

## CAS confab; PACAF's new boss; The missions are the message ....

### THE CAS CAMPAIGN

Since the Fiscal 2016 President's Budget was released, USAF officials have gone on a public relations offensive, attempting to answer critics who question the service's stewardship of the close air support mission. The push began at the Air Force Association's Air Warfare Symposium in Orlando, Fla., in February, with Welsh's loud defense of USAF's accomplishments and commitment to the mission.

It's an interesting conversation where everyone's talking about the F-35 not doing close air support when that's all the Marine Corps is buying it for, Welsh said. The "thread of conversation," which claims USAF doesn't care about the CAS mission, "is a little ridiculous."

The Air Force flew some 20,000 CAS sorties a year on average just in the last seven years, he noted, asking, "When is there a little bit of credit given for that?" Welsh said P-40s conducted CAS missions in World War II as did A-7s in Vietnam, "long before we had an A-10." The idea that USAF does not have a "mentality" for CAS is "a little beyond my comprehension," he added.

In a background briefing held later that month at the Pentagon, several Air Force pilots described their CAS experiences in F-15Es, F-16s, and other aircraft over the last 14 years. Improvements in joint terminal attack control, precision weapons, and training since September 2001 have rendered the close air support mission "platform agnostic," said one veteran F-16 pilot and weapons school instructor. Due to years of combat deployments to Afghanistan and Iraq, a wide swath of the combat air force is now steeped in CAS knowledge, from the F-16 to the B-1B. "You train for the mission you expect to fly. In the last 14 years, that's been close air support," said one pilot.

USAF's motivation for pushback is clear: The CAS conversation "is getting wrapped around the A-10," Air Combat Command boss Gen. Herbert J. "Hawk" Carlisle said in Orlando. Carlisle said he planned to convene a weeklong summit of the services in early March to discuss the CAS lessons from Southwest Asia operations and how the joint force should adapt to provide CAS in future combat scenarios, such as contested or anti-access, area-denial environments.

ACC officials dubbed the event "CAS Focus Week," calling it a deep dive into the mission to see what the services "have learned and what we think the gaps and seams are." Working groups from the Air Force, Navy, Marine Corps, Army, and US Special Operations Command met at the Pentagon in the first week in March to discuss subjects ranging from tactics to data and information sharing practices. They briefed Carlisle on the findings, then presented the findings to the service Chiefs. "We're hoping to solve a lot of this stuff," Carlisle noted.

An ACC official, speaking on background, said the timing for the event was part of a larger discussion about how USAF is reorganizing, training, and equipping its combat air forces. USAF leadership felt now was the time to uncover "existing and potential challenges, future requirements, and capability gaps" in CAS. Specific decisions "will be made over the coming months," he added, but ACC's goal is to engender

discussion on how to make sure CAS is a "sustainable" mission. "We have no preconceived notions or end state other than to generate ideas," he added.

At least publicly the ground service is backing USAF's talking points. CAS is a "platform agnostic" mission, said Army Secretary John M. McHugh on Feb. 26, echoing comments by USAF pilots. As technology and capabilities change, the expectations between services also will change, said McHugh, who noted that CAS's future is a strategic discussion that will be "addressed and readdressed over time."

McHugh swatted down the notion that the Army could inherit divested A-10s. Fixed wing CAS is an "Air Force mission, and it should be. And I'm sure the Air Force feels the same way," he told reporters. What is important is that when needed, ground troops can have timely and effective "explosive ordnance on enemy positions," McHugh said. He said he has received assurances from USAF that this will continue to be the case into the future.

### THE VIEW FROM HICKAM

In her first interview with *Air Force Magazine* as Pacific Air Forces boss, Gen. Lori J. Robinson, an experienced air battle manager, said she wants to continue and expand theater security cooperation as dictated by the "places not bases" construct emphasized by her predecessor.

However, Robinson gave it her own twist: "places, some bases, but airmen ambassador faces."

This concept applies to the PACAF's core tasks, with regard to its theater security cooperation efforts—partnerships, presence, and power projection, she said. Airmen are serving as the Air Force's ambassadors at all levels. Shortly after she took command, she went to Japan for a conference of allied air Chiefs. Japan Air Self-Defense Force Chief of Staff Gen. Harukazu Saito dubbed her the "dean" for the delegation, and as such, Robinson represented all the Chiefs present in meetings with the Defense Minister and Prime Minister Shinzo Abe. "That put a big stamp on my understanding of my role in developing partnerships in the region," she said.

Robinson sees great value in joint initiatives with key allies from Japan to South Korea to PACAF headquarters at JB Pearl Harbor-Hickam, Hawaii, particularly with regard to command and control and data sharing initiatives.

"If we think of [theater security cooperation] as a method of building trust and confidence, this is another measure ... as far as I am concerned," she said.

Robinson said there must be a "constant conversation" between military leaders and policy-makers, so no one has to figure out where they stand on issues when a crisis emerges. USAF and its policy-makers "both need to understand what's going on so we can provide the best defensive capability and the best mutual understanding of what's happening in the battlespace."

She also touted joint US-Japan initiatives. These include the JASDF Air Defense Command at Yokota AB, Japan, where USAF personnel work alongside their Japanese counterparts

to produce a common operating picture of the Japanese home islands, and exercises such as the integrated air and missile defense drills held at the Pacific Integrated Air and Missile Defense Center at Hickam. USAF airmen and their allies in countries like Japan “are starting to think alike” on how integrated air and space operations are managed and controlled, and over time, this will have strategic implications in theater.

These efforts are reflected in the expansion of PACAF’s set piece exercises, such as February’s Cope North on Andersen AFB, Guam. There, USAF worked alongside the Royal New Zealand Air Force and others in a humanitarian disaster response event staged on the islands of Rota and Tinian, in addition to joint combat training. The exercise involved some 2,340 personnel from the US, Australia, Japan, New Zealand, the Philippines, and South Korea, making it the largest-yet iteration of Cope North. Vietnam, an emerging partner the US is courting in Southeast Asia, sent observers, as did Singapore.

The “consistent presence and drumbeat of that exercise” has helped create stability and trust between key regional allies and partners, Robinson said, particularly enhancing humanitarian and disaster cooperation practices and procedures.

The joint US-Republic of Korea Key Resolve/Foal Eagle exercises, which began March 2, are an annual event featuring a series of air, naval, land, and command post exercises intended to prepare forces to counter North Korean threats on the peninsula.

The event drew a typically belligerent response from the North, which fired two Scud-class ballistic missiles from the port of Nampo into the Sea of Japan the same day. The launch was followed by a propaganda blast from its military general staff denouncing the exercises as “dangerous nuclear war drills for invading” the North.

Asked for her assessment of the military balance on the peninsula, Robinson said she had only visited South Korea briefly to call on ROK and US officials and to attend the 7th Air Force change of command ceremony in December, when Lt. Gen. Terrence J. O’Shaughnessy assumed leadership from Lt. Gen. Jan-Marc Jouas. “You can see there is a lot of vigilance, I’ll put it that way,” she said, adding that she would be returning in April for a longer visit.

The vigilance is in part due to the large number of rocket and missile firings in the North over the last year, as both ROK and US officials note, 2014 was the busiest year on record for these events.

While the US is attempting to get the North to return to the Six Party Talks regarding its nuclear program, Kim Jong Un’s regime has demonstrated no interest and has alienated some of the North’s traditional allies with its ruler’s behavior. (Kim has yet to pay a visit to Beijing as head of state.)

The March 2 launch was the third reported missile launch of 2015. Between January 2014 and March 2015, the North launched 117 rocket artillery rounds and ballistic missiles during tests and demonstrations, according to Jeffrey Lewis, director of the East Asia Nonproliferation Program at the Middlebury Institute of International Studies at Monterey in California. These include five separate testing events of an extended-range KN-02 short-range ballistic missile variant and six testing events of Scud variant missiles.

## NEEDS AND WANTS

Air Force leaders returned to Capitol Hill in late February to advocate for several unpopular proposals in the Fiscal 2016 budget plan, such as the phaseout of the U-2 and A-10 fleets. However, this time, USAF fine-tuned its pitch, emphasizing that its plans are a response to rising requirements from the

Pentagon’s combatant commanders and the need to maximize and modernize joint military power.

During a Feb. 27 hearing before the House Appropriations Committee’s defense panel, Air Force Chief of Staff Gen. Mark A. Welsh III pointed out that intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance demands, in particular, continue to mushroom despite the Afghanistan drawdown. US Central Command’s needs to support Operation Inherent Resolve—the campaign to degrade and defeat ISIS—are a leading driver of ISR demands. Air Force Secretary Deborah Lee James noted during the same hearing that the Air Force has provided some 18 million images during OIR alone, which has led to “22 high value individuals” being killed or captured.

The value of ISR as the “coin of the realm” on the battlefield continues to shape USAF decisions, Welsh said. “That’s where the demand is coming from,” he declared. Seven years ago the Air Force shut down 10 fighter squadrons in order to steer manpower



James and Welsh testified about the “coin of the realm”—ISR.

and resources to more ISR capabilities, he noted, adding that that’s “part of the capacity problem now ... for fighter squadrons, but we did it because that was the only place ... to get resources.” Welsh said he asks combatant commanders whether they “prefer us ... to invest in more ISR or more [fighter] capacity,” and they always ask for more ISR.

USAF is pushing this argument to defend its move to convert 18 combat-coded A-10s to backup aircraft inventory (BAI), which it announced on Feb. 27. Instead of moving the 36 airframes authorized in the 2015 National Defense Authorization Act into BAI, James has taken a cautious approach, saying she will revisit the action later in the year to see if it adequately balances current combat needs with the need to modernize. Air Force leaders continue to push for the A-10 divestiture, not only to meet Budget Control Act funding caps, but also because USAF needs the experienced maintainers on the A-10 to begin integration into the F-35 program.

“That’s where we come to these very difficult decisions,” Welsh argued to the HAC-D.

In comments to Congress and the press in February, Welsh and James have repeatedly emphasized the need to talk about close air support as a mission critical to the Air Force and joint combat operations. “The F-35 will not be a great CAS platform at IOC [initial operational capability] in 2016,” Welsh bluntly told the HAC-D. “It was not intended to be.” By 2021, however, “it will be a different story” and USAF is in the process now of developing “new weapons capabilities” for this mission area for the F-35. ★