

April 25, 2008

AFA Members, Congressional Staffers, Civic Leaders, and DOCA members, 2 weeks ago General Dave Petraeus testified before Congress - many times. Much of the testimony was carried on TV, and the press reported widely on his and Ambassador Crocker's words. Like many of you, I was too busy to catch but snippets of the testimony. So I sought additional information to better help me understand what his central messages were. I found the slides that he used to brief Members of Congress - and have put them on our website at:

<http://www.afa.org/PresidentsCorner/Other/Petraeus.pdf> They contain a lot of information - that can help you decide what he was trying to say.

Secondly, many of you have asked my why the Air Force has such an aging fleet of airplanes. There's a simple answer - in the aftermath of the end of the Cold War, we simply stopped buying aircraft. If you recall, the thinking was: "We don't need these expensive air vehicles any more." One author even penned a book called: The End of History and the Last Man - which posited that Western liberal democracy was universal. Well, someone should have told Al Qaeda. It seems that history does matter ... and it repeats itself. We need those machines; and to loosely quote the Chief of Staff of the Air Force - "The world of the future will not be like Mr. Roger's neighborhood."

What I want you to do is to look at some data - also from our website. The first is a set of charts on Procured Aircraft: http://www.afa.org/EdOp/Procured_Chart.pdf It lists what aircraft were bought in what year - going back to 1985. I want you to note a couple of things. From 1985-1990, we bought 150-180 F-16s per year. Now look to the future ... this same number of airplanes are going to age out of the fleet at the same time - given design specs and the number of hours we have on them. This means we will need to buy F-35s much faster than DOD plans to do ... or else we will have F-16s which break in half like the MO Guard F-15 did 6 months ago. Secondly, look at the bottom graph on page 2 - which shows graphically that after the Cold War, we quickly went to buying less than 50 aircraft per year ... and have not recovered since.

The next set of charts (http://www.afa.org/EdOp/National_Journal_Charts.pdf) shows deeper data - going back to 1975. Look at the last page on these charts and you can see what the lack of buying airplanes does to the average age of the fleet. I encourage you to use this data in your talks with public officials, in civic groups, and to the press.

As always, I look forward to your comments.

Mike

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