

MITCHELL INSTITUTE
for Aerospace Studies



Decades of Air Force Underfunding Threaten America's Ability to Win

**Lt Gen David Deptula, USAF (Ret.)
Dean of the Mitchell Institute for Aerospace Studies**

**Col Mark Gunzinger, USAF (Ret.)
Director Future Concepts and
Capability Assessments**



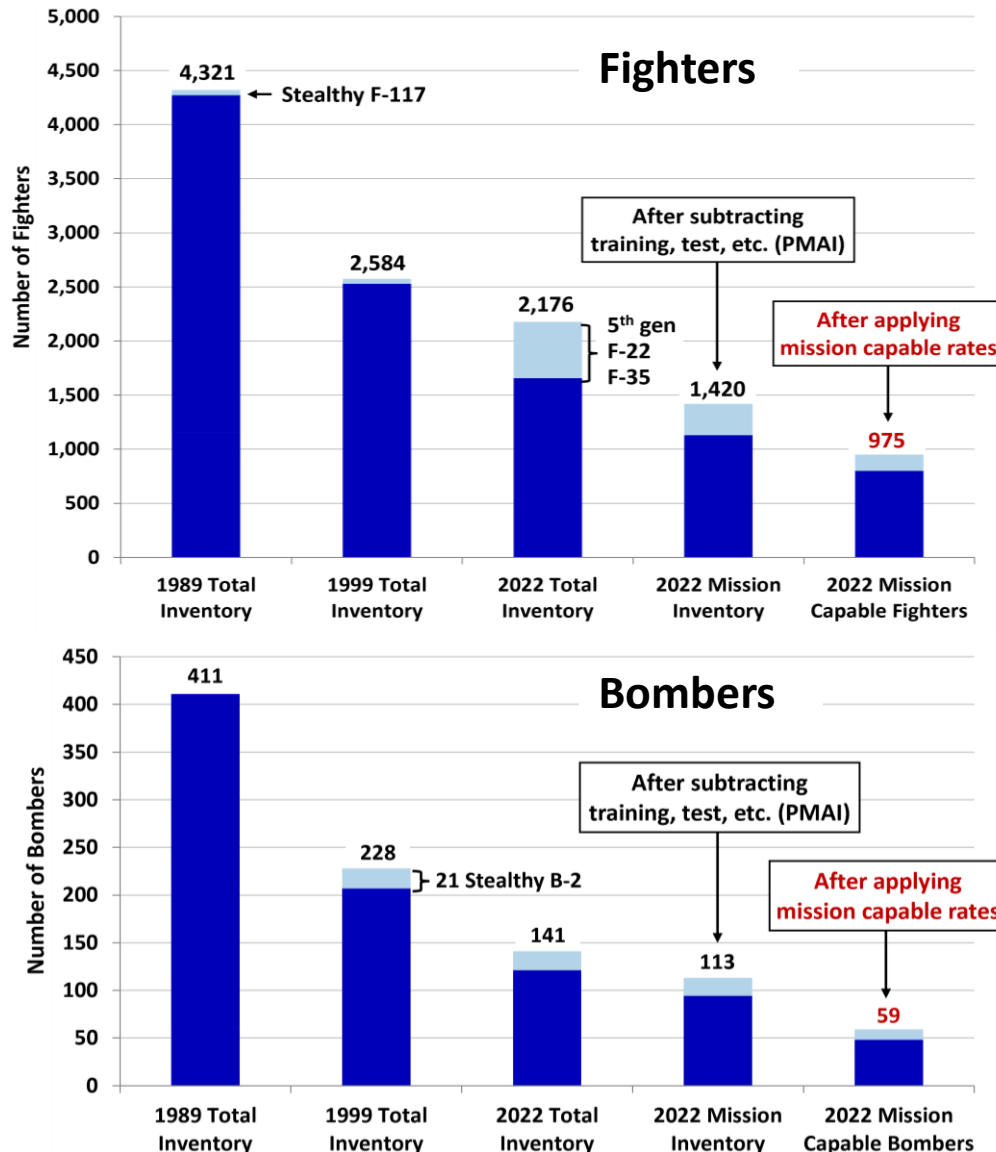
Why This Report?

Provide a data-based reference to communicate the magnitude of Air Force underfunding and force structure cuts it has absorbed for decades and their implications

- **The Air Force has the oldest, smallest, and least ready force in its history due to 30 years of chronic underfunding**
 - Air Force's budget less than Army and Navy's for 30 years in a row
 - Army averaged over \$66B/year more than AF for 20 years after 9/11
- **Correcting that underlying cause requires increased awareness of these facts by Congress, OSD, and the public**
- **Lack of a force sizing methodology inhibits understanding of the risks created by chronic Air Force underfunding and continued delays in modernization**



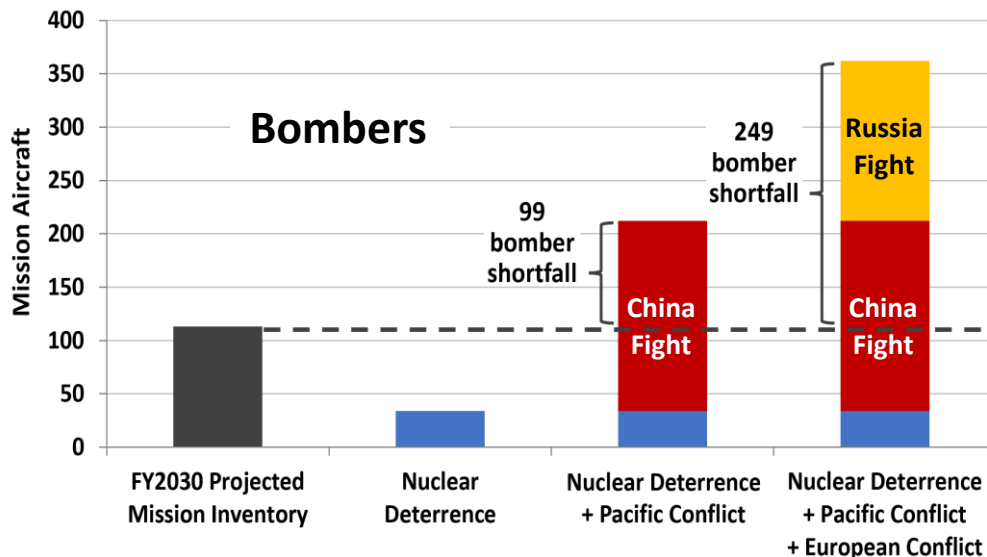
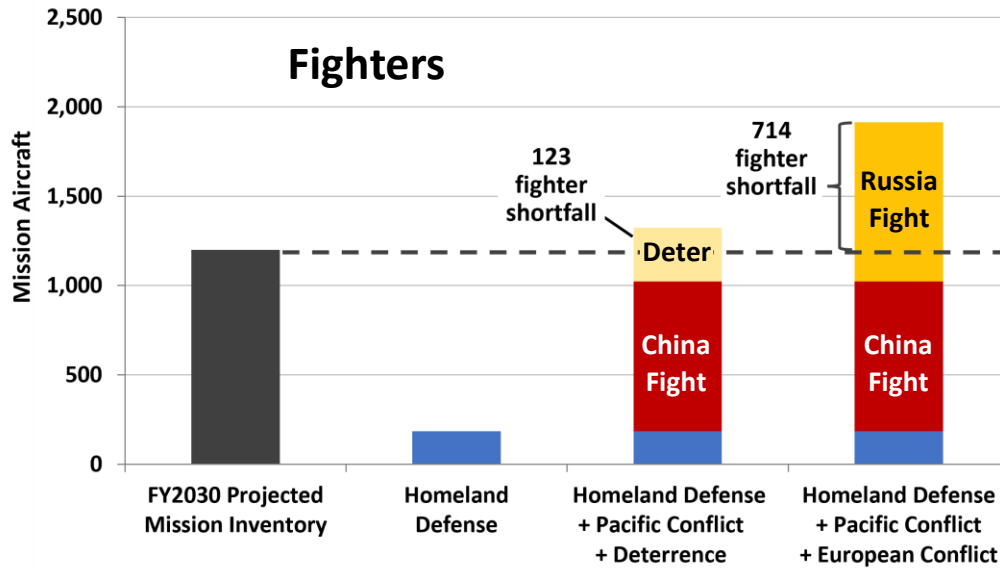
Air Force Fighter & Bomber Inventory Trends Since The Cold War Have Been In One Direction—**Down**



- Lost half its fighters and two-thirds of its bombers since 1990
- Inventories have reached an unprecedented high average age
- 80% of fighters are past their original design lives
- About 20% of the Air Force's fighter and bomber mission aircraft are stealthy
- Attrition reserves are not sized for a peer conflict



Air Force Fighter & Bomber Capacity Falls Short of National Defense Strategy Requirements



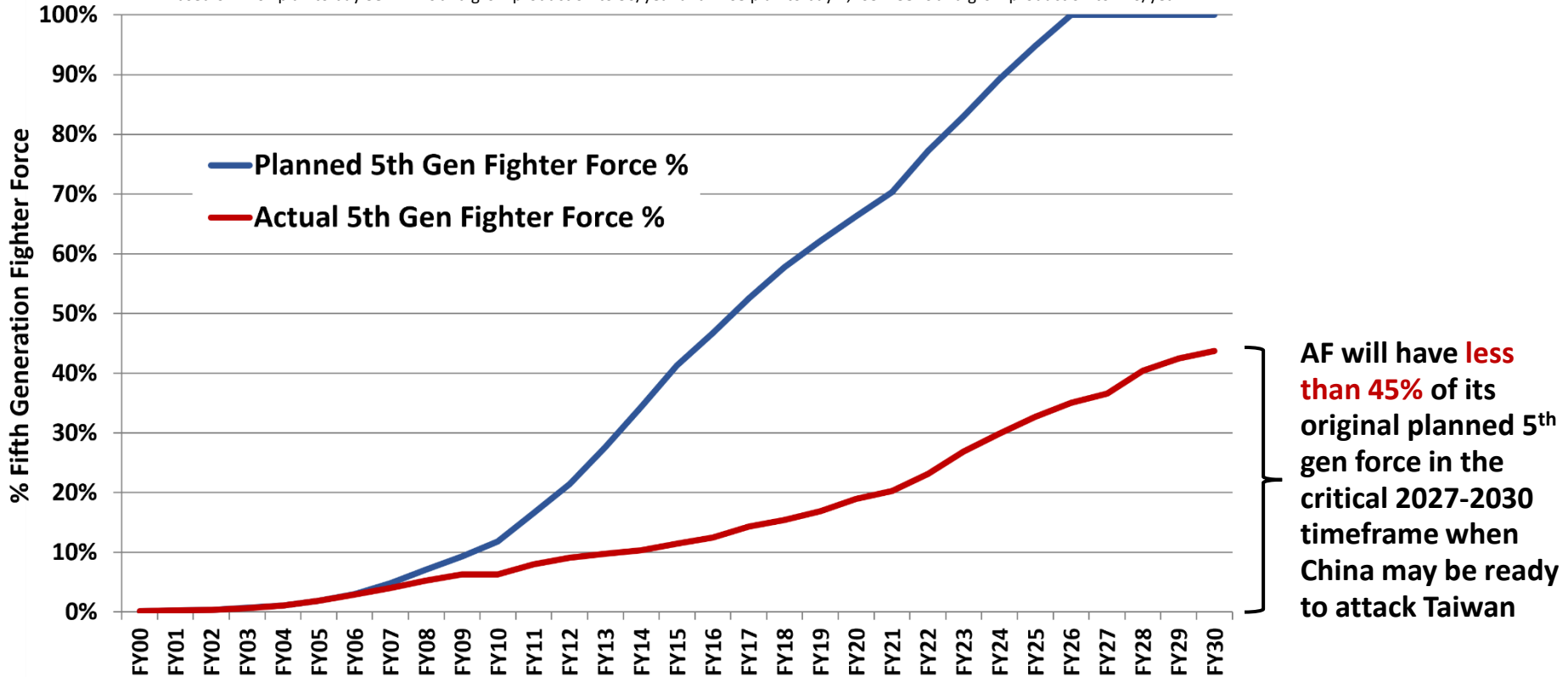
- The Air Force runs out of forces well before it meets National Defense Strategy requirements
- Shortfalls in Air Force mission capacity increase risk for all U.S. joint force operations
- No other service can bring enough combat air capabilities & capacity to fill existing gaps

Notes: Data on charts from studies directed by the 2018 NDAA to assess the USAF's aircraft requirements; fighter and bomber requirements adjusted for their mission capable rates



Development of an Air Force 5th Gen Combat Force Lags Real-World Operational Needs

Based on FY04 plan to buy 381 F-22s and grow production to 36/year and FY05 plan to buy 1,763 F-35As and grow production to 110/year



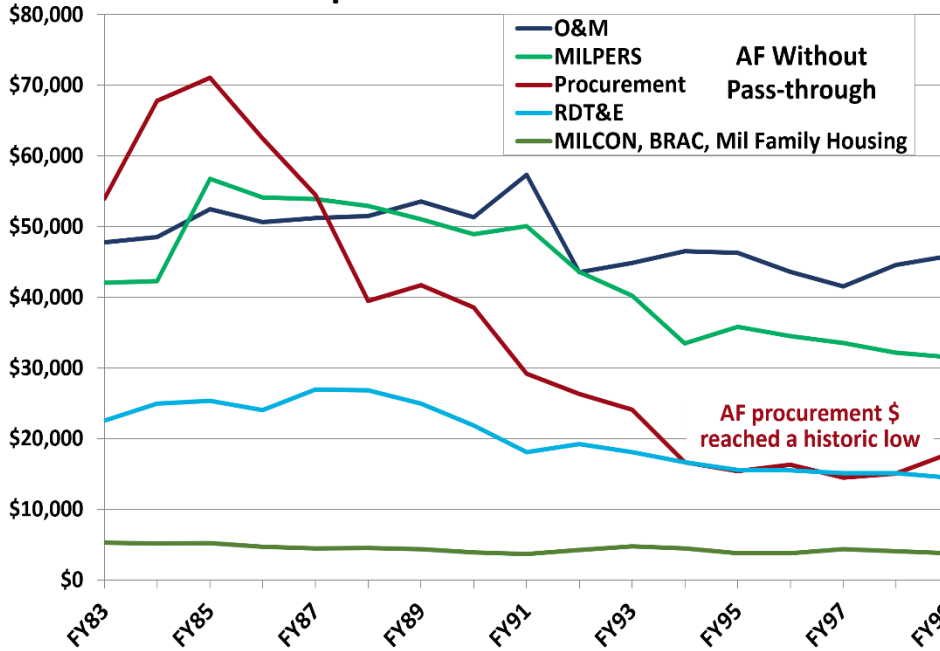
- **Only Air Force fighters and bombers have the range & lethality to go on the offensive within hours to blunt, then deny a Chinese invasion**
 - No other force can get there in time and project the offensive mass over long ranges needed to defeat a Chinese *fait accompli*



Why? These Trends Primarily Driven By Insufficient AF Budgets, Not Strategy Or Declining Operational Demand

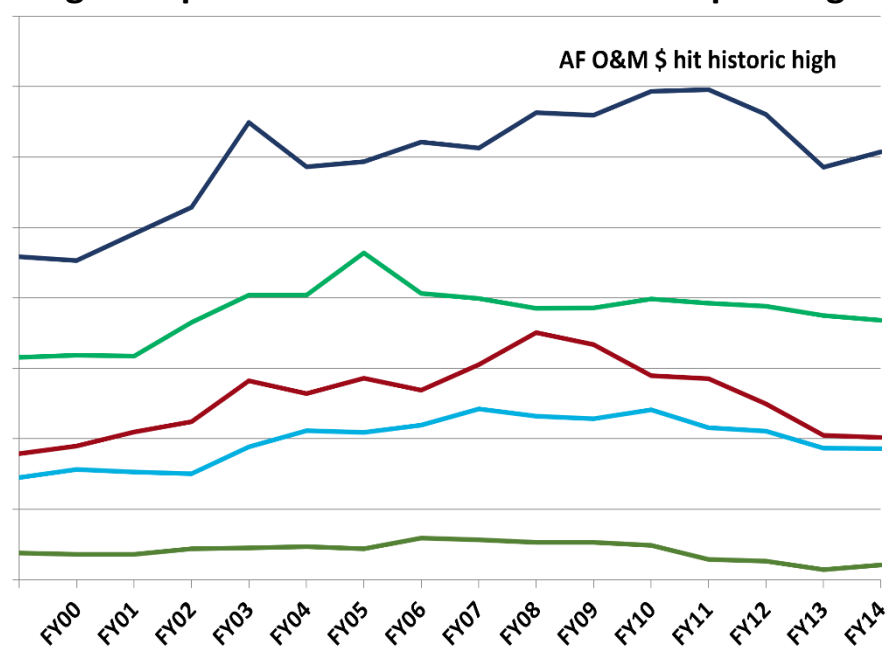
Era of peace dividend

AF procurement hit historic low



Era of hollow growth

High tempos drove AF to increase O&M spending



- Budget cuts forced the AF to retire forces to sustain readiness of its remaining forces – new capabilities and more capacity are now needed
- New AF weapon systems delayed or ended short of planned buys (B-2, F-22, new bomber...) – forces designed in the 1970-80s are aging out
- Upgraded/stretched the lives of existing aircraft instead of replacing with next-gen systems – further upgrading old aircraft has reached a limit



Reporting Pass-through Funding As Part Of The Air Force's Budget Creates A Misleading Picture

FY 2023 National Defense Budget Request

(Dollars in Billions)

By Department/Agency	FY 2021 Enacted	FY 2022 Enacted	FY 2023 Request
Army	173.6	173.4	177.3
Navy	206.9	220.3	230.9
Air Force	204.5	220.6	234.1
Defense-Wide	118.7	128.0	130.7
Department of Defense – Subtotal	703.7	742.3	773.0
Supplemental Funding*	1.0	14.3	--
Department of Defense – Total	704.7	756.6	773.0
Atomic Energy Defense Activities	27.5	29.1	29.7
Defense-related Activities	9.5	10.4	10.6
National Defense – Total	741.7	796.1	813.3

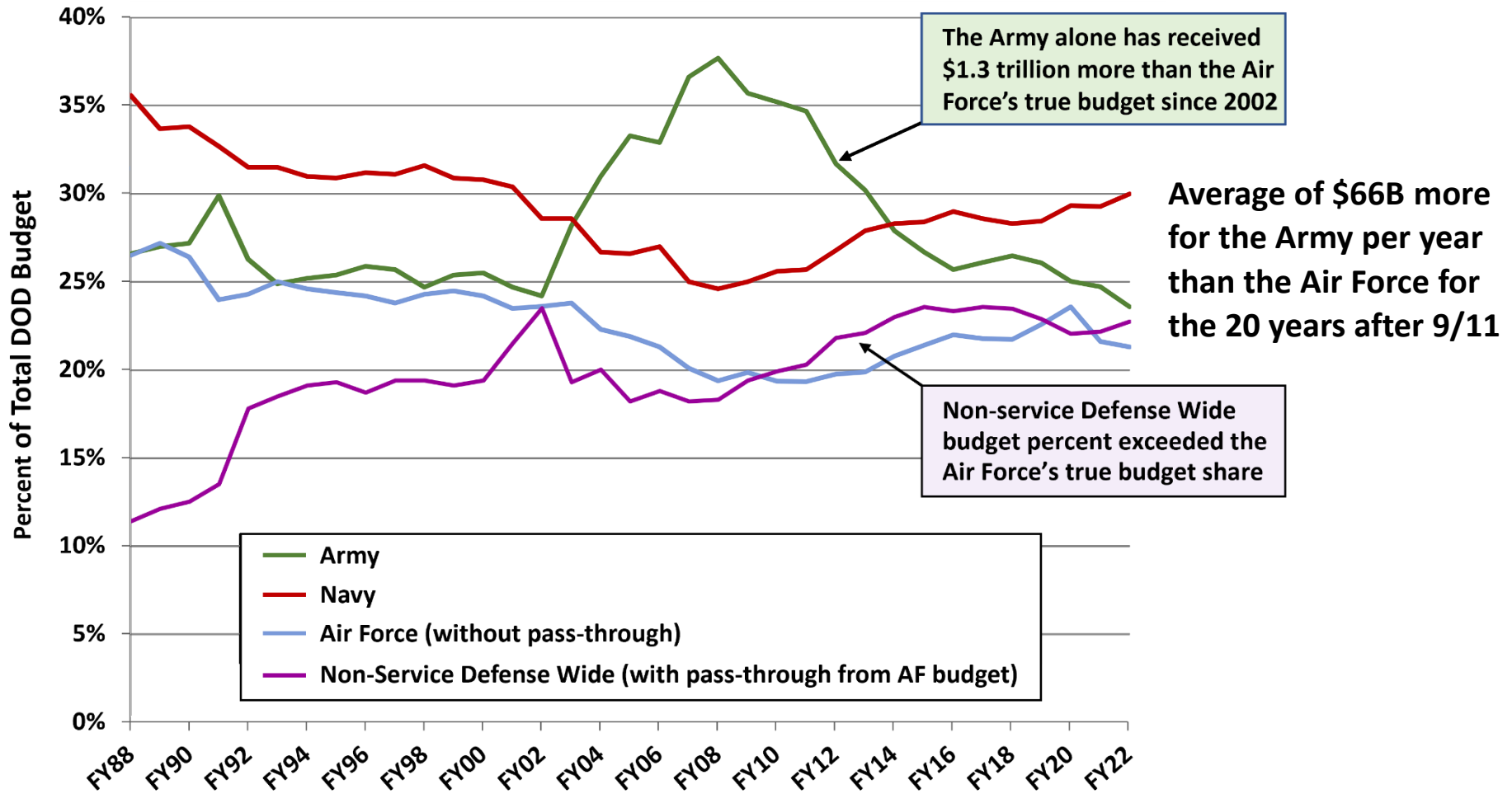
\$169.5B for the Air Force
\$24.5B for the Space Force
\$40.1B pass-through

Table from DOD's official "Defense Budget Overview" briefing, March 2022

\$988 billion total Air Force pass-through from FY 1991-21



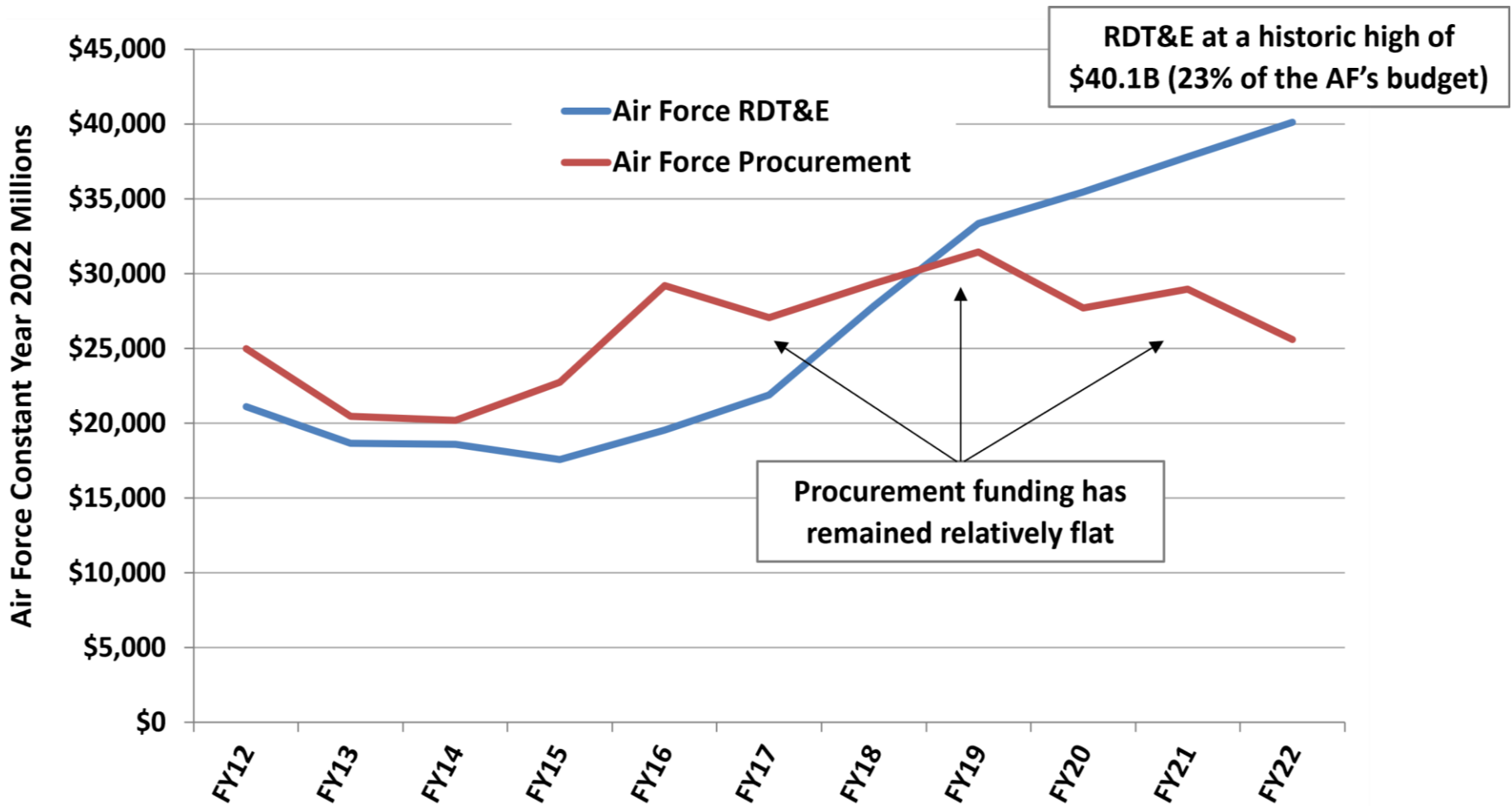
Air Force Has Long Been Underfunded: Budget Less Than Army and Navy's for 30 Years in a Row



OSD should change service budget allocation to fund the right capabilities and capacity to deter/win against China



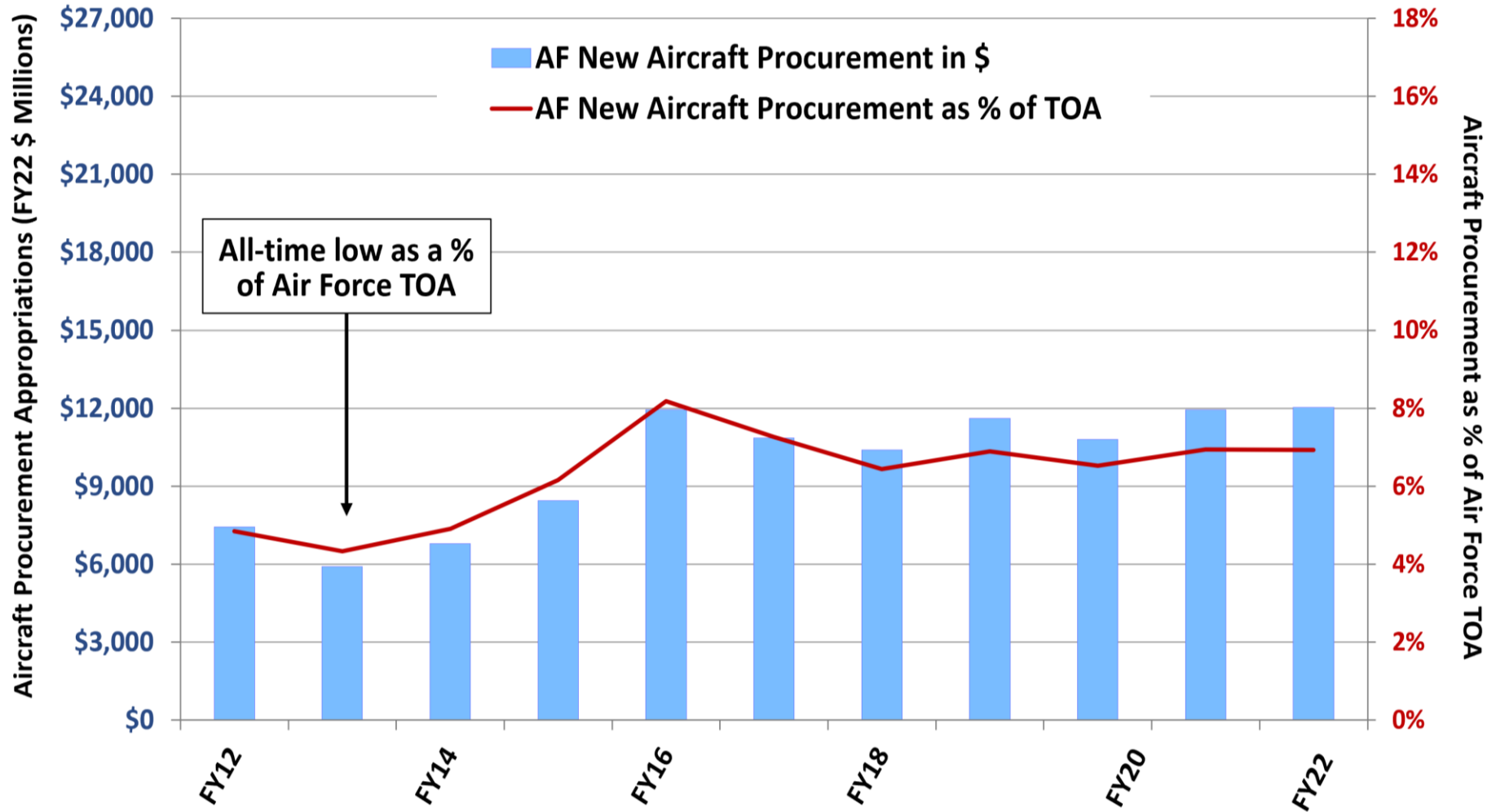
Underfunding and the “Valley of Death” – Enough Budget to **Develop** New Technologies **But Not Buy** Them



Must accelerate buying new now, starting with next-generation systems in production – survivable munitions, 5th gen stealth, etc.



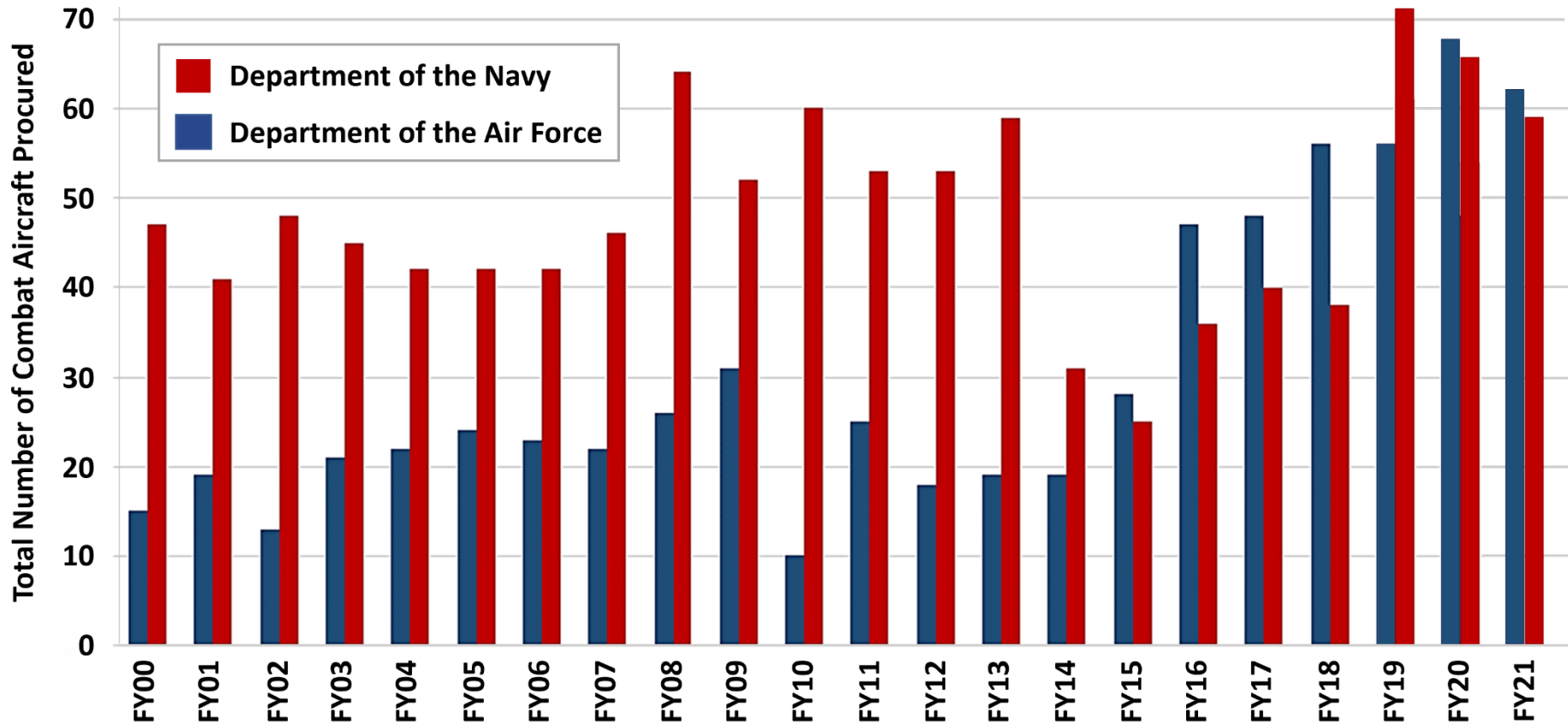
Air Force New Aircraft Procurement Flat



This will not build a force that can win against China



The Navy Has A Track Record Of Acquiring More New Combat Aircraft Per Year Than The Air Force



Budget is the driver: The Navy's topline has consistently exceeded the Air Force's



Recommendations

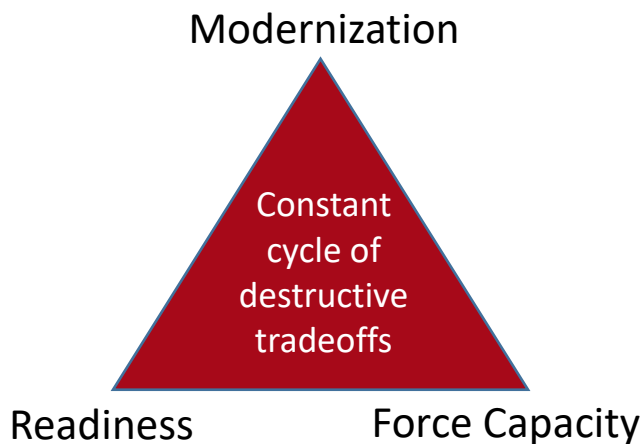
1. **Shift pass-through funding to other non-service DOD organizations.** Clearly identify resources that actually go to the Air Force by shifting pass-through funding to DOD's budget category for defense agencies and other non-service organizations
2. **Allocate funding to forces that are most needed for a China fight.** The Air Force followed by the Navy should receive the largest service budget shares given the increased need for modernized air, space, and maritime capabilities and force capacity to defeat Chinese aggression – the pacing threat
3. **Real Air Force budget growth.** Grow the Air Force's budget by 3-5 percent plus inflation for a decade or more – real budget growth plus a more equitable distribution of funding is the only viable path to a modernized Air Force that also has the force capacity to win
4. **Reduce risk in the critical period of 2027-2030.** Increase the Air Force's acquisition of next-generation capabilities that are currently or will soon be in production
5. **Need an Air Force sizing construct.** A force sizing construct will help explain and obtain resources the Air Force requires – it provides a critical tie between strategy and force structure needed to execute it



Break The Destructive Cycle of Tradeoffs That Has Hollowed Out The Air Force

- Reverse Air Force underfunding to build the force we need, the force that can deter and win against China

Stop this cycle of destructive tradeoffs...



...by getting the AF resources it requires

1. 3-5% real budget growth over inflation for a decade or more
2. Fund capabilities and force capacity most needed for a China fight – Air Force, followed by Navy
3. Maximize production of advanced capabilities in production or soon in production

- **No other service or Allied military can provide the capabilities and capacity to go on the offensive on day-one to blunt and then defeat Chinese aggression**



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