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The Honorable J. Randy Forbes
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Congressman Forbes:

Thank you for your letter inquiring about the role of the United States Air Force in the coming decade. As the Department of Defense's forthcoming strategy review will articulate, the next ten years will require a greater focus on challenges to a fundamental mission of the US military—global power projection. We are transitioning out of a post-Cold War world where our military could gain access and operate major systems with relative impunity. We can no longer take global access for granted—we must be able to organize, train, equip, and fight for it.

That strategic shift calls for a modified approach to force composition and modernization, one that emphasizes the increasing importance of power projection without sacrificing the ability, once access is gained, to overcome ever more powerful area denial threats. The Air Force is indispensable to Joint Force effectiveness. By dealing with emerging anti-access and area denial threats, we create freedom of maneuver for follow-on forces. In this changing geo-strategic landscape, the Air Force will become even more indispensable to national security, and must be resourced to sustain high readiness and pursue adaptive modernization during this period of strategic transition and fiscal austerity.

The Air Force brings four enduring and distinctive contributions to the Nation's military portfolio, each of which are critical in the new strategy: (1) air and space control; (2) wide-area intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR); (3) rapid global mobility; and (4) global strike. These four core contributions—plus our unrivaled ability to command and control air, space, and cyber systems—will sustain our Nation's military advantage as the Joint Force shrinks and anti-access/area denial (A2/AD) threats become more lethal.

Control of air and space has been an essential precondition to successful land and maritime operations for decades. The Air Force provides adaptive, comprehensive control, not just tactical, single-mission control. Freedom of action in air and space means U.S. and Coalition forces can accomplish a variety of missions in different locations without the threat of adversary attack from above and that they can fully leverage ever more essential space services. Additionally, the Air Force cyberspace mission is critically important to ensure the cross-domain effects required in future operations. Whether friendly naval forces are helping to secure vital lines of communication and transit; Marines are conducting amphibious operations; special

operations forces are executing counterterrorism missions; or ground forces are engaged in combined-arms maneuver; all fundamentally depend on the Air Force to provide mission-essential control of air and space. In the coming decade, both domains will be increasingly at risk as sophisticated military technology proliferates, demanding that we forge ahead and maintain the airpower advantage our entire Joint force has come to expect.

In the same way, Air Force ISR affords U.S. leaders an unparalleled decision advantage, from supporting national strategic decision-making to supporting success in life-and-death tactical situations. Your Air Force safely and reliably operates a mix of aircraft and satellites with powerful sensors that provide unparalleled data-collection capability on which commanders rely. Moreover, Airmen provide expert processing and exploitation of staggering volumes of raw data and timely dissemination of usable intelligence. Clearly, in the past ten years, Air Force ISR contributions have been ascendant, particularly from our space-enabled remotely-piloted systems. But the future strategic environment will require extending today's ISR capability into contested battlespaces, requiring significant and sustained attention to modernization of our ISR capabilities.

Rapid global mobility—both the capability to get friendly forces to the fight and to extend the range of airborne strike platforms—is a unique Air Force capability that enhances not only Joint effectiveness but also embodies the Nation's global reach and power. Air Force airlift, whether transporting humanitarian-relief supplies or wartime materiel, is unrivaled in its ability to move massive amounts of cargo to distant locations around the world. Air Force C-17s, for example, enabled the Marine occupation of the RHINO airfield in Afghanistan in 2001 by bringing their people and equipment into a rough, isolated airfield in only a couple of nights. The criticality of in-flight aerial refueling was demonstrated by Air Force tankers supporting the U.N.-mandated operations in Libya. In-flight aerial refueling is the linchpin to power projection at intercontinental distances, and provides for persistent pressure and overwatch once we arrive. Although easily taken for granted, rapid global mobility means that Joint and Coalition assets get to the fight and remain in the fight as an omnipresent threat to adversaries and ubiquitous asset to allies.

And finally, the Air Force's ability to conduct global strike—to hold nearly any target on the globe at risk—will be increasingly important in the coming decade. Our conventional precision strike forces compose a significant portion of the Nation's strategic deterrence, providing national leaders with a range of crisis response and escalation control options. Our nuclear strike forces provide two-thirds of the Nation's Nuclear Triad, quietly and competently underwriting a vital aspect of our national security. However, increasingly sophisticated air defenses and long-range systems require a focused modernization effort exemplified by the long-range Family of Systems, a key element being the Long-Range Strike Bomber (LRS-B) that will provide deterrence well into the future.

Collectively, these Air Force contributions, including an unrivaled ability to command and control the air, space, and cyber systems, provide the Nation with *Global Vigilance, Reach, and Power*.

America was the world's first air and space nation, and remains the only one with true global reach. Our Nation would have to fundamentally recast its global posture and military approach if budgetary pressures lead to drastic cuts to the Air Force. Today, the Air Force's real total obligation authority has fallen to less than 20 percent of the Department of Defense top-

line—the lowest of any military service since World War II. Yet, while resources have dwindled, Airmen have sustained combat operations for two decades, dating back to Operation DESERT STORM. The twenty-year airpower presence over Iraq is consistent with historical experience, which has shown that as land forces withdraw, the relative requirement for airpower typically remains. Thus, we are confronted with the prospect of a challenging world where Air Force operations tempo remains high, yet the adaptation to strategic challenges that require modernization and readiness is at risk.

Inevitably, the next decade will call on America to use airpower. But further reductions beyond \$450-plus billion over the next 10 years would threaten not just Air Force-unique contributions, but the effectiveness of the entire Joint force. Additional cuts would force us to further reduce Air Force end strength, stifle modernization, and accept even greater aging of the Air Force's fleet of fighters, strategic bombers, airlifters, and tankers. Perhaps more compelling in the short term, it would adversely affect training and readiness, which have suffered a steady decline since 2003.

Further cuts would also diminish strategic agility, the ability to address a wide range of known threats and inevitable surprises regardless of timing. Deeper budget cuts will curtail the Air Force's ability to conduct multiple operations in rapid succession, or simultaneously—for example, our concurrent response to crises in Japan and Libya while sustaining operations in Afghanistan and Iraq. The Nation has come to rely on this magnitude of strategic responsiveness and flexibility. But effective response to future scenarios like Operations TOMODACHI (Japan) and UNIFIED PROTECTOR (Libya), requiring concurrent action spanning across both the globe and the operational spectrum—will be far less likely.

Thank you for the opportunity to discuss the irreplaceable role of the Air Force in national defense. In this time of fiscal austerity and strategic transition, we must consider military capabilities relative to the emerging strategic environment. By doing so, we can avoid perceptions that we are a Nation in decline, that we can no longer continue in our critical role as a stabilizing influence on the global stage. Your Air Force's core contributions are not always visible—nor should they be—but the absence or inadequacy of those contributions would soon become blindingly apparent. Ultimately, even with the challenges ahead, we are confident that a strong Air Force underpins America's and the Joint Team's ability to project global power, defend our interests, and shape strategic outcomes in an increasingly contested, complex, globalized world.

Sincerely,


NORTON A. SCHWARTZ
General, USAF
Chief of Staff