

HAWLEY DELIVERS AF READINESS MESSAGE TO CONGRESS

Gen. Richard Hawley, commander of the Air Force's Air Combat Command (ACC), told Congress last week that the service is "substantially less ready today than we were just a few years ago" to fight a war. Hawley's testimony to the House National Security Committee on Sept. 25 adds another voice to the chorus calling for an increase in defense spending to address readiness throughout the services.

The drop in readiness for the Air Force, Hawley testified, was due less to shortages of spare parts and aging aircraft than to a fall-off in pilots, trained maintenance, support, and security personnel.

The Air Force is facing a shortfall of 721 pilots at the end of FY 1998. It is expected to be over 1,900 short by the end of FY 2002.

"An undermanned and inexperienced maintenance force with too few spare parts cannot produce the sorties we need to train these new pilots," Hawley said. Hawley pointed out that the retention rate for key maintenance and security personnel has fallen sharply in the past few years. According to today's edition of Defense Daily, only 62 percent of F-16 crew chiefs chose to re-enlist between October 1997 and June 1998.

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