

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT (FONSI)

QATAR EMIRI AIR FORCE F-15QA BEDDOWN MOUNTAIN HOME AIR FORCE BASE, IDAHO

Pursuant to provisions of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), 42 United States Code §§ 4321 to 4370h; Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) Regulations, CEQ Update to the Regulations Implementing the Procedural Provisions of NEPA (16 July 2020), 40 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) Parts 1500 to 1508; and 32 CFR Part 989, *Environmental Impact Analysis Process (EIAP)*, the Department of the Air Force (DAF) prepared the attached Environmental Assessment (EA) to address the potential environmental consequences associated with the Qatar Emiri Air Force (QEAF) F-15QA Beddown at Mountain Home Air Force Base (MHAFB), Idaho.

Purpose and Need

The purpose of the Proposed Action is to establish a United States Air Force (US Air Force)-led QEAF F-15QA training squadron and maintenance training within the continental United States (CONUS). The Secretary of the Air Force and the Chief of Staff of the Air Force would identify the installation that would meet the needs of the QEAF through the strategic basing process.

The need for the Proposed Action is to further strengthen relations between the United States and Qatar. Training of QEAF personnel is necessary to help ensure the combat readiness and enhanced performance of this partner nation in the event that multinational conflicts arise. The Proposed Action meets the QEAF's need to ensure the combat readiness and enhanced performance of its personnel. The QEAF requested that the training squadron be collocated with an existing F-15E Wing at a CONUS Air Force Base, beddown costs be minimized, and their aircraft have access to adequate airspace over variable topography similar to Qatar's operational region. The Proposed Action is needed to support this QEAF beddown request.

Description of Proposed Action and Alternatives

The Proposed Action would base and operate a US Air Force-led QEAF F-15QA squadron operating as a separate but integrated fighter squadron under the operational command of the 366th Fighter Wing Commander. The Proposed Action would include the basing and operation of 12 QEAF F-15QA Primary Aerospace Vehicle Authorized aircraft, use of the airfield, associated special use airspace (SUA) and Military Training Routes (MTRs) for training, use of defensive countermeasures and ordnance during training, approximately 300 additional QEAF and US Air Force personnel, and construction and modification of facilities and infrastructure to support the beddown. The proposed interim and permanent facility projects would include the use of three existing buildings, the demolition of two buildings, the construction of 23 buildings, the renovation of three buildings, and improvements to infrastructure including four roadways. Basing and operations would begin in early Fiscal Year 2024. The QEAF would beddown for 10 years with an option to extend the beddown beyond the initial 10 years.

Because of the extended time that would be required for the planning, design, and construction of permanent facilities to support the QEAF, interim (i.e., 0 to 5 years) housing and flightline facility solutions would be needed to meet the immediate beddown and sustainment timelines for the requested start of QEAF training by Fiscal Year 2024. The proposed interim flightline facilities and infrastructure would primarily utilize Building 211 to house four hangar bays, squadron operations, Aircraft Maintenance Unit (AMU), and equipment storage. Building 211 would be vacated by the US Air Force and renovated for the interim use by the QEAF. To support the US Air Force vacating Building 211, other facility renovations would be required. Two rows of sunshades would be constructed proximate to the proposed permanent QEAF hangar location to support the QEAF. All other QEAF backshop functions would be supported in existing facilities.

In total, the construction, renovation, demolition, and infrastructure improvements under the Proposed Action would include more than 264,805 square feet of building space for flightline facilities, 22,384 feet (4.2 miles) of road improvements, and approximately 519 new parking spaces.

No Action Alternative

Under the No Action Alternative, the beddown of the QEAF F-15QA squadron would not occur at a CONUS location. Changes associated with the Proposed Action would not be implemented. New construction, modifications, renovations, and demolition would not take place and additional personnel would not be required. No on-base or off-base housing would be required for QEAF and US Air Force personnel. The No Action Alternative would maintain the status quo. The potential environmental effects associated with the No Action Alternative are as described in the existing conditions section of the EA.

In addition to the No Action Alternative, four additional alternatives were considered in the EA and are described below.

Alternative 1. Partial On-Base and Off-Base Interim and All On-Base Permanent Housing and Flightline "Sea of Rocks" Location

Alternative 1 would include the proposed airfield operations, aircraft operations in the SUA and MTRs, personnel, and interim flightline facility and infrastructure improvements. The flightline facilities would be constructed in the "Sea of Rocks" location. The QEAF Hangar would be located near 12th and Aardvark Avenues and south of Alpine Street. The squadron operations and simulator, AMU, and supply warehouse would be located northeast and adjacent to the QEAF Hangar. The QEAF Community Center would be constructed adjacent to Building 2630 on Desert Street between Phantom and Gunfighter Avenues. In the interim, it would be anticipated that up to 20 accompanied and 20 unaccompanied QEAF personnel could be housed on base in military family housing units or dormitories if vacancy allows. Permanent housing would include newly constructed dormitories and housing units on base for 169 QEAF personnel.

Alternative 2. Partial On-Base and Off-Base Interim and All On-Base Permanent Housing and Flightline "Integrated Campus" Location

Under Alternative 2, the proposed airfield operations, aircraft operations in the SUA and MTRs, personnel, interim and permanent housing locations, community center, and interim flightline facilities would be the same as described in Alternative 1, except that permanent flightline facilities would be constructed at the "Integrated Campus" location. The QEAF Hangar would be located east of Building 210 and south of Alpine Street. The squadron operations and simulator would be constructed near the end of Phantom Avenue and the AMU and supply warehouse would be constructed near the end of 7th Avenue.

Alternative 3. All Off-Base Interim and Permanent Housing and Flightline "Sea of Rocks" Location

Alternative 3 would include the proposed airfield operations, aircraft operations in the SUA and MTRs, personnel, interim flightline facility and infrastructure improvement, and the community center. The permanent flightline facilities would be constructed at the "Sea of Rocks" location as described in Alternative 1. Under Alternative 3, interim and permanent housing for unaccompanied and accompanied QEAF personnel would be acquired by the QEAF off base in existing hotels, housing, and short-term rentals in Elmore and Ada Counties, Idaho. No housing would be constructed on base.

Alternative 4. All Off-Base Interim and Permanent Housing and Flightline "Integrated Campus" Location

Alternative 4 would include the proposed airfield operations, aircraft operations in the SUA and MTRs, personnel, interim flightline facility and infrastructure improvements, and community center as described in Alternative 1, except the permanent flightline facilities would be constructed in the "Integrated Campus" location as described in Alternative 2. Interim and permanent housing locations would be the same as described in Alternative 3.

Summary of Findings

Potentially affected environmental resources were identified through communications with state and federal agencies and review of past environmental documentation. Specific environmental resources with the

potential for environmental consequences include noise; air quality; safety; land use; earth resources; biological resources; cultural resources; infrastructure; hazardous materials and wastes, Environmental Restoration Program sites, and toxic substances; socioeconomics; and environmental justice.

Noise

The aircraft proposed for this action is the F-15QA fitted with F110-GE-129 engines. The Proposed Action for the F15QA is modeled using the F-15E with the F100-PW-229 engines because engine data for the F-15QA are unavailable. NOISEMAP, the computer program to describe potential noise impacts from aircraft operations, does not include noise estimates from an F-15 variant with the F110-GE-129 engines, and obtaining such data was not reasonable during the preparation of this EA due to cost and time constraints. However, NOISEMAP includes noise estimates for the F-15E with the F100-PW-229 engines. Under 40 CFR 1502.21, existing credible scientific evidence is acceptable for analyses and therefore a surrogate engine was selected. Several technical experts have reviewed this and validated use of the surrogate data as being a method generally accepted in the scientific community. Once noise measurements are obtained on the F-15QA, this analysis will be reevaluated, and if necessary, this EA will be supplemented. The most appropriate surrogate available in NOISEMAP is the F-15E with the F100-PW-229 engines. Noise levels from the F-15E with the F100-PW-229 engines are likely to be similar to that of the F-15QA; therefore, this is an appropriate engine surrogate for modeling based on engine type and maximum thrust.

All action alternatives would include the same level of increase in aircraft operations; the differences in noise between alternatives are associated with the location of interim and permanent housing and whether or not construction of permanent housing would occur. Short-term, minor impacts would be due to noise generated by heavy equipment during construction. For Alternatives 3 and 4, there would be no construction of permanent housing; therefore, short-term noise impacts would be slightly reduced. Long-term, minor impacts from noise would be due to incremental increases in aircraft noise in areas surrounding MHAFFB, at the Mountain Home Range Complex, and under the SUA and MTRs; however, the Proposed Action would not substantially change the noise environment in the SUA and MTRs and would not substantially increase areas of incompatible land use on and adjacent to MHAFFB.

Air Quality

There would be short- and long-term, minor effects on air quality under all action alternatives. Short-term effects would be from fugitive dust and the use of heavy equipment during construction and renovation. Long-term effects would be from an increase in heated area; the addition of personnel; and additional aircraft operations at the base, at Mountain Home Range Complex, and within the SUA and MTRs. The maximum annual net-change in nitrogen oxide emissions would be above DAF's insignificance indicator for attainment areas of 250 tons per year in the Idaho Air Quality Control Region (AQCR); however, flight operations and associated emissions would be spread out over a large area, and the net change in emissions in each MOA would be a fraction of the net change in the Idaho AQCR. Oxides of nitrogen emissions from the proposed aircraft operations within the Idaho AQCR would account for 2.1 percent of the annual county-wide emissions in counties beneath the MOAs within the AQCR. As the total nitrogen oxides emissions would be a small fraction of the regional emissions and the AQCR encompasses a large area, it is not expected that the Proposed Action would threaten the attainment status of the region and would have less than significant effects. Potential emissions would not contribute to a violation of any federal, state, or local air regulation.

Safety

Under all action alternatives, negligible impacts would be anticipated from the increased annual flight operations at the airfield. Airfield and airspace operations would continue to follow all applicable safety guidelines and regulations. The F-15 (all models) aircraft have flown more than 6,982,447 hours since the aircraft entered the Air Force inventory in 1972. Over that period, 160 Class A mishaps have occurred, and 127 aircraft have been destroyed. No impacts related to aircraft mishaps would be anticipated; all aircraft flight operations would continue to be conducted in accordance with standard flight rules and local operating procedures and policies. The approximately 15 percent increase in operations under the Proposed Action

would not be expected to significantly increase bird/wildlife aircraft strikes because MHAFB would continue bird/wildlife aircraft strike hazard management at the airfield and airspace for the additional operations. Munitions would continue to be handled and stored in accordance with DAF directives. All munitions maintenance would continue to be carried out by trained, qualified personnel; therefore, no significant impacts would be expected. Negligible impacts would be anticipated from the proposed increase in use of chaff and flares. Contractors performing renovation and construction work would be exposed to a slightly greater health and safety risk than a nonconstruction environment; therefore, negligible impacts on contractor health and safety would be expected. No impacts related to fire safety and management would be anticipated.

The interim off-base housing would cause a slight increase in the number of commuters traveling to and from the base, which would be a negligible to minor increase in the risk of traffic accidents. Similarly, under Alternatives 3 and 4, all 169 QEAF and DAF personnel would be housed off base, which would increase the risk of traffic accidents while commuting to and from the base. The expected increase in traffic in the vicinity of the installation would be minor; therefore, any increase in the risk of traffic accidents would also be expected to be minor.

Land Use

All construction, improvements, demolition, and renovations associated with the interim and permanent flightline facilities at the "Sea of Rocks" location (Alternatives 1 and 3) and the "Integrated Campus" location (Alternatives 2 and 4) would occur in areas with compatible land uses. Under all action alternatives, the QEAF community center would be located on land that does not conflict with surrounding land uses.

Under Alternatives 1 and 2, interim housing would be provided on base in existing family units and dormitories; permanent housing for QEAF personnel would be provided on base in newly constructed housing units and dormitories. The newly constructed housing units would be located on compatible land use or on lands that would not conflict with surrounding land uses. Under Alternatives 3 and 4, interim and permanent housing for QEAF personnel would be off base in existing hotels, housing, and short-term rentals in Elmore and Ada Counties; therefore, no impacts on land use would be expected.

The day-night average sound level would increase slightly on and proximate to MHAFB, but while considered long-term, this increase would not be noticeable and would result in a small increase of the noise contours on all sides of the installation. No sensitive receptors or residences affected from an increase in noise levels were identified; no impacts on land use from noise would be anticipated.

Earth Resources

Activities at locations proposed for facility construction, renovation, and demolition under all the alternatives may result in minor, short-term impacts on soils. When soils are disturbed or already bare, wind and water exposure can accelerate erosion, which can be the result of sedimentation flow to drainage systems, ground surfaces, or water bodies. Indirectly, impacts from exposed soils have the potential for increased surface runoff to downgradient areas. Adherence to Department of Defense and DAF construction requirements and implementation of construction best management practices (BMPs) would minimize impacts on soils. No changes or impacts on topography and regional geology would be expected under all the alternatives.

Biological Resources

Facility construction and improvement activities from the Proposed Action and action alternatives would be expected to result in short- and long-term, minor, effects on vegetation as the construction would impact approximately 58 ac but would primarily occur on improved and semi-improved land, which lacks sensitive vegetation. The impacts of the construction and improvement activities on wildlife are expected to be adverse, short-term, and minor. There are four species of concern that are known to occur on MHAFB: burrowing owl (*Athene cunicularia*), long-billed curlew (*Numenius americanus*), long-eared myotis (*Myotis evotis*), and Yuma myotis (*Myotis yumanensis*); however, there is no suitable habitat for these species at the locations where facility construction or improvements are proposed, and there would be no impacts on species of concern.

Noise associated with construction and renovation could cause wildlife to engage in escape or avoidance behaviors; however, the area of disturbance would be limited to the developed areas at MHAFB where disturbances such as noise and movement (e.g., mowing, landscaping, foot and vehicle traffic, and flight line activities) already occur.

The additional aircraft operations in the SUA and MTRs from the QEAF beddown would be anticipated to have short- and long-term, minor, adverse impacts on wildlife, including birds, from aircraft movement, increased noise, bird/wildlife aircraft strike hazard, and increased risk of ingesting small residual plastic components such as end caps and pistons from the use of chaff, flares, and inert ordnance during training. Adverse impacts on songbirds, raptors, and wading birds from aircraft movement would be long term and minor with a slightly increased risk of bird/wildlife aircraft strikes.

Because there are no known federally listed birds or mammals present on or off base and within the SUA and MTRs, there would be no effect on federally listed species under the Proposed Action and alternatives. A *No Effect* determination for federally listed species has been made for the Proposed Action and coordination with the US Fish and Wildlife Service concerning the DAF's determination was completed.

Cultural Resources

Under all action alternatives, no significant archaeological resources would be disturbed or otherwise affected. No traditional cultural resources or sacred sites have been identified at MHAFB or within the Area of Potential Effect. Management and protection of cultural resources would continue in accordance with the requirements of federal laws including Sections 106 and 110 of the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA).

Renovations included as part of the interim flightline facilities at the "Sea of Rocks" location would have the potential to result in an adverse effect on Building 211, a World War II era, National Register of Historic Places (NRHP)-eligible resource, if they alter the character-defining traits of the hangar – specifically the concrete foundation and floor, concrete and wood walls, and birchwood type bowstring truss roof support systems that characterize the WWII-era construction design of the period. However, it has been determined that proposed renovations to Building 211 would not adversely affect the historic hangar. An addition, Building 211 was constructed during the mid-twentieth century to provide office space. This expansion has been repeatedly modified since construction to adjust to changing mission priorities over time. The proposed renovations to Building 211 analyzed for this EA would be limited to the office space addition and would be consistent with current use. Renovations to the office space addition to the hangar would not alter the buildings character-defining features.

As the paved portions of the flightline, including the runway, taxiways, and aprons, have not yet been evaluated for NRHP eligibility, they are afforded the same consideration and protection as historic properties on MHAFB. There is no significant construction or modification proposed to the runway, taxiways, or aprons as part of the Proposed Action. While the undertaking does propose two additional rows of aircraft sunshades on the flightline, their installation is consistent with existing sunshades utilized by military aircraft and would not adversely affect any characteristics that may convey significance, thus qualifying it for listing in the NRHP.

Proposed interim flightline facilities and infrastructure at the "Sea of Rocks" location would include the addition of a second paint booth to Building 1330, a NRHP-eligible Cold War-era Aircraft Maintenance Dock and contributing resource to the Strategic Air Command (SAC) Nose Dock Historic District. Since this renovation involves an internal insert, as opposed to permanent alterations to the exterior or interior of the original structure of the hangar, the proposed addition would not result in adverse impacts to Building 1330.

Potential visual impacts to the SAC Nose Dock Historic District and Building 211 were also considered. New construction at the "Sea of Rocks" location would have the potential to impact the visual setting of the SAC Nose Dock Historic District and Building 211. While proposed new construction would be visible from the SAC Nose Dock Historic District it would not intrude upon it (i.e., altering or upsetting the spatial relationship between contemporary resources, particularly within the district). Further, setting is not the critical aspect of the district's integrity; the significance is primarily conveyed through design and

association. Similarly, proposed new construction would be visible from Building 211. The significance of the hangar is primarily conveyed through design, materials, and association. As part of a dynamic, mission-focused Department of Defense installation, new military construction would not introduce visual impacts inconsistent with the character of MHAFFB. Therefore, DAF has determined the Proposed Action under Alternatives 1 and 3, at the "Sea of Rocks" location would have no adverse effect on historic properties. The Idaho State Historic Preservation Office has concurred with this determination.

The construction of a QEAF New Hangar at the "Integrated Campus" location would obstruct visual continuity between Building 211 and the remaining World War II-era hangars (Buildings 201, 204, 205, and 208) situated in a linear fashion moving farther east between Oak Avenue and the flightline. These hangars are currently not recorded as part of a larger district, and the significance of each hangar is primarily conveyed through design, materials, and association – not setting. However, in the absence of design plans, per 36 CFR 800, implementation of Alternatives 2 and 4 would require additional consultation with the Idaho State Historic Preservation Office.

Infrastructure

Under all the Proposed Action and alternatives, facilities proposed for construction and renovation would be serviced by utilities such as gas, electric, and water/wastewater through existing MHAFFB utilities infrastructure, which would be adequate to service the additional facilities. During flightline facilities construction and improvement activities, construction equipment using roadways would have minor, short-term impacts on traffic flow at MHAFFB; however, the installation's roadways and gates would have adequate capacity to support the temporary additional construction-related traffic.

Under Alternatives 3 and 4, no new permanent housing would be constructed on the installation, and all interim and permanent housing for QEAF personnel would be provided off base. This would increase the number of vehicles accessing MHAFFB daily as the 300 QEAF and US Air Force personnel would commute to MHAFFB from off-base housing; however, there would be adequate capacity at MHAFFB gates to handle the additional privately owned vehicles. Therefore, there would be no impact on traffic at MHAFFB under any of the alternatives.

Hazardous Materials and Waste, Environmental Restoration Program Sites, and Toxic Substances

Under the Proposed Action and alternatives, short-term, minor impacts on hazardous materials, petroleum products, and hazardous wastes could occur from renovation and additions to flightline facilities. Hazardous materials and petroleum products would be contained, stored, and managed appropriately in accordance with Air Force Manual 32-7002, *Environmental Compliance and Pollution Prevention*, and MHAFFB Oil Spill Prevention and Emergency Response procedures to minimize the potential for release. In addition, the implementation of BMPs would reduce the potential for an accidental release of hazardous and petroleum wastes. Ground-disturbing activities would occur from flightline facility construction and on-base housing construction. Should unknown contamination be discovered or unearthed, the construction contractor would immediately stop work, contact appropriate installation personnel, and implement appropriate safety measures.

Short-term, minor impacts from asbestos-containing materials (ACMs) and lead-based paint (LBP) might occur from the proposed renovation of flightline facilities. Surveys for ACMs and LBP would be completed, as necessary, and adherence to all federal, state, and local regulations and the installation's management plans, would be taken to reduce potential exposure to, and release of ACMs and LBP. MHAFFB is located within radon zone 1; therefore, there is the potential for short-term, negligible impacts on radon levels. Radon would be managed at flightline facilities and the proposed permanent housing by including passive radon-reducing features, as appropriate.

Short-term, minor impacts from polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) might occur from the proposed renovation of flightline facilities because some existing facilities might contain PCBs, which could be disturbed during renovation activities. Surveys for PCBs would be completed, as necessary, by a certified contractor prior to work activities to ensure appropriate measures, including adherence to all federal, state, and local

regulations and the installation's management plans, would be taken to reduce potential exposure to, and release of PCBs.

Socioeconomics

Under the action alternatives, there would be minor, short- and long-term, beneficial impacts on socioeconomics. Under all alternatives, flightline development projects would result in expenditures in the local community for construction material, supplies, and labor. These expenditures would benefit the economies of Ada and Elmore Counties, Idaho. Interim off-base housing would also result in expenditures in the local community. In the long term, the QEAF personnel residing and working on base would continue to purchase goods and supplies in the local community, having a long-term socioeconomic benefit.

Under Alternatives 1 and 2, the construction of on-base housing to support the on-base housing requirement would have a short-term benefit to the local community through expenditures on material, supplies and labor. Under Alternatives 3 and 4, QEAF and US Air Force personnel would utilize only about 0.1 percent of the existing housing in Ada and Elmore Counties. Further, the rate of issuance of building permits and subsequently new housing construction in Ada and Elmore Counties is greater than that in Idaho and the United States, accommodating the increased regional population growth. Therefore, there would be adequate housing in Ada and Elmore Counties for personnel residing off base. The expenditures in the local community for off-base housing would provide a long-term, minor economic benefit.

Environmental Justice

There would be no disproportionate impact on minorities, low-income populations, and protection of children under the Proposed Action and alternatives on or off base. Expenditures on labor, materials, and supplies for the construction of facilities, training operations, and housing would provide a socioeconomic benefit to members of the local community. Further, minority, low-income, or youth populations do not occur disproportionately in local communities that would provide housing and services to QEAF and US Air Force personnel.

Reasonably Foreseeable Future Trends

The EA considered the potential incremental impacts that could result from Proposed Action and alternatives when added to reasonably foreseeable future actions. No potentially significant impacts were identified for the proposed QEAF beddown at MHAFB.

Mitigations

The analysis concluded that the Proposed Action would not result in significant environmental impacts.

Conclusion

Finding of No Significant Impact. After review of the EA prepared in accordance with the requirements of NEPA; CEQ regulations; and 32 CFR Part 989, *Environmental Impact Analysis Process (EIAP)*, and which is hereby incorporated by reference, I have determined that the Proposed Action as implemented by either Alternative 1 or Alternative 3 to support the QEAF F-15QA Beddown at MHAFB, Idaho, would not have a significant impact on the quality of the human or natural environment. Should Alternative 2 or 4 be preferred, consultation with the Idaho State Historic Preservation Office would be initiated prior to implementation. Accordingly, an Environmental Impact Statement will not be prepared. This decision has been made after considering all submitted information, including a review of public and agency comments submitted during the 30-day public comment period, and considering a full range of practical alternatives that meet project requirements and are within the legal authority of the Department of the Air Force.


ERNESTO M. DIVITTORIO, COLONEL, USAF
COMMANDER, 366TH FIGHTER WING

25 Mar 22
DATE