

THE DEFENSE MONITOR

PROJECT ON GOVERNMENT OVERSIGHT

IS THE Pentagon Crying Wolf over Its Budget?

This year, Pentagon budget spending levels dominated debate and the legislative agenda in Washington, as well it should have. Congress busted statutory spending caps by using the off-budget Overseas Contingency Operations (OCO) spending account. Yet again, this account became a slush fund for spending hawks to add billions of dollars in weapons neither wanted nor needed by the Department of Defense.

Two articles in this publication provide important perspective to misguided claims that Pentagon spending is too low to meet our current national security needs. The first, by POGO Researcher Jacob Marx, places current budget levels into an appropriate historical context and finds that funding is still above historical norms. The second, written by Cato Institute Vice President for Defense and Foreign Policy Studies Chris Preble and Straus Military Reform Director Mandy Smithberger, argues that true reform of military spending will not occur if Pentagon funding increases. Instead, important decisions about strategic tradeoffs will continue to be deferred.

BY JACOB MARX, POGO RESEARCHER
The Pentagon is requesting a \$38-billion funding increase in this year's budget, claiming it can't provide for national defense without it. However, recent reports from the Congressional Research Service (CRS) and the Government Accountability Office (GAO) paint a different picture. These reports show that even under the Budget Control Act (BCA), Pentagon funding is well above historical norms, and that the Pentagon is failing to take steps to manage this high level of funding without negatively impacting operations and readiness. Moreover, the Pentagon has failed to prepare itself for the possibility of sequestration by fully studying the impact of previous automatic cuts.

U.S. military spending in the last decade is unprecedented. According to CRS, in terms of total dollars, the U.S. spends more on the military now than at any time since the Korean War, when it had about double the troops under arms. There have been two major buildups between then and our conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan, one for Vietnam and the other during the Reagan presidency, both followed by significant drawdowns. In Iraq and Afghanistan however, military spending expanded far more and contracted far less than in previ-

ous conflicts. Since peaking in 2010, it has stayed elevated despite the relatively small scale of operations and the conclusion of major hostilities.

Furthermore, over the last decade the Pentagon has taken the irresponsible step of paying for some of its base budget requirements with cap-exempt war funding in the Overseas Contingency Operations (OCO) account. This has created two related problems: it has made defense budget oversight more difficult by putting funds into opaque accounts; and it has made it hard to calculate budget growth and determine how best to move the Pentagon forward in the BCA era. It is in this context of historically unparalleled funding and reckless budgeting methods that the Department of Defense has had to confront limited spending caps.

DoD's argument for an increased budget is that it can't execute national security strategy at current funding levels. Speaking to the Senate Appropriations Committee earlier this year, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Martin Dempsey argued that "sequestration will result in a dramatic change to how we protect our nation and how we promote our national security interest." This seems incongruous with DoD's budget documents

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DAN GRAZIER: Jack Shanahan Fellow

BY JACOB MARX, POGO RESEARCHER

The Straus Military Reform Project increased its capacity in June when Captain Dan Grazier, formerly of the U.S. Marine Corps, joined the team as the Jack Shanahan Fellow.

The Project On Government Oversight created the Jack Shanahan Fellowship in 2014 in honor of Vice Admiral Jack Shanahan, USN (Ret.). Adm. Shanahan enlisted in the Navy in November 1941, just prior to the Pearl Harbor attack. Through grit and determination, the strong-willed sailor rose through the ranks, retiring in 1977 as a vice admiral and having commanded the Navy's Second Fleet.

Adm. Shanahan served his nation in World War II, Korea, and Vietnam. He was

the face of the nation in 1976 when he led the International Naval Review for the bicentennial celebration in New York Harbor.

Following his retirement, Adm. Shanahan became the director of the Center for Defense Information and worked as a tireless advocate for Pentagon reform. He did so with grace and good humor, not just for the benefit of the sailors of his beloved Navy, but for all the young Americans serving in the military.

Adm. Shanahan understood the broader implications of Pentagon reform. He was concerned about the scale of U.S. military spending and the negative impact it had on funds available for schools, highways, and infrastructure.

"It is not unpatriotic to question defense spending," he once said. "It's simply the right thing to do."¹

Grazier brings the same spirit and enthusiasm to the Straus Military Reform Project. After more than ten years in uniform, Grazier left active duty in May. A tank officer in both Iraq and Afghanistan, he began advocating for military reform while in uniform. He has authored numerous articles, appearing in the *Marine Corps Gazette*, *Fires Bulletin*, and *Small Wars Journal*. As a passionate believer in the military reforms advocated by John Boyd, Chuck Spinney, Pierre Sprey, and other military reformers, he will continue working to ensure America has the most effective military force possible.

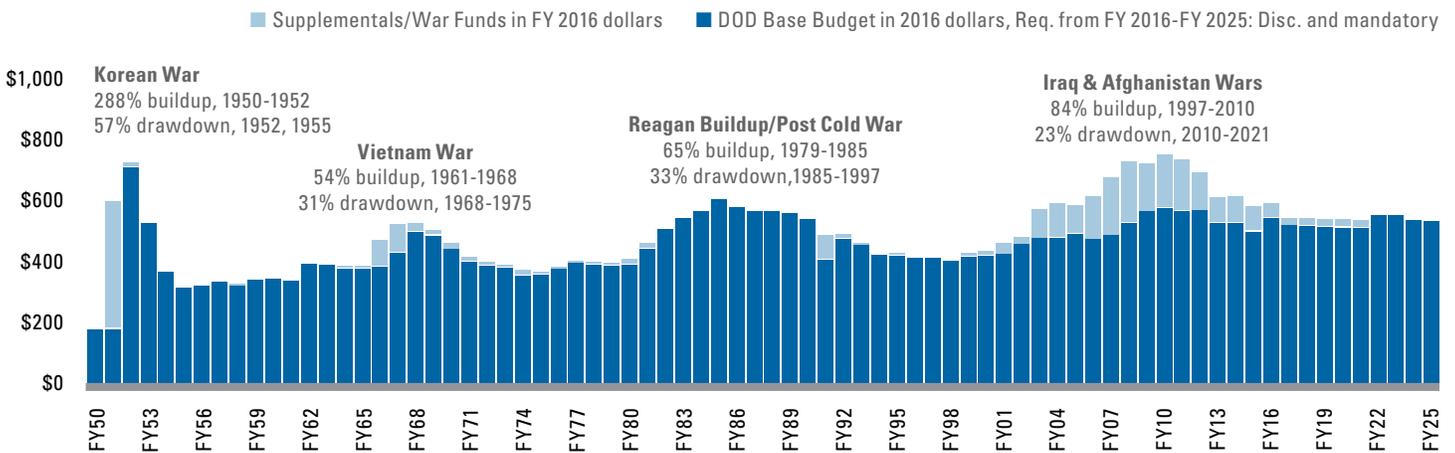
"The military-industrial-congressional complex currently has its priorities exactly backwards," Grazier says, "with an undo focus on military hardware and a neglect of people and ideas." Combatting the mistaken belief that the United States can prevail in future conflicts with overwhelming technology alone will be a centerpiece of his work.

Prior to his service in the Marines, Grazier worked as a television journalist where he gained valuable experience putting together investigative reports. His unique combination of professional experiences is a valuable addition to the Straus Military Reform Project.

The goal of the Straus Military Reform Project is to secure far more effective military forces and more ethical military and civilian leadership at significantly lower costs. Grazier says he is eager to contribute his efforts towards achieving those goals.

1 "John 'Jack' Shanahan Jr. Obituary," *The Daytona Beach News-Journal*online.com, www.legacy.com/obituaries/news-journalonline/obituary.aspx?pid=166921492

DOD SPENDING INCLUDING BOTH BASE BUDGET AND EMERGENCY/OCO (in billions of FY 2016 budget authority)



from just a year ago, which said current funding levels, though they carried some risk, were appropriate “to protect and advance U.S. interests.” It is not clear what has changed; Russian revanchism and the rise of ISIS require Pentagon resources, but expanded operations in Europe and Iraq have cost \$1 billion and about \$2.75 billion respectively, less than 10 percent of the requested increase.

That \$38 billion increase is 6.8 percent above the budget caps, and will trigger automatic cuts unless it goes into the OCO or is cut from the budget. The OCO option creates long-term planning problems for the military since there are limitations on using the funds for programs that aren’t related to war efforts. Moreover, funneling the funds into OCO is a clear violation of the spirit of the BCA, so it should be off the table. Fortunately, according to CRS, modest budget cuts are far from unusual. Previous drawdowns after conflicts have ranged from 31 to 57 percent. To date the post-Iraq and Afghanistan drawdown has only been 23 percent, making it the smallest since World War II, and leaving Pentagon funding still well above historical norms. Second, since 1950, Congress has appropriated defense funding 3 to 5 percent below the Pentagon’s request in 4 out of every 10 years. And, while the differ-

ence is higher this year, over the next few years the difference between caps and projected budgets will decline to an unexceptional average of 5 percent.

Current funding levels also include a great deal of waste. According to the CRS, the Pentagon is leaving savings on the table by failing to delay high-risk acquisition programs and implement efficiency savings. The \$1.5 trillion F-35 Joint Strike Fighter—the most expensive weapons program in American history—is years behind schedule and has more than doubled in cost. A large part of the problem has been simultaneous testing and production, which requires costly retrofits as new issues are discovered. Since new problems are being discovered on a regular basis, CRS writes (as POGO has advocated) that delaying the program, “could be attractive because the additional time could help ensure that problems would be resolved before production is ramped up.” There are other areas where the Pentagon (with congressional approval) could find savings as well, such as Base Realignment and Closures, changes to the military pay and compensation system, and contracted services.

DoD has also failed to fully study the impact sequestration had in 2013 despite the obvious importance of conducting an internal review. In just

seven months in 2013, DoD cut 7 percent of its budget, a total of \$37.2 billion. Yet, according to the GAO, the Pentagon “did not comprehensively document or assess best practices or lessons learned from their experiences.” Some measures taken by the services even drove up costs in the long term, including a deployment delay for a carrier strike group and maintenance delays for Army equipment. In future years, “[g]iven that some budget flexibilities the department used in 2013 to mitigate the size of reductions may be unavailable...it is all the more important that DOD be able to use the institutional knowledge it gained when implementing sequestration,” writes the GAO.

Our service members deserve full support, but that doesn’t mean rubber-stamping inflated budgets at taxpayers’ expense. If history is any guide, current DoD funding is sufficient, and there are cost-saving measures that should be implemented before spending is increased. If a budget increase is necessary, it should be done within normal accounting procedures, and not through accounting gimmicks like OCO that enable waste and inhibit oversight. ■

For more charts and a listing of all sources, visit www.pogo.org/blog/2015/06/is-pentagon-crying-wolf.html.

Budget Gimmicks

Stymie Real Pentagon Reforms

BY MANDY SMITHBERGER AND CHRISTOPHER PREBLE

The following piece was first published on the War is Boring blog under the headline “The Pentagon Conned Washington ... Again: Budget gimmicks stymie real military reforms.” It has been excerpted and updated. The original can be found at <https://medium.com/war-is-boring/the-pentagon-conned-washington-again-583587b6cbc8>

Advocates for higher Pentagon budgets won a victory this spring: The National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) managed to circumvent the spending caps imposed by the bipartisan Budget Control Act of 2011. But their jubilation is misplaced, and these budgetary shenanigans are likely to postpone a series of reforms that nearly everyone in Washington knows are long overdue.

The NDAA clearly violated the spirit of the statutory budget caps by packing tens of billions of dollars into the account that is supposed to be reserved for wartime emergencies. [As mentioned in the previous article, the addition of \$38 billion to this account allows Congress to circumvent defense spending caps required by the Budget Control Act.] Pentagon boosters shouldn't be allowed to demolish what little fiscal discipline has been achieved in the last few years. Increased spending is unwarranted as long as Congress refuses to authorize common sense reforms like another round of base closures to allow the services to get rid of excess infrastructure, modernizing the military's pay and benefits structure for the 21st century, and compelling the Pentagon to eliminate excess civilian overhead.

A bipartisan group of 38 think-

tank experts endorsed such reforms in an open letter to Secretary of Defense Ashton Carter and leaders in Congress.¹ We agree with most of what is called for in the letter. But, in the end, we declined to sign because it didn't go nearly far enough to address the most wasteful aspects of the Pentagon's budget and falsely implied that spending limits threatened to undermine national security.

For example, we agree that the growth of the civilian workforce is entirely out of sync with cuts to force structure. But a large civilian workforce is only part of the problem. Feeding into this monster is also an excessive service contractor workforce—the greatest area of cost

than 2 times what the private sector pays for comparable services.² The Defense Department has ignored its responsibility to implement an improved service contract tracking system, shirking its total force management responsibilities and perpetuating billions of dollars in unnecessary service contracting costs. As a result, as Representative Chris Van Hollen (D-MD) recently confirmed, we have no reliable information about the size of our contractor workforce.³ Right-sizing the Defense Department's workforce must look at the costs of all of these personnel, which will benefit mission and readiness capabilities.

In another example, the defense

Pentagon boosters shouldn't be allowed to demolish what little fiscal discipline has been achieved in the last few years.

growth for the Defense Department's workforce in the last 10 years. A 2011 Project On Government Oversight study shows how costly this workforce can be, finding that the federal government pays contractors, on average, 1.83 times more than they pay federal employees, and more

reform consensus letter calls on Congress to approve a round of base closures to allow the Pentagon to eliminate excess capacity and overhead. Many Members of Congress hate the Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) process, which closed over 100 major bases in five rounds

between 1988 and 2005, but BRAC has so far saved taxpayers tens of billions of dollars, and released land and other assets that local communities have put to productive use.⁴ The signatories of the defense reform letter understand that parochialism shouldn't be allowed to prevent the military from better aligning its resources.

They go too far, however, in suggesting that the United States has reduced too many overseas bases, and that the U.S. military should be larger and more active abroad. In fact, most Americans want the U.S. military to focus on defending the

situation ("fly before you buy"), reduce concurrency between testing and production, and hold program managers and contractors accountable for program failures. They would also require Congress to look beyond their parochial interests. While we appreciate that there are legitimate disagreements as to which reforms will provide more effective and less expensive weapons on time, the need for drastic changes in this area is obvious.

We also take issue with the way the letter frames the reform debate around the inaccurate claim that the world is a more dangerous place, and

It is misguided to link increased Pentagon spending to increased safety...Years of bloated Pentagon budgets insulated the Pentagon from the need to make smart strategic choices.

United States and its vital interests. If we reduce the U.S. military's permanent overseas presence and create more incentives for burden-sharing by our allies, we could reap significant savings for U.S. taxpayers.

The other stealthy elephant in the room—which goes unmentioned in the letter—is the need for acquisition reform. The Pentagon's weapon systems acquisition process delivers systems that are grossly over cost and behind schedule. Genuine reforms in this area would increase competition, require realistic testing before acqui-

that the recent decline in military spending has undermined our military's effectiveness, allowing potential competitors to challenge U.S. interests around the world. On the contrary, the U.S. military remains the world's preeminent fighting force, and our all-volunteer force is second to none. Most of the decline in military spending since 2011 is associated with the drawdowns in Iraq and Afghanistan. The Pentagon's so-called base budget remains well above the Cold War average in inflation-adjusted dollars.

It is misguided to link increased Pentagon spending to increased safety. As former Defense Secretary Robert Gates once said, "If the Department of Defense can't figure out a way to defend the United States on a budget of more than half a trillion dollars a year, then our problems are much bigger than anything that can be cured by buying a few more ships and planes."⁵ Neither of us believes that the United States is in a weak and vulnerable position today due to flat spending. Instead, years of bloated Pentagon budgets insulated the Pentagon from the need to make smart strategic choices, and have allowed policymakers to avoid a necessary debate about whether our use of force in the last two decades has made us safer. We ask much of our men and women in uniform, and they have delivered. But they cannot be everywhere, and they can't do everything, no matter how much money we spend. Now is the time to have a serious conversation about military commitments, and we shouldn't assume that all of them are sacrosanct.

We are glad to see there is a growing consensus for reform, and we hope that there will be progress in these areas this year. The necessary changes, however, are unlikely to occur if increased funding allows the Pentagon to defer yet again decisions about strategic tradeoffs. We cannot ignore how wasteful spending endangers our fiscal health and national security. ■

1 "Open Letter: A Defense Reform Consensus," *Politico*, April 29, 2015, p. 12.

2 Project On Government Oversight, *Bad Business: Billions of Taxpayer Dollars Wasted on Hiring Contractors*, September 13, 2011.

3 Letter from Douglas W. Elmendorf, Director of the Congressional Budget

Office, to the Honorable Chris Van Hollen, Ranking Member of the House Committee on the Budget, about federal contracts and the contracted workforce, March 11, 2015.

4 Walter Pincus, "Pentagon budget efforts trapped by a cycle of 'madness,'" *The Washington Post*, December 1, 2014.

5 Secretary Robert M. Gates, Department of Defense, "Economic Club of Chicago as Delivered by Secretary of Defense Robert M. Gates, Chicago, IL, Thursday, July 16, 2009," July 16, 2009.

UPDATE:

Close Air Support and Major General Post

BY MANDY SMITHBERGER

“I can’t wait to be relieved of the burdens of close air support,” Major General James Post, the vice commander of Air Combat Command (ACC), allegedly told a collection of officers at a training session in August 2014. As with his now notorious warning that service members would be committing treason if they communicated with Congress about the successes of the A-10, General Post seems to speak for the id of Air Force headquarters’ true hostility towards the close air support (CAS) mission.

So far it appears that good reason and the safety of our troops has prevailed. The House and Senate included funding for the A-10 in their annual authorization and spending bills. Preserving this language to final passage is essential to protecting this mission. A working group of A-10 pilots, F-16 pilots, and Joint Terminal Attack Controllers (JTACs) estimated that A-10 divestment would “cause significant CAS capability and capacity gaps for 10 to 12 years,” create training shortfalls, increase costs per flying hour, and sideline over 200 CAS-experienced pilots due to lack of cockpits. The authorization bills also require an independent study of the required capabilities of platforms to replace the A-10 and significantly improve our CAS capability for the future.

We have also seen some accountability for Air Force headquarters efforts to intimidate A-10 pilots who exercised their constitutional rights to talk to Congress. POGO/CDI led a coalition letter and organized an action, signed by thousands, calling on Air Force Secretary Deborah James to remove General Post from his command. Following an investigation onto his remarks, the Air Force responded to this public pressure and removed him from his position on April 10.

CDI will continue to fight to make sure our ground troops have the combat capabilities they need to be successful, including effective close air support.

Air Force “Treason” Debacle Reveals Deeper Problems

BY TONY CARR

The following piece was first published on April 16, 2015, on the John Q. Public blog. It has been excerpted and updated. The original can be found at www.jq-publicblog.com/air-force-treason-debacle-reveals-deeper-problems/

ON JANUARY 10, MAJ. GEN. JAMES POST addressed participants in the Air Force’s annual Weapons and Tactics conference. Responding to a question about the future of the A-10, he made two remarks that ended up costing him his job. He first said that if later queried, he would deny the statement he was about to make. He then told the audience that anyone passing information to Congress about the capability of the A-10 was committing treason. His first remark got a chuckle from some audience members. His second remark froze the room into stone silence. Generals speak for the service, and to have their own Air Force applying such a demeaning word to them in even a vague sense shocked many in the 350-person crowd.

Several members of the audience reached out to me in the subsequent few days to share the comments. They were concerned, intimidated, and in some cases indignant. They did not feel free, for reasons made obvious by the tone and circumstances of Post’s comments, to challenge him or the Air Force directly. To give them a voice, I worked to corroborate their accounts and then made public what Post had reportedly said.

As the story went viral in mainstream media accounts, senior officials at Air Force headquarters stood fast, making no public comment and taking no noticeable action. Lawmakers were not so sanguine, with many expressing grave concern about the incident and Senator John McCain (R-AZ) demanding an investigation. The Air Force Inspector General (IG) eventually initiated an investigation on January 26, and the findings were published in early April.¹

The investigating officer, an experienced IG official specializing in senior officer inquiries, found by a preponderance of the evidence that Post’s words would have had a “chilling effect” on anyone contemplating contact with Congress to advocate for the A-10. The investigation found that Post’s position as Vice Commander of the Air Force’s premier warfighting command, combined with his choice of words in addressing a group of captains and majors, clearly had the effect of attempting to prevent members from communicating with Congress. Hence, Post’s words were deemed unlawful restriction in violation of 10 U.S.C. §1034.

Witnesses interviewed for the investigation intimated that even if they didn't feel restricted from contacting Congress, they expected that doing so would potentially damage or even jeopardize their careers. One witness remarked that "[i]f I ever went to Congress about the F-35 or the A-10...I sure as heck would not tell anybody that I'd done it."² This fear is something Post understood (or should have understood) when he made his remarks.

The investigation was relatively swift, and the report was made publicly available with minimal redaction. Acting on the findings, the Air Force formally reprimanded Post and removed him from his position as Vice Commander of Air Combat Command.

These actions can be seen as sending a strong message to airmen that curtailment of their right to confer with Congress won't be tolerated. Senator Kelly Ayotte (R-NH), who grilled General Mark Welsh, the Air Force's Chief of Staff, about the incident in a late January hearing, noted appreciation for "the thorough investigation that the Air Force Inspector General conducted into Maj. Gen. Post's comments."³

But even to the extent the Air Force's action is to be lauded (and not everyone believes the investigation was sufficient⁴), it doesn't satisfactorily conclude the treason debacle. Lurking within the investigation and the events leading up to it are clues gesturing toward deep-set problems of senior leadership and institutional climate. Unless these underlying issues are addressed, the treason debacle will be just another symptomatic stumble rather than the turning point it could be.

The Role of the Chief of Staff

The investigation's sluggish start

and certain facts it revealed raise fair questions about why General Welsh didn't respond differently when Post's comments were first brought to his attention.

Post made his comments on January 10. After I shared his remarks on the John Q. Public Facebook page on the evening of January 12,⁵ the initial account of the incident went viral and caught the notice of Senator McCain. Sometime shortly thereafter, Senator McCain demanded an account of the matter from the Air Force, and this triggered Welsh to reach out to Post for an explanation.

Here's an excerpt from Post's January 13 emailed response to Welsh:

"And then I suggested that for those in uniform it would be disloyal to our Senior leaders, some might say treason, to undermine the decisions that have already been made and briefed to Congress."⁶

So, according to the Air Force's own investigation, the Chief of Staff was aware on January 13 that the 2-star Vice Commander of his premier warfighting command had raised the specter of treason in discouraging airmen from advocating against the service's established budget position, and yet he chose not only to leave Post in his position, but to allow Post to finish out the rest of the ongoing conference where the troubling remarks had been made.

Has General Welsh, wittingly or unwittingly, created an unhealthy Air Force climate that undervalues the intellectual and political freedom of airmen?

This is a judgment call, to be sure. But it's a judgment call Welsh should explain. It seems at odds with his established expectation that commanders not only follow the rules, but cultivate an environment of dignity and respect among teammates.⁷ Post's explanation should probably have

jarred Welsh to the realization that not only had his 2-star subordinate likely broken federal law, but had certainly disrespected an auditorium full of airmen by implying, without evidence to support the claim, that some of them were culpable of an abhorrent betrayal of country.

Arguably, Welsh should have fired Post immediately, something government watchdogs (including the Project On Government Oversight)



Major General James Post

urged.⁸ He could also have directed Post to address the crowd again and clear up any lingering misunderstanding, something Post declined to do of his own accord. Perhaps more appropriately given the media coverage and the potentially chilling impact on the speech and civic participation of airmen across the force, Welsh himself could have promptly addressed the service and clarified in no uncertain terms that airmen were entitled to unfettered access to Congress.

He did none of this, and it's now fair to question those decisions.

It would be reasonable to accept that Welsh didn't take any of these actions because he felt an investigation

should be conducted first to establish whether Post's admitted words were understood by the audience the way myself and others asserted they had been. It would be fair, except that Welsh did not, at any point, initiate an investigation. There's no evidence he ever would have done so.

Only after Senator McCain sent a letter to Secretary of the Air Force Deborah Lee James on January 21 formally requesting an inquiry into the matter did the service agree to conduct one, and it was James rather than Welsh who responded to Senator McCain's office with assurance that the Inspector General (IG) would look into the incident.

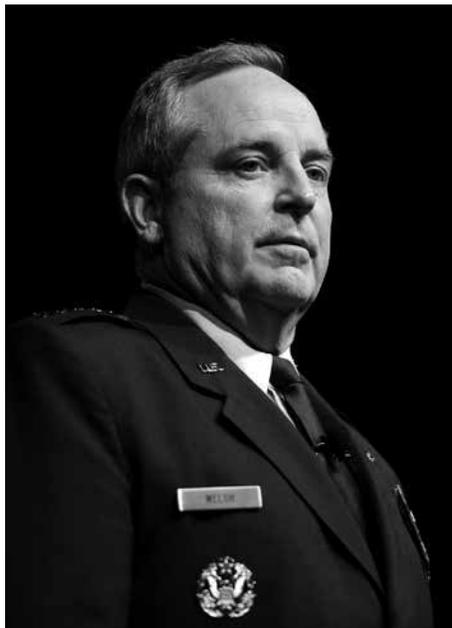
If Welsh wasn't going to investigate and had decided not to discipline Post, what, if anything, was he going to do? This question deserves an answer.

The Role of Institutional Climate

Commanders are responsible for the tone they set and the climate they create in organizations. This idea is embraced by the Air Force. At the very top, tonesetting is particularly important because it creates effects that span the entire service, coloring the attitudes and shaping the beliefs of hundreds of thousands of airmen.

Has General Welsh, wittingly or unwittingly, created an unhealthy Air Force climate that undervalues the intellectual and political freedom of airmen? Welsh has been labeling anyone who advocates in favor of keeping the A-10 "emotional" for a long time now,⁹ and this debacle evinces how his tactic of trivializing opponents has been adopted and recklessly misapplied by subordinates. While it doesn't excuse his conduct, the investigation makes clear that James Post was doing what he thought his Chief of Staff wanted.

Quoting the investigating officer:



As the Post situation unfolded, Gen. Welsh stood silent. His commanders want to understand why.

"Air Force leadership made their decision on this issue, and Maj. Gen. Post believes in the need to support the Secretary and the Chief on this issue. Maj. Gen. Post spoke to the frustration at the senior level of what is felt by some to be efforts to undermine the Air Force on this issue. The evidence indicates that this frustration led to Maj. Gen. Post's remarks." (Emphasis added)

Additionally, one witness remarked that he believed Post "was conveying a strong backing of the Chief of Staff of the Air Force's position on the A-10 and the retirement of the A-10."¹¹

It turns out that in his preamble to the mention of treason, Post first referred to the debate in favor of the A-10 as "emotional," arguably barking at the sound of the dog whistle repeatedly sounded by Welsh over the previous months. Post's subsequent insistence that "to do anything contrary to what the chief and secretary have directed would be disloy-

al" reinforces that he felt he was acting on their behalf.

When senior officers develop the idea that they can be breaking the law and simultaneously demonstrating utmost loyalty to their masters, we have reason to suspect a malignant culture has overtaken a proper regard for the law as ultimate governor of power. When the expression of personal views is equated with treason and senior officials feign concern in congressional hearings¹² while having taken no action to address the problem, we have reason to worry that the power wielded by institutional leaders on the nation's behalf has become unmoored from reason. Whether the Air Force is a healthy functioning federal agency at the most basic level is now open to question, and should be explored by Congress.

Post made another revealing statement in the investigation when he insisted that he "never said, nor meant to imply to anyone that it was treason, disloyal or disobedient to speak or testify when summoned by Congress."¹³ (Emphasis added)

This reveals one of two things. Either Post dodged an important question by cabining his response to include only those congressional communications solicited by legislators, thereby preserving the notion that it *could indeed* be considered "treason, disloyal, or disobedient" to actively reach out to Congress and offer unsolicited input; or, Post's long years sealed into the culture of the Air Force have given him the impression that service members can only legitimately communicate with Congress when summoned, which would be akin to considering airmen eligible only for an abridged version of their entitled political rights. Either revelation speaks unfavorable volumes about the climate of the institution

Post thought he was representing.

Post isn't the only airman to exhibit conduct symptomatic of a poorly tended Air Force climate. As first reported by Mandy Smithberger of POGO¹⁴ and further developed by the *Arizona Daily Independent*,¹⁵ officers recently scrubbed key information from a briefing given to senior service leaders following the Air Force's recent Close Air Support "Summit," an otherwise unremarkable and substantively vapid exercise in political theater designed to reassure Congress.

An excerpt from Smithberger's column details how Colonel James Meger

briefed lower level joint representatives from the Army and the Marine Corps about the risks identified by the group... [including] the prediction that divestment of the A-10 would result in "significant capability and capacity gaps for the next ten to twelve years" that would require maintaining legacy aircraft until the F-35A was fully operational. After the presentation, an Army civilian representative became concerned. The slides, he told Col. Meger, suggested that the operational dangers of divestment of the A-10 were much greater than had been previously portrayed by the Air Force. (Emphasis added)

Continuing, Smithberger notes that

[f]ollowing the briefing, Col. Meger met with Lt. Gen. Tod D. Wolters, the Deputy Chief of Staff for Operations for Air Force Headquarters. Notably, the Summit Slide presentation for general officers the next day stripped away any mention of A-10 divestment creating significant capability gaps.

Meger's attenuation of the briefing—speculatively at the urging or

at least with the knowledge of Wolters—resulted in a final presentation to Welsh and other senior generals that touched on the concept of strategic risk in only glancing fashion, and did not make Welsh responsible for the knowledge that retiring the A-10 would create an estimated 10-12 year gap in Close Air Support capability. This was the most relevant finding of the entire "Summit," and was censored from its findings.

This is demonstrable of a climate of corruption within which subordinate officers are reluctant to tell the truth when they know it conflicts with a senior leader's predilections. If the environment is exerting coercive pressure on officers like Meger (by all accounts a superb Colonel) to tell their bosses what they think those bosses want to hear rather than the truth necessary to make the right decisions and recommendations about the prioritization of scarce de-

When senior officers develop the idea that they can be breaking the law and simultaneously demonstrating utmost loyalty to their masters, we have reason to suspect a malignant culture has overtaken a proper regard for the law as ultimate governor of power.

fense dollars, the service is in a moral and ethical tailspin and likely beyond its ability to self-correct. Last year's cheating scandal in the missile community should have taught the Air Force the lessons of manufactured dishonesty.¹⁶ The A-10 issue is exposing that not enough was internalized from that painful experience.

In the wake of Post's firing from his job at Air Combat Command, spokesman Captain A.J. Schrag explained to the Associated Press that:

"Given the fact the A-10 issue continues to be an emotional topic...All

parties felt it would be best if [Post] continued to serve the Air Force in a different capacity."¹⁷

This is a jaw-dropping statement. Air Combat Command officially states that Post was removed not because he broke the law, or because an investigation proved he ran roughshod over the rights of his subordinates, or because his actions reflected poorly on the command and the service...but because "*the A-10 issue continues to be an emotional topic.*" This shows that even down to the Captain level, Welsh's subordinates are noting the way he has marginalized and cheapened those who reasonably disagree with him about the A-10. They're parroting his rhetoric. It also shows that he's fostering an environment where political rationales are given perceptual dominance over the proper reasons for command action.

This portrays the service as wholly unrepentant for Post's conduct,

and invites concern about whether the investigation was designed as a sacrificial offering rather than a true course correction.

Conclusion

Given what this analysis exposes, Secretary James should invite congressional assistance in the conduct of an objective, external review of the climate created by Air Force senior leaders. This calamity demonstrates that generals are creating an environment hostile to the truth and misaligned with the system of laws and

values the service exists to defend. This can't be tolerated.

It is said that when a leader senses a problem in his organization, he should begin looking for the root

only he can, the Chief of Staff could use this moment to illustrate the concepts of integrity, loyalty, civic participation, and constructive debate. There is reason to believe the service

ers must persuade, win arguments on merits, and get buy-in. This restates the timeless reality that informal authority is tenfold more effective than brute force.

Americans, especially those who fight for a living, don't take kindly to bullying and are willing to stand up for what they believe is right. Welsh shouldn't want it any other way, and should ask himself if his iteration of the Air Force properly recognizes and champions these all-important ideals.

cause starting at the edge of his own desk. While Gen. Welsh's recent lamentation that his subordinate commanders aren't communicating well undoubtedly has some merit, he should also reconsider his own approach.

This debacle is a unique chapter in Welsh's tenure that will partly define his legacy. By facing it head-on as

could use a refresher in these foundational areas.

This incident reflects a nascent Air Force tendency to silence opposing ideas by crushing them with the weight of formal authority. This is inconsistent with a service heritage born of reasoned disagreement and oft-contentious collaboration. For true loyalty to come about, lead-

The treason debacle demonstrates something else worth registering. Americans, especially those who fight for a living, don't take kindly to bullying and are willing to stand up for what they believe is right. Welsh shouldn't want it any other way, and should ask himself if his iteration of the Air Force properly recognizes and champions these all-important ideals.

The sooner these notions are transmitted loud and clear from the very top, the better. ■

Tony Carr is a retired Air Force officer, defense reform advocate, and student at Harvard Law School, where he edits the National Security Journal. He is also the creator and editor of the popular defense-related blog John Q. Public, which can be found at www.jqpublicblog.com.

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Member of Fighter Mafia Passes

BY PIERRE SPREY

Colonel Everest E. “Rich” Riccioni USAF (Ret.) passed away on April 15 in Monument, Colorado, at the age of 91. We at the Project On Government Oversight were privileged to have a fighter aviation expert of his stature as advisor, consultant, and contributor to our work. We will miss the brilliance of his insights, his lucid analyses of airpower and its costs, his dedication to improving national defense while reducing its burden on the taxpayer, his unforgettable, larger-than-life personality, and his passionate advocacy of all things Italian.

To say he was a colorful character is a vast understatement: his business card included *Raconteur*, *Bon Vivant*, and *World’s Third Greatest Fighter Aircraft Designer*. Whether lecturing as a charismatic professor of Astronautics at the Air Force Academy or leading radically innovative aeronautical programs in the Pentagon, he always carried an arrow, both as a pointer and as a reminder of the real fundamentals of war. The Academy cadets loved him for it. The Pentagon generals hated the reminder.

All told, Riccioni flew 55 military aircraft of all types, particularly fighters, logging 5,500 hours in the air over the course of his career.

In 1969, he was transferred to Air Force HQ in the Pentagon to work on F-15 R&D.

There Rich quickly became disenchanted with the unnecessary complexity and large size of the F-15, convinced that its high cost would destroy the possibility of acquiring an adequate number of fighters. Despite the Air Force’s enormous pro-F-15 career pressures, he courageously joined forces with two like-minded Pentagon dissidents, Col. John Boyd, the Air Force’s greatest air-to-air tactics innovator, and Pierre Sprey, the OSD “whiz kid” hated throughout the Air Force for his anti-bombing, pro-fighter analyses. They formed a triumvirate that Rich quickly dubbed the Fighter Mafia, dedicated to producing the most unbeatable, smallest, and cheapest air-to-air fighter in the world. At great risk to his career, Riccioni created and funded the initial covert design program that launched the unprecedented F-16 versus F-17 prototype flyoff competition.

It took five more years of incessant bureaucratic guerilla warfare in the corridors of the Pentagon and the Capitol to shape the design and then nail down production fund-



From L to R: Chuck Myers, Pierre Sprey, Chuck Spinney, Rich Riccioni, Tom Christie, and Winslow Wheeler.

ing, but the Fighter Mafia prevailed: the F-16 became the backbone of the USAF fighter force and the F-17 morphed into the F-18 to become the dominant Navy fighter. It was Riccioni’s proudest achievement but it ended his military career: the USAF Vice Chief of Staff banished him from the Pentagon to Korea and thence to a career-end tour as the commander of the Wright Patterson Flight Mechanics Division, a staid bureaucracy he shook to its roots with his crusading advocacy of supersonic cruise for fighters.

Rich retired from his beloved Air Force in 1976 and started a distinguished 15-year civilian career leading path-breaking design and analysis projects, including supercruising fighters, in Northrop’s Advanced Design department. Retiring from Northrop in 1981, he branched out on his own as an aviation consultant.

In the late 1990s, Riccioni and POGO began working together, primarily on cutting back the technically flawed and hugely expensive F-22, a fighter Rich passionately opposed. The plane’s grossly excessive complexity destroyed the supercruise capability that he had been advocating for 20 years; even worse, he saw that the fighter’s unaffordable and burgeoning sticker price—eventually \$419 million per fighter—was forcing the Air Force into “unilateral disarmament.” Rich’s vision was soon vindicated: in 2009 Defense Secretary Robert Gates terminated the F-22 at a uselessly small force of 187 aircraft.

For other points of view on Riccioni’s fascinating life, see Robert Coram’s meticulously researched and superbly insightful biography of Col. John Boyd (*Boyd: The Fighter Pilot Who Changed the Art of War*). ■



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