

ACC Gen. Mike Hostage Says Recapitalization Is Best of Bad Options

Older aircraft fleets will have to be sacrificed

BY **ERIC TEGLER** - OCTOBER 28, 2013





Staff Sgt. Joshua Bard straps Air Combat Command Commander Gen. Mike Hostage into an F-22 Raptor for his qualification flight at Tyndall Air Force Base, Fla., June 27, 2012. Hostage says recapitalization of the Air Force is the best of the bad options left to the service due to the current budget climate. U.S. Air Force photo by Christopher Cokeing

Advertisement

The screenshot shows the top portion of the Defense Media Network website. At the top, there are social media sharing icons for Facebook (5), Twitter (0), and a red circular icon with a white 'S'. Below this is an orange navigation bar containing a hamburger menu icon, the 'DefenseMediaNetwork' logo, a search icon, Facebook and Twitter social media icons, and a shopping cart icon labeled 'DMN SHOP'. Underneath the navigation bar is a grey sidebar menu with the following text: 'SECTIONS: Military & Security News', 'TOPICS: Aerospace', and 'LABELS: Aircraft, Attack Aircraft, Bomber Aircraft, Fighter Aircraft, Issues, JSF, Programs & Technology, U.S. Air Force'. To the right of the sidebar is a large image of a soldier in a combat uniform holding a rifle, with the text 'Cyber Mission Assurance Systems' overlaid at the top. A white box at the bottom of the image contains the text: 'Click here to learn more about General Dynamics' Cyber Mission Assurance Systems.'

In the wake of sequestration in late March, Hostage made the difficult decision to ground 17 squadrons in order to preserve combat readiness in the remaining force. He explains that he could have kept the entire squadron complement flying, but at ludicrously low rates that would have left pilots marginally safe-for-flight, let alone combat ready.

“It’s a moral imperative that we only send units to war if they’re fully trained and fully equipped. I believe it’s morally corrupt to send somebody who is not fully qualified or capable into combat.”

To illustrate, Hostage cited a quip made by USAF Chief of Staff Gen. Mark Welsh last July: “Upgrading the existing fleet may save money, but it won’t make it competitive. A fourth-generation aircraft meeting a fifth-generation aircraft in combat will be more cost-efficient, but it will be dead before it ever knows it’s in a fight.”

ACC got those squadrons flying again in July, but only by receiving permission from the Pentagon to use funds (\$211 million) it had earmarked for procurement and investment to fund readiness. It did not receive money; it merely shifted what was on hand. The effects on readiness were still apparent in September.



Two Lockheed Martin F-35 Lightning II aircraft land at Nellis Air Force Base, Nev. March 6, 2013. The Lockheed Martin F-35 Lightning II is a single-seat, single-engine, fifth generation, multirole fighter that's able to perform ground attack, reconnaissance, and air defense missions with stealth capability. U.S. Air Force photo by Airman 1st Class Jason Couillard

During the grounding, aircraft received no maintenance due to lack of money for spares. They sat, and like idled cars, they had problems when fired up again. Flying to regain proficiency started with experienced pilots, who constitute about 40 percent of the average squadron's aircrew. Only when they were again safe to fly could experienced pilots begin taking junior pilots aloft and getting them safe-for-flight. Then both groups had to regain combat proficiency. Hostage said he expected to have the units combat ready by mid-October. In the meantime, U.S. forces and interests were at elevated risk.

Contrary to the past decade, America's future adversaries will contest airspace by asymmetric and symmetric means, Hostage said. USAF aircrews already must train to deal with momentary or prolonged interruption of the linked/satellite-enabled capabilities upon which precision strike relies. Russian and Chinese weapons makers are selling fifth generation (or near fifth-gen) fighters to more than 50 countries. The Air Force's front-line **F-15Cs** and Block 50 **F-16s** are not a match for them. To illustrate, Hostage cited a quip made by **USAF Chief of Staff Gen. Mark Welsh** last July: "Upgrading the existing fleet may save money, but it won't make it competitive. A fourth-generation aircraft meeting a fifth-generation aircraft in combat will be more cost-efficient, but it will be dead

before it ever knows it's in a fight.”

“

“The programmed purchase of 1,763 Air Force F-35s is not a luxury,” Hostage said. “It’s a national security imperative... Another tiny fleet is not what we need.”

The threat means that maintaining and upgrading **the F-22 fleet** is essential. **The Raptor fleet** allows the Air Force initiative in **sophisticated anti-access/area denial scenarios** “despite its pitifully small numbers” Hostage said. Such capability enables the joint force to conduct offense and provides protection for the ISR assets it is so reliant on. Ensuring that capability in contested environments rests squarely on getting the **F-35A**.

Gen. Mike Hostage recapitalization

Gen. Mike Hostage addresses audience members during his “Combat Forces in the 2020’s” speech at the Air Force Association’s 2013 Air & Space Conference and Technology Exposition Sept. 17, 2013, in Washington, D.C. U.S. Air Force photo by Airman 1st Class Neshia Humes

“The programmed purchase of 1,763 Air Force F-35s is not a luxury,” Hostage said. “It’s a national security imperative... **Another tiny fleet is not what we need.**”

Ensuring that mandate will likely mean axing other assets to free up funding. The “vertical cuts” that the Air Force has been discussing since last spring are painful but real choices, according to Hostage. If the USAF leaders are allowed to make the decisions, **the A-10**, KC-10, and HH-60G (which Hostage calls “worn to hell”) fleets would likely be retired.

“I’ve said it, the Chief has said it. The only way you really save money is to make entire weapons systems go away.”

Hostage’s forthright answers regarding the possibility of eliminating entire weapons systems demonstrated both a discomfort with the necessity to do so and a determination to recommend the cuts to preserve essential combat power. They will be made if politics and Congress do not preclude them.

If opting for recapitalization without modernization is the only choice the Air

Force has due to the budget, we must hope the F-35 is as good as advertised, Hostage said without humor.

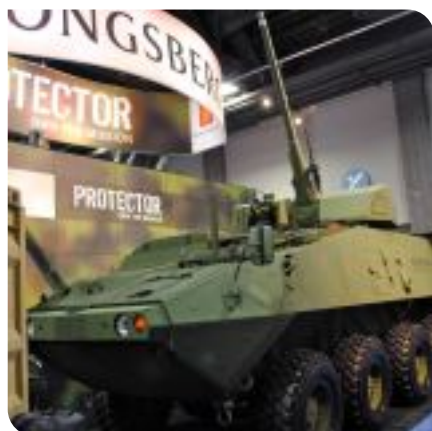
“If we burn the bridge behind us on the fourth-generation [fleet] because of this short term fiscal crush and we don’t get to where we have to with the F-35, we’re in deep doo doo.”

PREV PAGE

1 2

NEXT PAGE

RELATED POSTS



Is the U.S. Army Looking Beyond GCV?



Healthcare-Associated Infections (HAIs)

Stryker SNE NIE 14.1 SG

Army Conducts NIE 14.1

Book Review – Under Fire: The Untold Story of the Attack in Benghazi

BY **ERIC TEGLER**

Eric Tegler is a writer/broadcaster from Severna Park, Md. His work appears in a variety...

5
Share

0
Like

Tweet

0
Comment

Submit

f COMMENTS



Add a comment...

Comments



Daniel Kramer · Engenheiro Agrônomo at CATI - SAA SP

If the USAF feels this way what one can expect from another country, such as Brazil, which as of december of this year will only have F-5 as air superiority aircraft?

Reply · Like · October 30 at 9:03am



Chuck Oldham · ★ Top Commenter · University of Iowa

Which is why Brazil is carrying out the F-X2 program, though it has been a long and fraught process, and has been delayed

Reply · Like · October 30 at 5:19pm

f Facebook social plugin

POPULAR ARTICLES



Operation Damayan: The U.S. Response to Typhoon Haiyan | Photos



Book Review – Under Fire: The Untold Story of the Attack in Benghazi



RC-135W Arrives in Britain




Adrift in the Budget Fog Bank




The UH-72 as a UH-1N Replacement

FACEBOOK



Defense Media Network

 Like

13,275 people like [Defense Media Network](#)

NEWSLETTER SIGN UP

Sign up for the Defense Media Network newsletter. News and articles delivered to your inbox!

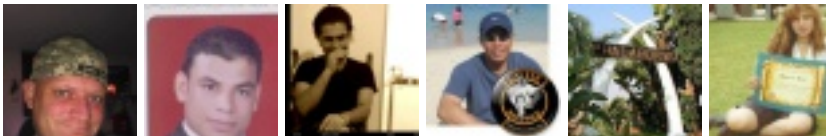
SIGN UP!


POPULAR VIDEOS



Thales Watchkeeper WK450 UAV

10,270 people like Defense Media Network.



 Facebook social plugin

TWITTER

Tweets by [@DefenseMediaNet](#)

FEATURED PHOTOS



California National Guard Battles Rim Fire Near Yosemite | Photos

SHOP

View one of our great shop categories below:

- [Print Publications](#)
- [Books](#)

NEWEST PRINT PUBLICATION



Connect to DMN



Looking for a DMN Product?

[About](#) [Contact](#) [Advertise](#) [Promotions](#) [Terms & Conditions](#)

© 2013 Defense Media Network. Faircount Media Group. All Rights Reserved.