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

March 12, 2015

Dear Mr. Secretary,

I write this letter to express my objection to placing 18 A-10 Warthogs into Backup Aircraft Inventory (BAI) status. I'm deeply concerned that actions to move 18 planes into BAI status will harm military readiness and put American troops in danger during a critical time for our national security. I'm also concerned this is a backdoor route to divestment. While I understand the realities of budget constraints, this Administration is placing today's military men and women at greater risk by further cutting the A-10 fleet. My first national security concern is the safe return of any service member who volunteers to fight for our Nation. I urge you to immediately cease any transfers of A-10s to BAI status, which is clearly the first step to putting these aircraft in the boneyard.

I am a former A-10 pilot and 354th Fighter Squadron Commander with 325 combat hours in the A-10 in Iraq and Afghanistan. I know first-hand the unique capabilities the A-10 brings to the Close Air Support and Combat Search and Rescue (CSAR) missions. As an A-10 squadron commander, I was responsible to deploy 24 aircraft anywhere in the world on 24 hours notice. To meet that requirement, I had 24 primary aircraft assigned (PAA) and three BAI aircraft to ensure we always had 24 aircraft to deploy while accounting for heavy maintenance and normal rates of aircraft malfunctions. This is the intent of BAI, and those three aircraft came with no resources or manpower.

I was not in Congress until January 6th, 2015 and would not have supported the 2014 "compromise" provision in the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) for Fiscal Year 2015 (Public Law 113-291) that provided any opportunity to put any A-10s into BAI status. This Administration already mothballed three A-10 squadrons in the last few years, and this would essentially be the first nearly irreversible step to mothball the equivalent of two squadrons' worth of aircraft. This initial decision to put 18 A-10s in BAI status is the equivalent of losing the capabilities of one A-10 squadron. Once you give orders to the personnel and families to retrain in another aircraft and move them to another base, you cannot easily reverse this decision without significant additional cost and disruption to their lives.

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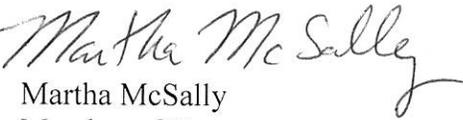
This Administration closed down the only remaining A-10 squadron in Europe in recent years, and now A-10s from Davis-Monthan are deployed to Europe to show resolve and train our Allies in the face of increased Russian aggression. A-10s are also deployed to the Middle East to conduct strikes against ISIS and provide critical CSAR Rescue Mission Commander (RMC) capabilities. After the barbaric murder of the Jordanian F-16 pilot, we must ensure we have a robust CSAR posture for our pilots flying missions over Iraq and Syria. The A-10 is the only platform and community that is trained and suited for the critical RMC role to locate, communicate with, protect, and coordinate all assets for the rescue of a downed airman. We must use our best resources and capabilities to ensure we do not have an American pilot captured and subject to the same horrific fate as the Jordanian pilot, and the A-10 is a critical part of that mission.

The National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2015 (Public Law 113-291) explicitly forbids the Air Force from moving any A-10s to BAI status without an independent assessment. By keeping the information in this assessment hidden from the public, you have not honored the intent of Congress. The classification of the explanation for cutting the most effective Close Air Support platform flies against the open nature of our government. The public has a right to review the analytic methods used, the alternatives assessed, and any competing recommendations. Otherwise, it is reasonable to conclude the 'rubber stamp' nature of the classified report is simply a backdoor attempt at divestment.

I represent Arizona's 2nd district where Davis-Monthan (DM) Air Force Base houses the U.S. Air Force's 355th Fighter Wing which has two training A-10 squadrons and one operational squadron (the one I commanded), which is currently deployed to Europe. Of the 18 A-10s you desire to move to BAI status, 9 of them will come from DM. That is 50% of the global cuts and over 10% of the DM fleet. We know from negotiations last year that you desired to close the 354th Fighter Squadron this fiscal year, and this disproportionate distribution of cuts at DM is alarming. I strongly urge you to reconsider this decision.

Moving A-10s to BAI status will affect national security, risk the lives of our troops, and disrupt military families. The public deserves to see how the decision was justified. Do not continue to take actions against the intent of Congress, declassify the independent assessment, and recommit the Pentagon to protecting every member of our all-volunteer force by reversing the A-10 BAI status decision.

Sincerely,


Martha McSally
Member of Congress