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AFA's Mission

Our mission is to promote a dominant United States Air Force and a strong national defense and to honor airmen and our Air Force heritage. To accomplish this, we:

Educate the public on the critical need for unmatched aerospace power and a technically superior workforce to ensure US national security.

Advocate for aerospace power and STEM education.

Support the Total Air Force family and promote aerospace education.

Help Those Who Help Themselves

I disagree with your editorial requiring that we either go all out at war with ISIS or abandon any effort against them [*Editorial: Win or Go Home, December 2014, p. 4*]. Instead, I believe the current implied strategy is the best route to the goal "degrade and ultimately destroy" ISIS. Note that I believe this is a goal—and not the strategy to reach the goal.

Our strategy appears to be in two parts. First is to degrade ISIS by reducing resources it needs to wage war. Financial resources are being attacked through destruction of refineries and financial sanctions. Facilities and equipment are being destroyed. This part of the strategy is apparently being implemented as forcefully as possible.

The second element could be summarized as: "Helping those who are willing to fight ISIS." You note that the US is capable of bringing far more direct military force than is now being applied. However, you suggest that our involvement should be based entirely on the potential long-term threat. We must also consider the questionable willingness of the American public to support another massive invasion, regardless of the threat. Additionally, regional resentment seems to follow our direct insertion of massive land forces—even from those who benefit from it. This part of our current strategy avoids those problems.

Afghanistan posed an unacceptable long-term risk of an unsophisticated terrorist organization that had seized control of an entire country. We initially removed that complete control through helping local tribal forces against that organization. Removing all terrorist control developed into a long, drawn-out, and expensive operation, which we have now turned over to newly organized forces.

ISIS is much better organized and presents a far greater threat. We should not ignore that threat. However,

unlike Afghanistan, ISIS faces much more than a temporary tribal collection. We have seized the opportunity to bypass massive direct involvement by supporting established local forces willing to fight ISIS. As their engagement increases, the total level of our support increases. We will not win; they will win. But we decidedly should not simply go home.

Michael R. Polston
Blue Springs, Mo.

Paying Respect, Yo

General Welsh's letter in the October issue (p. 6) [*About That Flight Suit ...*] has given me new respect for *Air Force Magazine*. To think that he took the time to not only read but respond to another letter makes me, well, kinda happy.

I hope the general reads the articles, too: Like "The Hearings That Revolutionized Airlift" (November 2014, p. 64). That article is a great example on why the Army doesn't trust the Air Force! Bring that thought to current [day], and you see getting rid of the A-10 and C-27 aircraft that have no purpose other than serve the needs of the Army, updates their mistrust. Nothing tells the Army we love them more than an A-10 overhead. But who cares what the Army thinks, right?

Do you have a comment about a current article in the magazine? Write to "Letters," *Air Force Magazine*, 1501 Lee Highway, Arlington, VA 22209-1198. (Email: letters@afa.org.) Letters should be concise and timely. We cannot acknowledge receipt of letters. We reserve the right to condense letters. Letters without name and city/base and state are not acceptable. Photographs cannot be used or returned.—THE EDITORS

In the December edition, General Welsh said F-16s do more CAS than A-10s (p. 36). But that's because there are a lot more F-16s deployed. And just how does one justify retiring 283 A-10s as equaling 350 F-16s? That's all funny math to me. Just like replacing a paid-for \$18 million A-10 with a \$108 million F-35 somehow saves money. What accounting school did that come from?

Recently, James Fallows wrote a great article on our "chickenhawk nation" (*Atlantic*, January/February 2015). He states that we will spend more on defense than the total of nearly the next 10 countries *combined*. How much is enough? He quotes William Lind:

"The most curious thing about our four defeats in Fourth Generation War—Lebanon, Somalia, Iraq, and Afghanistan—is the utter silence in the American officer corps. Defeat in Vietnam bred a generation of military reformers. ... Today, the landscape is barren. Not a military voice is heard calling for thoughtful, substantive change. Just more money, please."

Is sequestration such a bad idea? Maybe it's time (again) to seriously re-examine roles and missions. For example, the F-35 does more than an A-10. But at what cost? Let's start with putting all the A-10s in the Guard and Reserve. Then, let's revisit how many F-35s are needed, as opposed to a mixed force. We have a near trillion dollar budget! *A trillion dollars!* Let's just look at promoting some of those who save money, not reward just those who justify spending more money. My grandkids will appreciate it.

Wayne P. Grane
Hobe Sound, Fla.

Time for Reflection

With the passing of the recent congressional spending bill for FY 2015, it seems likely the A-10C Thunderbolt II (or Warthog, as it has been known throughout its service) has yet another year's reprieve from retirement. This should give USAF sufficient time to reflect upon its purely business-driven decision to retire the A-10 early and instead determine what's best for the close air support (CAS) mission, the other critical missions performed principally by the A-10 community, and our nation's defense, in general. That discussion begins by clearing up some of the inaccuracies in Marc Schanz's December 2014 *Air Force Magazine* article, "What's Next for CAS?" [p. 34], then exposing the real problems behind the debate about the future of the A-10 that USAF, DOD, and Congress must solve to provide for CAS and the other A-10 missions in the future.

USAF has claimed for over two years now that it has "no choice" but to retire the A-10 due to the fiscal constraints of the Budget Control Act (sequestration). Yet the budgeting process is all about choices, cost-benefit analyses, and risk-reward trade-offs. What USAF planners appear to have done is what all the services typically do: projected the kind of future war they want to fight onto their assessments to determine the mix of capabilities they need (want). The A-10, as a supposedly single-mission platform built in the 1970s, apparently doesn't fare well in future defense projections in anti-access, area-denial (A2/AD) scenarios like a Taiwan Strait confrontation. But if you think you've heard this all before, you aren't wrong, as this is no less than the fourth time USAF has tried to retire the A-10 early. Nonetheless, after each attempt the real world—Operations Desert Storm, Deliberate Force, Allied Force, Iraqi Freedom, Enduring Freedom, Odyssey Dawn, and now Inherent Resolve—intervened to prove the A-10's worth and applicability. USAF leaders continue to decry the A-10's lack of survivability in the A2/AD environment, but A2/AD is a low-probability, high-risk scenario that consistently shows losses for all fourth generation platforms in training and exercises, not just the A-10. While USAF certainly needs to prepare to prevail in the low probability but high consequence A2/AD environment, it must also be ready to win in the much more likely, but less sexy, majority of the conflict spectrum, from battlespace shaping, through irregular warfare, to regional conflicts against non-A2/AD major powers. Not doing both is a failure for USAF to properly balance its capability portfolio for national defense—a business case USAF planners should fully appreciate.

Some of the debate's other inaccuracies, continued in the Schanz article, include:

- The need to retire the A-10 early to make the F-35 initial operational capability (IOC) date: The F-35 program is already years behind schedule, yet USAF has only recently made the claim that the A-10 is one of the key factors slowing IOC. It would be more correct to say that poor DOD acquisition policies (known for years and beyond the scope of this letter) and sequestration have slowed F-35 IOC and that the A-10 has simply become the public scapegoat for the true underlying issues.

- Eighty percent of CAS sorties in Afghanistan since 2001 flown by other aircraft: While this is very likely true, it is a classic example of the creative use of statistics to prove a point.

- The mission of CAS has "diver-

sified and changed": Capabilities, technology, and tactics, techniques, and procedures have evolved, but the mission of "air action against hostile forces which are in close proximity to friendly forces and which require detailed integration of each air mission with the fire and movement of those forces" has not appreciably changed since the start of World War II. Unfortunately, this argument is often used to show how "outdated" the A-10 is, which is laughable in the face of the precision-engagement A-10C upgrade started in 2007 (and long since complete), which brought digital connectivity, J-series precision weapons, a color moving map, and advanced targeting pods to the A-10A's already impressive CAS capabilities, an upgrade that, along with the Scorpion Helmet-Mounted Cueing System, has made the A-10C's tactical suite the envy of other fighters in air-to-ground mission sets.

- The idea that the US will conduct CAS in an A2/AD environment: A2/AD is a strategic and operational environment incompatible with executing modern CAS, where you need local air superiority (as you do for the successful conduct of most missions); that is, the joint force will need access to the battlespace before surface forces are introduced and CAS is needed, freedom of action that air, space, and cyber capabilities will provide prior to follow-on action by surface forces. CAS in an A2/AD environment might be something we'll be able to do someday but not in the next generation of CAS capabilities and certainly not with the F-35 whose A2/AD configuration would be extremely weapons-limited due to solely internal carriage. When the F-35 conducts CAS in the future, it will very likely do so with weapons and fuel tanks externally mounted, just like current fourth generation fighters and the A-10.

- Can't do air superiority with an A-10: This seems obvious on its face but depends again on perspective and consideration of all the facts. USAF, as an institution, thinks of air superiority in terms of freedom of action above the range of small arms, automatic weapons, and light anti-aircraft artillery (nominally 10,000 feet above the ground). Yet below that bubble is where helicopters have suffered hugely in the past 13 years and where air superiority also needs to be achieved. This is a regime USAF has spent little effort addressing—but with which a platform and pilots like those in the A-10 community can provide significant capability in terms of locating and suppressing enemy defenses and armed escort of more vulnerable platforms like helicopters and the V-22 Osprey.

- One of the biggest inaccuracies

in the debate is the number of omitted facts and issues, presumably cherry-picked to support USAF's early retirement case. These include three key additional missions performed by the A-10 community that are either unknown to most within the debate or intentionally omitted to strengthen the erroneous single-mission argument:

(1) Forward air control (Airborne) (FAC[A]).

(2) Combat search and rescue/personnel recovery rescue mission commander (RMC, or Sandy One).

(3) Special operations forces support.

(4) Multimission versus single-mission capability: As shown above, the A-10 conducts three additional missions above and beyond CAS, belying the oft-seen argument that the platform and community are only "single mission." Detractors will argue that the above missions are all simply a subset of CAS. While certainly not true in the case of CSAR/PR, a rarely seen counter needs to be: How can and will USAF justify having communities dedicated to each of its classic functions—air superiority, strategic attack, and interdiction—and three of its more recently constituted ones—airlift, ISR, and CSAR/PR—and not have a community dedicated to provide CAS to the US Army, a specific function tasked to the service by the 1948 Key West Agreement?

The F-35 was slated to take over all A-10 missions and many of the F-16's and F-15E's missions, as well, in a graceful phasing out of the older platforms over time while the F-35 community stood up. What needs to be addressed by USAF, DOD, and Congress in this debate before the FY 16 Presidential Budget and spending bills are the real problems:

- What is the best way to provide CAS to the US Army?

- Does the joint community need USAF to conduct FAC(A)?

- Does the joint PR and USAF CSAR require a trained, qualified RMC?

- Does SOF need dedicated, integrated fighter air support?

- If USAF maintains the CAS mission for the US Army (and presumably the other missions above), how does the service institutionalize the CAS attack mission excellence developed and maintained by the A-10 community since the 1970s?

The youngest Hog airframe is over 30 years old, making it one of the oldest fighter fleets in USAF. A service life extension and the A-10C upgrade have added life to the platform, but even USAF's most liberal projections in the

past slated its retirement for 2028-30. The A-10 retirement debate needs to be less about retirement of an aging airframe and more about when and how that retirement is conducted in a way that preserves the attack mission excellence.

Lt. Col. Robert M. Chavez Jr.,
USAF (Ret.)
Las Vegas

For the USAF Chief of Staff and the Secretary of the Air Force Deborah Lee James to reinvent close air support and declare other "platforms" suitable for CAS, they are forgetting the ultimate benefactor and *raison de guerre* that we fly is the US Army soldier, the boots on the ground.

Yes, General Welsh has taken some heat over the controversy that has arisen concerning scrapping the A-10 and reassigning the CAS mission to "other platforms" as the bean counters and politicians like to characterize the discussion. I guess that's why he has four stars on his shoulders.

"It's not all about the A-10." Our obligation is in supporting the young Army troopers on the ground—referred to as troops-in-contact or TICs. My college roommate Maj. Pete Larkin, flying an AC-47 in Vietnam, explained it to me: "TICs are Army troops engaged in a firefight with NVA or Viet Cong. When confronted with a larger communist force, they usually call us for help. Then we kill the attacking enemy troops with our three Gatling guns."

Look at the typical munitions mentioned in the subject article that can be fired from the example fast jets "platforms" and drones when performing CAS: GBU-12 Paveway II, AGM-65 Maverick missile, and the AGM-114 Hellfire missile. These examples are all expensive, heavy, guided weapons.

Either way, the enemy will probably confront our troopers in small squads or platoon sized groups. Traveling in stolen vehicles, probably Toyota pickups "Desert Rat style" with mounted guns, seem very popular, as well as stolen Bradley Fighting Vehicles—and a tank or two. Another popular enemy tactic is to stage an ambush using mortars from dug-in positions. Are we going to send an F-16 after a mortar team or a Toyota pickup truck?

SECAF James, and Air Force Deputy Undersecretary Heidi H. Grant recently assured us other aircraft can pick up the CAS role: F-16s, F-15s B-1s, B-2s, and B-52s; and we will have a stronger Air Force even though we downsize, cut pilot flying time, and send masses of operating personnel home in cruel RIFs.

No ma'am, we are playing Russian roulette with our national defense and the lives of countless ground personnel—boots on the ground, remember? I would venture that if we asked ISIS if we should keep the A-10, they would vote to scrap it.

My first squadron commander—fresh out of UPT—had a sign on his desk that read, "The mission of the US Air Force is to fly and fight, and don't you ever forget it!"

Michael W. Rea
Savannah, Ga.

No Pressure

I must disagree with the statement at the bottom of p. 64 that the C-124 Globemaster II was derived from a Douglas commercial design [*"The Hearings That Revolutionized Airlift," November 2014*].

The C-124 was derived from the C-74, which built on the Douglas DC-4 in terms of aerodynamics and airframe structure, but was designed specifically as a military transport. Since the C-74 was never intended to be an airliner, it was not pressurized.

Paul Talbott
Fayetteville, Ga.

Exhaustingly Loud

Thanks for a most interesting piece on Eisenhower's B-25 [*December 2014, p. 70*]. I flew in the Marine Corps bomber version, the PBJ-1, as an aircrewman in the Southwest Pacific in 1944 and 1945. Postwar, with a USAF commission courtesy AFROTC, the TB-25J was my advanced pilot training airplane. The B-25 was well-described in the article, except for one "feature": It was *loud*. Note the individual exhaust stacks ringing the cowling, giving each cylinder its own blast port. And I do mean blast. On p. 74, note in the picture that there are no exhaust ports on 34030's cowling, the exhaust having been converted to a more modern—and quieter (relatively speaking)—collector ring system. I have never seen a preserved and operating Mitchell that has not been converted to collector rings. If there is one, clue me in, and I'll get my ear defenders and observe.

Col. Robert J. Powers,
USAF (Ret.)
Shreveport, La.

Anti-aircraft Flak

I'd like to respond to retired Colonel Coffman's comments on General Hostage, the A-10, and the "bigger picture" [*"Letters," December, p. 8*]. I don't know when Colonel Coffman left the Air Force, but I'm a retired fighter pilot who trained almost exclusively against the Soviet-era threat, retiring in 1997.

I returned to Active Duty from 2009 to 2013. I can assure Colonel Coffman that, without going into specifics, the integrated air defenses possessed by many of today's military forces, including Syria, far (yes, far) exceed the threat we faced during the Cold War. The A-10 was designed to kill Soviet tanks pouring through the Fulda Gap. Today it remains an unequaled low-threat CAS aircraft. But there is no serious consideration among those with knowledge of the current environment, of being able to employ the A-10 against any enemy with modern air defense capabilities.

Incidentally, Capt. Mike Hostage was a student of mine in the F-16 in the '80s. I remember him being a receptive student, a gifted pilot, and a thoroughly likeable guy.

Lt. Col. Dale Hanner,
USAF (Ret.)
Loveland, Colo.

More of the Same

Rebecca Grant's fine article (Fighting Through, December 2014, p. 40) brought back a flood of fond memories from my tour at Kunsan Air Base in South Korea.

In 1997-98, Korea was about as close as you could get to all-out war, and we regularly exercised to fine-tune our warfighter skills. As the senior airfield ops officer, I was assigned to an

exercise position as night shift mission coordinator in the "Wolf Pit," located in the bowels of the wing's operations center. From that not-so-lofty position I couldn't actually see but could monitor flying ops and other operations on the airfield.

Kunsan's airfield was somewhat operationally constrained by its one, and rather narrow, runway and accompanying limited ramp space—good enough to support fighters but challenging for big cargo aircraft. With that in mind we'd scratch our heads when we'd review war plans that identified numerous cargo aircraft projected to transit through that would make up the air bridge to support our war efforts.

Every exercise would come with those exhilarating moments when the incoming missile light would come on. We'd all scramble to top off our MOPP (Mission Oriented Protective Posture) gear by donning gas mask, hood, and gloves. We'd then hunker down in place to await the outcome.

Invariably the simulated missiles would hit on and/or around the airfield and cause considerable havoc. With the all clear we'd quickly dispatch fully MOPPED personnel out to assess the damage. A runway sweep would be conducted to identify any damage, and the various sensors on the airfield would be checked for chemical-biological presence.

These sweeps brought their own threat. One dark night we got a reality check when a fully MOPPED troop in a pickup truck was reported driving helter-skelter down the runway headed to check an onfield sensor. This would not necessarily be a problem except for the four-ship of Vipers that was taxiing into position for immediate takeoff at end of the runway. Expect to deal with communications breakdowns in war.

There were always runway cratering scenarios to cope with during exercises. The real showstopper was not necessarily missile impacts but what was notionally contained in their warheads. We not so affectionately called it being "spodged" when our contaminant sensors detected positive results—a potential showstopper.

For practical purposes, that would bring our exercise to a screeching halt. In a weeklong exercise you can't wait out long-term chemical/biological impacts. In a real-world scenario, I suspect that any continued ops would be a real challenge for the short or long term.

As I read Grant's article I couldn't help wondering what all has really changed since my Kunsan experience. I hate to cast a cloud over "fighting while degraded," but I sense: not much.

Col. Bill Malec,
USAF (Ret.)
O'Fallon, Ill.



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