Force seeks to continue right-sizing the C-130H/J fleet to 255 with a net reduction of 8 C-130 aircraft. The Air Force is committed to maintaining all current Air National Guard C-130 units. If any units do transition out of the C-130, we will ensure transition to a mission that supports the future force and has long term viability. Any transition will be mutually agreed upon by the Air Force, the Air National Guard, and the State.

**CONCLUSION**

The Air Force's FY22 budget submission demonstrates our commitment to balancing near-term risk with readiness. While all platforms once served a purpose, not all will meet the requirements and demands of the 2030 battlespace. We cannot continue the status quo business model; we must make difficult decisions to shed increasingly irrelevant capabilities.

Choosing which technologies we will further develop and take into production is the most difficult decision; as this undoubtedly will create an offset in some current capability and often incurs some unplanned program cost growth. The Air Force must make these tough choices and take calculated risk, seeking to reduce potential inefficiencies where possible, when determining which capabilities have the greatest chance of success against future adversary technologies. China and Russia continue to develop and rapidly field increasingly advanced designs, eating into and eliminating our technological advantages. The Air Force cannot wait to develop advanced systems to fight and win in the ever-changing highly contested environment.

We are committed to making the bold tradeoffs required to answer President Biden's call to "shift our emphasis from unneeded legacy platforms and weapons systems [and] free up resources for investments in the cutting-edge technologies and capabilities that will determine our military and national security advantage in the future," and look forward to working with this committee to mitigate risks as we do so.

On behalf of all Airmen, active, guard, reserve, and civilian, thank you for your leadership and partnership as we build the ready Air Force our Nation needs both today and into the future.