

## Sanctions, Schmanctions

I agree with the reasoning expressed in your April editorial [*“Crimea and Punishment,”* p. 4] but I believe you were remiss in not including the tools [Vladimir] Putin has to counter the West’s sanctions. Putin’s leverage is substantial and to have ignored that in your editorial was unfortunate. Russia is the largest energy exporter to the European Union (EU) as 38.7 percent of the natural gas and 32.6 percent of the oil consumed by the EU comes from Russia. In addition, Ukraine receives most of its natural gas from Russia. The United States has neglected the capability for refining and transportation of liquified natural gas for the last 50 years. As a consequence of this neglect, we are not prepared to supply the energy needs of the EU and Ukraine with that vital commodity.

The EU is Russia’s largest trading partner as 52.3 percent of all Russian trade is with the EU and 75 percent of foreign direct investment in Russia comes from the EU. Thus, sanctions would work for and against Russia. However, so far the EU, because of the trade and energy issues, has been reluctant to impose more stringent sanctions, and Putin is well aware of his leverage and the economic risks to Russia. In addition, Putin is aided by the fact that Crimea has been part of Ukraine only since 1954, when [Nikita] Khrushchev transferred the administrative responsibility from the Soviet Union to Ukraine. There is, therefore, not a long historical connection between Crimea and Ukraine, which weakens the case for intervention and stronger sanctions from the West.

Our Air Force flies from its base in Romania into Afghanistan. If we continue to have Russian overflight rights then those could be canceled. It would be possible to fly from Romania to Afghanistan and avoid Russian airspace, but that would require over flight of Georgia, Azerbaijan, and Turkmenistan. Putin could put pressure on each of those countries to deny such overflights. If he were successful in that effort it would make operations very difficult for the United States Air Force.

Putin’s popularity has soared with the Russian people since his seizure

of Crimea and the subsequent activities of his proteges in eastern Ukraine. Such popularity may very well allow a semi-dictator to withstand the difficulties imposed by any economic sanctions, including those more restrictive, than currently in force. This ability to withstand the pain of sanctions has certainly been true with Iran because of its nuclear program. The sanctions have not brought the Iranians, in a serious way, hat in hand, to the negotiating table and their truculence continues to this day.

Col. Lee R. Pitzer,  
USAF (Ret.)  
O’Fallon, Ill.

The editorial, “Crimea and Punishment,” hit the nail on the head. The very last [sentence] is worth remembering: “The US is only helpless against Russia if it chooses to be.”

MSgt. Drayton Robinette,  
USAF (Ret.)  
Panama City Beach, Fla.

## Remember the Depots?

The April article “Nuclear Readiness” was informative but incomplete because only operations were addressed [p. 40]. ICBM readiness requires both capable field operations and depot engineering. The best operations cannot mitigate the risks of engineering errors affecting safety or reliability. The engineering question is highly relevant since in 2013 all engineering responsibilities previously performed by the system contractor were moved in-house. Though a significant change, this new depot engineering approach was not addressed in the article. Is depot readiness important? Recall the last straw that caused the Secretary of Defense to lose confidence in Air Force nuclear operations in 2008 was an ICBM depot incident.

Brig. Gen. John Clay,  
USAF (Ret.)  
Ogden, Utah

There are no “systemic problems” in the Air Force ICBM personnel business. The end of the Cold War simply forgot them. The “Iron Fist” of the Strategic Air Command, with its global reach of bombers, tankers, and ICBMs,

theoretically held all threats at bay for many years.

I spent seven years of my career in the ICBM business as a crew member, instructor, flight commander, and squadron operations officer. At all times the importance of the top secret documents entrusted to us as officers and their handling was never in doubt. The importance of testing our continued knowledge to a 100 percent level was always enforced and encouraged from top to bottom in the chain of command. No one under my command ever cheated or was suspected of cheating—nor were any others within the ICBM community. It was the SAC way! We knew the mission and accomplished it!

In the missile business, it’s hard to motivate folks. Within SAC we had great motivational activities, such as missile combat crew competition, athletic competition, flight meetings between site managers, crews, and security teams, etc. I got my MBA through AFIT just for spending time underground. Is this still there?

In my opinion, placing the ICBM business under an admiral in a command with no apparent awareness of the codes involved or the importance thereof IS the problem. Perhaps there is a “systemic” problem here and a realignment may be the answer and keeping AETC out of it would help—as a rule they have no clue at this level.

Lt. Col. Jeff Valentine,  
USAF (Ret.)  
Friendswood, Texas

There must still be thousands of us alive who served in SAC, Strategic Air

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Command, with memory of how our bomber force was managed. A “barely passing grade” on the command, control, and execution procedures, was 100 percent—with no room for interpretation. All test questions were straight, answers obvious. Support of the bomber and missile legs of the triad was tested via management systems scoring such things as on-time takeoffs for airplanes and Vandenberg launches of missiles pulled from alert with their crews. All of SAC was readied for launch during the Cuban crisis with aircrews in airplanes as “live aboard” or in alert facilities on the flight line. Some bombers were dispersed to civilian airports, all practice alerts cancelled. All of the related activity was not lost on the Soviet intelligence community. To show any activity by a bomber force that could currently compare, would require a trip to the graveyard in Davis-Monthan.

Is it not apparent that one leg of the triad—subs, missiles, airplanes—is more than a little crippled? Whether testing of the remaining Air Force alert force in our missile silos should be viewed with alarm is a question of what they are tested on. Procedures that involve execution of the use of nuclear should be tested with 100 percent passing grade.

“If everyone were passing all the time there would be something to worry about” may mean everyone is sure they know how to deploy their missiles, not that the tests are not hard enough.

Lt. Col Bill Cross,  
USAF (Ret.)  
Davis, Calif.

### Pandora’s Box

Regarding Colonel Pitzer’s “I Never Promised You a Rose Garden” letter [April, p. 6]: Although the disability reasoning needs rectifying (no one gets sleep apnea from serving), his first paragraph “and all so-called promises made or imagined by previous Administrations” opens the same Pandora’s Box some DHS uninformed person opened when they stated, “Tricare wasn’t designed for working age military retirees. They should buy into their work plan.” Now it’s all the buzz—if the government isn’t held “to honor and totally fulfill” (his words) said promises, then what is to stop them from cutting back or taking away retirement?

Is it possible? They just tried to keep one percent from working age military retirees. It’s not only possible, they did it! I’m glad I kept reading—thank you, Lieutenant Colonel Cook and Ron Miller, for your on-target and coherent comments. Shame on Colonel Pitzer for not thinking outside the box.

The government owes our retirement,

as in past tense. We earned it; they pay the bill (they set the requirements, not us!). Retirees are not some future expense—they are a past debt. For them to try and make retirees’ pay into the military budget is boggling—I read less than one percent of our nation ever served, and 17 percent of those draw a retirement check. So those of us who paid with our dedication and bodies are not expected to pay again to carry this nation’s defense? Preposterous. Let the 99 percent who do nothing for this country’s defense other than pay taxes pay a bit more—or wear the uniform. After all, they want the protection. Stop punishing those who served 20-plus years.

SMSGt. Mark Cipriano,  
USAF (Ret)  
Elyria, Ohio

The letter by Col. Lee R. Pitzer in the April 2014 issue of *Air Force Magazine* regarding compensation and “promises” by the government clearly demonstrates how the colonel is out of touch with reality. I genuinely feel sorry for the colonel’s spouse, I guess he is not bound by any “promise” he may have made at the wedding. If you really feel this way, sir, why don’t you return your retired pay? After all, the current Administration should not be bound by the promises made 20 years ago when you joined.

With regard to service connected disabilities that he deems are unfair, simply applying for a rating does not guarantee a check, but in many cases it does guarantee services for injuries incurred while in the service of this nation and this is processed by VA personnel who authorize the compensation based on evidence.

Even more outrageous though is the claim that Air Force and Navy personnel are not subject to the hazards of “road patrols” or “IEDs.” You may want to rethink that statement. My son-in-law (USAF) deployed in 2008-09 and 2012-13 doing “road patrols.” I deployed in 2004-2005 (USN) and was subjected to “road patrols” and “IEDs” almost every day. US Navy Seabees, SEALs, and other sailors have augmented Army, Marine Corps, and other services since Day 1, and to imply that they do not deserve compensation is outrageous!

Thomas Izbrand,  
Temple, Texas

### Heart of the North

I read the article “The Heart of the North,” by retired Col. Jack Broughton with amazement [April, p. 70]. He forgot to mention another critical element that saved the rear ends of many a fighter pilot: the men at the GCI (ground control intercept) sites in Thailand. I do not

know enough about the GCI sites in Vietnam to speak knowledgeably but I am positive they also worked their tails off. Let’s not forget the controllers and aircrews in the AEW C-121s that spent hours flying at 50 feet over the Gulf of Tonkin.

It is true the fighters went north in flight formation, but they often came back with battle damage and required the assistance of both GCI and tanker crews to get home. GCI personnel took great pride in the assistance provided. I personally worked with one battle damaged Thud that with our (Brigham) help was hooked up over the west side of the Plain of Jars. For every four gallons of fuel pumped in, three gallons were lost. The tanker crew “pulled” (my words) the pilot over Tahkli where a safe landing was made. Every tanker crewman that I have ever talked to was also justly proud of his efforts.

My experience was limited but many controllers can provide many more situations than this example. Just ask for comments.

Maj. Ralph Gibbons, Maj  
USAF (Ret)  
Fremont, Neb.

A very interesting article by Colonel Broughton and it brought back memories for this former boom operator about refueling the F-105. I believe every pilot tried to make the contact without my help but there was a little edge in front of the receptacle that would catch the boom nozzle. I would lift the boom up slightly just before the contact was made.

When the copilot said that the fuel flow had stopped, I would wait a few seconds before I triggered a disconnect to minimize the fuel that would get into the F-105 air-conditioning system.

CMSGt. Clarence E. Vold,  
USAF (Ret.)  
Yuba City, Calif.

### Sorry, Wrong Number

John Correll’s “Fear of Fallout” in the April issue [p. 64] of *Air Force Magazine* is a fascinating retrospective on a way of thinking [that] is hard to imagine today. However, the CONELRAD frequencies cited (630 and 1230) are incorrect. The musical mnemonic was “640 1240 CONELRAD.”

Hank Caruso  
California, Md.

■ *Hank Caruso is right. My memory of the CONELRAD frequencies was wrong.*—JOHN T. CORRELL

### Old Time Autonomy

Full auto? Automation in warfare has been with us and improved over decades [“The Autonomy Question,”

April, p. 44]. Starting in the 1950s, USAF strived toward automating the air defenses of points of North America that would become known as "SAGE" (semi-automatic ground environment). Although the human element was still a part of this vast mixed network, these enormous vacuum-tube computers were later capable of self-directing F-106s and Bomarc missiles to their intended targets. Hence the digital-age and "push-button warfare" had come together.

Forthcoming evolution of smart machines may have made human pilots outdated, but the redundancy systems can still rely on the intervention of humans.

Vince Granato  
Suisun City, Calif.

**Blowhard Brass**

Hardly a month passes before we are again chided by the Pentagon brass, both military and civilian, about making "tough choices" on the Air Force budget under the sequester, about cutting personnel costs, which are "spiraling out of control," and about "slowing the growth" of those same costs. At best, the rhetoric is shopworn; at worst, it is disingenuous to the point of being intentionally deceitful and dishonest [*Aperture: Three Levels of Budget Pain*, April, p. 12].

I entered the Active Air Force in 1969 from the Air Force Academy and served almost six years, including one year in SEA. Following Active Duty, I served two-and-a-half years in the Air National Guard, and then I finished with 13 years in the Air Force Reserve, retiring in 1990. Nearly two-thirds of my commissioned service was in the reserve as a Category H, Individual Ready Reserve (IRR). Except for 10 to 15 paid duty days each year, I received one inactive duty training points toward reserve retirement. Most years I accumulated 90 to 100 of these nonpaid points. In those days, only 60 IDT points were credited toward retirement, so I effectively gave up both pay and retirement credits totaling 30 to 40 points each year. According to my calculations, including inflation, those points represent about \$150,000 to \$200,000 in lost income over my expected retirement lifetime. Like all retired reservists I waited from my retirement (age 43) until age 60 to receive retirement pay and Tricare benefits.

I did all of this for two reasons. The first reason: I believed in serving my country. By any measure I believe that I did a fair job of it. I know many other military members whose service and sacrifice were much greater than mine.

The second reason that I served was that I believed that the Air Force had made a promise to repay me for some of this service with a pay and benefits package that would keep up with inflation and growing health care costs. Since I was self-employed for more than 30 years of my 37-year civilian career, I had no other employer-sponsored health care. Thus, at age 60 my wife and I started using Tricare, and then at 65, Medicare with Tricare For Life.

Now, those still serving, as well as those of us who are retired, are told that the Air Force can no longer afford to keep past promises. We are told that personnel costs are growing at a faster rate than the overall budget. Even though these assertions have been disproved by the facts many times, Pentagon civilian and military leaders operate under the guise of repeating these assertions so often that they will drown out the voices of reason who know the facts and who repeatedly refute such misinformation.

On a personal level, I am offended when I am told by high-ranking officers that they are "keeping the faith" with those of us who serve and who have served. I am even more offended by similar comments of high-ranking officers who are my alumni and who supposedly lived under the same honor code that I did. My response to those senior leaders is that I am willing to sacrifice for the good of the service only to the extent that the service cleans up its own act and shows us similar loyalty. This includes better management of the public funds that have been entrusted to our senior leaders for weapon system procurement. The recent history of Air Force leaders, in that regard, is woeful! Further, before the civilian leaders try to throw us "under the bus" on health care costs, perhaps they should examine their own track record of failure to implement the many cost-saving measures that have been repeatedly presented to them by members of the military coalition. Lastly, both military and civilian leaders need to ensure that all components of the Total Force, and military retirees, are not being singled out for a disproportionate share of the budget cuts by this or any subsequent administration. If, and only if, Pentagon senior leaders take such measures will I be a willing partner in any effort to make reasonable sacrifices for the good of the country.

From this process the lesson objective for all of us is to learn, and remember, that loyalty is a two-way street.

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