



# PROJECT ON GOVERNMENT OVERSIGHT

Exposing Corruption. Exploring Solutions.

November 12, 2014

The Honorable Carl M. Levin  
Chairman  
Senate Committee on Armed Services  
Russell Senate Office Building, Room 228  
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable James M. Inhofe  
Ranking Member  
Senate Committee on Armed Services  
Russell Senate Office Building, Room 228  
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Howard “Buck” McKeon  
Chairman  
House Committee on Armed Services  
2120 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Adam Smith  
Ranking Member  
House Committee on Armed Services  
2120 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairmen and Ranking Members:

As the House and Senate make their way to enactment of the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2015, we want to express our concern about equipping American military forces, now and in the future, to win decisively on the battlefield, to save America lives and to do so at a cost future defense budgets can readily bear.

We are deeply concerned that, for reasons that defy combat needs and budgetary logic, the Air Force wants to start retiring the A-10 “Warthog” immediately, even as US forces continue to fight prolonged conflicts against enemies on the ground in Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria.

Senator Kelly Ayotte, who brought this matter to national attention and who has made herself a model for committed, informed oversight and effective bipartisanship on this issue, said it better than we can in her additional views on page 441 of the Senate Armed Services Committee’s Report on S. 2410 (Senate Report 113-176):

Echoing the virtually unanimous praise offered by soldiers and special operators with combat experience in Iraq and Afghanistan, General Ray Odierno, the Army Chief of Staff, testified before the Senate Armed Services Committee on April 3 and April 8, 2014, that the A-10 is “the best close air support aircraft” and that “obviously, we prefer the A-10.”

While the F-15, F-16, and B-1 aircraft are excellent airframes with important capabilities and missions, none of them can fully replace the A-10’s CAS capabilities—especially in situations involving moving targets, bad weather, and the close proximity of friendly and enemy forces.

In a world that is less stable and predictable, any proposal to eliminate the A-10 before an adequate replacement achieves full operational capability is dangerously short-sighted. We have a responsibility to ensure our ground troops in the next conflict receive the best possible CAS. When we fail to fulfill that responsibility, the cost can be measured in the lives of our troops.

Reinforcing these words, a wide spectrum of recent combat veterans, including ground unit leaders, pilots and Joint Terminal Attacks Controllers (“JTACs”), have visited congressional offices and have explained

directly to the public the combat-proven features of this unique aircraft. In addition to its demonstrated superiority in the close support role, it has also been highly effective in combat search and rescue, reconnaissance, forward air control, battlefield interdiction and air defense suppression. It is less expensive to operate than any other US Air Force combat aircraft (in some cases by a factor of two or three), and it has survived over multiple modern battlefields in Iraq (twice) and Kosovo, where some more expensive, complex and fragile aircraft proved more vulnerable.

In the face of decisive votes in the House and Senate Armed Services Committees and on the floor of the House of Representatives in favor of retaining the current A-10 force and despite action in the Senate Appropriations Committee that was adopted against no public opposition, some in the Air Force are proposing to circumvent the clear intent of your legislation by inactivating a significant part of the A-10 inventory and commensurately reducing manning and maintenance—even as current conflicts continue into the indefinite future.

We urge you to reject this interference with your legislation’s overwhelmingly clear intent by adopting the Senate bill language (Section 134 of S. 2410) that specifically prohibits efforts “to make significant changes to [A-10] manning levels” or “to retire, prepare to retire, or place in storage any A-10 aircraft, except such aircraft the Secretary of the Air Force, as of April 9, 2013, planned to retire.”

We also urge you to incorporate in your conference report thoughtful language that the House Committee adopted, in its 41-20 vote, to require the Comptroller General to report to you evaluating current platforms for the close air support mission, including operating cost, capabilities and “whether such airframes other than A-10 aircraft are able to successfully carry out such close air support missions.” We know we can all agree that in ultimately replacing the extraordinary A-10, there should be no step backwards regarding effectiveness for our troops in close combat.

Finally, on the question of financing the A-10 in the active and reserve forces in 2015, the Senate provision sets a floor of \$339.3 million, while the House would fund at a higher level ongoing modernization and other initiatives to keep the A-10 even more viable and compatible with our other forces in full readiness for ongoing conflicts. We appreciate the controversy of the House’s use of the Overseas Contingency Operations account to more fully fund the A-10 in 2015; therefore, we encourage you to explore further offsets in the base budget, which we would be happy to discuss with your staff, to make sure the A-10 is adequately supported in 2015.

We look forward to working with you now and in the future as the close air support and A-10 issues continue to be central to providing the most effective force possible for our troops in combat within spending levels the taxpayer can afford.

Sincerely,

Danielle Brian  
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Executive Director, Center for a Secure and Free  
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CC: Members of the House and Senate Armed Services Committees