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EFFECTIVENESS

## POGO Remembers Pierre Sprey

Pentagon Provocateur and Mentor

BY DAN GRAZIER

Generals feared Pierre Sprey. The more corporate-minded mistakenly viewed him as an enemy, when in fact there was no more effective ally for the warfighters. But fear him they did — which provoked some to extraordinary lengths to malign and discredit him. Fortunately, Pierre Sprey proved to be made of sterner stuff than them. He persevered for 60 years, dogged in his efforts to make sure the troops serving in the U.S. military had the right weapons to meet the battlefield challenges they faced.

Every time a pilot takes off in an F-16 or a soldier is saved when an A-10 sweeps an enemy position with a burst of 30mm rounds, Pierre Sprey's contributions to our national defense are on display. The world lost this towering man when he died peacefully in his Maryland home on August 4, 2021.

Pierre earned the terror he inspired in the Pentagon brass through his hard work, piercing intellect, and unmatched integrity.

He led a life full of adventures and accomplishments, the complete listing of which would require an entire book to detail in full. He was born in France in 1937, and he fled to the

United States with his family to escape the advancing Nazis. His abilities as a mathematician prompted Yale to accept him at the age of 14. There, he earned a degree in mechanical engineering and a minor in French literature. He went on to earn a master's degree in operations research and mathematical statistics from Cornell. In between, he worked through the ranks at Grumman, where he started out pounding rivets and eventually became a lead statistics analyst.

At Grumman, his abilities gained the attention of then-Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense Robert Valtz, who in 1966 brought Pierre

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into the Pentagon's systems analysis office as one of Robert McNamara's "Whiz Kids." In this role, Pierre earned the perpetual enmity of the Air Force when he conducted a year-long analysis of its plans to fight a Soviet attack through Western Europe. He found that the Air Force's strategy to use tactical aircraft to bomb widely dispersed and camouflaged targets far behind the front lines, much like the fruitless strategic bombing missions of World War II, would do little to blunt a determined Soviet advance. His study concluded that the Air Force should instead build a fleet of specialized attack aircraft to work closely with NATO ground forces and concentrate all available combat power on the exposed enemy at the end of its logistics train.

His conclusions flew in the face of decades of airpower theory and threatened the very identity of the Air Force. Because the first goal of any bureaucracy is self-preservation, Air Force leaders did all they could to discredit the study and Pierre. The Air Force brass made one of their greatest mistakes in this effort when they sent their leading aerial tactics expert, then-Major John Boyd, to speak with Pierre to explain why he was wrong.

Their plan backfired. Boyd and Sprey quickly discovered they were kindred spirits and formed a partnership whose influence has now outlasted both of them. The two men, along with friends like Tom Christie, Chuck Spinney, Everest Riccioni, Chuck Myers, and Harry Hillaker, became the "Fighter Mafia." Their work, often behind the scenes and against the official positions of the Air Force leadership, produced the F-16 and F-18 aircraft, which still form the backbone of the United States fighter fleets.

Pierre's study led to another conse-

quential partnership in the Pentagon. A staff officer working for the Air Force chief of staff reached out to Pierre to help design the aircraft to fill the close air support role the study called for. Colonel Avery Kay had been tasked with the program, but he found little support through the official procurement channels. Kay and Sprey became the leaders of the A-X program that ultimately produced the A-10.

One challenge Pierre and the other Pentagon reformers had difficulty overcoming was directing public attention to the issues they raised. They expected journalists to be crusaders exposing wasteful defense spending and ineffective weapons programs. In the age of the big three news networks and two major national newspapers, they ultimately decided they needed another outlet.

In 1981, the reformers teamed up with the journalist Dina Rasor to form the Project on Military Procurement to expose "waste, fraud, and fat" in the defense budget. According to Rasor, Pierre played a significant role in the organization's early success.

"He was willing to take a big chance on a woman who had no military background but was willing to learn, and I understood the media and knew how they could get some traction. Pierre could explain to me how something like the Maverick missile worked, and I could then go out and tell the true story," Rasor said.

His influence helped to set the Project on Military Procurement — now the Project On Government Oversight — apart from other national security related organizations. Rather than fighting mainly for straight cuts in the Pentagon budget, he helped show how doing so could improve military effectiveness and safety by producing sim-

pler, and therefore superior, weapons.

Pierre eventually grew increasingly frustrated with the machinations of the Pentagon and retired from his consultancy work in 1986 to pursue his passion for music. He started his music business, Mapleshade, in 1986 to produce recordings and some of the finest audio equipment in the world.

But he never stopped caring about the troops and Pentagon missteps. Right up until his final hours, he freely gave of his time to anyone willing to carry on the fight he began, as I was privileged to discover.

The first time I met him, it took every ounce of willpower I possessed to keep from exclaiming, “Holy shit! You’re Pierre Sprey!” This happened in Washington on a cold and rainy Thursday afternoon in January 2015. Adrenaline already coursed through my veins because I was walking into my first job interview in more than a decade, having spent the intervening years cloistered in the Marine Corps. When I received the invitation to interview for a position with the Project On Government Oversight, I had only been told the time and location. No one had said anything to me that a figure legendary in American defense circles would be there to see if I really did know my stuff.

A requirement of the job posting I had responded to two weeks earlier said the candidate must have “a working knowledge of ‘military reform’ as explained by John Boyd, Pierre Sprey, and Chuck Spinney.” Like all Marine officers, I first heard the name of John Boyd at the Basic School. I later read Robert Coram’s biography of Colonel Boyd and learned about how he struck fear in the hearts of generals and policymakers with his friends and collaborators, including Pierre Sprey.

Fascinated by their antics, I spent a considerable amount of time studying all I could find about their work. I became an admirer.

So my surprise to suddenly find myself standing inside a small conference room in front of Pierre that winter day was real. Another of Boyd’s friends, Chuck Spinney, and the author and movie producer Andrew Cockburn were also in the room along with the

*“Pierre earned the terror he inspired in the Pentagon brass through his hard work, piercing intellect, and unmatched integrity.”*

POGO staff, setting the scene for the most interesting job interview I ever experienced. The formal part, with the sort of questions usually asked in that situation, lasted for perhaps 20 minutes. We then spent the better part of two hours trading stories.

They wanted to learn about my experiences in the Marine Corps and how that sparked my interest in military reform. Pierre and Chuck amused us with tales of their work inside the Pentagon, their collaboration with John Boyd, and the ways they were able to make things happen by leveraging their understanding of the Pentagon’s bureaucracy.

That day began one of most interesting and consequential friendships I will ever have. Pierre and I worked together regularly for the last six years. Hardly a week went by when we did not speak on the phone about either a current project of mine or one of our joint ventures. Often our conversations could range across subjects. One minute we would be talking about the shortcomings of the F-35, the next minute we would be talking

about the importance of keeping your speaker wires off of the carpet and attaching them directly to the terminals (the sound quality will increase 5%, he told me).

While most people know him for his military work and his expertise about airplanes, Pierre Sprey was a true polymath. He once spent an hour on the phone telling me about the work of the 19th century French political car-

toonist Honoré Daumier. We arrived at that conversational tangent after a discussion of Otto von Bismarck and the Franco-Prussian War. Most of our conversations would unfold in such a manner and rarely did they end before I had added at least one new book to my Amazon wish list. If I live to be 100, I will probably still be reading Pierre-recommended titles.

Few things appeared to give Pierre more joy in life than a good caper. Whenever he got together with his friends in the Fort Myer’s officers’ club, they would often retell stories of their adventures and roar with laughter as if they had never heard the stories before.

I had the opportunity to team up with Pierre to pull off one of his most highly visible escapades. When Colonel Kay, the Air Force father of the A-10, died in late 2015, his friends and family decided a fitting tribute would be to have A-10s fly over his Arlington National Cemetery burial service. Pierre found out what it would take to make that happen and I arranged for the publicity.



Pierre Sprey with the author, Dan Grazier. (PHOTO: DAN GRAZIER / POGO)

This happened at a time when the Air Force leadership were mounting their strongest efforts yet to retire the entire A-10 program. Colonel Kay's friends worried that if the Air Force brass knew anyone had specifically requested an A-10 flyover, they would deny it rather than give the A-10 a moment in the spotlight. So Pierre had Colonel Kay's family request a flyover, an honor he earned due to his rank, and Air Force public affairs approved. Leaders at the

they passed over the cemetery, one pulled up in the missing man formation honoring the Air Force officer who had cared enough about the troops on the ground to risk his career to create an aircraft program built specifically to protect them.

Looking back on the moment today, the flyover served as an excellent tribute to Pierre in life. He watched with justifiable pride as those four magnificent aircraft buzzed the building he fought with so much over the years.

*"Pierre can rest peacefully knowing that he inspired a new generation of people in government, the military, and in civil society who will carry on the good work he began."*

Pentagon didn't know that an A-10 squadron was in on the plan. When the flyover tasking order went out to units, the A-10 squadron immediately answered the call and put on a memorable display over Washington. As the caisson bearing Colonel Kay's casket approached the burial site, all of us in attendance looked to the south over the Pentagon and saw four A-10s passing directly over the building. As

Pierre never stopped in his quest to ensure the troops were well served by the Pentagon, and the American people had the most effective military force possible. My colleague Mandy Smithberger and I met with him the day before he died to talk about some upcoming projects. I spent about two hours with him that evening, talking about several issues that remain unresolved today. Until the very end, he

maintained the boundless enthusiasm about the subjects dearest to him.

He attracted his fair share of detractors over the years. Truth-tellers always do. Members in good standing with the military-industrial-Congressional complex fear his influence to this very day, as evidenced by the obvious and easily disprovable lies on his Wikipedia entry about the significance of his contributions to the A-10 and the F-16.

I don't know how history will ultimately remember Pierre Sprey. He deserves an honest treatment that accurately describes his contributions while focusing on his towering intellect, his unbreakable good character, and his general good humor.

What I do know for certain is that my life will be a lot less interesting now that my friend Pierre is gone. Never again will I answer the phone and hear an enthusiastic, "Hey Dan!" to be followed by a discussion of airplanes, history, art, and anything else that piqued his interest.

Pierre can rest peacefully knowing that he inspired a new generation of people in government, the military, and in civil society who will carry on the good work he began. And those people who rightly feared Pierre Sprey should not rest too comfortably now that he is gone. His spirit survives in his friends, and it's our job to ensure the Pentagon does what is right, which would be fitting tribute — equivalent to an A-10 flyover. ■

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*This piece was first published in August 2021. The original and its sources can be found at [pogo.org/pogo-remembers-pierre](https://pogo.org/pogo-remembers-pierre).*

**ABOUT THE AUTHOR:** Dan Grazier is the Jack Shanahan Military Fellow at the Center for Defense Information at POGO.

# Axing Pentagon Cost Reports Threatens Acquisition Oversight

BY DAN GRAZIER

Understanding the true cost of the weapons the military buys is a difficult proposition: Pentagon bean-counters use various accounting tricks to present as rosy a picture as possible to keep the money flowing. Now, understanding the costs will be even more difficult due to a single sentence buried deep within the National Defense Authorization Act for fiscal year 2020. That sentence eliminated the selected acquisition reports, one of the best tools available to see the overall cost of a weapons program.

Selected acquisition reports provide information about a weapon's total program cost, development and production schedule, performance, and cost breaches. The reports are written by the program manager and submitted to Congress quarterly, with an annual report at the end of each calendar year. Federal law mandates selected acquisition reports for all Pentagon programs with a cost exceeding \$300 million (in 1990 dollars).

Without the selected acquisition reports, members of Congress and their staffs will have to wade through mountains of budget documentation and calculate thousands of figures to understand exactly where taxpayer dollars are being spent. Because there are so many ways to calculate the data and because the absence of

the reports provides an opportunity for program boosters to undercount costs, the totals that different people come up with could vary widely and differ on a scale of magnitude from the real costs. The selected acquisition reports provide a common picture for everyone, allowing effective oversight of the weapons buying process. The reports also provide a convenient way for the public to check actual data against the deceptive cost figures that appear in defense industry press releases.

Selected acquisition reports showed how the defense industry and the Air Force misled the public when they claimed an F-22 only cost \$143 million each when the real figure was more than twice that at \$350 million per copy. The reports are also useful to see how individual components in a program can drastically increase costs. The Navy's failed scheme to reconfigure its littoral combat ships for specific missions is a prime example, as the selected acquisition reports for that program showed that the individual mission modules added \$7.6 billion to the total cost.

Then-House Armed Services Committee Chair Mac Thornberry made reducing the number of reports the Pentagon had to submit to Congress a cornerstone of his efforts to streamline the weapons procurement process. A panel of defense industry representatives charged

by Congress to draft acquisition reform proposals recommended adding automatic sunset provisions for congressional reporting requirements.

The provision terminating the report requirement was slipped into the fiscal year 2020 National Defense Authorization Act virtually unnoticed. We're already seeing reduced reporting. Inside Defense noted last month that the Department of Defense won't be providing the reports at all this year.

This is not the first time Pentagon leaders have attempted to keep weapon costs hidden from the public by doing away with the selected acquisition reports. An effort led in 2004 by then-Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld would have ended the requirement, until public pressure led by POGO put a stop to it.

There is fortunately an effort underway to restore the selected acquisition reports. Representative Sara Jacobs (D-CA) added an amendment to the fiscal year 2022 National Defense Authorization Act to reinstitute the reporting process. All members should support this effort so they and the American people can gain a clearer picture of how our money is being spent and hold specific programs accountable when they go over budget or fail to meet their intended purpose. ■

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**ABOUT THE AUTHOR:** Dan Grazier is the Jack Shanahan Military Fellow at the Center for Defense Information at POGO.

# THE BUNKER

## Dissent in the Five-Sided Monument of Group Think

BY MARK THOMPSON

*Here's a preview of what you'll get if you subscribe to our weekly newsletter, The Bunker. Subscribe at [bit.ly/301Xlwk](https://bit.ly/301Xlwk).*

**I**n *The Bunker* this week: Questioning hypersonic silver bullets; blasting nuclear skeptics inside the Pentagon; plane-and-sub news from Down Under; the Defense Department's Same Auld Lang Spendthrifts; and more.

### HYPERSONIC QUESTION MARKS

#### Answers MIA for these silver bullets

It's always refreshing when someone inside the Pentagon—that five-sided monument to groupthink—starts asking uncomfortable questions. That's what Frank Kendall, the Air Force's new top civilian leader, did when he started kicking the tires (merely a figure of speech) of the service's hypersonic weapons. Purportedly the silverest of silver bullets, they're powered by either rockets or jet engines. Backers believe they will revolutionize warfare; skeptics think they will simply speed up spending and stupidity.

Kendall is “not satisfied with the degree to which we have figured out

what we need for hypersonics—of what type, for what missions,” the new Air Force secretary said September 20. “The target set that we would want to address, and why hypersonics are the most cost-effective weapons for the U.S., I think it's still, to me, somewhat of a question mark.” That's aeronautical blasphemy, but the service's uniformed leaders dismiss him at their peril. After all, it was a decade ago that Kendall—then the Pentagon's top civilian weapons buyer—decried the mammoth F-35 program as “acquisition malpractice” for buying the plane before finishing its design. Turns out he was right.

For those who have been sleeping through Air Force scramjet dreams over the past decade, hypersonic weapons are basically missiles capable of flying at least five times the speed of sound. It's kind of like replacing arrows with musket balls. But as we sadly witnessed August 29 in Afghanistan—when a missile fired from an Air Force drone mistakenly killed 10 civilians, including seven kids—speed is worse than worthless without the right intelligence to guide a weapon to the right target.

Such lousy intelligence goes hand-in-hand with the Pentagon's lousy hypersonics leadership. It's basically nowhere to be found when it comes to the 70 hypersonic efforts the Defense Department is pursuing, the Government Accountability Office reported in March (Yes, that's more than one hypersonic effort for every state...and territory!). “DOD itself has not documented the roles, responsibilities, and authorities of the multitude of its organizations, including the military services, that are working on hypersonic-weapon development,” the GAO said. “Without clear leadership roles, responsibilities, and authorities, DOD is at risk of impeding its progress toward delivering hypersonic weapon capabilities and opening up the potential for conflict and wasted resources as decisions over larger investments are made in the future.” The Pentagon wants to spend \$3.8 billion on hypersonic weapons next year, a nearly 20% hike from 2021's \$3.2 billion.

Kendall isn't opposed to hypersonics, he simply wants fundamental questions answered before the Pentagon begins buying gobs of them.

“We have to solve the problem first of where we’re trying to go,” he added, “and then get there as quickly as possible.” Or the military can ignore his warning, as it did on the F-35, and get there as slowly as possible.

## **NUKES ‘R’ US**

### **Another Pentagon official gets atomized**

Readers of *The Bunker* with a half-life approaching that of Uranium-235 may recall back in June when Thomas Harker, the acting Navy secretary at the time, ran afoul of the nuclear priesthood. His sin was saying the sea service should scrap a new submarine-launched, nuclear-tipped cruise missile. He apparently left the Navy last month, according to his LinkedIn profile, and has yet to resurface.

Well, looks like it has happened again. Leonor Tomero, who questioned the Pentagon’s nuclear modernization plans, was reorganized out of her senior Pentagon post after only eight months on the job, *Politico* reported September 21. In her role as the deputy assistant secretary of defense for nuclear and missile defense policy, she would have overseen the Biden administration’s Nuclear Posture Review.

Over the past 30 years, four Nuclear Posture Reviews have routinely rubber-stamped the status quo when it comes to U.S. nuclear-weapons policy. They’ve generated sage chin-stroking nods of approval from those in the military, industry, and Congress interested in business as usual. Which, alas, is pretty much everybody in the military, industry, and Congress who’s an atomic power.

Tomero’s offense? She wanted the nation to rely less on nuclear weapons. “Certainly that’s the objective of

the president, is to find ways to reduce the role of nuclear weapons, and so we look forward to examining those issues, as part of our Nuclear Posture Review,” Tomero told the *Asahi Shimbun*, a Japanese news outlet, in April.

“People wonder why we don’t learn from failures like Vietnam, Iraq and Afghanistan,” Jeffrey Lewis, a professor and nuclear weapons expert at the Middlebury Institute for International Studies, told the *Washington Post*. “The reason is simple: People who point out alternatives to current national-security policies are systematically driven out of positions of authority,” he added. That yields (if you’ll excuse that word when it comes to nuclear weapons) predictable results: “Firing her sends a clear message to everyone in the Pentagon that there is no tolerance for new ideas when it comes to our nuclear-weapons policies.”

While the half-life of the U.S.’s calcified Cold War nuclear strategy hasn’t lasted as quite as long as U-235’s (700 million years), it has lasted far too long.

## **PILOT TERROR**

### **Wild blue idiots**

We don’t know about you, but *The Bunker* still gets a chill when witnessing a plane passing behind a skyscraper—or even the Washington Monument. It brings back too many memories of 9/11. He first felt that shiver while reporting on a fatal B-52 crash in 1994; the video is heart-stopping. Now comes a video of a C-17—a large, lumbering plane not that different from the B-52—threading the skyline September 23 over Brisbane, Australia. It seems the crew was practicing for an air show—exactly what that hot-dogging B-52 pilot was doing

when he killed his three crewmates and himself. Given such C-17 clownery Down Under, we may have been better off if we’d let the Aussies buy those damn French submarines.

## **COSTLY SUBS**

### **“You want moola on that?”**

Speaking of Australia, you may have heard it stiff-armed France recently. It jettisoned a troubled \$66 billion deal for 12 French diesel subs in favor of a pact with the U.S. and Britain for more advanced nuclear-powered ones (and no, they won’t carry nuclear weapons). It’s a way to blunt Chinese military power in the western Pacific, and is part of a new Australia-U.S.-United Kingdom (AUSUK) alliance. Predictably, the decision ticked off both France and China. The effort will begin with a study lasting up to 18 months to determine just what kind of underwater firepower Australia needs. It could be “decades” before the Down Under subs begin cruising down under the Pacific, according to Admiral Mike Gilday, the U.S. Navy’s top admiral. And, based on early indicators, the deal won’t come cheap: former U.S. Navy secretary Donald Winter is going to help smooth Australia’s entry into the AUSUK alliance for \$6,000 a day. “Plus expenses.”

## **HAPPY NEW YEAR!**

### **Pentagon begins 2022 fiscal year**

#### **October 1**

New Year’s Eve for most of us happens on December 31, before we wake up the next morning with foggy recollections—and sometimes regrets—about what we did the night before. The Pentagon has the same annual problem three months earlier, because each fiscal year begins on October 1, 92 days before the calendar year starts.

Those of us (Defense Dweeb Alert!) who anxiously await the Pentagon's contract announcements each weekday at 5 p.m. notice that they start growing by leaps and bounds every September. Plucking two recent dates at random, a month apart, highlights the discrepancy: On August 24, there were 11 such announcements, which is typical. On September 24, there were 55, which is not. "Spending in the last week of the year is 4.9 times higher than the rest-of-the-year weekly average, and year-end information technology projects have substantially lower quality ratings," a 2017 study noted. Plundering the Pentagon purse at year's end has become so popular it has even nurtured a cottage industry to help contractors get their share.

Let's return to Frank Kendall, the Air Force honcho questioning hypersonic weapons, who we met higher up in *The Bunker* this week. A U.S. Military Academy graduate who spent 11 years in the Army—he taught engineering at West Point—he knows how the military works. He discussed the tradition of pushing money out the door of the Pentagon by the end of each fiscal year a decade ago. A fighter pilot approached Kendall after the session. "He brought up the fact that at the end of the year, every year when he was in the unit, they would go out and fly around at the end of the [fiscal] year in September to burn up fuel," Kendall said. "The reason they were doing it was obvious, right? The reason they were doing it is because they would get their budget cut the

next year if they didn't burn up their fuel and spend their money. That's not the kind of culture we want, OK?"

Kind of makes you wonder how you can change that incentive. Yet shifting the U.S. military's mercantile ethos is just as vital. "Changing culture is one of the hardest things you can do in any organization," Kendall said. "It's a long-term project. It requires constant reinforcement and tenacity."

Just like the war in Afghanistan. ■

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*A version of this piece was first published in September 2021. The original and its sources can be found at [pogo.org/the-bunker-dissent](https://pogo.org/the-bunker-dissent)*

**ABOUT THE AUTHOR:** *The Bunker* is a precision-guided e-newsletter by Pulitzer prize-winning National Security Analyst Mark Thompson for the Center for Defense Information at POGO.



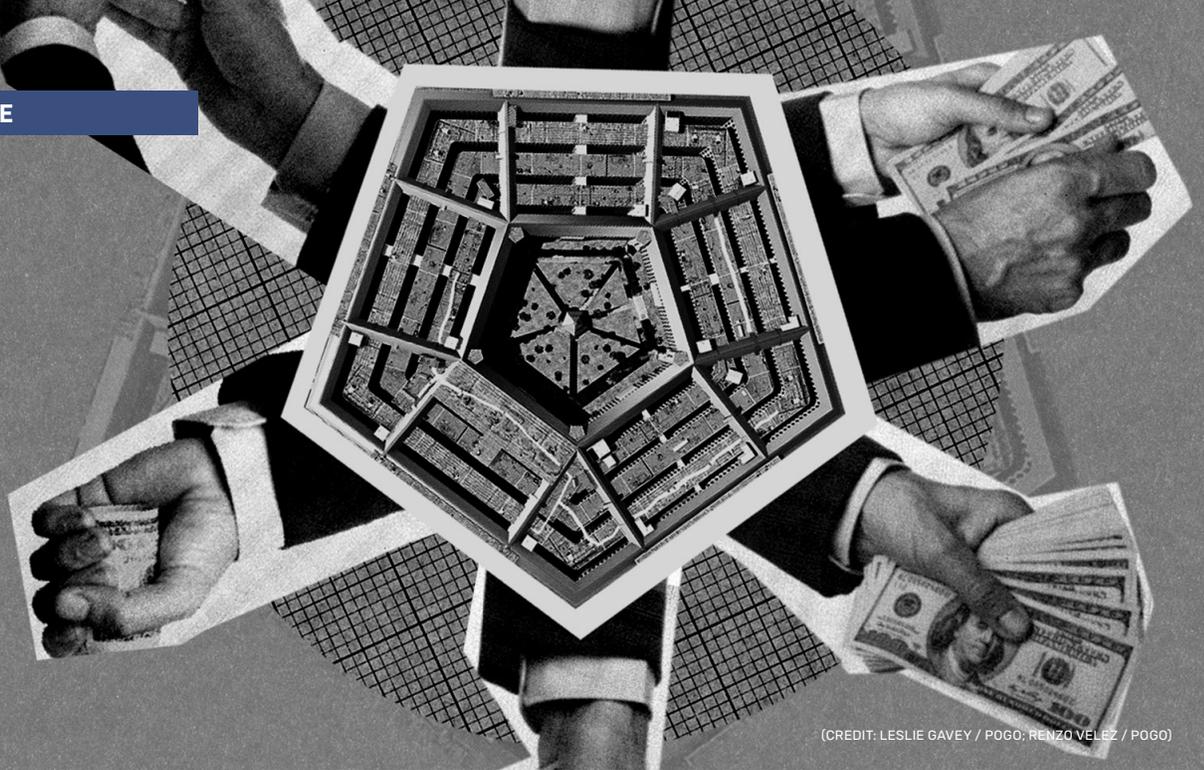
# THE BUNKER

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# The Profits of War

How Corporate America Cashed in on the Post-9/11 Pentagon Spending Surge

*This piece was first published in September 2021. The original and its sources can be found at [tomdispatch.com](http://tomdispatch.com).*

BY WILLIAM HARTUNG

**T**he costs and consequences of America's twenty-first-century wars have by now been well-documented — a staggering \$8 trillion in expenditures and more than 380,000 civilian deaths, as calculated by Brown University's Costs of War project. The question of who has benefited most from such an orgy of military spending has received far less attention.

Corporations large and small have left the financial feast of that post-9/11 surge in military spending with genuinely staggering sums in hand. After all, Pentagon spending has totaled an almost unimaginable \$14

trillion-plus since the start of the Afghan War in 2001, up to one-half of which (catch a breath here) went directly to defense contractors.

## **“THE PURSE IS NOW OPEN”: THE POST-9/11 FLOOD OF MILITARY CONTRACTS**

The political climate created by the Global War on Terror, or GWOT, as Bush administration officials quickly dubbed it, set the stage for humongous increases in the Pentagon budget. In the first year after the 9/11 attacks and the invasion of Afghanistan, defense spending rose by more than 10% and that was just the beginning. It would, in fact, increase annually for the next decade, which was unprecedented in American history. The Pentagon budget peaked in 2010 at the highest level since World War II — over \$800 billion, substantially

more than the country spent on its forces at the height of the Korean or Vietnam Wars or during President Ronald Reagan's vaunted military buildup of the 1980s.

And in the new political climate sparked by the reaction to the 9/11 attacks, those increases reached well beyond expenditures specifically tied to fighting the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. As Harry Stonecipher, then vice president of Boeing, told the Wall Street Journal in an October 2001 interview, “The purse is now open... [A]ny member of Congress who doesn't vote for the funds we need to defend this country will be looking for a new job after next November.”

Stonecipher's prophesy of rapidly rising Pentagon budgets proved correct. And it's never ended. The Biden administration is anything but an exception. Its latest proposal for

spending on the Pentagon and related defense work like nuclear warhead development at the Department of Energy topped \$753 billion for FY2022. And not to be outdone, the House and Senate Armed Services Committees have already voted to add roughly \$24 billion to that staggering sum.

### **WHO BENEFITTED?**

The benefits of the post-9/11 surge in Pentagon spending have been distributed in a highly concentrated fashion. More than one-third of all contracts now go to just five major weapons companies — Lockheed Martin, Boeing, General Dynamics, Raytheon, and Northrop Grumman. Those five received more than \$166 billion in contracts in fiscal year 2020 alone. To put such a figure in perspective, the \$75 billion in Pentagon contracts awarded to Lockheed Martin that year was significantly more than one and one-half times the entire 2020 budget for the State Department and the Agency for International Development, which together totaled \$44 billion.

While it's true that the biggest financial beneficiaries of the post-9/11 military spending surge were those five weapons contractors, they were anything but the only ones to cash in. Companies benefiting from the buildup of the past 20 years also included logistics and construction firms like Kellogg, Brown & Root (KBR) and Bechtel, as well as armed private security contractors like Blackwater and Dyncorp. The Congressional Research Service estimates that in FY2020 the spending for contractors of all kinds had grown to \$420 billion, or well over half of the total Pentagon budget. Companies in all three categories noted above took advantage of "wartime" conditions — in which both

speed of delivery and less rigorous oversight came to be considered the norms — to overcharge the government or even engage in outright fraud.

The best-known reconstruction and logistics contractor in Iraq and Afghanistan was Halliburton, through its KBR subsidiary. At the start of both the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, Halliburton was the recipient of the Pentagon's Logistics Civil Augmentation Program contracts. Those open-ended arrangements involved coordinating support functions for troops in the field, including setting up military bases, maintaining equipment, and providing food and laundry services. By 2008, the company had received more than \$30 billion for such work.

Halliburton's role would prove controversial, reeking as it did of self-dealing and blatant corruption. The notion of privatizing military-support services was first initiated in the early 1990s by Dick Cheney when he was secretary of defense in the George H.W. Bush administration and Halliburton got the contract to figure out how to do it. I suspect you won't be surprised to learn that Cheney then went on to serve as the CEO of Halliburton until he became vice president under George W. Bush in 2001. His journey was a (if not the) classic case of that revolving door between the Pentagon and the defense industry, now used by so many government officials and generals or admirals, with all the obvious conflicts-of-interest it entails.

Once it secured its billions for work in Iraq, Halliburton proceeded to vastly overcharge the Pentagon for basic services, even while doing shoddy work that put U.S. troops at risk — and it would prove to be anything but alone in such activities.

Starting in 2004, a year into the Iraq War, the Special Inspector General for Iraq Reconstruction, a congressionally mandated body designed to root out waste, fraud, and abuse, along with Congressional watchdogs like Representative Henry Waxman (D-CA), exposed scores of examples of overcharging, faulty construction, and outright theft by contractors engaged in the "rebuilding" of that country. Again, you undoubtedly won't be surprised to find out that relatively few companies suffered significant financial or criminal consequences for what can only be described as striking war profiteering. The congressional Commission on Wartime Contracting in Iraq and Afghanistan estimated that, as of 2011, waste, fraud, and abuse in the two war zones had already totaled \$31 billion to \$60 billion.

A case in point was the International Oil Trading Company, which received contracts worth \$2.7 billion from the Pentagon's Defense Logistics Agency to provide fuel for U.S. operations in Iraq. An investigation by Congressman Waxman, chair of the House Government Oversight and Reform Committee, found that the firm had routinely overcharged the Pentagon for the fuel it shipped into Iraq, making more than \$200 million in profits on oil sales of \$1.4 billion during the period from 2004 to 2008. More than a third of those funds went to its owner, Harry Sargeant III, who also served as the finance chairman of the Florida Republican Party. Waxman summarized the situation this way: "The documents show that Mr. Sargeant's company took advantage of U.S. taxpayers. His company had the only license to transport fuel through Jordan, so he

could get away with charging exorbitant prices. I've never seen another situation like this."

An egregious case of shoddy work with tragic human consequences involved the electrocution of at least 18 military personnel at several bases in Iraq from 2004 on. This happened thanks to faulty electrical installations, some done by KBR and its subcontractors. An investigation by the Pentagon's Inspector General found that commanders in the field had "failed to ensure that renovations... had been properly done, the Army did not set standards for jobs or contractors, and KBR did not ground electrical equipment it installed at the facility."

The Afghan "reconstruction" process was similarly replete with examples of fraud, waste, and abuse. These included a U.S.-appointed economic task force that spent \$43 million constructing a gas station essentially in the middle of nowhere that would never be used, another \$150 million on lavish living quarters for U.S. economic advisors, and \$3 million for Afghan police patrol boats that would prove similarly useless.

Perhaps most disturbingly, a congressional investigation found that a significant portion of \$2 billion worth of transportation contracts issued to U.S. and Afghan firms ended up as kickbacks to warlords and police officials or as payments to the Taliban to allow large convoys of trucks to pass through areas they controlled, sometimes as much as \$1,500 per truck, or up to \$500,000 for each 300-truck convoy. In 2009, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton stated that "one of the major sources of funding for the Taliban is the protection money" paid from just such transportation contracts.

## **A TWO-DECADE EXPLOSION OF CORPORATE PROFITS**

A second stream of revenue for corporations tied to those wars went to private security contractors, some of which guarded U.S. facilities or critical infrastructure like Iraqi oil pipelines.

The most notorious of them was, of course, Blackwater, a number of whose employees were involved in a 2007 massacre of 17 Iraqis in Baghdad's Nisour Square. They opened fire on civilians at a crowded intersection while guarding a U.S. Embassy convoy. The attack prompted ongoing legal and civil cases that continued into the Trump era, when several perpetrators of the massacre were pardoned by the president.

In the wake of those killings, Blackwater was rebranded several times, first as XE Services and then as Academii, before eventually merging with Triple Canopy, another private contracting firm. Blackwater founder Erik Prince then separated from the company, but he has since recruited private mercenaries on behalf of the United Arab Emirates for deployment to the civil war in Libya in violation of a United Nations arms embargo. Prince also unsuccessfully proposed to the Trump administration that he recruit a force of private contractors meant to be the backbone of the U.S. war effort in Afghanistan.

Another task taken up by private firms Titan and CACI International was the interrogation of Iraqi prisoners. Both companies had interrogators and translators on the ground at Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq, a site where such prisoners were brutally tortured.

The number of personnel deployed and the revenues received by security and reconstruction contractors grew dramatically as the wars in Iraq and

Afghanistan wore on. The Congressional Research Service estimated that by March 2011 there were more contractor employees in Iraq and Afghanistan (155,000) than American uniformed military personnel (145,000). In its August 2011 final report, the Commission on Wartime Contracting in Iraq and Afghanistan put the figure even higher, stating that "contractors represent more than half of the U.S. presence in the contingency operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, at times employing more than a quarter-million people."

While an armed contractor who had served in the Marines could earn as much as \$200,000 annually in Iraq, about three-quarters of the contractor work force there was made up of people from countries like Nepal or the Philippines, or Iraqi citizens. Poorly paid, at times they received as little as \$3,000 per year. A 2017 analysis by the Costs of War project documented "abysmal labor conditions" and major human rights abuses inflicted on foreign nationals working on U.S.-funded projects in Afghanistan, including false imprisonment, theft of wages, and deaths and injuries in areas of conflict.

With the U.S. military in Iraq reduced to a relatively modest number of armed "advisors" and no American forces left in Afghanistan, such contractors are now seeking foreign clients. For example, a U.S. firm — Tier 1 Group, which was founded by a former employee of Blackwater — trained four of the Saudi operatives involved in the murder of Saudi journalist and U.S. resident Jamal Khashoggi, an effort funded by the Saudi government. As the *New York Times* noted when it broke that story, "Such issues are likely to continue as

American private military contractors increasingly look to foreign clients to shore up their business as the United States scales back overseas deployments after two decades of war.”

Add in one more factor to the two-decade “war on terror” explosion of corporate profits. Overseas arms sales also rose sharply in this era. The biggest and most controversial market for U.S. weaponry in recent years has been the Middle East, particularly sales to countries like Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, which have been involved in a devastating war in Yemen, as well as fueling conflicts elsewhere in the region.

Donald Trump made the most noise about Middle East arms sales and their benefits to the U.S. economy. However, the giant weapons-producing corporations actually sold more weaponry to Saudi Arabia, on average, during the Obama administration,

including three major offers in 2010 that totaled more than \$60 billion for combat aircraft, attack helicopters, armored vehicles, bombs, missiles, and guns — virtually an entire arsenal. Many of those systems were used by the Saudis in their intervention in Yemen, which has involved the killing of thousands of civilians in indiscriminate air strikes and the imposition of a blockade that has contributed substantially to the deaths of nearly a quarter of a million people to date.

#### **FOREVER WAR PROFITEERING?**

Reining in the excess profits of weapons contractors and preventing waste, fraud, and abuse by private firms involved in supporting U.S. military operations will ultimately require reduced spending on war and on preparations for war. So far, unfortunately, Pentagon budgets only continue to rise and yet more money flows

to the big five weapons firms.

To alter this remarkably unvarying pattern, a new strategy is needed, one that increases the role of American diplomacy, while focusing on emerging and persistent non-military security challenges. “National security” needs to be redefined not in terms of a new “cold war” with China, but to forefront crucial issues like pandemics and climate change.

It’s time to put a halt to the direct and indirect foreign military interventions the United States has carried out in Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, Somalia, Yemen, and so many other places in this century. Otherwise, we’re in for decades of more war profiteering by weapons contractors reaping massive profits with impunity. ■

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**ABOUT THE AUTHOR:** William Hartung is the director of the Arms and Security Project at the Center for International Policy.

#### **GET INVOLVED**

## **Defense for the People, Not for Contractors**

Right now, defense contractors are used to getting their way because there are not enough voices outside of Washington, D.C. telling their elected representatives that **enough is enough.**

**With your help, we can disrupt business-as-usual and win back defense for the people.** Sign up for updates on advocacy training opportunities, actions in your district, events in your area or online, and more.

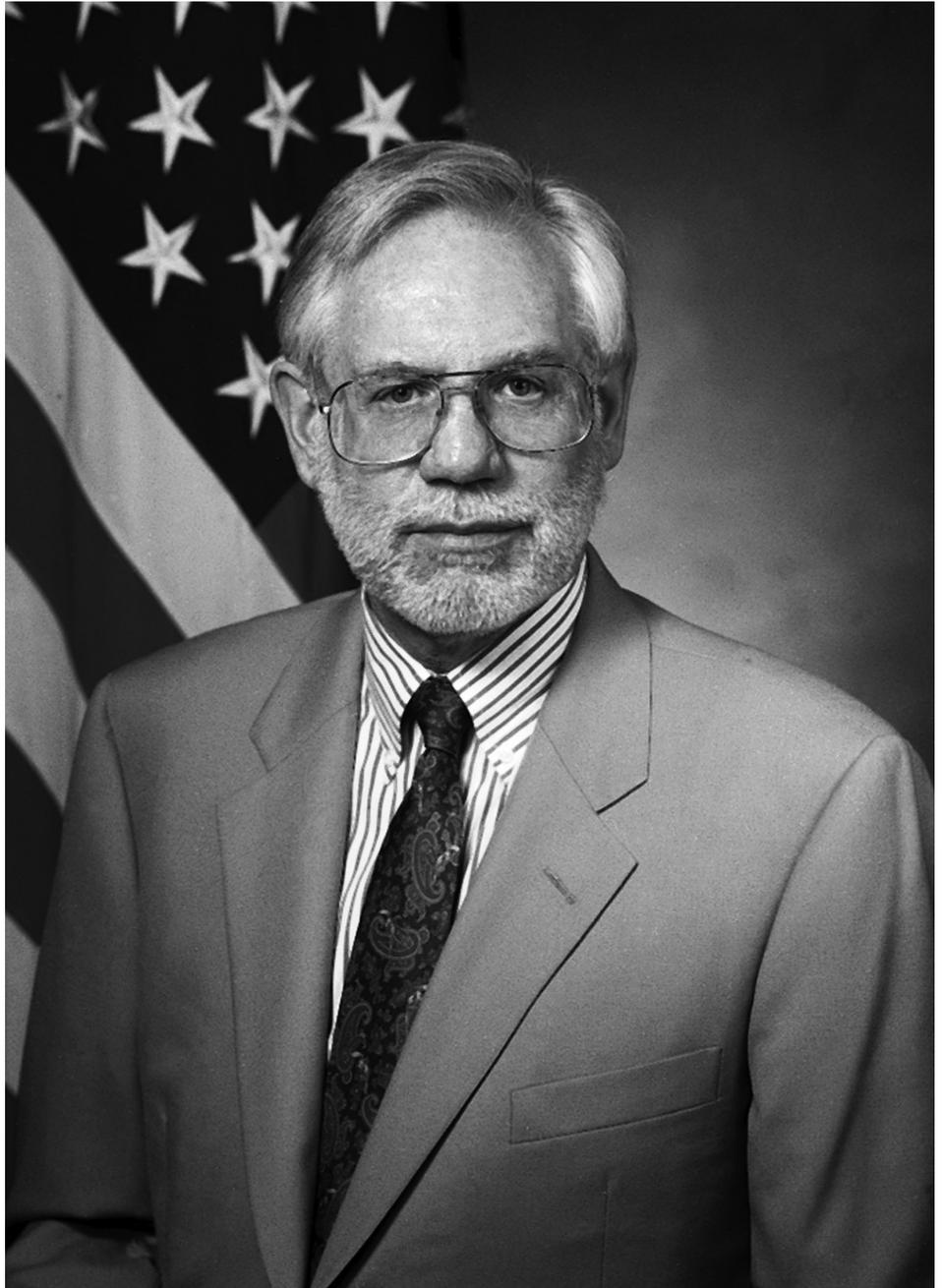
**WANT TO GET INVOLVED?** Visit [bit.ly/pogo-sign-up](https://bit.ly/pogo-sign-up) to become a Defense Accountability Supporter and receive more information about how you can help.

## POGO REMEMBERS Philip E. Coyle III

BY MANDY SMITHBERGER

**P**OGO is sad to report that former Center for Defense Information Senior Advisor Philip E. Coyle III passed away this September. He was an expert on military research, development, and testing, and served in multiple administrations, including as one of the longest serving directors of operational test and evaluation. In that role, he exposed how the Pentagon exaggerated to Congress and to the public about the success of missile defense tests, and warned about the inadequacies of the V-22 Osprey before it killed 19 Marines. He was also a recipient of POGO's Beyond the Headlines Award, created to reward those who initiated substantial public policy improvements.

Congress's creation of the Office of Operational Test and Evaluation in 1983 is one of the most important reforms achieved to increase accountability in the Pentagon's weapon spending programs. Congress created the office to make sure we "fly before we buy," so that weapons tests for effectiveness and safety are evaluated by an agency independent of the military services. The director is required to provide the public with an annual unclassified report on the results of realistic tests of major weapons systems.



Philip E. Coyle III (SOURCE: DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE)

Unfortunately, those sympathetic to the arms industry persuaded Congress to insert a sunset provision that would keep these reports from being provided in the future. CDI has fought this sunset, and worked with Congress to eliminate the provision in both the House and Senate versions of the National Defense Authorization Act this year.

After he left DOT&E, Mr. Coyle continued to serve the public in govern-

ment and civil society, including at CDI, and repeatedly provided testimony to Congress on the testing and evaluation of major weapon programs. His mentorship to many was invaluable. We're proud to continue Mr. Coyle's legacy of rigorous analysis of major weapon systems. ■

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**ABOUT THE AUTHOR:** Mandy Smithberger is the Director of the Center for Defense Information at POGO.

NEW DOCUMENT SHOWS:

# Air Force is Starving the A-10 Fleet

Leaders defying Congress's close air support mandates

BY DAN GRAZIER

**F**or years the Air Force has tried to retire the A-10 program. Time after time, Congress has clearly required the Air Force to maintain the A-10 fleet as is because they realize no other aircraft provides the same level of support to the troops on the ground — not even the flawed but favored F-35.

The iconic A-10 is the first, and so far only, aircraft designed from the very beginning specifically for the close air support mission. Air Force leaders generally prefer aircraft that fly high and fast to bomb targets deep within enemy territory in the mistaken belief that doing so can win wars independent of ground forces. But over one hundred years of military history has shown that military forces are much more effective when working in close cooperation, which is the exact purpose of the A-10.

Because of this, Congress included several provisions in federal law to prevent A-10 retirements. Yet sources have told POGO that, despite these provisions, Air Force leaders have pursued a de facto retirement of the fleet through a starvation campaign.

A chart obtained by POGO shows the success of this campaign. As of February 2020, the Air Force had a fleet of 281 A-10s. 133 were non-

deployable, and they anticipated that to rise to 146, meaning that more than half of the A-10s in service today cannot deploy.

To better make their case to retire the A-10, Air Force leaders have done everything they can to hobble the fleet to make it appear too old and incapable of providing useful service. Over the course of several years, Air Force leaders have slow-rolled an effort to build new wings, diminished the capacity to conduct needed overhauls, and refused to provide the necessary parts by allowing supplier contracts to lapse. A source within the A-10 community says that many of the flight-worthy aircraft can't shoot their iconic GAU-8 cannons because the squadrons can't get needed replacement parts. The same source says the fleet's current struggles are the result of the contempt Air Force leadership has for civilian oversight.

Congress has come to the rescue of the A-10 at least five times since 2014, adding provisions in the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) to either specifically prohibit the Air Force from retiring aircraft or to green-light projects that keep the fleet flying.

The project to build new wings for the A-10 serves as an excellent example of how Air Force leaders are deliberately attempting to hobble the fleet

to better make their case for its retirement. Back in 2007, the Air Force awarded the Boeing Corporation a contract to build new wings for 242 A-10s. But Air Force leaders allowed the contract to lapse after purchasing only 173 new wing sets — 70% of those required — and after spending \$1.1 billion of their \$2 billion contract. Questions about the whereabouts of the \$900 million balance for the original A-10 re-wing project went unanswered by the Air Force.

Air Force leaders tried to make the case that restarting the production line would be prohibitively expensive since the contract would have to be re-bid. Congress ordered the Air Force to buy new wings anyway, but the effects of the delayed wing project can be easily seen on the Air Force's A-10 Wing Management Plan. The last of the originally contracted wings were installed during fiscal year 2018. Since then, no new wings have been delivered and deliveries under the new contract will not begin until fiscal year 2023.

In the meantime, some of the aircraft face a kind of de facto retirement, grounded when inspections show signs of metal fatigue or when the current wings have too many flight hours. According to the A-10 wing management plan, by 2023 the number of A-10s expected to be

non-deployable will grow to 177. That means that 63% of the A-10 fleet would not be able to deploy to protect ground troops.

A-10 squadrons are also missing central interface computer units, integrated flight and fire control computers, radios, hydraulic actuators to control flight surfaces, and all replacement parts for the 30mm GAU-8/A cannon. Part shortages for the cannon are so acute that at one squadron there are anywhere between three and eight aircraft that can't shoot at any given time. The parts are missing because Air Force leaders have not renewed contracts with the suppliers, according to a source within the A-10 community.

The delay caused by the lapsed wing contract and the Air Force's earlier schemes to mothball the fleet have a cascading effect within the program. During earlier efforts to retire the A-10, Air Force leaders started to shut down the vital A-10 maintenance depot facility at Hill Air Force Base in Utah, restarting it only when Congress intervened to save the program.

But significant damage had already been done. The A-10 fleet, like all aircraft programs, needs a lot of maintenance work. Limited resources meant the depot couldn't continue to function at the volume needed to properly sustain the fleet — or the workforce needed to support 281 aircraft. Many of the most experienced A-10 maintainers have reportedly found new jobs due to their concerns about the program's future.

The Air Force needs to send 57 A-10s through the facility for repairs, overhauls, or complete rebuilds every year. Right now the A-10 depot can only handle only 31 aircraft a year. And until the A-10 program receives the parts it needs in the right quantities,

it will be difficult to entice the maintenance crews back.

The Air Force's starvation effort may be having the desired effect. One congressional staffer said he saw an A-10 at Utah's Hill Air Force Base that appeared worse for wear, which made him more inclined to support the Air Force's plan to trim the fleet.

The A-10 has repeatedly proven its worth. It can't fly forever, but if Congress compels the Air Force to properly maintain the fleet in the near-term, it can fly long enough until a dedicated close air support replacement program can be put into service. The original A-X program took seven years from the initial close air support study to a contract to build the A-10. A new program based on the same basic

*The troops on the ground will pay a terrible price if this critical capability disappears.*

design requirements could be fielded before the current fleet's updated lifespan expires in the 2030s. A future A-10 replacement should still be survivable close to the ground, nimble at low speeds, able to carry heavy ordnance loads, and capable of generating a high sortie rate from austere fields close to the front lines.

The A-10 needs to keep flying until that aircraft is ready. There may come a day soon when troops on the ground will need the capabilities the A-10 brings to the fight. Arguments that the A-10 isn't relevant for a potential war with China are based on a false premise. They presume that A-10s will be flown deep into enemy territory beyond ground troops into heavily

defended airspace. But when A-10s are employed with ground forces, the air and ground units mutually support each other. Ground force commanders plan for suppression of enemy air defense missions to protect their supporting air units as a matter of routine.

But that's only one reason the program needs to be preserved until a replacement is in place. The ultimate value of the A-10 program is not the aircraft itself — it's the dedicated community of pilots specializing in the close air support mission that grew up around it. If the Air Force brass have their way and are allowed to retire the A-10 without a dedicated replacement, that community will be lost. Based on conversations with current and former A-10 pilots, many serving

today do not want to fly anything else and will leave the service if the fleet is retired. Those who stay in uniform will be spread out across other aircraft programs. Their specialization will be diluted in the multirole morass and will subsequently vanish in just a few short years.

The troops on the ground will pay a terrible price if this critical capability disappears. ■

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*Pierre Sprey contributed to this investigation. This issue was one of several topics he and the author discussed at length the evening before his death on August 4, 2021.*

**ABOUT THE AUTHOR:** Dan Grazier is the Jack Shanahan Military Fellow at the Center for Defense Information at POGO.



**Center for Defense Information**

1100 13th Street, NW, Suite 800  
Washington, DC 20005  
Email: info@pogo.org

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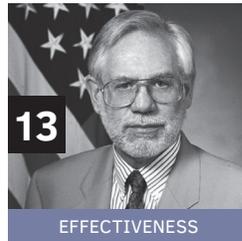
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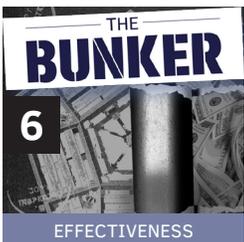
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