

United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510

February 25, 2015

The Honorable Ash Carter
Secretary of Defense
1000 Defense Pentagon
Washington, DC 20301-1300

Dear Secretary Carter,

We write with deep concern that the Air Force is poised to implement its A-10 backup aircraft inventory (BAI) status plan. This step will damage the readiness of the Air Force's A-10 fleet and reduce our nation's close air support (CAS) capability at a time when the need for effective close air support is more apparent than ever. We request that you not permit the Air Force to implement its plan to place A-10s on BAI status until Congress can fully scrutinize the readiness impacts of the Air Force's proposal and until you can independently examine the Air Force's A-10 divestment proposal, including the Air Force's BAI plan.

During your first week in office, we have been impressed by your eagerness to re-examine current policy, ask tough questions, and challenge entrenched bureaucratic viewpoints. You have already visited Afghanistan and Kuwait to determine if our plans against the Taliban and ISIS need improvement. We ask you to bring that same level of scrutiny to the Air Force's proposal to divest the A-10, including its plans to place A-10s on BAI status. In the coming weeks, Congress will apply that continued scrutiny as well.

The A-10 is the Air Force's most combat-effective and cost-efficient close air support aircraft. Close air support experts believe that the A-10 provides capabilities that no other aircraft can replicate. This is not just another fight over a Department of Defense weapons program; this is about what kind of help we will provide our ground troops when they are pinned down by enemy fire and call for help. Your decisions regarding the A-10 will determine whether Americans and our allies in future battles will be able to accomplish their missions and return safely to their families. We cannot imagine a more serious obligation.

Despite the growing need for the CAS capabilities that the A-10 provides, as evidenced by the deployment of A-10s to fight ISIS and deter additional aggression in Europe, the Air Force continues to attempt to pursue a 'back-door' divestment of the A-10 using a BAI plan. The House and Senate voted in an overwhelming, bipartisan, and bicameral manner to prohibit the divestment of the A-10 in fiscal year (FY) 2015.

Under Section 133 of the FY 2015 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA), the Air Force is only authorized to implement the BAI plan if, after receiving a Director of Cost Assessment and Program Evaluation (CAPE) assessment, the Secretary of Defense certifies that the BAI plan is required to avoid a significant degradation of the readiness of the fight fleet or a significant delay in the fielding of the F-35 aircraft. CAPE has completed their assessment and on February 2, 2015, former Secretary Hagel notified Congress in writing of his intent to authorize the Air Force to implement the BAI plan.

We believe the CAPE report, as well as the former Secretary's certification based on that report, represents a disappointing rubber stamp of the Air Force's misguided fiscal year 2016 A-10 divestment proposal. We call your attention to three facts related to the CAPE assessment that demonstrate the need for a reexamination of the Air Force's A-10 proposals.

First, the CAPE assessment says divestment of active duty A-10s or use of the BAI plan is the most "effective" way to reduce maintenance personnel shortages, including those for the F-35A. It is obvious that divesting large numbers of A-10s—or any other aircraft—or placing them on BAI status would free up a significant number of maintenance personnel for other purposes. We did not need CAPE to establish that fact in a vacuum, while assiduously ignoring the impact on our ground troops of such a decision. The question for CAPE was whether there are other ways to meet maintenance personnel requirements that do not involve gutting the readiness of our nation's best close air support aircraft.

Second, the CAPE assessment identified several ways to attain a significant number of additional maintenance personnel that do not require implementation of the destructive A-10 BAI plan. For example, CAPE specifically suggested that the use of reserve component activations, high year tenure extensions, and retention bonuses could provide an increased number of maintenance personnel. It is noteworthy that the CAPE assessment concludes that the Air Force is only "considering" the use of retention bonuses. It seems unacceptable that the Air Force would gut the readiness of A-10 units before exercising other available options to maximum effect. While these courses of action may not provide as many maintenance personnel as divesting an entire fleet of aircraft or mothballing large numbers of aircraft, these alternative courses of action could provide a significant number of maintenance personnel without gutting the readiness of A-10 units and reducing our nation's close air support capabilities.

Third, CAPE's assessment of the inadequacy of the potential use of contractors to address the shortfall in F-35A maintenance personnel is not persuasive. We note that the Air Force plans to use contractors to address some of the F-35A maintenance personnel shortfall. The willingness of the Air Force to use contractors for 300 full-time equivalent positions begs the question whether the Air Force could make greater use of contractors for initial F-35A maintenance in fiscal years 2015 and 2016 in order to protect the readiness of A-10 units.

We admire your focus on the welfare of our troops and your willingness to question policies that may need renewed scrutiny. We ask you to bring that approach to bear on the Air Force's A-10 divestment proposal, including its plan to place a portion of the A-10 fleet on BAI status. Congress will certainly continue to do so in the coming weeks. Absent your intervention,

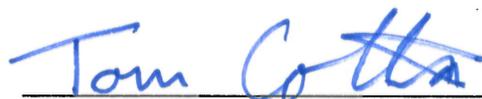
the Air Force will proceed with a plan that will result in the loss of close air support capability at a time when the need for it is only growing.

Thank you for your distinguished service to our country.

Sincerely,



Kelly Ayotte
United States Senate



Tom Cotton
United States Senate



Lindsey Graham
United States Senate



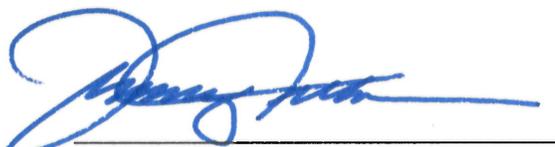
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