

**MONDAY MORNING GROUP OF WESTERN RIVERSIDE COUNTY
ANNUAL ADVOCACY TRIP – WASHINGTON, DC
April 9 – 11, 2024**

TRANSITIONING F-15C TO F-15EX

ISSUE: The viability of the California Air National Guard's 144th and Louisiana's 159th Fighter Wings are at risk for transitioning from F-15C to F-15EX due to flawed strategy at the National Guard Bureau (NGB).

ACTION: The Monday Morning Group urges a plan to transition the National Guard's F-15C fleet to F-15EX. Specifically, the plan should allow each Wing to have a small number of new F-15EX's with trained pilots and maintainers when F-15C aircraft are decommissioned. Thus, making it easy for the Air Force to deactivate the Wings and NGB to reassign the remaining personnel and aircraft to other National Guard states.

BACKGROUND: The United States Air Force has designated that all F-15C's be decommissioned by FY 2026. The Air Force has cut all sustainment funding for F-15C in FY26. Three Fighter Wings in the Air National Guard are transitioning from F-15C to F-15EX currently in the following order:

- Portland, OR – 142nd Fighter Wing – Air National Guard
- New Orleans, LA – 159th Fighter Wing – Air National Guard
- Fresno, CA – 144th Fighter Wing – Air National Guard

All three Wings share the same mission to defend the United States against airborne threats. The 142nd Fighter Wing, Portland, Oregon, will be the first to transition in accordance with the National Guard Bureau plan, receiving their first new F-15EX in FY24 and fielding all 18 new F-15EX aircraft prior to the FY26 deadline for the retirement of the F-15C. 159th Fighter Wing, New Orleans, Louisiana, is programmed to receive its first F-15EX in FY27 and will be fully transitioned in FY 2030. Hence, creating at least a one-year gap in which the Wing will have no aircraft. Meanwhile, 144th Fighter Wing, Fresno, California, is programmed to receive its first F-15EX in FY28 and will not be fully transitioned until FY 2031. Thus, creating at least a two-year gap in which the Wing will have no aircraft. The 159th Fighter Wing and the 144th Fighter Wing, are at risk of only having approximately 35 fighter pilots and 400 maintenance personnel.

Under the current NGB plan, the three Wings will transition sequentially. Each Wing will receive their entire allotment of new aircraft before the next state gets even one new aircraft. This creates a multi-year gap in which the 159th and 144th Fighter Wings will have no aircraft (See Table 1).

A gap in the transition of aircraft will stall fighter pilots by losing currency and be unqualified to fly F-15EX when they are eventually fielded, such as the case with the 144th FW with a two-year gap. Once a pilot loses currency, they must be retrained by completing the entire fighter aircraft transition program. When an Air Force pilot loses their qualification to fly, their military career and livelihood are at risk. A long transition gap of two years would result in about half of the fighter pilots from each Wing leaving the Air Force for civilian airline jobs or transferring to other Air National Guard states.

Aircraft maintainers must also remain current to be relevant. A two-year gap will result in scores of maintainers leaving the Wings for other jobs elsewhere. Because it's very difficult to recruit and train fighter pilots and maintainers, the 144th and 159th Fighter Wings will struggle for years to get back to full strength. Consequently, it will cause them to fail to reach minimum readiness standards. These aircraft can be used to train the remaining pilots and maintainers until all new aircraft are fielded. Even with a smaller number of aircraft on the flightline, all three Wings can perform their Aerospace Control Alert missions.

Simultaneously issuing new aircraft to all three states during the fielding process (See Table 2) is an alternative solution that will allow all pilots and maintainers in all three Wings to remain current and viable during the F-15EX fielding process. On an average day, 40% of the F-15C's are unable to fly due to the advanced age of the

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aircraft and the corresponding maintenance issues. Therefore, a small number of brand-new F-15EX aircraft can replace a larger number of legacy F-15C's.

If pilot training is concurrently done with fielding before pilots lose their currency, Wings will not need to send pilots to expensive long-term retraining. This plan would improve by increasing the number of F-15EX aircraft produced each year. Increasing production by six aircraft per year in FY25 and FY 26 would make a significant difference in readiness during the fielding process.

TABLE 1

	Portland	NOLA	Fresno
FY 24	4	0	0
FY 25	10	0	0
FY 26	4	0	0
FY 27	0	6	0
FY 28	0	12	12
FY 29	0	0	6
Total	18	18	18

TABLE 2

	Portland	NOLA	Fresno
FY 24	2	1	1
FY 25	4	3	3
FY 26	2	1	1
FY 27	2	2	2
FY 28	6	9	9
FY 29	2	2	2
Total	18	18	18