

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-0302

January 29, 2015

The Honorable Barack Obama
President of the United States of America
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20500

The Honorable Chuck Hagel
Secretary of Defense
Department of Defense
1000 Defense Pentagon
Washington, DC 20301

Dear President Obama and Secretary Hagel,

On January 9, 2015, the Department of Defense (DoD) reiterated its commitment to retiring the A-10 Thunderbolt II, also known as the "Warthog." On that date, Defense Department spokesman, Admiral John Kirby, expressed in a Pentagon news conference that despite the A-10 involvement in current combat missions against the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), the DoD was not changing its position on retiring the A-10. I am deeply concerned with the fact that the DoD is again trying to mothball such a one of a kind asset that saves American lives deployed in harm's way.

I am a retired Air Force Colonel and A-10 pilot with 325 combat hours in the A-10 in Iraq and Afghanistan. I had the privilege of commanding an A-10 operational squadron from 2004-2006, including a combat deployment to Afghanistan in 2005-2006. From my experience as an A-10 pilot and Squadron Commander, I know first-hand the unique capabilities of the A-10 in Close Air Support (CAS), Forward Air Control-Airborne (FAC-A), and Combat Search and Rescue (CSAR) missions. The Warthog is anything but a "single mission aircraft" and there is simply no other asset that can match its lethality, loiter time, and survivability. The decision to retire it is reckless and will put American lives at risk.

The A-10 was originally scheduled to remain in the Air Force inventory until at least 2028. The taxpayer recently invested over \$1B to upgrade the A-10 to the A-10C model and rebuild the wings to increase the lifespan, capabilities and survivability. Despite these investments, the comments made by Admiral Kirby show that the DoD still desires to send the A-10 to the boneyard as soon as possible. The proponents of taking such actions blame budget constraints brought on by sequestration. However, with the lowest per-flight-hour cost, the A-10 remains our most survivable, affordable, and cost effective air to ground aircraft.

When American troops find themselves in perilous positions on the battlefield, there is no better sound overhead than the A-10 bringing its 30 mm gun to bear on the enemy, often in very close proximity to friendly forces or civilians. I have seen the Department's misleading statistics that state the A-10 only performed a small percentage of CAS missions in Afghanistan. I hope you know that there is a big difference between a CAS mission where a ground controller is stationary and able to provide 8 digit coordinates of a fixed target to a fast mover or bomber, and some of the more complex CAS missions

scenarios where enemy and friendly forces are on the move and in very close proximity, increasing the risk of fratricide. These other assets are simply less capable than the Warthog in these dangerous scenarios, and we owe it to the men and women in uniform to provide the best air support overhead. The A-10 also provides the best FAC-A and CSAR Rescue Mission Commander capabilities to maximize firepower and rescue downed airmen or isolated personnel in hostile territory. There is simply no other asset in the inventory or under development that can match these crucial capabilities.

The battlefield success of the A-10 has been demonstrated frequently during Operation Inherent Resolve. Air Force Secretary Deborah Lee James recently noted that the A-10 has performed 11 percent of Air Force sorties against ISIS. This statistic contains an important caveat. Other Air Force assets have been engaged in operations against ISIS since August, but the Air Force did not start deploying the A-10 until November. That the A-10 was used in 11 percent of all operations in just three months signals the Air Force is frequently using the aircraft against the group. In fact, recent reports stated that an A-10 mission carried out air strikes that killed and wounded dozens of ISIS components near Mosul. Iraqi News went so far as to note that "the aircraft sparked panic in the ranks of ISIS."

Last year the House and Senate both overwhelmingly rejected the DoD's proposal to mothball the A-10. That position has not changed in the 114th Congress. I strongly urge you to reconsider any language that may be included in the Fiscal Year 2016 budget that would cut funding to the A-10. To do so would significantly reduce the Air Force's unique capability to provide unrivaled firepower and protection for American troops on the ground.

Sincerely,



Martha McSally
Member of Congress