Dear CDI Supporter,

This issue of the Defense Monitor is all about impact.

As we prepare to go into what is already one of the largest, most contentious, and most uncertain congressional defense budget cycles in history, I want to take a moment to share with you what we have done to try and pave the way for a more realistic, effective, and accountable national security strategy this cycle.

Since our last Defense Monitor, POGO’s Center for Defense Information has been pushing hard on multiple fronts.

Our Senior Fellow Dan Grazier and our government affairs team led a coordinated effort to bring close air support (CAS) pilots and ground forces veterans to the Hill to educate members of Congress on the critical importance of maintaining the A-10 Warthog, the only dedicated CAS aircraft in our arsenal, until the Air Force can design and field a full-time replacement. Together they met with some 40 congressional offices to push back on Air Force plans to retire the platform, cut the combat air controller training budget, and redistribute the dedicated CAS pilot community to other missions and aircraft.

In April, POGO Executive Director Danielle Brian testified before the Senate Armed Services Committee about how weakened oversight and accountability around the military industrial complex’s revolving door have weakened our national security, degraded our force structure, and squandered hundreds of billions of taxpayer dollars — funds we were told were essential to America and our allies’ defense. Her testimony provided a menu of steps that this Congress can take to close contractor loopholes, help improve readiness, and build a more effective and accountable defense policy.

We also published a new report detailing what an alternative U.S. naval strategy for competition with China could look like: a strategy based not on what could sell the biggest new and exquisite weapons systems for U.S. defense contractors but on sound policy and realistic analysis.

These are just a few highlights of the work we have undertaken. In the pages that follow, I hope you will see the clear dedication and commitment of all of POGO and CDI’s staff to meet this challenging moment, and how the critical analysis and advocacy we provide can move the needle in Washington.

I want to thank you for your support, and I hope that you will continue to back the Center for Defense Information as we continue this critical work.

Regards,

Geoff Wilson
With POGO’s support, a group of 11 veterans stormed Capitol Hill in March 2023 to convince lawmakers to preserve the crucial close air support mission. This happened just as Air Force leaders were once again seeking permission to retire the combat-proven A-10 program by claiming the A-10 is no longer relevant and can’t survive in modern combat.

Over a three-day period, teams made up of retired A-10 pilots and veterans from the Army and Marine Corps met with 40 Hill offices to explain to staffers and a few members of Congress directly just how misguided the Air Force’s plans are, and the danger ground troops will face in the next war if they do not have effective air support.

POGO has been unstinting in its support for the A-10 program over the years. While other aircraft have been pressed into service for the close air support role, the A-10 is the only aircraft designed specifically to support ground troops. Its unique design features, like armor protection and its ability to carry large quantities of ammunition, matched with a dedicated cadre of highly trained attack pilots make all the difference for troops in contact on the ground.

We know this from hard-fought experience.

Many of the close air support techniques used today were first developed in World War II. Airmen like Lieutenant General “Pete” Quesada developed effective measures to integrate aviation and ground operations in Germany, mounting radios in tanks and trucks capable of talking directly to pilots flying overhead or assigning pilots to ride with ground forces to talk their counterparts onto targets. These methods worked well, but in the post-war years the newly independent Air Force let these skills atrophy, preferring to promote strategic bombing programs.

Unfortunately, by the time the Korean War began less than five years later, the Air Force lacked the ability to support ground troops, and many American soldiers died needlessly. This is exactly what could happen again if Air Force leaders get their way now and continue to push for the A-10’s retirement without a replacement.

We understand the reality. The A-10 is nearly 50 years old now, and while the program can continue to be effective in combat for years to come if it is properly maintained and modernized, it can’t fly forever. A new, dedicated close air support program should have been started years ago. Instead, Air Force leaders chose to focus their efforts on building flashy aircraft like the F-35 and B-21 that match their own self-image.

But the truth is that despite all the technological innovations in the eight decades since the United States entered World War II, the wars of the present and the wars of the future will still come down to young service members fighting in close contact on the ground. We owe it to them to ensure they have air support that can get the job done.

It remains to be seen how effective our lobbying efforts were. That will only be known when members of Congress cast their votes later this year. But no matter what, POGO and CDI will continue to maintain the pressure to ensure the military maintains the capabilities the troops need to be successful in combat. They deserve nothing less than our best efforts.
There is too much at stake now to do nothing. This Congress is in a position to make a real impact. We urge Congress to pass legislation that more effectively slows the revolving door between the Pentagon and defense contractors while simplifying the rules; deters the possibility of foreign influence by ending the rubberstamp approval of former military personnel working for foreign governments; and expands the stock ownership prohibition to reduce the risk and perception of financial conflicts of interest for senior Pentagon officials.

Our aspirational American values of government ethics and taxpayer accountability are all touched by these reforms. And in a very real sense, the strength of our military and our readiness are also directly undermined when policymakers make decisions based not on actual need, but on what is best for the bottom line of defense contractors. Congress should move to ensure that the United States military, the servicemembers who wear its uniforms, and the citizens who depend on their service are all provided for by a system that prioritizes our national security and results over private gains.
We recommend that Congress:

- Enact substantive prohibitions on former government officials (including but not limited to the military) seeking and obtaining employment with certain problematic foreign countries or entities controlled by those countries. The list of prohibited employers should include adversaries, serial human rights abusers, regimes that do not respect religious freedom, and other authoritarian and malign governments and the entities controlled by those governments.

- Enact a five-year ban or a ban that lasts for the duration of a president’s administration, whichever is longer, on former senior and very senior DOD employees covering both representational activity and behind-the-scenes assistance to foreign governments, foreign political parties, and foreign business entities.

- Require expanded waiver applications to include more substantive details and information about potential foreign employers, including the precise nature of the role, any preexisting relationships or communications between the applicant and the prospective employer, compensation, and additional relevant information.

- Require submission of comprehensive waiver application data to Congress on a regular basis and make those reports available to the public within a reasonable time frame. This reporting should come from the Department of Defense and Department of State, and should include complete articulation of the methodology and procedures for assessing and rendering decisions on waiver applications.

- Require a retrospective analysis and subsequent report on previously approved waivers and any conflict of interest or national security concerns that were either flagged at the time and not resolved or that were flagged and adjudicated. This report should also specifically address any waivers in which the Department of State flagged International Traffic in Arms Regulations (ITAR) concerns, what the exact nature of those concerns were, and how they were resolved.

- Impose robust financial penalties for those retired and reserved officials who violate the law by not obtaining a waiver prior to working on behalf of a foreign interest or who have otherwise violated the rules in place around seeking employment with foreign interests.

- Require the Government Accountability Office to periodically audit the emoluments waiver system and its efficacy as well as any ongoing concerns around the potential corrupting impact of former U.S. government officials working on behalf of foreign interests.”

POGO urges the committee to undertake the work of implementing our recommendations by advancing legislation. The American people deserve nothing less that the protection these solutions would provide.
A Rational China-Oriented Military Strategy

BY GEOFF WILSON

This quarter, we were proud to release a new report on an alternative China-oriented military strategy from Senior Fellow Dan Grazier. The report recommends ways that the United States and its allies should change their current strategy toward confronting China to a truly “defense-oriented policy” that could deter or defeat aggressive Chinese moves in the western Pacific.

“Unfortunately, either through a misevaluation of the evidence or willful ignorance,” the report explains, “the Washington national security complex continues to push [a narrative that China is an imminent military threat to the United States] and asserts that we need drastic increases in defense spending over the next five to 10 years to prepare for this purportedly looming confrontation.”

“But the plans put forward by civilian and uniformed defense officials to defend against China ... make little sense,” writes Dan. “The United States is foolishly building a strategy and force to attack where this potential adversary is most fortified.”

As an alternative, he outlines critical measures for reducing the footprint of vulnerable and expensive surface combatants in favor of more numerous, cost effective, and deadly asymmetric submarines. Doing so could be the first steps towards a realistic strategy of deterrence and containment that would not only provide a sustainable defense, but also reduce the dangers posed by our rapidly militarizing relationship with China.

“All of humanity received a lucky break when the first Cold War ended peacefully. A war between the Soviet Union and the West could have resulted in a death toll in the hundreds of millions. To hear today’s politicians and military leaders using rhetoric and arguments that echo that earlier struggle in reference to China should worry everyone,” the report concludes.

“The kind of war that many politicians and military leaders envision, where cyber-enabled fighter jets, long-range missiles, and multi-billion-dollar ships are used against their Chinese counterparts, isn’t even theoretically practical. China and the United States are both nuclear powers. If a direct military confrontation breaks out between China and the West, it is difficult to imagine how such a conflict would not cross the nuclear threshold.

“Now more than ever, we need cooler heads to prevail. The current trajectory of events leads the world into extremely dangerous, and vastly expensive, territory. A strategy and force structure that is largely defensive, as proposed here, offers an alternative security plan that should ideally deter war and, failing that, would thwart potential aggression. The largely defensive nature of this proposal should assure the world of our peaceful intentions, which could help cool tensions.”

I hope you will take the time to read Dan’s full report on our website. After you do, reach out to us — we’d love to hear your feedback on this and other work our team is doing.
Our CDI experts are trusted voices in the national conversation on the military-industrial-congressional complex. Here are some of the places you may have heard from them over the last six months:

**npr**

*Slow manufacturing and price gouging threaten the new U.S. military arms race*

“Defense spending is growing at an incredibly unsustainable rate.”

- Julia Gledhill

**The Wall Street Journal**

*What Makes the M1 Abrams So Critical to the Russia-Ukraine War?*

“If we gave the Ukrainians tanks and we didn’t give them everything they need to support them logistically, then we would hardly be doing them any favors.”

- Dan Grazier

**Vox**

*Today, Explained: Auditing Ukraine*

“Last year, Congress authorized $858 billion for the Department of Defense. … The Pentagon is notoriously really bad at managing its money.”

- Julia Gledhill

**Responsible Statecraft**

*SecDef Austin calls on Congress to end wasteful ‘wish list’ gimmick*

“The unfunded priority process is just a way to add more money into the budget at the end. It just creates opportunities for shenanigans on Capitol Hill.”

- Dan Grazier

**Santa Fe New Mexican**

*LanL would get increased funding for nuclear pit work under proposed budget*

“The weapons contractors and labs have leveraged world events to stoke a drive for new nuclear arms. Unfortunately, we could very quickly be in a place where there are no nuclear constraints on the world’s largest arsenals.”

- Geoff Wilson

**Salon**

*Former top Pentagon official reveals brazen defense contractor price gouging*

A 2022 Defense report found that the company was charging as much as 3,850 percent above market price for at least one part, netting the company $21 million in less than three years, according to the Project On Government Oversight.
The Project On Government Oversight (POGO) is a nonpartisan independent watchdog that investigates and exposes waste, corruption, abuse of power, and when the government fails to serve the public or silences those who report wrongdoing. We champion reforms to achieve a more effective, ethical, and accountable federal government that safeguards constitutional principles.

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