

Note from AFA President -- Wynne Op-ed, Sec Gates at Maxwell AFB

AFA Members, Congressional staffers, Civic leaders, and DOCA members, on my last note [http://www.afa.org/PresidentsCorner/Notes/Notes_4-10-09.pdf], I asked you to respond back to me with your views on Sec Gates' proposed force structure cuts for 2010. I heard from more than 1,500 of you – many with thoughtful responses. Many of you made similar (sometimes cynical) responses ... such as:

- The cuts make the average fighter age go down, so there is less of a problem.
- The cuts take the heat off the fighter trough that OSD created
- It reduces the need for replacement aircraft.
- The cut relies on an increased F-35 production rate ... that is not yet assured
- Finally, there is a strong possibility that, once cut, the force will never grow back

All are great points ... but I stand by my assertion that these airplanes will age out of the force before they can be replaced ... Consider just the F-16. We bought them at a very high rate ... 150-175 aircraft per year. If you assume they all have about the same number of flying hours, then they will all age out at the same rate. The replacement rate for the F-35 then has to be 150 or so per year in order to keep the force structure stable. The present F-35 program production rate grows to 80 aircraft per year in 2015. The AF has requested a rate of 110 per year ... but we don't know whether Sec Gates supported that in the FY10 budget. Hence the problem.

Secondly, a very thoughtful piece came from former Secretary Wynne. In the piece, he rose above the fray and talked about the strategic environment – maintaining: **"We are now [if the production cuts are approved] entering a period of strategic pause in which others can enhance their ability to undercut the capabilities of the existing power projection forces, while not fearing breakout capabilities delivered by the United States and a general process of further weakening the ability of the US to produce power projection forces."**

Further, Sec Wynne maintains: **"The larger argument that we should be having is how to expand and not contract the sovereign options we offer to the president ... The evolving strategic environment simply does not support the reduction of US engagement to imperial custodianship."**

Finally, Sec Wynne made what I think may be his most important point ... and it is one missed by most in the press. He focused on the impact on the industrial base, saying: **"The terminations in the air, space, helicopter and bomber domain will essentially gut American aerospace engineering — the very area that has provided our sea-locked nation with strategic advantage and strategic reach. This action; in combination with the actions to save finance and automotive should make our heads spin. ... This may prove to be the greater weakening of defense; as we found out in the last lost decade. We lost talent that was available for the Reagan buildup; but was not there when we need it now. Now we are giving up design and development talent with no means to carry it into a dimming future."**

You can find the entire piece at this link: <http://www.dodbuzz.com/2009/04/13/gates-cuts-leading-to-strategic-drawdown-wynne/>

Finally, Secretary Gates recently gave a speech at Maxwell AFB. We have put the text of it on our website at: <http://www.afa.org/EdOp/2009/GatesSpeech.pdf>

I think the speech explains his views on a variety of issues ... and sheds light on his decisions. As many of you know, I have a number of different views on this subject ... but I will not bore you with them now. I do, however, want to point out one factual error in the speech.

"While the military has made great strides in operating jointly over the last two decades, procurement remains overwhelmingly service-centric. The Combat Search and Rescue helicopter had major development and cost problems to be sure. What cemented my decision to cancel this program was the fact that we were on the verge of launching yet another single-service platform for a mission that in the real world is truly joint."

Air Force CSAR assets are in fact the only truly joint CSAR assets in the Department of Defense. When they are deployed to the AOR, they are controlled by the Joint Forces Air Component Commander (JFACC), not the Air Force. This means that they are tasked to support the entire joint team and don't just focus on Air Force needs. Other Services' lift assets do not belong to the JFACC. Additionally, the contract has yet to be let, and the initial selection was a helicopter operated by the Army, SOCOM and many of our Allies. Thus cost growth and development problems can't be too much. And ... it's about as joint as it comes.

For your consideration

Mike

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[Provide your comments here.](#)