

# U.S. Air Force Chief Backs Idea Of Low-Cost Fighter Fleet

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## ***Scorpion: Textron***

The U.S. Air Force chief of staff endorses the idea of buying 300 low-cost, light-attack fighters for counterterrorism missions as a “great idea.”

Gen. David Goldfein is already preparing to talk with industry about engaging companies such as Textron, which makes the Scorpion light attack fighter. The dates are still to be determined, but after a talk at the American Enterprise Institute Jan. 18, Goldfein said he may begin to “experiment” with commercial off-the-shelf designs for light fighters as soon as this spring.

In a white paper out this week, Sen. John McCain (R-Ariz.), the chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, suggested that in addition to using the A-10 for close air support, the Air Force should buy 300 light-attack fighters. They could help perform close air support and other missions where air defenses are not a problem and help bring pilots up to speed. “The Air Force could procure the first 200 of these aircraft by fiscal year 2022,” the paper says.

It is not the first time that top Air Force officials have mentioned the idea. In July, officials discussed the possibility of an “OA-X” program to supplement the service’s light attack force. Sierra Nevada’s A-29 Super Tucano and the Beechcraft AT-6 Wolverine were mentioned as possible platforms.

A new light-attack aircraft would be helpful, Goldfein said, because U.S. engagement in the Middle East will continue to be a long campaign that will be fought with allies and partners. Given global challenges, Goldfein said, he will have to build readiness for high-end fighters while continuing counterterrorism missions. That commitment taxes readiness back in the U.S.

To build readiness, “I have to look at new ways of doing business,” Goldfein said. “One of the new ways of doing business is absolutely spot on in his paper, is to take a look at is there a more sustainable view of the future that is less costly.” A lower-end aircraft could be more affordable not just for the U.S. but also for its allies. Having such a fleet could then free up

high-end fighting forces and increase readiness. If a high-end fight broke out, global combatant commanders will require 80% of the Air Force within 180 days, he said.

"I have to be ready for what's right around the corner. So if getting a low-end capability can help me build and sustain a coalition, lowers cost and improves my readiness, I'm all for it," Goldfein said.

In the summer, the Air Force also discussed a potential replacement for the A-10, called the A-X2, a role that could be filled by Raytheon's T-100, a Leonardo M-346 outfitted for the T-X trainer competition.

Goldfein did not address the potential for an A-10 replacement, but said that the Air Force will remain committed to the close-air support mission.